

Merthyr Tydfil Early Years Partnership Plan

Improving opportunities for early years children
and their families

2022- 2027



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol
MERTHYR TUDFUL
MERTHYR TYDFIL
County Borough Council



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FOREWORD

This Plan sets out our shared commitment to ensuring that every child has a happy and healthy home life, as well as access to childcare and other support services that are high quality and reflect the bilingual nature of our County Borough.

We believe that a child's experience in the first days, weeks and years significantly impacts on the rest of their lives; the earliest years of a child's life really do matter. The relationships and experiences in the first 1000 days of an infant's life lay the foundations and shape their future life chances. The Early Years professionals that work with children are important to making sure that parents get the help they need to be the best parent they can be and for children to have experiences both in and outside of the home that will give them a chance to become happy, healthy and ready for their onward journey into school.

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2. Introduction

For the purpose of this plan, early years is defined as the ante natal period up until a child is 3 years of age and before they start school ¹. This plan sets out Merthyr Tydfil's medium to long term vision for ensuring families have access to the services they need during the early years and that children have access to quality pre-school services in order to maximise their chances of leading a healthy, happy and fulfilling life. It is acknowledged that parents are children's first and primary educators, but the education of our children is also everyone's business and collaboration is key to ensuring we provide the best support and opportunities to children and their families in the early years.

The implementation of the plan will be overseen by an Early Years partnership made up of partners from the public, maintained and third sectors, the Partnership is a sub-group of the Tackling Poverty Board. The partnership was established in 2013 to oversee the development and implementation of the previous plan and will continue to fulfil this role for this latest plan- see appendix A for membership of the Early Years Partnership. It is important that all partners have ownership over the implementation of the vision, strategic outcomes and priorities as it is only through this joint approach can children and their families receive the services and support to meet their needs.

The priorities identified within this plan are influenced through a range of national policy drivers including:

- Raising Aspirations Raising Standards Strategy (RARS)
- Welsh Education Strategic Plan
- Cymraeg 2050
- Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan – WG
- Child Poverty Strategy for Wales
- Welsh Government Flying Start Guidance and policy documents
- Welsh Government Families First Programme Guidance
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015
- Childcare Act 2016
- Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) (ALNET)
- Prosperity for all- the National Strategy 2017
- Cwm Taf Well-being Plan 2018-2023

¹ Children in Merthyr Tydfil start school the term following their third birthday, for children starting in the Autumn term they are usually offered a full time place with Spring and Summer term starters accessing part time Nursery provision.

These drivers work in tandem with and contribute towards the Raising Aspirations Raising Standards Strategy 2020-2025 which sets out the following vision and commitments:

The opportunity for all children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil to access high quality education so that they develop as ambitious capable learners, enterprising and creative contributors, ethically informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives

We are committed to:

- Raising the aspirations of all our children and young people and our expectations of what they can achieve, irrespective of their background
- Promoting the emotional, mental and physical well-being of children, young people
- Promoting the emotional, mental and physical well-being of our education workforce
- Working collaboratively, especially in tackling the greatest challenges
- Engaging with families to recognise and develop their role as the first and fundamentally influential educators of their children
- Involving all our children and young people in the future developments for Merthyr Tydfil ensuring their ideas are listened to and form part of strategic plans – truly giving them a voice
- Celebrating the diverse cultural heritage of Merthyr Tydfil and promoting its future ambitions amongst our children and young people
- Facilitating the wider use of Welsh language both within schools and the wider community and championing the identity of Wales
- Respecting the natural environment in and around the County Borough and developing sustainable practises within education settings

Defining success for 2021-2026

The success of this Early Years Partnership Plan will be judged by ensuring that we have an early years system that provides support to children and families who need it through a preventative approach and with a focus on identifying those who may need additional or more intensive support. It is important that children have access to quality learning experiences that excite and inspire them both at home and in early years provision.

The Strategic Vision for Early Years & Childcare

Children are supported to enjoy positive health and wellbeing and maximise their potential in all areas of their development, so they are ready for entry into Nursery at age 3 and have confidence in their own abilities.

3. Vision and Defining Success

Priority 1

Merthyr Tydfil has high quality Early Years provision that is focused on positive outcomes for children

Why this matters

There is good evidence to suggest that attending early years provision can improve a wide range of child outcomes and will positively influence the type of person that the child will become, it provides a chance for children to learn new skills, to develop socially through being with other children and to enjoy new experiences. The early years sector in Merthyr Tydfil is underpinned by a highly skilled and experienced workforce who are focussed on supporting children's development through quality play and learning opportunities with a focus on early identification of children who may need additional support.

Priority 2

Children enjoy a healthy lifestyle which encourages an optimum level of health and wellbeing for the whole family

Why this matters

Focussing energies in this area is especially important when the childhood obesity and dental caries rates for children aged 5 years in Merthyr Tydfil are amongst the highest in Wales. Being healthy means much more than just physical health, for babies and young children being made to feel special and cared for by someone who is important to them is essential for their physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing.

Good early health and wellbeing provides a firm foundation for later life and ensures that children are more likely to take advantage of opportunities to grow, learn and develop in all aspects of their lives. In contrast, early childhood illness and deprivation can set a trajectory for a lifetime of poor health and wellbeing.

Priority 3

Effective collaboration between the Early Years sector, health, statutory education and families to support smooth transitions for all children.

Why this matters

Transitions are milestone events central to young children's development and emotional wellbeing. It is important to maintain a focus on how children transition from one service or phase to another as this has an impact on the child's capacity to cope with change in the short and long term. Transition is a process that should involve children, practitioners from all sectors as well as parents in the sharing of information so that all interested parties are well informed about the child and their needs.

Priority 4

Parents are actively engaged in their child's development and learning from the ante-natal period onwards

Why this matters

The first 1000 days from conception to age 2, is a time of unique opportunity and vulnerability, it is a period of rapid brain development with complex wiring and sculpting taking place all of which are influenced by an infant's early experiences. Research shows that children's early experiences and the interaction and bond they form with their parents deeply affects their future physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. Parents should be supported to have the confidence and skills to form secure responsive relationships that support their child's development.

Priority 5

Partners across Early Years actively work with families to help identify what is important to them to ensure they have access to the right support at the right time with a focus on building resilience

Why this matters

The early years system is a complicated system with a myriad of different access points, criteria and partners which can be daunting and confusing for parents and professionals alike. The focus should be on a joined up, responsive integrated early years system that put the needs of children and families first regardless of traditional professional and organisational structures. Families are the experts in their own lives and should feel listened to, with a view to ensuring what matters to them is used to shape the support they access.

4. Achieving the Priorities

Priority 1

Merthyr Tydfil has high quality Early Years provision that is focused on positive outcomes and provides children with the best start before entering school.

- 1.1 Ensure that all registered non maintained education providers are equipped to implement the Non Maintained Curriculum and Assessment framework.
- 1.2 Ensure that all early years settings implement the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) framework to ensure consistency across care and early education.
- 1.3 Ensure effective implementation of the needs led approach for supporting childcare settings enabling effective use of resources and more sustainable settings.
- 1.4 Review national and current local quality assessment systems and processes to incorporate the requirements within both the ECEC and the Non Maintained Settings frameworks.
- 1.5 Develop systems and relationships with partners to collect and analyse children's developmental progress data for **all** children attending early years provision to support transitions into statutory education.
- 1.6 Work with identified partners to ensure robust workforce planning including the development of an employment pathway that will meet the current and future needs of the sector to deliver high quality childcare.
- 1.7 Develop and implement a Campus Cymraeg style approach across Early Years settings to increase bilingual environments across early years.
- 1.8 In conjunction with Mudiad Meithrin and wider partners, actively engage with families to promote the benefits and availability of Welsh medium childcare and education with a view to increasing demand for Welsh Medium early years provision and Welsh medium education whilst ensuring sufficiency and availability of Welsh medium childcare places.
- 1.9 Respond to the priorities identified in the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022 and carefully facilitate supply and demand to ensure the childcare needs of families are met and the sector is well prepared for any changes.
- 1.10 Support the development of high levels of communication skills, literacy, numeracy and digital competency for early years children in partnership with schools through ensuring an appropriate range of early learning experiences within childcare settings that support school readiness.

- 1.11 Review and further develop an outreach approach to targeting Flying Start support outside of Flying Start geographical areas in line with anticipated future demands and declining birth rates.
- 1.12 Review the Flying Start childcare commissioning model to ensure that it provides best value and considers future population trends.
- 1.13 Plan and implement the Welsh Government phased 'geographical' expansion of Flying Start (all 4 core elements) building towards funded childcare for all 2 to 3 year olds across Merthyr Tydfil.

Priority 2

All children enjoy a healthy lifestyle which encourages an optimum level of health and wellbeing for the whole family

- 2.1 Ensure effective promotion and dissemination of consistent public health messages to parents and other professionals through a programme of upskilling on the Make Every Contact Count (MECC) approach.
- 2.2 Support early years providers to achieve health based quality assurance programmes such as Healthy and Sustainable Pre-schools Award and Health Snacks Award.
- 2.3 Develop approaches to working with parents and vulnerable families during pregnancy to promote healthy lifestyle choices, improved attachment and reduce the need for more intensive services later on.
- 2.4 Ensure preventative services work alongside statutory services during the ante natal period to provide a seamless package of support for expectant women with a focus on a continuum of support once baby is born.
- 2.5 Support a partnership approach to promoting the benefits of breastfeeding with a view to increasing the rates of mothers choosing to start and maintain breastfeeding.
- 2.6 Work in collaboration with Public Health Wales, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB Pre-conception to the first 1000 days Strategic group and other key partners to implement innovative approaches to supporting healthy weight and lifestyle choices for children and their families.

Priority 3

Effective collaboration between the Early Years sector, health, statutory education and families to support seamless transitions for all children.

- 3.1 Implement and refine the Early Years Transition guidance ensuring effective information sharing across sectors.
- 3.2 Implement the new Curriculum Early Years Assessment Tool and SLT screening tool and embed quality assurance and cross sector moderation into the process.
- 3.3 Improve the sharing of information across professionals, particularly the transfer of data from health and further develop Capita One to implement the Early Years Vulnerability profile to target interventions based on identified need.
- 3.4 Work closely with Learning Department to ensure the non-maintained sector continue to support the sufficiency of Foundation Phase Nursery provision across the County Borough.
- 3.5 Increase the take up of the Childcare Offer to provide financial support for families and quality childcare opportunities for children.
- 3.6 Ensure the NEST Framework is considered a children's rights approach when planning, developing and delivering mental health, well-being and support services for babies, children, young people and their families.

Priority 4

Parents are actively engaged in their child's development and learning from the ante-natal period onwards recognising their role as primary educators.

- 4.1 Work in collaboration with partners to promote the benefits that limiting the use of technology has on the parent and child relationship.
- 4.2 Increase support for the parent infant relationship during the first 1000 days leading on and responding to regional research recommendations.
- 4.3 Review and strengthen the blended learning approach between home and early years to support parents in their child's learning and development.
- 4.4 Review national developments across early language and embed a seamless pathway of language development interventions, whilst improving early identification of language needs for all children.
- 4.5 Increase the number of community based groups (English and Welsh) where parents and their children can play, develop and be with their peers, within quality environments and build towards a peer led parent approach.

Priority 5

Partners across Early Years actively work with families to help identify what is important to them to ensure they have access to the right support at the right time with a focus on building resilience

- 5.1 Ensure the Early Years sector is focussed on early identification of children's needs and implements a timely graduated response to meeting the needs of children in the context of the ALNET Act (Wales), person centred practices and Individual Development Plans.
- 5.2 Early Years professionals work with all relevant agencies including the Early Help Hub and the TAF model to support improved engagement and co-ordination of relevant agencies to provide specific support for family wellbeing and resilience.
- 5.3 Ensure the views and experiences of families are captured effectively across the early years system and used to inform future service design and delivery.
- 5.4 Encourage the use of peer and community led initiatives to contribute towards the early years and maternity goals within a sustainable community based approaches.

5. Measuring Progress of the Strategy

Key Performance Measures
Children enjoy a healthy lifestyle which encourages an optimum level of health and wellbeing for the whole family
National KPI
% of singleton births with a weight of under 2.5kg
% of babies breastfed at 10 days, 6 weeks and 6 months following birth
% of children with a “healthy weight” at age 5
% of children fully immunised by their 4 th birthday
Local KPI
Number and % of childcare providers who deliver Design to Smile programme to ensure that children and parents are engaged in good dental hygiene practices
Number and % of Early Years providers who have achieved phase 1, 2 and 3 within the Healthy and Sustainable Pre-school Scheme with a view that 100% providers achieve Phase 2
Number of families engaged with the HENRY programme led by PHW
Merthyr Tydfil has available high quality Early Years provision that is focused on positive outcomes for children
Local KPI
% early years and childcare providers judged as good or excellent by Care Inspectorate for Wales (CIW)
% of Flying Start children achieving attendance of 95%+ in pre schools
% of identified children screened at 20 months and a baseline of speech language and communication needs established
% of Early Years and Flying Start children screened and identified as having speech, language and communication skills within normal range on entry into pre-school increases
% of Early Years and Flying Start children who have made at least expected progress within speech, language and communication on exit from pre-school
% of Early Years and Flying Start children who are within normal limits within speech, language and communication on exit from pre-school
% of Early Years & Flying Start children demonstrating at least expected progress across the developmental pathways of the Curriculum for the Early Years settings on exit from early years provision
Number of CPD opportunities accessed by the Early Years sector to support an improvement in practice and impact on children’s learning
Effective collaboration between the Early Years sector, health, statutory education and families to support seamless transitions for all children.
National KPI
% of children registered on school roll
Local KPI
Number and % of all children entering school with a completed transition document
Number of children benefiting from a successful TAC transition approach prior to starting nursery
% of early years settings engaging in moderation and transition opportunities with primary schools to ensure a seamless learning journey for children in line with curriculum changes
Number of children experiencing a gap between their early years pre-school place and access to school place
% of children transferring from Welsh medium early years provision into Welsh medium primary education

Parents are actively engaged in their child's development and learning from the ante-natal period onwards recognising their role as primary educators

Local KPI

Number of parents engaged in a preventative antenatal intervention and % that demonstrate an increased understanding of how to meet their child's developmental needs

% of 3 year olds who have attended early years provision prior to starting school

% of 3 year olds attending early years settings through the medium of Welsh

% of eligible children taking up their Flying Start pre-school place

% of parents who identify that the Flying Start experience has been positive for their child on exit

% of parents that access an identified range of interventions within Flying Start report how it has positively changed their approach as a parent

Partners across Early Years actively work with families to help identify what is important to them to ensure they have access to the right support at the right time with a focus on building resilience.

Local KPI

Number of FS families working with a family support intervention reporting positive outcomes on case closure

Number of children who have received additional support and had support removed/reduced within 3rd term of pre-school

The Merthyr Tydfil population measures this strategy indirectly contributes towards will be monitored and are able to be benchmarked against other local authorities in Wales as identified below. These measures directly contribute to the national wellbeing indicators and the seven wellbeing goals for Wales. Some of these population measures are within the wellbeing plan and are therefore reported and monitored through identified leads and the corporate reporting framework.

Merthyr Tydfil Priority Mapping	MTCBC Strategies	Cwm Taf Wellbeing Plan	Wellbeing Indicator	Wellbeing Goals
% Attendance in Primary School	RARS/Best Start	Thriving Communities		WBFG 1
Early Years children reaching their developmental milestones at age 3 in all areas	RARS/Best Start	Healthy People		WBFG 1
Early Years children's speech & language within normal limits on exit from provision at age 3	Best start to Life	Healthy People		WBFG 1
% Children transferring from Welsh medium early years provision into Welsh medium primary education	WESP	Thriving Communities	3.1	WBFG 6 - a Wales of Vibrant culture and Thriving Welsh Language
% of children with a "healthy weight" at age 5	RARS	Healthy People	2.1	2.3

Context for Early Years in Merthyr Tydfil

Data relevant to children and their families in the early years gathered from national and local sources:

Birth Information

- In 2019 of the 321 live singleton births registered in Merthyr Tydfil, 8.1% had a birth weight of less than 2.5kg compared to the Welsh Average of 5.96%
- 65.5% of births in Merthyr are to mothers aged 29 or under, Welsh Average 54.7%
- 3.8% of births in Wales were to teenage parents
- Over a third of all births in Merthyr Tydfil are registered by parents at different addresses, compared with under a quarter in Wales
- Merthyr families tend to be larger with a higher maternity rate than in Wales
- Only 8.7 % of all births in Merthyr are to non-UK mothers, Welsh Average 12
- In 2020 verified Welsh Government data shows that 51.7% of babies are breast fed 10 days after birth across Wales, however within CTM this rate is only 40.9% and drops to 28.4% at 6 weeks and 18.6% at 6 months
- The 2020 Maternity and birth statistics released by Welsh Government show that 29.2% of women had a 30+ BMI at initial assessment in Wales with Cwm Taf Morgannwg showing the highest rate at 35.6%
- 17.3% of expectant women in Wales were recorded as being a smoker at initial assessment, with CTM again showing the highest rate at 21.1% with 27.2% of women recorded as smoking at birth.

Life Experiences - Children

- The Welsh Government annual Statistical Release states that there were 2852 under 4 year olds living in Merthyr in 2019, 38% are covered by the Flying Start programme
- In 2017 the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment highlights that 62% of children living in poverty are aged below 10yrs, 31% being under 4yrs
- At the year ending December 2018, 19.7% of children in Merthyr Tydfil were living in workless households against the Welsh Average of 12.6%, this is a 3.3% increase since Parenting Plan was published with 2016 information
- In 2019, 89% of children are immunised by their 4th Birthday which is slightly above the Welsh Average of 88%
- 64.9% of children were at a healthy weight or underweight at age 4-5 as measured in the 2018 Healthy Child Wales programme in Merthyr Tydfil compared to the Welsh Average of 73.1%
- Merthyr has the highest level of obese children in Wales (20.7%) this is 8.1% higher than the Welsh average (12.6%)
- In 2015/16 dental caries (decayed, missing or filled teeth dmf) amongst 5 year olds in Merthyr was 56.5%, compared to the Welsh average of 34.2%
- The number of children on the Child Protection Register as at 31/3/21 was 98, this is 38 children lower than the same date in 2020 and 34 children lower than 2019

- Numbers of Children Looked After in Merthyr Tydfil as of the 31st of March 2021 was 193, down from 207 the previous year
- Apart from 1 setting, who are currently in the process of exploring becoming FS approved, all early years provision in Merthyr offer some form of Flying Start childcare;
- 4 early years provisions within the borough are Registered Education Providers with Estyn.
- In academic year 19/20, 12.2% of all nursery intake were for Welsh Medium education

Lived Experiences – Parents

- 12,381 (25%) adults aged over 16 have at least one dependent child in 2011 according to the Census
- At year ending March 2020 (Stats Wales), the International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment rate for 16-24-year olds in Merthyr Tydfil was 7.5%, nearly double the Welsh average.
- In Merthyr Tydfil 14.9% of adults aged 16-64 years had no recognised qualification in 2020 against a Wales average of 7.6%
- In Merthyr Tydfil year ending 31st December 2020 adults aged 16+, 23.9% are identified as economically inactive, excluding students, with 70.9% economically active.
- The employment rate for 16+ in 2020 was 65.8% and the unemployment rate was 5.5%
- The claimant count (job seekers allowance) for all age groups being 275 adults aged 16+ at the end of December 2020
- The Cordis Bright Mapping (2018) identified in terms of Think Family Indicators, the most prevalent were low income (86%) mother mental ill health (64%) and parents not in work (67%)
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) – Merthyr has the lowest number of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA's) in Wales (36) and has consistently had at least 1 LSOA in the top 10 most deprived for at least the last 7 years
- Child Poverty Action (2021) report that every Council area in Wales has at least one in five children living below the poverty line (having enough money for basic needs such as food, clothing)
- In 2020 the number of people who could speak Welsh in MTCB was 21.7%

References

Stats Wales (<https://statswales.gov.wales/>)

Birth & Maternity Data 2019 (<https://gov.wales/maternity-and-birth-statistics-2019>)

Office for National Statistics & Official Labour Market Statistics (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/>)

(<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>)

PHW Child Measurements Programme (<https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/child-measurement-programme>)

Welsh Government Flying Start Annual Statistical Release (<https://gov.wales/flying-start-april-2019-march-2020>)

Annual Population Survey (Welsh)

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment (2017) (<https://www.merthyrfis.org/childcare-sufficiency-assessment/>)