

# **RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **MUNICIPAL YEAR 2016 - 2017**

### **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**5th OCTOBER 2016**

#### **A Cwm Taf Partnership Statement of Strategic Intent: Children and Young People who are looked after.**

#### **REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**Author:** Ann Batley Service Director Children's Services  
Tel: 01443 744044

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of this Report is to update members on the 'Cwm Taf Partnership Statement of Strategic Intent: Children and Young People who are Looked After.'

#### **2. BACKGROUND**

Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil children's looked after figures have been high for a number of years when compared to local and national comparators. The cost of meeting this high demand has resulted in significant financial strain being placed on both Local Authorities. For this to change it was apparent that services delivered to families needed to be redirected so that families receiving family support services accessed these services at an earlier stage so that they can care for their own children safely and achieve better outcomes.

In order to do this the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board commissioned a Children Looked after Early Intervention Prevention Strategy. The purpose of the Strategy was to support families early and to prevent them needing substitute or ongoing complex care. This also meant that partner agencies would be required to play their full part in supporting families and to change some of the ways they also delivered their services.

During the development of the Strategy it became apparent that the Safeguarding Board was not the place for the development of the Strategy and after discussion it was adopted by the Cwm Taf Social Services and Wellbeing Partnership Board. The Board, however, took a different view to the

Safeguarding Board and the Strategy was redefined as a “Cwm Taf Partnership Statement of Strategic Intent: Children and Young People who are Looked After” ( Appendix 1). They felt that it should form part of an expanded Joint Children’s Services Commissioning Strategy that covered all partner agencies including the Local Health Boards, police, voluntary and third sector.

The partnership’s vision for the Joint Children’s Services Commissioning Strategy is to set the direction of travel for the provision of high quality, accessible and integrated services that will focus on improving the education, health and wellbeing of children, young people and families in the Cwm Taf Partnership region. It will cover the whole shared partnership responsibility of all agencies and will need the ongoing commitment for each partner to develop and deliver their existing services in line with the strategy.

The Joint Children’s Services Commissioning Strategy will be produced for implementation from April 2017 onwards. It will include a long term, 10year direction of travel, 5 year strategic priorities for change and short term measures of progress to inform local plans and activities. The strategy will be relevant to all children and young people and promote:

- Prevention support.
- Resilient families and communities.
- Early Intervention for those who need help.
- Co-production of solutions with children, young people and their families.
- More effective and cost effective joined up services.

### **3. CWM TAF PARTNERSHIP STATEMENT OF STRATEGIC INTENT: CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER**

In order not to lose the work already completed on the Cwm Taf Statement of Intent for Children Looked After it was agreed by the Partnership Board that the work undertaken with young people in the development of the statement should be progressed immediately to ensure that their experience of being in care would be improved. The feedback from children and young people highlighted the need for:

- Quality life story/Journey work
- Opportunity to speak with others who were looked after.
- Experiencing better preparation prior to being placed in care or moving between placements.

Therefore, a plan will be developed with the aim of improving practice within the areas identified by the young people and will be completed, implemented and monitored through the Partnership Board. Young people will also be consulted on the delivery plan and will have the opportunity to influence its development. The

timescale for the implementation of the plan will be finalised at the next Partnership Board.

# **A Cwm Taf Partnership Statement of Strategic Intent:**

**Children and young  
people who are looked  
after**

**June 2016**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page number:</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Vision</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Goal</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Principles</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Young peoples' views</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Compliance with the Social Services and Well-being Act</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Early Intervention and Prevention</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Outcomes for children, young people and their families</b>	<b>10</b>
- <b>Outcomes</b>	<b>11</b>
- <b>Governance and accountability</b>	<b>13</b>

## Introduction

This strategy sets out how partners in Cwm Taf will ensure that we meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families improve outcomes and safely reduce the number of Children within the region who need to become looked after.

The strategy was originally commissioned by the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children's Board (CTSCB). It was co-produced via consultation and workshops with a range of partners, stakeholders and children and young people across the Cwm Taf region.

This joint strategy details our shared thinking about the approach we are adopting, and how we plan to implement it over the next few years. It details how we will meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families with regards to preventing children becoming looked after. It will also form the catalyst for a wider Cwm Taf Children's Strategy.

Children and young people who remain living with their family achieve better outcomes in the longer term. We recognise that in many cases early intervention provision can negate the need for more costly interventions later on.

While we will always need to safeguard and look after some children, we believe that, by working more effectively together with our partner agencies we can reduce the number of children who end up needing intensive interventions. This requires us to support families with emerging difficulties earlier and more effectively, and help them build on their resilience and independence. The strategy will promote collaboration with families and a range of partners to give support when and where it's needed.

In 2013 the All Wales Heads of Children's Services, the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Association of Directors of Social Services commissioned Cordis Bright to undertake research to understand why local authorities with similar levels of need, have different looked after children populations.

The research highlighted five main areas that can contribute to local area efforts to reduce the numbers of looked after children:-

1. **Strategy and leadership:** the key characteristics relate to whether there is a strategy in place to reduce the numbers of looked after children and, if there is, the extent of buy-in from the full range of roles and partners working with children and their families. To be successful, such a strategy needs to genuinely prioritise the improved outcomes that can be achieved by:(a) preventing need from escalating; (b) responding appropriately to disadvantage and to safeguarding concerns; and (c) maintaining a focus on discharging children from being looked after.
2. **Prevention and early intervention:** prevention and early intervention can be used to reduce the number of looked after children where the full range of

stakeholders are bought in to the objective and to the ability to reduce need from escalating and to support children and families out of statutory services (step down). As a result, prevention and early intervention needs to be appropriately resourced and part of a coherent continuum of support and intervention for children and families. Such initiatives have greater success at reducing the numbers of looked after children when they are long-standing and embedded and where there are clear, robust mechanisms in place to measure outcomes for children and families. Finally, to be successful and have maximum buy-in from stakeholders, senior managers need to recognise that the management of risk is more dispersed and that practitioners need to be equipped with appropriate skills and experience to reflect this and have access to appropriate leadership and management support.

3. **Approach to practice:** local authorities who have relatively low numbers of looked after children have a clearly defined approach to social work practice and give practitioners and managers sufficient time to implement this approach with children and families. This is complemented by robust and effective quality assurance mechanisms in place with a clear organisation-wide process in place for learning from quality assurance findings. This results in a system that is focused on improving outcomes for children and families. As part of this, there is an effective mechanism in place to allocate appropriate resources and support to children based on need, rather than on status or designation.
4. **Partnership working:** effective partnership working is important in achieving a relatively low rate of looked after children. The partners that have particular influence are the courts, CAFCASS and the council legal team. Where local authorities have relatively low rates partnership working is characterised by effective collaborative working focused on improving outcomes for children; a culture of mutual support and challenge; and a high degree of trust in local authority assessments and practice in its work with vulnerable children and families.
5. **Information and intelligence about performance:** local areas with relatively low rates of looked after children collect high quality information and intelligence that gives them insight into how effective the system as a whole is at protecting and supporting vulnerable children. A second important element is that this information is regularly used throughout the organisation to change and improve practice.

The five main factors and recommendations identified above have been reflected in the outcomes and aims within the strategy and forms the framework of this strategy.

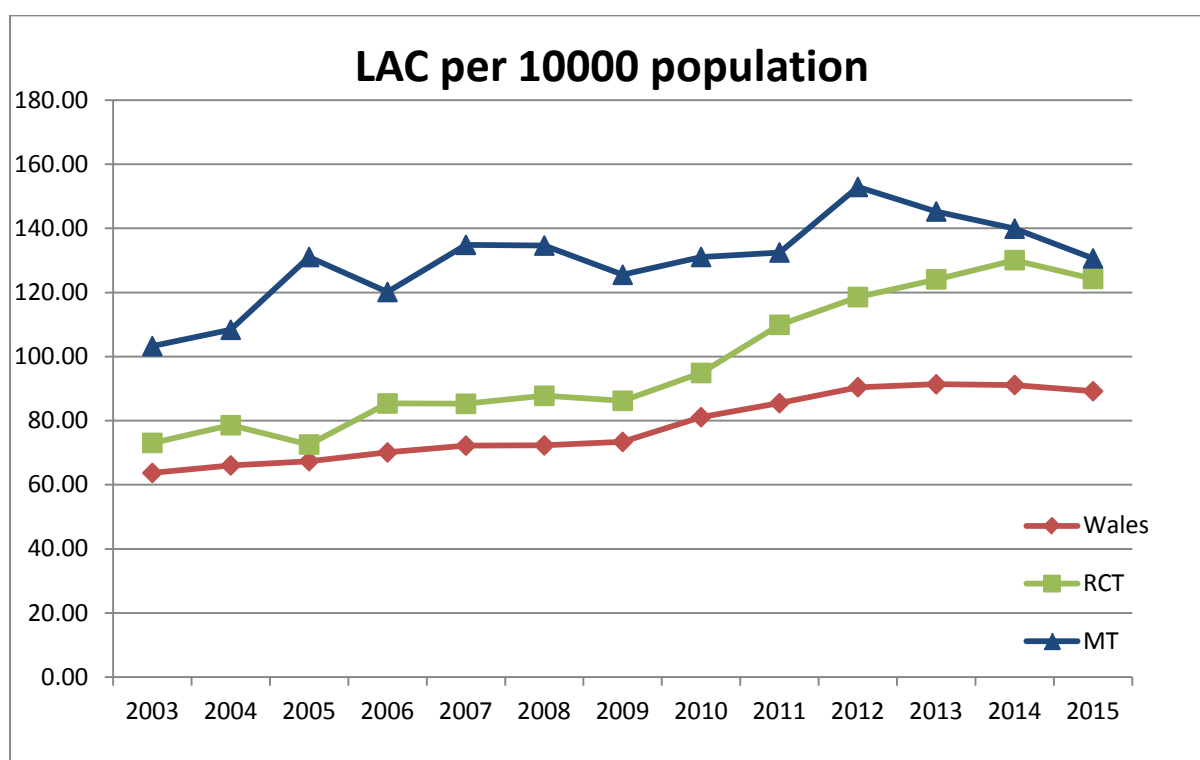
### **Current Demographics & Trends**

This strategy sits within the context of unprecedented pressures on local authorities to change services and reduce costs. The proportion of looked after children across Cwm Taf averages at 135 per 10,000, which is over a third more than the Welsh average and over double the English average.

The below table shows a consistent steady increase in the numbers of Looked after Children, per 10,000 capita across Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil. It also highlights the average number of children across Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr is higher than that of the Welsh average.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Wales</b>	64	66	67	70	72	72	73	81	85	90	91	91	89
<b>RCT</b>	73	79	73	85	85	88	86	95	110	119	124	130	124
<b>MT</b>	103	108	131	120	135	135	125	131	132	153	145	140	131

The below graph highlights that the number of Looked After Children across Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil is reducing at a greater pace than across Wales.



## Our Vision

Our vision is to ensure that children in and young people in the Cwm Taf region live safe, healthy and fulfilled lives and that they are supported to achieve their potential. By working together more effectively and prioritising early intervention and prevention we can ensure that fewer children and young people in the Cwm Taf region need to become looked after. We will make sure that this is a priority for all safeguarding board agencies. We want children who become looked after within the Cwm Taf region to have a positive experience of being looked after and achieve great outcomes.



## Goal

Based on the needs of our children, young people and their families, the overall goal of this strategy is:

Whenever it is safe, children and young people remain living within their family or kinship network due to improved early identification of needs and positive interventions.

The following pages detail how across Cwm Taf we plan to meet this goal, and the outcomes identified.

## Principles

The below principles outline how the Cwm Taf Children Looked After Prevention Strategy plans to realise its goal.

### Safety and wellbeing

- Our overriding duty is to safeguard and promote the child's well-being.

### Voice

- Children and their families have the right to be consulted and involved in all decisions affecting their future.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be respected and considered when decisions are made.

### Early Intervention and prevention

- Early intervention and prevention services to support children in need and their families should be provided to give them every chance to remain together and to avoid difficulties increasing.
- We will expand our capacity to identify vulnerable families early and enhance our capacity to intervene at an early stage to support children and families at risk.

### Outcome focussed

- Children and their families will be at the centre of outcome focused care and support plans and reviews.

### Family First

- Where it is safe to do so we will support children and young people to remain in their birth families or extended family and avoid the need for children to be looked after.
- If children require alternative care outside their family or extended family suitable alternative family based foster placement will be firstly considered.
- Priority will be given to keeping children and young people who are part of a sibling group together.

**Closer to home**

- Placements should be sufficiently local to enable looked after children to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives. Out of county foster or residential placements will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and once we are satisfied that there is no local alternative.

**Stability**

- Permanence planning should commence at the initial contact with the family. We should minimise the amount of time children spend in the care system. This means ensuring those children who can return home do so as soon as it is safe, and that families are supported to build the capacity to keep children safe, reducing the risk of returning to care. For those children who cannot return home, it means finding a suitable permanent home without delay.

**Collaboration**

- Plans for permanence are important and requires commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who must work together to meet the needs of our service users and their families.

## What young people told us:

A Citizen Panel of looked after young people was coordinate on behalf of the Social Services and Well-being Partnership Board. The messages from young people are compelling and will inform our future work. Young People's told us that:-

- Its important to have somebody who you can trust and talk to;
- The examples of people they trusted included foster carer, a teacher, a support worker, a friend who had been through the same thing;
- The following qualities were highlighted by young people when describing the people they trusted:
  - ✓ Supportive
  - ✓ Knew right from wrong
  - ✓ Always there for them
  - ✓ Made (me) happy
  - ✓ Helped ( me ) with problems
  - ✓ Somebody you could talk to like a friend
- Things that would make it better included:-
  - ✓ Photographs of myself as a baby ( said by teenager)
  - ✓ Life Story Work
  - ✓ Explaining (to me) why I am looked after
  - ✓ Talking to somebody else who is in the same boat ( also looked after)
- The young people told us that every young person who becomes looked after should have the following help:-
  - ✓ Photographs of the place where you will live. Every foster carer should have a book so you know about them before you go there
  - ✓ Meet the foster carer before moving to live there
  - ✓ Have an explanation of what is happening so the young person can understand
  - ✓ (Let me) Know there is somebody there who can help me
  - ✓ Help (me) to learn from (my) mistakes
  - ✓ Help (me) to be aware of the people I can trust
  - ✓ Help (me ) to be aware of my surroundings
  - ✓ Support (me) so I am able to be my own person
  - ✓ Support (me) so I am able to tell you where I am going
  - ✓ Support (me) so I am able to choose my friends wisely
- Additional comments from young people were received which include the following:
  - ✓ If you have to decide what happens to me, tell me about it
  - ✓ Don't promise something and then don't do it
  - ✓ Make it easy for me to say what I think
  - ✓ What I feel about things is important as well

- ✓ Don't ask me about things you can't change

We will make use of this information in our delivery under the strategy to ensure that young people are heard.

The strategy was also open to public consultation via the Cwm Taf Hub leading to a small number of responses that highlight the importance of early intervention and the role of the not for profit sector in supporting vulnerable families.

## Compliance with the Social Service and Well-being Act

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act received Royal Assent and became law on 1 May 2014. It provides the legal framework for improving the well-being of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, and for transforming social services in Wales.

The Act will transform the way social services are delivered, promoting people's independence to give them stronger voice and control.

The Statutory framework of the SSWB Act incorporates 3 parts: Guidance; Regulation; and Codes of Practice. The Act will be in force in April 2016. It is broadly made up on 11 parts. Part 6 of the SSWB Act is to safeguard and promote the well-being of looked after and accommodated children and care leavers, and to enable each child or young person to achieve their personal well-being outcomes. Part 6 of the Act replaces Part 3 of the Children Act 1989.

Whilst the legal framework for looked after children is contained within part 6 of the Act other parts are also of significance. Part 3 and 4 (assessing and meeting the needs) and part 2 (Well-being) are extremely important in the development of services for Looked After Children. There is a mapping of well-being outcomes, quality standards for Local Authorities and measures in Appendix A.

Local authorities, when exercising their social services functions, **must** act in accordance with the requirements contained with the code of practice part 6 which was laid before the National Assembly November 2015.

The outcomes we look to achieve through this strategy are set within the context of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act and its codes of practice, regulations and standards.

## Early Intervention and Prevention

***Early intervention and Prevention is intrinsic to this strategy; from preventing the child/young person entering the care system to ensuring that their family has the skills and capacity needed for their child to return home.***

The purpose of an early intervention approach is to work in partnership to improve outcomes for children, young people and families at every stage.

Early intervention requires a shift in focus onto the causes rather than the symptoms of problems. Investment in prevention and early intervention has been proven to reduce the demand on specialist services in the longer term.

### **Preventing the child/young person entering the care system**

What does this mean?

- Addressing problems at the earliest opportunity before they are able to escalate and by helping to break the longer term intergenerational cycle of poor outcomes.
- Focusing on timely and proportionate interventions to prevent family breakdown.
- Preventative services will work with families to reduce cyclical behaviour patterns that lead to repeated risks of children and young people being looked after.

### **Ensuring the family has the skills and capacity needed for their child to return home.**

What does this mean?

- The aim is to work with families whilst their child is being looked after to support them to develop/build on the skills necessary to ensure that they are best prepared for their child to return and remain home.
- When children do become looked after ensure rapid development of support plans to enable children to return home quickly, unless the care plan is for alternative permanence.
- Closer working between Looked After Children and Early intervention and Prevention services are the focus.

To ensure that early intervention and prevention is effective it requires the workforce within Social Services and wider prevention services to identify families 'at risk' and work together to offer the right support at the right time.

## **Outcomes for children, young people and their families**

Below are the outcomes that through a multi-agency approach we will achieve in order to meet our goal of:-

***'Whenever it is safe, children and young people remain living with their family or kinship network due to improved early identification of needs and positive interventions'***

An outcome is defined as the benefit experienced by the community. An outcome represents the desired result from improving the wellbeing of the communities we serve. For the purpose of this strategy ‘the community’ is regarded as children, young people, and families in need and organisations.

An outcome is not in itself a measure, so in order to be accountable and to assess whether we are achieving the desired outcomes we will use performance measures and Performance indicators. This enables the service to quantify achievement and measure change.

**Performance Measures:** Performance Measures "measure" the effectiveness of something the service does, to contribute to delivering an outcome. The council, and its services, are therefore responsible for delivery against performance measures.

At this stage Regional and Local performance measures have not been agreed, these will be scoped during workshops with partners early 2016 and will reflect the effectiveness of the work/ outcomes being delivered under this strategy.

**Performance Indicators:** Performance Indicators provide an "indication" of whether an outcome is being successfully delivered. A performance Indicator cannot be met by the council in isolation. The council and its partners will contribute to the performance indicators; they are not able or solely responsible for meeting them.

For the purpose of this strategy we will be using the National Wellbeing performance indicators which have been mapped against our outcomes to ensure that we are meeting the required wellbeing outcomes as well as our identified outcomes.

## Outcomes

<i>Early Intervention and prevention.</i>	<p><b>Outcome 1</b></p> <p><b>More children and young people are supported to live with their families, safely.</b></p>
<i>Intervention</i>	<p><b>Outcome 2</b></p> <p><b>More Parents and carers are supported to help their children live with their families safely.</b></p>
<i>Improved wellbeing for Looked after Children</i>	<p><b>Outcome 3</b></p> <p><b>The well-being and opportunities for children and young people who become looked after is improved.</b></p>

<i>Listen and learn/ collaboration</i>	<p><b>Outcome 4</b></p> <p><b>People who need our support experience a seamless service that will help them achieve the things that matter to their wellbeing.</b></p>
--	--

The below section details aims that will contribute to achieving our outcomes.

Local performance measures will be agreed during the development of the delivery plan which will bring together existing work streams and develop new ones. The delivery plan will guide and monitor delivery against the outcomes and therefore the measures will need to reflect contribution from all partners. The delivery plan will be developed in conjunction with partners.

### **Outcome 1**

More children and young people are supported to live with their families, safely.

#### **In order to achieve the outcome we will:-**

1. Improve mechanisms to intervene early to support families with issues that could put their families at risk.
2. Furnish parents, carers and families with information, advice and assistance they need, in a way they can use it.
3. Staff who work with children and families have the appropriate skills, knowledge and access to specialists that is required to fulfil their role.
4. Develop a joint evidenced based approach to the commissioning of services, seeking opportunities to benefit from regional partnership led commissioning.

### **Outcome 2**

More Parents and carers are supported to help their children live with their families safely.

#### **In order to achieve the outcome we will:-**

1. Map existing provision of services that support children and families to ensure that there is a strong relationship between need and delivery, and a congruent outcome focused model for delivery across the region.
2. Establish a process for ensuring that reunification is successful through ensuring the most effective multi-agency interventions.
3. Potential carers, foster carers, adopters, family members (kinship) are trained to effectively support the children and young people in their care.

### **Outcome 3**

The wellbeing and opportunities of Children and Young People who become looked after are improved.

#### **In order to achieve the outcome we will:-**

1. Ensure that all multi-agency processes for decision making and supporting looked after young people have mechanisms for promoting the views of the child.
2. Consistently achieve high standards in permanence practice, with no missed opportunities for learning and improvement.
3. Support children in care and those leaving care to prepare for adulthood and independence within a safe environment.
4. Achieve amongst partners an agreement that services will prioritise their response to looked after children.

#### **Outcome 4**

People who need our support experience a seamless service that will help them achieve the things that matter to their wellbeing.

#### **In order to achieve the outcome we will:-**

1. Practitioners will develop their skills and improve processes to ensure outcome focused planning is consistently implemented.
2. Develop and agree then evaluate performance measures across the region that will facilitate continuous improvement.
3. Service user experience will be used to improve our services.
4. Evaluate appropriate information and intelligence to illustrate the effectiveness the system in protecting and supporting children.
5. Activate the intelligence of the Population Needs Assessment which will inform the delivery plan.

## **Governance and accountability**

This strategy has been commissioned and developed by the partner agencies of the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board.

The delivery plan will drive and monitor delivery against the outcomes within this strategy. The plan will identify targets and performance measures (including relevant National and Regional Performance Indicators) to ensure the outcomes of the strategy are met.

The delivery plan will be a partnership plan with overall accountability to the Cwm Taf Social Services and Well-being Partnership Board for its work. The Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board will however continue to hold the Partnership Board to account given the safeguarding duties within the strategy. In order to achieve this Cwm Taf Social Services and Well-being Partnership Board and Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board will identify and agree a reporting arrangement with key performance indicators that will ensure that the delivery plan maintains focus and priority in relation to safeguarding children and young people.