



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

21 April 2021

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

Agenda Item No:
Children's Services: Covid 19 Recovery and Contingency Planning

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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Scrutiny Members in relation to: Children's Services response to the continuing impact of the pandemic, recovery, and contingency planning.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- Acknowledge the information contained within the report.
- Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

3. BACKGROUND

- Children's Services provided a report to Scrutiny Committee on 4 November 2020, in relation to the functioning of the service during the Pandemic and the then developing Recovery Plan. The period since has been a demanding one operationally, and saw the service move to a business

critical approach due to the national lockdown implemented 20 December 2020 following the First Minister's announcement on 19th December.

- The service has however moved forward with some focussed improvement and development work during this period and is beginning to respond to the adjustments to restrictions at the exit of the lockdown, as they occur.
- There continues to be uncertainty about the specific mid and long term impact of the Pandemic for vulnerable families, however, given the rate of referral and the conditions families face which, in many cases are understood to compound adversity, the service is sadly still projecting increasing demand, whilst working to connect as many families as possibly to early help or preventative services.

4. CHILDREN'S SERVICES CRITICAL BUSINESS APPROACH

4.1 As much of Children's Services' provision is required by statute and is not altered by the Pandemic and related legislation, the Service continues to work to Welsh Government statutory guidance, subject to risk assessment and physical distancing requirements, adapting methods of service delivery as necessary.

4.2 Agile working remains in place and staff continue to work from home wherever possible.

4.3 Guidance for staff was revised in December 2020 to take account of the Alert Level 4 national coronavirus restrictions, as Children's Services focused activity on the four critical areas of work previously identified: access to services and family support, safeguarding duties, children looked after and youth offending. A detailed breakdown can be found at Appendix 1.

4.4 Community Well-Being staff, Children's Services and YOS are now once again beginning to deliver what is likely to be a staged return of services in step with the easements of the previous restrictions. The guiding principle must be how we safeguard the health and wellbeing of our service users and staff as well as minimise the continuing risk of infection.

4.5 Priority is being given to safely visiting and hearing the voices of children most at risk, this includes those on the child protection register, those looked after where there is potential placement breakdown or those where input is critical to maintaining children at home. We continue to look after children in both residential and foster care, prioritising children and carers most in need of support.

4.6 In line with Welsh Government expectations, arrangements have been put in place for all visitors to Children's Homes to have a lateral flow test which must be negative before entering a children's home. This does not change the existing arrangements for regular residential staff testing.

4.7 Children's Services' have terminate the commissioned external resource to increase social work capacity in our Intensive Intervention Services where we are working with a social work vacancy factor, which had a significant impact on service provision.

5. HOW ARE WE DOING?

Performance Area	Last year / This year as at 31 st March		Comment
	31.3.20	31.3.21	
Number of Contacts	17782	19478	10% increase in contacts received when compared to Apr19-Mar20
Number added to Child Protection Register	598	592	1% decrease in new child protection registrations when compared to Apr19-Mar20
Number of children on the Child Protection Register	463	425	8% decrease in the overall numbers of children on the Child Protection Register
Number Becoming Looked After	179	148	17% decrease in the number of children becoming looked after
Total Number of Children Looked After	717	695	3% decrease in the overall number of children who are looked after
Rate of Looked After per 10,000 child capita	143.1	138.7	Decrease in the rate of children looked after per 10,000 population
Number of Exits from CLA	136	170	25% increase in the number of care leavers
Number of Adoption Placements Made	25	20	20% decrease in the number of children placed with prospective adopters
Percentage of children who are looked after who are placed with their parents or extended family	302 (42%)	307 (44%)	Small increase in the percentage of children who are looked after who are placed at home with parents or placed with extended family
Number of Care Leavers Being Supported	244	293	20% increase in the number of care leavers requiring support

Care leavers not in education, employment or education	140	144	3% increase in the number of care leavers who were not engaged in education employment or training
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6. SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

6.1 Despite the demands of the Pandemic response, the service has identified some key strategic areas to make progress on. For example, a **Workforce Strategy** has been developed, our vision being to have a motivated, engaged and valued workforce, with the capacity, competence and confidence to meet the needs of children and families..

6.2 A staff well-being week was held in December 2020, which included a programme of events designed to give staff the opportunity to focus on their physical and emotional wellbeing given the impact of the Pandemic. Feedback is being considered as part of the Workforce Strategy to maintain the focus on the wellbeing of staff during the pandemic

6.3 Action plans have been developed, and key components are being implemented in response to **Care Inspectorate Wales Reports** regarding disabled children and 16+ services

This includes:

- The remodelling of the Disabled Children's Teams (DCT), the new structure being in place from April 21
- Development of a strength based outcome focused work model of social work practice for the whole Children's Service and accompanying training programme
- Taking forward key elements of the 16+ Support and Accommodation Strategy assisted by the new Mercury Project Team which will look at accommodation pathways currently operating for children looked after who are 16+ years of age. This is due in part to the clear pressures being experienced across the services and also the impact the pandemic has had on the functioning of our systems and pathways.

6.4 Children's Services has appointed the Institute of Public Care (IPC) at Oxford Brookes University to undertake an independent evaluation of the **Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy**, which was developed in 2017-2018 to:

- Safely prevent children from needing to become looked after.
- Safely reduce the amount of time that some children remain looked after, helping them to return home where it is safe to do so or supporting them into special guardianship or adoption, as appropriate.
- Safely reduce reliance on out of county placements for some looked after children.

The purpose of this evaluation is to inform future service development as part of Children's Services Delivery plan 2021/22.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 This is an information report.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 This is an information report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

9.1 There are no direct financial implications aligned to this report.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The legal requirements for children and young people are set down within the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Children Act 1989.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/ SIP

11.1 This consultation links to the corporate priority of promoting independence and positive lives for everyone by ensuring that the Council listens to the people it provides for.

11.2 It also contributes to the following well-being goals:

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities
- A globally responsible Wales

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 Early help and statutory children's services have, and will continue to be provided during the Pandemic, delivery adjustments being made dependent on the national alert level.

12.2 The service will continue to provide services to families with a priority approach on the basis of risk and need and with an emphasis on prevention in line with the Welsh recovery framework principles for children's services.

12.3 In anticipation of increasing challenges for families, our focus on early help and prevention remains a priority.

Appendix 1: Children's Services' critical business services includes the following business areas:

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND FAMILY SUPPORT:

- Emergency Duty Team (EDT)
- Front Door for referrals – Information Advice Assessment (IAA) / Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Assess and provide support at home where there is potential breakdown or where input is critical to support children and young people to remain at home
- Direct Payments, where Personal Assistant (PA) support cannot be accessed due to PA sickness or isolation.
- MASH: Child Protection and Adult Protection functions and Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC – High Risk Domestic Abuse) referrals
- High risk cases identified by Resilient Families Service
- High risk cases identified by Youth Engagement and Participation Service

SAFEGUARDING DUTIES:

- Strategy discussions and section 47 investigations
- Child protection visits- children at the most immediate risk will continue to be identified and prioritised
- Child protection medicals-in accordance with CTMUHB guidance on medical examinations
- Children requiring placements due to safeguarding concerns
- Child Protection Conferences
- Pre-birth assessments
- PLO meetings for cases that require agreement to placement or court application
- Access to Child Protection Register and arranging temporary registration in other Local Authorities
- Hospital discharges: new-borns
- Court work (in accordance with Family Court guidance)

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER:

- Continuing to provide care to all children and young people placed in our residential children's homes. Non-essential visits to children's residential homes are restricted.
- Ensuring we provide residential care to children with external residential providers.
- Ensuring care is provided to children looked after with foster carers and prioritising support to placements RAG rated as requiring the highest level of support.
- Children looked after statutory visits- children at the most immediate risk will be identified and prioritised including potential placement break down.
- Adoption transitions for children to proceed only following joint risk assessment with VVC.
- Contact for children with family members will continue to be assessed on a case by case basis, with particular consideration being given to new-born babies and court agreed arrangements.

YOUTH OFFENDING:

- Children held in police stations and requiring an appropriate adult.
- Young people on Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Orders and Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Bail Support.
- Young people who are remanded into the secure estate or sentenced and residing in the secure estate.
- Transition and resettlement of young people being released from the secure estate.
- Young people subject to MAPPA level 2 processes.
- Young people appearing in Court.