

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Annual Director of Social Services Report

2023/24



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Director of Social Services – Introduction

Each year, the Council's Director of Social Services is required under the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 to publish an annual report on how Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has delivered it's Social Services self-reflecting on what we have achieved and the challenges we have faced across both our Adult and Children's Social Services, emphasising the links to our Council Corporate Plan and providing examples of how our work has promoted and improved the wellbeing of those that we support. We also set out our service priorities for 2024/25.

2023/24 has been another both challenging and rewarding year. Our Adult and Children's Social Services have continued to feel the pressure related to recruitment and retention and increased complexity of need. This is in a context of a pandemic legacy, the enduring cost of living crisis and the difficult financial position across the public sector. Like other Social Service functions across Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf, is having to balance service pressures and complexity against reducing local authority funding and having to make savings, and whilst both Adult Social Care and Children's Services remain a priority for the Council, it is inevitably impacting on our ability to manage expectations and meet need.

Notwithstanding these significant challenges, both our Adult and Children's Social Services have continued to deliver and transform services, working collaboratively, where possible, to identify opportunities to tackle issues and maximise resources to ensure we continue to meet our statutory obligations. The imperative to work in partnership across the local authority and work all other agencies has never been greater.

Our ability to keep delivering services has only been possible because of the dedication, commitment and immense efforts of our social services workforce, commissioned providers, foster carers and people who come forward to adopt children and our partner organisations. We are also fortunate to have strong corporate support from across the Council and support of colleagues from other departments and our Elected Members.

I am extremely proud of our achievements, the good news stories and case studies, that remind us of the positive impact we make to the lives of some of our most vulnerable people in Rhondda Cynon Taf. I would like to thank everyone who has ensured that our residents have received the care and support they need, and I hope that this report shows the results of their hard and tireless work over the past year.

Neil Elliott

Director of Social Services

section

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Children's Services Overview




In Children's Services, we contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan **"Making a difference"** and specifically the wellbeing priority **"Ensuring PEOPLE are independent, healthy and successful"** by


“Improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do.”

In this Section, we provide data and information to evidence key service achievements, developments, and challenges in Children's Services in 2023/24, together with our key service priorities for 2024/25, where further developments and change have been identified.

Our key achievements in 2023/24

This year has seen continued high demand and increasing complexity for Children's Services. This is expected to continue in the current context as vulnerable families experience the long-term impact of pandemic harm and austerity. Children's Services are serving a community where there are high levels of domestic abuse, poor mental health, substance misuse and exploitation. This reinforces the need to deliver against our strategic priorities that are intended to support us to focus on prevention, strengthening families and moving towards a not for profit future of care services for looked after young people. An overview of demand and related performance is set out below:

28,035 
contacts for children
received by statutory Social
Services during the year
(up from 26,712 in 2022/23)

97% 
of the contacts received, a
decision was made by the
end of the next working day
(98% in 2022/23).

45% 
of the contacts received,
advice or assistance
was provided
(45% 2022/23).

331 
children on the Child
Protection Register
on 31st March (down
from 407 2022/23).

5,635 
new assessments
completed for children
(up from 5,633 in 2022/23).

4,487 
within statutory timescales
(down from 4,628 in 2022/23).

1,803
children with a care
and support plan (down
from 1,904 in 2022/23).



842
families known to Resilient Families
Service with increased resilience
(down from 1,075 in 2022/23).



Despite these pressures, teams across Children's Services have continued to deliver high quality safe services to vulnerable children and families, as evidenced by some of our key achievements set out below:

- We have continued to take forward our Children Looked After Prevention Strategy and the overall numbers are stabilising at a lower rate, and we have seen a reduction in the rate at which under 1 year olds become looked after.
 - At the end of March 2024, we had 637 Children Looked After compared to 624 in 2023, 655 in 2022, and 717 in 2020.
 - The Pre-birth Magu Team is fully operational and has worked with 78 families 2023/24. The rate of Becoming Looked After for under 1 years has fallen from 28% in 2022/23 to 18% in 2023/24 which demonstrates the positive impact of this improved pre-birth support.
 - Reunification Project as part of the CLA Prevention Strategy is complete and we have seen 50 reunifications of families during the year and work is underway to increase that number going forward.
- We have continued to take forward our **Children Looked After Residential Transformation Strategy 2022-2027** which has led to the expansion in number of children homes and we are on target to open seven new homes by 2025.
- In a context of insufficient supply of foster care and increasing complexity, the number of children requiring residential care has increased. However, positively the number of children being placed in Rhondda Cynon Taf (closer to home) has increased as has the number in not for profit settings, whilst the number of children in commissioned for profit settings has decreased.
- In terms of our Children Looked After:
 - Care Leavers continue to thrive as part of the Care2Work scheme with 9 trainees recruited to our Step in the Right Direction programme in 2023/24: Step in the Right Direction **Trainee of the Year**.
 - A care experienced children and young people celebration event was held in November 2023 at the Heritage Park Hotel as a joint celebration between the Virtual School for Children Looked After and Children's Services.
- We have continued to implement our Children's Workforce strategy activities aimed at improving staff wellbeing and maximising the retention of staff:
 - Reflective spaces were nominated for an accolade and support resilience in the services: <https://youtu.be/Uojp3ITPkrM>.
 - Staff took part in one of four Inform and Involve sessions with a celebration theme showcasing reunification of families where a child had previously been looked after and our work with unaccompanied asylum seekers.
 - 19 newly qualified social workers have joined Children's Services.
 - Preparations are underway to develop a Rhondda Cynon Taf Social work Academy.



How are people shaping our Services?

We have continued to strengthen participation of children and young people in line with our new Children's Services Participation Strategy 2023-26 to promote engagement and involvement specifically with Children Looked After and partner agencies to ensure co-production and that the voice of children and young people are heard in service development and delivery. This area of work was identified as a priority for Children's Services in 2023/24 and more information about our work can be found in the Delivering our Priorities section.

In addition, we have continued to increase opportunities for young people and families to have greater say, involvement and choice in their plans and the services they receive, for example, we have:

- continued to improve our Advocacy Services offer in line with the National Offer, providing support to 96 young people and families during the year, where the 'active offer' for advocacy had been made. This compares to 73 young people and families in 2022/23.
- involved staff and family members in the review of our permanence policy so we could understand and identify what works well and what needs to change going forward. This involvement activity included focus groups, interviews and a reunification workshop in the Autumn 2023.
- developed a new 4-week workshop within our Parenting Support Team after it was identified through consultation with parents that the current programmes of 10 weeks were too long for the parents to commit to. The Parenting coordinator developed a new 4-week workshop in place of the 10 weeks covering all the key components of the programmes and deliver face to face within the community. 2 workshops were delivered to 11 families, all completing with positive feedback.
- launched our new Children's Services website to provide more accessible information for children and carers.
- undertook a six-month parent advocacy pilot, delivered by TGP Cymru. The pilot was specific to the child protection arena, with parent advocacy support provided to those parents either entering or those already in Child Protection. All parents were supported to have their voice heard in meetings via their wishes and feelings reports which was written in partnership with advocates and then via support at meetings. This has now been extended via Welsh Government funding to a three-year pilot across Wales.

Rhondda Cynon Taf Parent Advocacy Pilot – feedback from parents

“ I feel more confident and knowledgeable and feel I understand the process better because of advocate. ”

“ Even though I am not happy the kids were registered I felt I was listened too and got my point across. ”

“ I would not have been able to get across what I wanted to if it wasn't for you and I wouldn't have remembered all I needed to say so the report really helped me have my say. ”

As in previous years, we have carried out an annual service user survey which asked a sample of children and young people, who had a care and support plan on the day the sample was drawn, how they feel about the care and support they receive. This year we altered some of the questions that we asked to capture more outcome focussed data so we can better understand children's lived experience. This included a free text question 'Do you have anything else to say that is important to you? Your voice matters'. 29 children responded to this question. To improve take up of the survey and gather as many responses as possible we also introduced an online version of the survey which could be accessed through a QR Code to encourage more involvement.

In total 169 children completed the survey, compared to 140 in 2022/23. Overall responses to the survey were positive, as shown in the table below, with the vast majority of respondents stating that they 'felt safe where they lived' and 'felt well cared for'.

Service quality measure

Of the 169 children and young people who responded to the survey:

92% live in a home where they are happy
(Compared to 90% in 2022/23 and 85% in 2021/22).



95% feel well cared for



86% feel they belong in the area where they live
(Compared to 84% in 2022/23 and 81% in 2021/22).



98% feel safe where they live
(Compared to 95% in 2022/23 and 91% in 2021/22).



86% know why they have a social worker



83% are able to speak to their social worker about things that are important to them



94% have been able to use their everyday language
(Compared to 97% in 2022/23 and 97% in 2021/22).



82% had advice, help and support that will prepare them for adulthood (16/17 year-olds only) (Compared to 93% in 2022/23 and 80% in 2021/22).



82% had their views about their care and support listened to
(Compared to 88% in 2022/23 and 82% in 2021/22).



We also receive feedback from children living within our children's homes as a part of regular Quality of Care Reports:

“...You know that I couldn't walk to school on my own, and I really wanted to, well you can see me do it today! Staff have been helping me, crossing the road and that, showing me where to cross and what I got to do, and then they followed behind me a few times and now I can do it on my own! You won't believe it, I knew you wouldn't believe it, but come and watch me now!”

“Staff really do care about me, I didn't think that would happen, but it has.”

“Sometimes I say horrible things to staff, I don't mean it but it's like things build up. It's not good, but they don't make me feel terrible about it. They just listen, and when things are calm, they talk it through, you know, like to try, and work it through so it don't all build up again. There's rules, but you know, they try to find out why I feel like this and help me with it. They don't give up on me.”

“Staff made Christmas really special” another child, who was experiencing their first Christmas in care said, “I had one of the best Christmases I have ever had!”

“I'm supported here to achieve my goals.” While discussing their individual goals with the RI the young person continued by stating “sometimes I change my goals every five minutes, because I'm not sure what they are yet, like what I really want to be, but the staff just say ok give that a go too, and see what works best for you. I've done lots of things to help me make up my mind, I've tried it all!”

“I really like all the staff at the home and that they have lots of time for me and always listen to my opinions.”

“I love it here, the activities are great, and I go to a local swimming club. Also, I have a new Hamster as a pet as I always wanted one.”

“The staff at the home helped to get me back into my education as I was excluded from my last one ,and I really like my new school.” I get to go on free time at my friends and sleep over night, as my friends are really important to me.”

“Comment re Agency staff: “they don't know what they are doing, they don't know us, half of them don't even know how to answer the phone.” Another child commented “bosses should do more to make sure we got enough staff, it makes you feel like bad when agency come in and they don't know you, or how they should be doing things.”

“I love the food here, we make our own Nandos , and I get to have my own choice of a takeaway once a week. I have tried food I have never had before, we all have a say in the weekly menu.”

“I love coming here, we do loads of things we like” and “I love having a sleep over here I see my friend and I wouldn't be able to sleep over her house so it's really good, we can choose what activity we do.”

Children's Services compliments and complaints

The Social Services statutory compliments and complaints process provides the opportunity for service users and their families and carers to provide feedback. The following table summarises the number of complaints and compliments received this year and in the three previous years.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of complaints received	29	47	70	89
Number of compliments received	92	116	75	55

As in previous years, the number of complaints for Children's Services in overall terms remain low although there has been an increase compared to last year. This pattern has been reflected across Wales. When, occasionally, we have not been able to meet people's expectations, we use the feedback to learn what we can do better and, where necessary, we make changes to do this.

What do our inspectors say about our services?

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Quality of Care Inspection Reports 2023/24: Most reports have been positive, demonstrating that our children's residential homes are consistently delivering high quality care in a challenging environment. However, an Inspection of one new children's home that requires refurbishment once there are no children living there has resulted in six Priority Action Notices that are being addressed as a priority.

CIW completed an Inspection in November 2023, the outcome was positive and reflected the quality of care provided by foster carers and the range of services that are available to support both young people and foster carers as well as current position of the service. The last inspection took place 7 years ago. The 2023 inspection resulted in a list of improvements to the service such as:

- Service Manager to be appointed.
- The absence of a service manager has impacted on the provision of the service with no consistent oversight to review and develop service objectives.
- The delegation of tasks and responsibilities from managers to senior staff needs to be reviewed to enable managers to focus on the development of the service and to ensure it meets the requirements of the regulations.
- Recommendations of the review for future planning and developing the service were identified but it was unclear what action and progress had been made.

Further improvements noted by CIW are discussed in the **Quality of Care Report Foster Wales RCT** that was presented to Corporate Parenting Board in March 2024. A number of improvement points have already been actioned, including the appointment of a Service Manager, and an update will be reported on in the next Quality of Care Report. The Inspectors are aiming to return within 12 months of the review undertaken in November 2023 to review the improvements required.



Delivering Our Priorities - Outcomes, Progress and Challenges

Priority 1 - Implementing the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy

Supporting children and families to stay together safely and to thrive and providing effective support for children who need to become looked after are two essential responsibilities and key aims of Children's Services. In 2023/24, we have continued to provide support for families so that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.

As part of this support we have continued to deliver the four development areas that are identified in our Children Looked After (CLA) Prevention Strategy 2022/25 which are:

i) Development of Pre-birth team MAGU

We have developed better pre-birth support for our most vulnerable families including those who are themselves care or social care experienced or have had another child already removed from their care, through our new MAGU team, which became operational in May 2023. Aimed at delivering an integrated health and social care pathway for pregnant women and their families from 12 weeks of pregnancy through to a child's first birthday, across early intervention and edge of care services, the MAGU Team has worked with 78 families 2023/24. By focusing on building skills and resilience and thereby reducing risk, the team seeks to reduce the number of children under one becoming looked after. This first year has enabled comprehensive baseline data to be collated from which to measure future progress but already there are some very promising indicators to suggest Magu is making a difference.

- There has been a 22% reduction in children under the age of 1 year becoming Looked After in Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Reliance on parent and child placements has reduced by 10%.
- Decrease in parent and child placements ending with separation of parent and child. Only 1 of the 9 placements being supported by Magu ended in separation. Previous rates have been at approximately 30-40% separation.
- Of the 46 babies born where Magu support is in place 41 have remained in the care of a parent or have returned to the care of a parent following a period of separation.
- There is good uptake of the service by fathers. Of the 78 families, 53 of those involved a father as part of a couple or as the sole involved parent.
- Improved wellbeing and resilience recorded in 100% of those exiting the service.

A number of very positive outcomes have been achieved on cases where Magu is providing support. There are examples of babies born, where there has been high risk of negative assessment and ultimately potential of separation from a parent, who have successfully remained in the care of one or both of their parents.

MAGU Team

Case study



Both Mother and Father to child A are care experienced having had significant involvement with children's services throughout their childhoods.

Issues of concern:

- Vulnerable to sexual exploitation.
- Use of substances.
- Both having engaged in risk taking behaviour.
- Extremely poor home conditions.
- Difficulties with unstable mental health.
- Lack of self-care and poorly developed independence skills.
- Non-attendance at ante natal appointments.
- Not accepting concerns raised and not engaging with the social worker.

Child protection procedures were initiated leading to a plan for the name of the baby to be placed on the child protection register at birth, due to the extent of worry about parents' ability to care safely for their baby PLO was also invoked.

At this stage, there was a very real possibility of care proceedings being initiated and potential of the plan for the expected baby to be one involving separation from parents.

What form did the intervention take?

- Relationship building, spending time listening to parents differing experiences of children's services involvement in their lives.
- Hands on practical support to address very poor home environment, this included cleaning our debris and clutter, teaching about cleaning products and their use.
- Focus on healthy and safe lifestyle for themselves in order to create a safe environment for their baby.
- Delivery of parenting programmes at pace suitable for learning needs.
- Practical support to prepare for baby, teaching about feeding, bathing, sleeping.
- Assistance to attend ante natal classes and medical appointments, the parents have minimal support network and were at risk of disengagement with health services.

The pre-birth parenting assessment carried out by the social worker from the Intensive Intervention Team concluded that, whilst recognising strengths and significant progress in engagement, the risk of placing the expected baby directly into parents' care was still too high. A parent and child placement was identified as the post birth plan. Parents were highly anxious and needed much support over this period. Although the placement was outside of the local area the Magu worker visited regularly and continued to support parents to understand and work through the concerns identified in the parenting assessment. Magu staff supported the transition from the placement back into the community with a high level of visiting patterns until it was evidenced that risk was reducing.

Outcome:

- The transition has been completed.
- Parents are meeting the needs of their baby consistently to a good standard.
- They provide a warm, nurturing and loving environment.
- They were delighted when PLO ended with a positive post birth parenting assessment.
- They are now awaiting a review child protection conference whereby the plan is to remove the name of their baby from the child protection register.
- They work well with all necessary services for themselves and their baby and are eager to continue with Magu support over the coming months.

In their words:



We are both so happy with the help we have received from you. We hope that all future interactions are as positive, and we strongly believe they will be.



ii) Developing the support of Kinship Carers

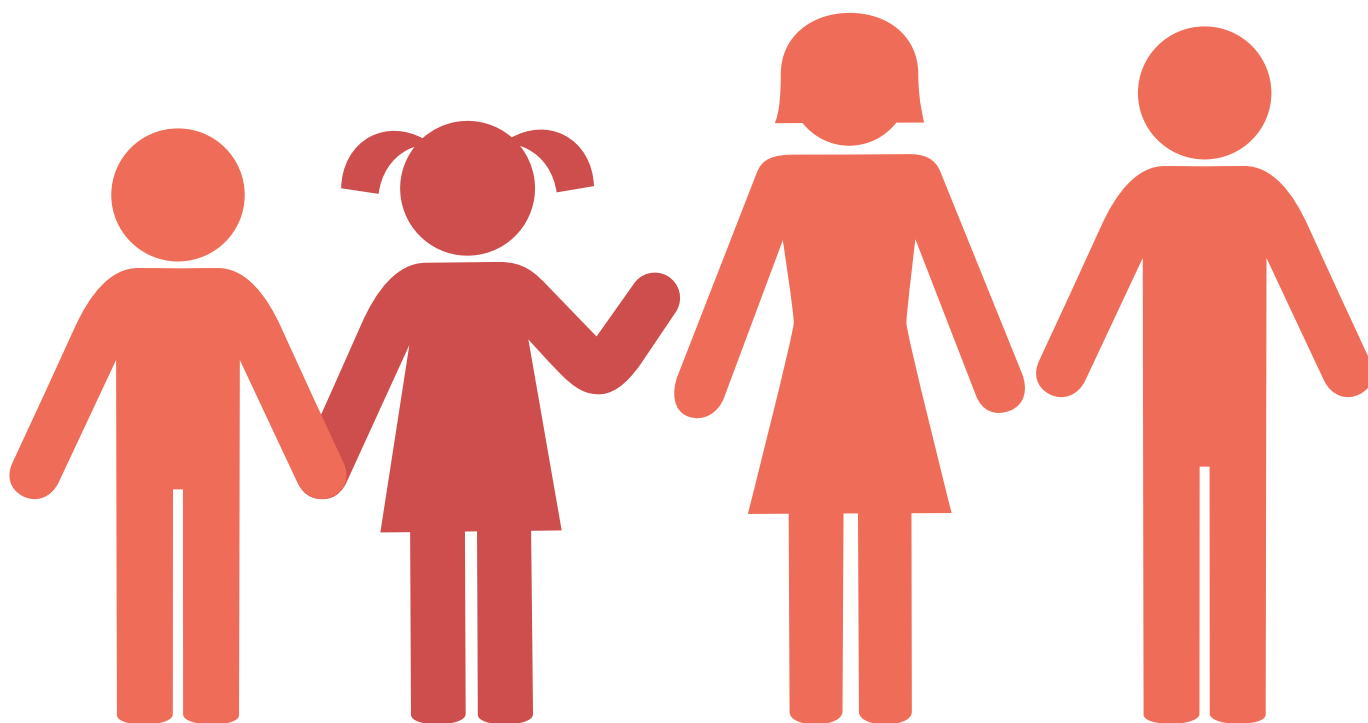
We planned to develop, deliver and publish a core offer for all kinship carers and special guardians but we were unable to progress this in 2023/24. This work has since been achieved. Currently data shows a slight decrease in the number of Special Guardianship Orders from 330 in April 2023 to 323 to March 2024. We will monitor the impact of a pilot that is aimed to make Special Guardianship an equal opportunity for all, especially those who feel that their personal finances are a barrier. We continue to commission **Kinship Cymru** to offer a **Kinship Connected** service to improve outcomes for special guardians and other kinship carers in the county borough. Kinship Connected helps kinship carers develop long-term supportive networks which result in a more stable and supportive environment in which the children in their care can thrive. The support includes one to one support, peer support, advice, support to access grants and free online workshops to ensure that the kinship carers have the help that they need to support the children that they look after. In Rhondda Cynon Taf most looked after children live with relative carers.

iii) Developing our Model of Practice

We are co-producing a new model of practice for social workers and staff working with families that have been referred to Social Services. Following a research exercise which included a literature review and 'deep dive' into a short list of preferred models, a new model of practice was agreed by Children's Services Management Team, and we have started to consult with families and practitioners on the implementation of the new model.

iv) Enhancing Reunification Work

Not all children who need to come into care can or should return home to birth parents. However, many can do so successfully, with the right support and we have refreshed our permanence policy and developed an evidence-based reunification strategy to reunify children home who have spent some time being looked after by the local authority. In doing this, we involved staff and family members so we could understand and identify what works well and what needs to change going forward. This involvement activity included focus groups, interviews and a reunification workshop in the Autumn 2023. In 2023/24, of the 119 children who ceased to be Looked After, 50 children were returned home (42%). This is less than in 2022/23 when 57% of children who were ceased to be Looked After returned home.



Priority 2 - Implementing the Children Looked After Residential Transformation Strategy

For those children that cannot remain with their families, we want to make sure that they can be looked after closer to home. In 2023/24, we continued to work with providers to develop placement sufficiency close to home, making sure that the Council provides the accommodation and support that our looked after children need.

In line with the Welsh Government ambition of eliminating profit from children's care, we are implementing our long-term **Residential Transformation Strategy** which was agreed by Cabinet in February 2023. Through the Strategy, we will develop new provision of children's homes that meets need and matches statutory sufficiency duty including identifying those providers who will collaborate / convert to not for profit. In 2023/24, we have opened four new children's homes, recruited and trained staff for these new facilities as well as purchased another property that will be refurbished and registered as a children's home. As a result of these developments, whilst the number of children requiring residential care has increased, from 56 to 69, positively the number of children being placed in Rhondda Cynon Taf (closer to home) has increased from 459 to 464. 19 children have been placed in in-house Rhondda Cynon Taf children's homes in March 2024 compared to 10 in March 2023. The number of children placed outside of Wales has also fallen from 8% in March 2023 to 5% in March 2024.

Despite these positive developments, it has again been necessary to place a small number of young people in an Operating Without Registration (OWR) setting where the unacceptable alternative would be to provide no accommodation and care for the young person concerned. This is due to increased demand, increasing complexity of need and scarcity of registered children's homes. During January and February the Institute of Public Care reviewed the arrangements, providing considerable assurance and useful pointers for improvement. The report will be received by the Council's Corporate Parenting Board in 2024/25.



Foster Wales RCT is the Local Authority's Fostering Service. In line with our Residential Transformation Strategy, in 2023/24 we continued to work to increase the supply and skill of foster carers in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This included joining the new National campaign '**bring something to the table**' which aims to inspire people from all walks of life to consider fostering with their local authority. Key to this campaign is the sharing of realistic experiences of foster care and exploring the small but significant human attributes people possess that can make the world of difference to a young person in care. We also promoted Foster Week 19th February- 25th February 2024 in collaboration with Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board.

Training and support for our foster carers - Trauma Informed Carers

In addition to the provision of therapy, our therapeutic service MAPPS (Multi-agency Permanence Support Service) provides training to our foster carers to support stability within placements.

You can watch this **Trauma Informed Care Interview** with Tracy, one of our foster carers, to better understand how providing Trauma Informed training can positively impact on children in foster care and their carers.

In 2023/24, there were a total of 268 Foster Carers (128 Mainstream and 140 Kinship) in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This compares to 286 in 2022/23 (136 Mainstream and 150 Kinship). We need to accelerate recruitment of foster carers and costed plans are being developed for approval. To find out more about Foster Wales RCT you can read our **Quality of Care Report** that was presented to our Corporate Parenting Board in March 2024.

Celebrating Success – The Fostering Network Awards 2023

Megan was nominated for **The Fostering Network award** for children of foster carers by her parents supervising social worker. She was selected as a joint winner and was presented with her award at a ceremony in November 2023. The ceremony was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the fostering community and highlight their amazing achievements:

Megan's parents have fostered with Foster Wales Rhondda Cynon Taf since 2008, and in this time, Megan has been a pillar of support to her family.

When her Mum recently became unwell and had to spend time in hospital, Megan helped with the day-to-day care of the twin boys the family care for, who Megan considers as her brothers.

Megan is also balancing studies for her pharmacy degree. Sarah Hanspal-Blake, supervising social worker says: 'Megan has not complained once and has blown me away with the help she's given to the boys and her Dad.'

Her invaluable support, from household tasks, taking the boys to after school sessions and caring for them during the school holidays has not gone unnoticed – vitally, allowing the boys to stay with them.

We continue to improve support provided to our care leavers and have developed an Accommodation and Support Strategy for Care Leavers which outlines our approach to providing support to young people who are leaving care. The strategy has been developed with care leavers through a series of drop in events. The young people we spoke to were in agreement with the principles of the strategy and felt that the continuum of support that we have outlined for care leavers was positive. When reflecting on their own experiences of leaving care, the majority of young people we spoke to said that they would have liked some light touch support when moving into independent living; to have a mentor drop in on them a few times a week to see how they're coping, gradually reducing the number of visits they receive in a week. Additionally, many young people felt they would benefit from more practical information about living alone for the first time, such as information about how to manage money and bills, along with meals that would be easy to make on a budget. We have produced an Easy Read version on the strategy so that care leavers understand what we are trying to deliver and when.



Our Vision for the Accommodation and Support Strategy for Care Leavers:

To provide young people who are leaving care with a continuum of accommodation and support, to meet the needs of care leavers in Rhondda Cynon Taf, whilst developing a clear accommodation pathway for care leavers.

Through the Housing Support Grant Programme we continue to develop supported housing and housing related support services that can help young people develop independent living skills and help to solve problems that might lead to homelessness. Developments this year have included opening a new facility containing 5 self-contained flats for young people aged 16-21 with high support needs.

We continue to provide support and advice and deliver employment, education and training opportunities to our young people living in or leaving care via a range of programmes to improve employability and employment prospects. We provided an **annual update** on our Step in the Right Direction programme and our Care 2 Work programme to the Corporate Parenting Board in March 2024.

Step in the Right Direction Traineeship Programme

Case
study



A two year paid traineeship for young people aged 16-25 living in and leaving care in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Trainees are given work opportunities within a variety of Council Departments.

Lizzy's Story:

Step in the Right Direction Trainee Lizzy Hattersley has been on placement at Adult Day Services Learning Curve in Abercynon. Lizzy completed the All Wales Induction Framework and the CORE qualification. As a result of completing her CORE qualification Lizzy Hattersley applied and was successful in securing a place at Cardiff Met University studying a BA (Hons) Youth & Community Degree course.

Care2Work

Case study



This programme seeks to provide care experienced young people aged 16-25, with encouragement and support to identify and access a range of employment and training opportunities.

Breakdown of Outcomes from April 2023 – March 2024:

Referrals – 101

Secured Employment – 8

Entered further education – 8

Achieved a qualification – 18

Completed a Care2Work Course – 21

Work experience and volunteering – 9

Currently still working with Care2Work – 16

Did not engage – 21

New Initiatives:

From September 2023 Care2Work have linked with the Virtual School to offer all Year 10 and 11 pupils Education, Employment and Training support. Visits arranged with Designated Person's each academic term.

JE's Story:

Referral received from Designated Person at Ferndale Community School as JE wasn't attending school and at risk of leaving education with no qualifications and no destination. J.E met with Care2Work adviser and expressed an interest of working within the construction industry.

Advised JE of Care2Works 2 week Introduction to Construction course and he was keen to attend as he wanted to achieve his Level 1 in Health and safety and CSCS Card. School agreed to release JE to attend the course. JE attended every session during the 2 week Introduction to Construction course with Care2Work and showed that he was capable of attending, participating and also achieving his goals. JE has built up an excellent rapport with Care2Work and attends weekly revision sessions.

Since completing the course and working with Care2Work JE has attended school on a more regular basis and has even sat an exam and achieved a qualification in science.

JE is due to sit his Level 1 in Health and Safety and the CITB CSCS Test on 10th May 2024 and has applied for and been accepted for Level 1 Construction Multi Skills in Coleg Y Cymoed for September 2024.

There has been an increase in the number of unaccompanied child refugees (UASC) who have entered our care from 8 children under 18 in 2022/23 to a total of 17 children under 18 and 15 over 18 up to the end of March 2024 via the National (UK) Transfer Scheme and a small number of spontaneous arrivals. It is envisaged to be an area of increasing need as geopolitical; economic; and climate factors drive migration across nations.

Priority 3 - Promoting engagement and involvement - Delivering our Participation Strategy

We have continued to strengthen participation of children and young people in line with our new Children's Services Participation Strategy 2023-26 to promote engagement and involvement specifically with Children Looked After and partner agencies to ensure co-production and that the voice of children and young people are heard in service development and delivery.

Our participation promise to Children and Young People

We will treat you fairly.

We will always listen, respect you and be professional.

We want to have open and honest conversations with you.

We want you to know your rights and what to expect when we work together.

Staff will share their 'All about me' profiles (when appropriate) so you know who is supporting you and what their likes and interests are.

We want you to challenge us if you feel that you are not being listened to.

Tell us how we could do things better to support you.

Every person is different and unique, we will learn from your ideas and listen to what support you feel you need and work together to develop this.

Tell us what went well and what could be better through feedback.

We want to understand your experiences and listen to your feedback to help make improvements for all children and young people.

Every year we will provide feedback through 'You said, we did' about the improvements we have made to better support all Children and Young People.

Our participation promise to Parents, Carers and Families

We will always listen, respect you and be professional.

We will get to know you.

We want you to know your rights and what to expect when we work together.

Staff will share their 'All about me' profiles (when appropriate) so you know who is supporting you and what their likes and interests are.

We will always check that you have understood the information discussed.

Your voices will be heard.

You can challenge us if we fail to meet the high standards that we have set for ourselves.

We will use the information we receive from you to help us improve our support for parents, carers and families.

We will provide annual (every year) feedback through 'You said, we did' and share the improvements we have made for parents, carers and families.

As part of continuing and strengthening the 'Get Involved' conversation with care experienced young people, participation events were held with young people aged 11 to 15 on the **22nd September 2023** and **10th November 2023** at the YMa, Pontypridd. Young people got involved in an arts and crafts session and a session making non-baked desserts (based on previous feedback). Young people also shared their voice about what is going well for them and what could be improved for children and young people.

A key action within the Participation Strategy 2023/26 is to develop public facing information for children, young people and families. An aspect of this project will be to redevelop our website information for care experienced children and young people. This is taking forward feedback from the 'Get Involved' survey and in person participation events, where young people have said they would like more accessible information that they can quickly look up along with information for supporting their mental health and wellbeing.

Further examples of work undertaken in 2023/24 to engage and involve care experienced children and young people were presented to the **Corporate Parenting Board in January 2024** and includes the following case study below:

Supporting care experienced children and young people – Care Experienced Children and Young People Celebration Event

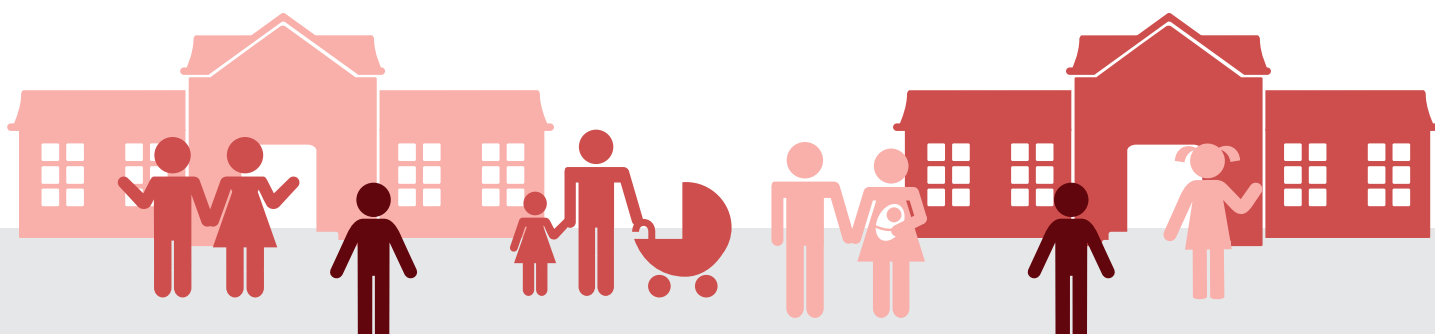
A care experienced children and young people celebration event was held on the 29th November 2023 at the Heritage Park Hotel as a joint celebration between the Virtual School for Children Looked After and Children's Services. 37 young people were nominated for achievement awards in education, personal achievements, arts and sport.

The event included a performance by the Our Sing Proud Cymru choir that is made up of children, young people and carers as part of Voices from Care Cymru and included a song with the use of Makaton along with inspirational speeches and performances from children and young people.

Over 100 children, young people, carers, staff and Corporate Parent Board Members attended to recognise young people's achievements.

Comments from the Participation Officer:

“ A Foster carer told me that she found the event inspirational for her young people because it was good for them to listen to young people who have overcome challenges and are doing well with their education, training or employment and for her son to listen to this information from young people themselves. **”**



Early Intervention and Prevention

There is continued increasing demand and activity at the front-door with 28,035 contacts for children received by statutory Social Services during the year, up from 26,712 in 2022/23.

In 2023, we asked the Institute of Public Care to conduct a review of our Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service. The purpose of the review was to make recommendations on the optimum operating model, to deliver an effective and efficient service that meets the needs of children and families and is aligned with digital and place-based transformations that will be taking place over the next few years.

We have continued to provide support to families as early as possible to increase resilience and prevent the need for statutory services. In 2023/24, we engaged with 1,195 families who increased their resilience after completing work with our Resilient Families Service. This is consistent with 2022/23 when 1,263 families reported increased resilience following an intervention with the Resilient Families Service.

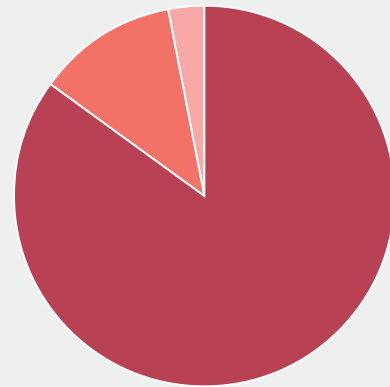
Resilient Families Service Outcomes

(for those families that completed intervention)

85% NFA Resilience Improved

12% Disengaged from Evaluation

3% NFA Resilience not improved



Resilient Families Service – Feedback from a Family

“ I feel that both myself, [Child] and [Child] have benefitted greatly from the support you have provided. ”

“ Thank you for all your help! It’s really appreciated. ”

“ We are extremely grateful for the time you took to help us, and the way you really listened to our concerns ”

“ Your individual approach to the three of us has meant that we have all been supported in the areas where we have needed it. ”

“ Coming away from each of our discussions, I felt that I had gained positive feedback and reassurance in my decisions going forward, instead of the expected feeling that my pride had been dented. ”

“ When I first self referred into RFS, I was doubting myself as to if I’d made the right decision. Opening up your family’s situation and struggles to a stranger makes you feel incredibly vulnerable... Feeling that I would be seen as a bad mother, I was really apprehensive about our first meeting. However, within the first few minutes of meeting you, you’d put me at ease ”

“ You made it so easy for me to explain my concerns to you. Instead of feeling the judgement that ‘d anticipated, I instead felt that you understood what I was saying. ”

“ We are already seeing results from our CAB referral. I’ve applied for a blue badge for [Child] (independently of DLA) and this has been approved by RCTCBC. This alone will make the world of difference to [Child] when we are out and about. ”

Young Carers

The assessments completed for young carers under 18 increased to 147 during 2023/24 compared to 133 the previous year. Our contracted support provider Action for Children delivered 144 events for young carers with more than 1,100 attendances during the year, with a further 70 specific events and groups delivered for sibling carers with more than 450 attendances. The events and activities offered to young carers and sibling carers are focused on providing a break from the caring role, as well as building resilience and new skills, and has included:

- Regular group sessions across the county to provide peer support
- Wellbeing sessions
- Mentoring support
- Cooking skills
- Swimming
- Trips to theme parks and play centres
- Bowling
- Cinema
- Money management
- Interview techniques
- Trips to the beach
- Graffiti art
- Singing workshops

Young Carer Support

Case study



Child A lives at home with her mother and father and was referred for support by the carers champion at her school. Child A's mother has diagnosed Epilepsy and has been experiencing severe seizures for the past 10 years which can take her some time to recover from. The seizures have left Mum with nerve damage in her leg, and this affects her mobility and how long she is able to walk around independently. Child A and her parents agreed to a young carer's assessment which identified the following areas of concern:

- Child A feels she needs to help a lot at home to make things easier for Mum as there is a possibility that stress may be a trigger for the seizures.
- Child A is reluctant to leave Mum in case something happens to her while she's away and, following a seizure, Child A stays with Mum in case she needs anything while she recovers.
- Concerns around Child A's emotional wellbeing. Child A doesn't like to talk about her worries and feelings with her family as she doesn't want to add to their stress and acknowledged that she doesn't feel able to talk to anyone else.
- In school, Child A worries about how her Mum is and finds it difficult to concentrate.
- When the family are able to go out together, Child A spends most of the time watching her Mum in case there are signs that she isn't feeling well. Parents feel that Child A is missing out on going out and having fun.

What form did the support take?

- During the assessment process, the family felt it was beneficial to have the time to talk openly about their situation and the impact it was having on each of them. The parents were able to provide recognition and reassurance to Child A.
- Child A applied for the Young Carers Card and takes it to school every day. All of her teachers are now aware that when Child A shows her card, she needs some time alone or needs to talk to someone in a quiet place. She can use her phone if her Mum has been unwell in the morning, after negotiating this with the carers champion.
- Child A was referred to the young carers project for ongoing support. Initially she wouldn't stay for group sessions as she didn't want to leave Mum. So they invited Child A and her Mum to an activity together and were able to engage with Child A as she knew her Mum was still there. Child A gradually started getting to know the other young carers and the workers and is now regularly attending the group sessions. She has made new friends and is having a regular break from being at home.

Outcome:

Child A's parents say that she is much happier going to school now, is getting more confident asking teachers for help and knows that she can use her phone at lunchtime which has reduced her anxiety about leaving her Mum. Child A is now leaving her Mum for short periods of time and Mum said that it is getting easier for her each time she does it. Child A has been engaging with other young people who are also young carers so is aware that there are lots of other young people who have similar home lives and worries that she has. Child A now has a network of support outside of her family and has regular opportunities to talk about any worries or concerns she has. She has been enjoying group sessions and small activities independently of her family and has been focussing on herself rather than worrying about how Mum is.

In their words:



"Child A looks forward to going to the project and wishes she could go every week! She knows that they are all in the same situation. She has got a lot better leaving me for a short time and will now ask for help when she needs it."

"It's really good (the young carers project). It makes me feel relaxed. I wish it were more often!"



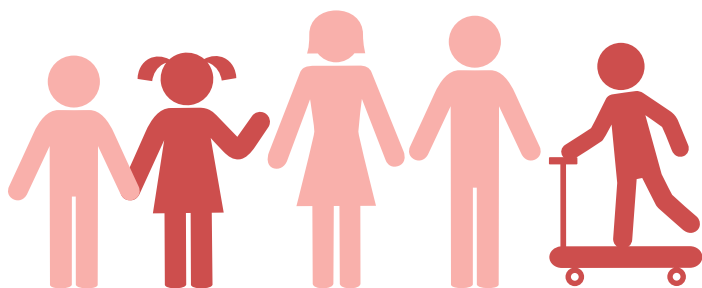
Safeguarding Children and Young People

We have collaborated with our partners via the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board and Community Safety Partnership to agree development of a Regional Exploitation Strategy. More information can be found in the **Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board Annual Report 2023/24**.

We have also collaborated to develop a RCT Safer Spaces initiative that will further enable communities to develop opportunities to help themselves using a contextual safeguarding approach as well as contribution to other new initiatives such as the Built for Zero Pilot and Clear, Hold, Build Framework.

We continue to provide a Youth Justice Service in line with the 'child first' approach that we set out in our Youth Justice Board Strategic Plan 2021/24 which treats children as children and seeks to ensure that they are not unnecessarily criminalised because of their vulnerability or the challenges they face. It ensures that the service is child-centred rather than service focused and meets the individual needs of children and responds to their best interests. In 2023/24, **a Toolkit and other training material and resources** were developed for professionals to introduce a new way of working to reduce the number of care experienced children and young people who come into contact with the criminal justice system. The Toolkit aims to turn the principles in the **'All Wales Protocol for Reducing the Criminalisation of Children and Young People 2022'** into practice. As part of the development of the Toolkit, over 65 children and young people who are care experienced were involved and their views have shaped the content within the Toolkit. More information is available in our **Youth Justice Service update report** that was presented to Corporate Parenting Board in January 2024.

This work has seen an increase in the number of out of court disposals (from 124 in 2022/23 to 143 in 2023/24) therefore diverting children and young people from formal sanctions, and a criminal record. This is a positive trend and aligns with the drive to reduce the criminalisation of children and young people where appropriate. However, we have seen an increase in First Time Entrants to the youth justice system during the past 12 months (from 55 in 2022/23 to 66 in 2023/24) and a significant increase in the numbers of children remanded or sentenced to a period of youth detention (from 2 in 2022/23 to 8 in 2023/24). Reducing these numbers will be a clear challenge and a priority for the year ahead, and success will, to a large degree, depend upon an improved understanding of the needs of our cohort and the effectiveness of strong partnership working alongside Children's Services, Health, Education and Police.



What are our priorities for 2024/25?

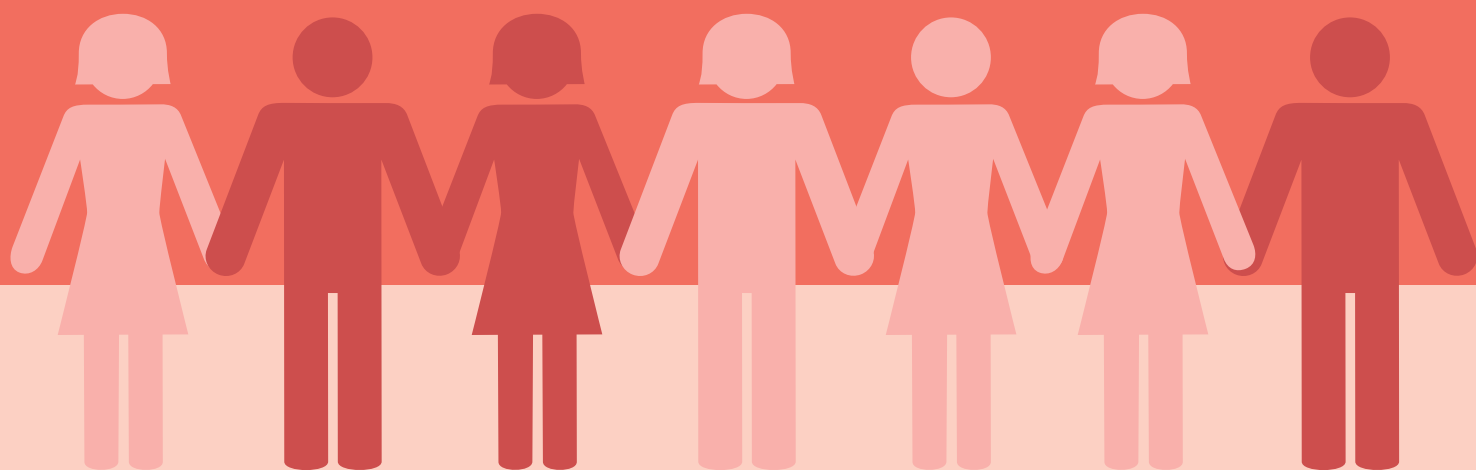
Our strategic priorities will remain the same for 2024/25:

1. We will implement the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy- Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.
2. We will deliver the Residential Transformation Strategy- Making sure that the Council provides the accommodation and support that our looked after children need.
3. We will deliver the Participation strategy which outlines Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services approach to supporting the rights of children, young people, parents, carers, and families in receipt of care and support, to have their voices heard and to actively participate in decisions about their life and help to shape future service developments.
4. We will re-design our Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service ('Right Help, Right Place, Right Time' Strategy') alongside stakeholders to be a sustainable service with a strong prevention intention at the front door.
5. We will ensure that Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services' workforce is motivated, engaged and valued; staff have the capacity, skills, competence and confidence to meet the needs of children and families.

section

3

Adult Services Overview



In Adult Services, we contribute to the Council's Corporate Plan **"Making a difference"** and specifically the wellbeing priority **"Ensuring PEOPLE are independent, healthy and successful"** by

“ Supporting our residents who are older, vulnerable or who have disabilities, to remain independent and have a good quality of life. ”

“ Integrating health and social care and providing support for those with mental health problems and complex needs. ”

In this Section, we provide data and information to evidence key service achievements, developments, and challenges in Adult Services in 2023/24, together with our key service priorities for 2024/25, where further developments and change have been identified.

Our key achievements in 2023/24

Adult Social care generally is facing a challenging future. Demographic change, rising demand, difficulties associated with funding and the ability to recruit and retain the workforce place social care services under pressure at a time when other partners across the public services, such as the NHS and housing, are equally challenged.

We are fortunate that we have a positive tradition of joint working with the NHS to co-ordinate care for people with complex conditions and care and support needs particularly in areas such as learning disabilities, mental health services, hospital discharge and reablement. However, to effectively meet the scale and interdependency of needs anticipated from an ageing population we will have to facilitate a move towards a more integrated health and social care model. That said, adult Social Care is delivered in a variety of ways including directly through council services, from other social care providers, or the community and voluntary sector or by support from family and friends providing informal care. This formal and informal workforce is our greatest asset and maintaining its integrity during times of change and uncertainty remains our priority. An overview of demand and related performance is set out below:



13,553

contacts for adults received by statutory Social Services during the year (down from 14,013 in 2022/23).

Of which,
10,847

were new contacts received (up from 11,444 in 2022/23).

66%

of the new contacts received, advice or assistance was provided (down from 76% in 2022/23).



6,081

new assessments completed for adults during the year (down from 8,315 2022/23).

Of which,
1,484 (24%)

had a care and support plan outcome (down from 1,490 (18%) in 2022/23).

4,282

adults with a care and support plan on 31st March 2023 (up from 4,260 in 2022/23).



2,240

reviews completed in the year (down from 2,890 in 2022/23).



76.2%

of adults supported in the community during the year (down from 79.3% in 2022/23).



1,179

reablement packages completed during the year (up from 1,087 in 2022/23).

Of which,
51%

returned to self-caring following intervention (down from 62% in 2022/23).

1,871 

services for adults started during the year (up from 2,027 in 2022/23).

Of which:

- 444 were residential care placements (505 in 2022/23)
- 1,184 were domiciliary care packages (1,235 in 2022/23)
- 243 were for respite support (287 in 2022/23).

Despite this context, good progress has been made on delivering service improvements to help us meet the current and future challenges, as evidenced by some of our key achievements set out below:

- Completion of the care and support / Learning Disability team remodelling to create two new Learning Disability teams, disestablish the CRT and create the new care and support teams across the Borough.
- ‘My day my way’ engagement programme with people who have a learning disability to co-produce a day service strategy and operating model to transform the service and meet the aspirations of current and future people with a learning disability needing to access daytime opportunities.
- Work is progressing to transform the range of accommodation available for vulnerable people. Whilst these large capital projects are not anticipated to complete this year our investment will offer far more choice and opportunities for people to live independent and unrestricted lives in the future. The future extra care facilities at Danymynydd and Mountain Ash will have a positive impact on care accommodation capacity in the future as will the planned new development in Treorchy when a suitable site becomes available.
- We have successfully re-tendered the Supported Living contracts for people with a Learning Disability with the participation of people with a learning disability.
- We responded to the closure of the Willows nursing home and transferred the vulnerable residents safely to appropriate alternative placements despite the challenging timescales.
- We worked with our partners in the Region to introduce the Welsh Government Discharge to Recover then Assess (D2RA) requirements and implemented the new Pathway of care delays (PoCD) reporting system from April that replaced the Delayed transfers of care (DToC).
- We have reduced waiting lists in the ACE and care and support services and introduced effective risk management and escalation processes for all teams in order to support managers prioritise those in greatest need of an intervention.
 - Care and Support: from 186 in March 2023 to 129 March 2024.
 - ACE (Occupational Therapy) from 201 in March 2023 to 120 in March 2024.
- RCT has taken a lead role in leading several integrated teams, services and partnership boards with Local Authority and NHS partners e.g., the community equipment service, SW@H, SCWDP, DoLS and most recently the Substance misuse team for Merthyr.
- Our Vision Products service continues to provide an effective community equipment service across the region and a new Section 33 agreement has been established and signed by all Local Authority members.





How are people shaping our services?

Individual service areas have well-established processes for collecting feedback as part of their quality assurance processes. Below are some examples of service related engagement and service user involvement undertaken in 2023/24 and how these have shaped our services:

- residents in the Council's care homes are encouraged to provide comments and suggestions through resident meetings and comments/suggestion boxes to inform service improvement. Some examples of how this feedback has shaped services include:
 - Enhanced our horticultural activities within our residential care homes.
 - Refurbished and decorated the dining areas and residents chose the colour schemes and furniture.
 - Menu changes have been implemented within Cwrt Yr Osaf extra care.
- My day my way' engagement programme with people who have a learning disability to co-produce **a day service strategy** and operating model to transform the service and meet the aspirations of current and future people with a learning disability needing to access daytime opportunities.
- The Supported Living re-tender process as part of the "My Home, My Way" programme has been coproduced from the service specification right through to the evaluation of the bids. It has been beneficial to involve users in the process of Service Specification drafting as defining need has been where their knowledge comes in most useful. The tender questions set by the group have been based on their individual knowledge and personal experience of Supported Living Services. This was identified as positive practice by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) & Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) in their assurance check of Rhondda Cynon Taf community learning disability service and the South Community Learning Disability Team within Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board:

A comment from a stakeholder who responded to our survey:

“Adults with LD are included in everything the authority is planning and everything is issued in easy read format.”

- We gathered the views of people who had recently used our Information, Advice and Assistance service (proportionate assessment at Single Point of Access) as part of the IAA review to understand experiences and improvement opportunities.
- We engaged with unpaid carers to understand what support they feel they need now and in the future to support them in their caring role. We also engaged with our staff to identify improvements to how we conduct statutory Carer Conversations, and this will be used to identify further engagement and development work in the coming year. This will include engaging with carers to understand expectations for alternative forms of respite which alongside further engagement will inform the development of a new carers respite service specification for tender in 2024/25.

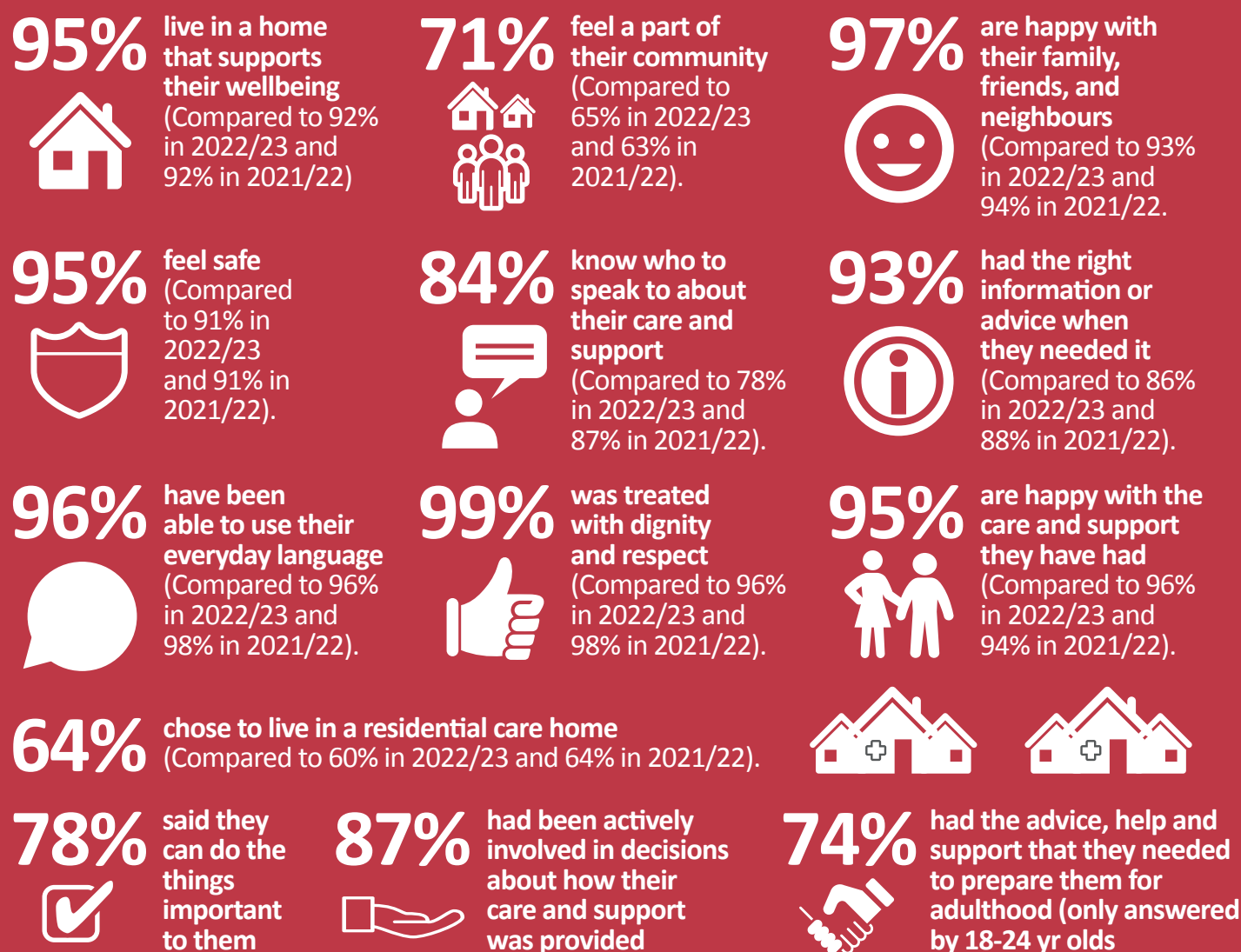
- We continue to adapt how we communicate and involve service users including using easy read. This was highlighted as positive practice during the learning disability services assurance check completed by CIW and HIW in February 2024:

“ We saw an example of information in easy read format developed and used to support a person with learning disability to understand why her parents/carer needed to move to a residential care home. **This is positive practice. ”**

As in previous years, we carried out an annual service user survey which asked a sample of adults aged 18 and over, who had a care and support plan on the day the sample was drawn, how they feel about the care and support that they receive. This year 724 people completed the survey compared to 465 people in 2022/23. Overall, performance compared to last year is positive with the majority of the service quality measures improving or remaining the same compared to last year.

Service quality measure

Of the 724 adults who responded to the survey:



45 carers completed a carers questionnaire in 2023/24 compared to 25 in 2022/23. 97% of carers agreed 'yes' or 'sometimes' with the statement 'I can do the things that are important to me' and 78% agreed that they 'yes' or 'sometimes' felt part of their community.

Adult Services compliments and complaints

The Social Services statutory compliments and complaints process provides opportunity for service users and their families to provide feedback. The following table summarises the number of complaints and compliments received this and in the three previous years.

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of complaints received	25	63	57	74
Number of compliments received	91	66	70	90

As in previous years, the number of complaints for Adult Services in overall terms remain comparatively low in contrast to the number of people that access services. When, occasionally, we have not been able to meet people's expectations, we use the feedback to learn what we can do better and, where necessary, we make changes to do this.

What do our inspectors say about our services?

CIW Quality of Care Inspection Reports 2022-2023: A new silent rating system has been introduced this year by CIW, the care home service has obtained a silent rating of 'Good' this year and is striving to improve practice to achieve an 'Excellent' rating.

CIW and HIW learning disability services **assurance check** of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council, and Cwm Taf Morgannwg and Swansea Bay University Health Boards in February 2024 found:

- Senior managers are aware of the significant ongoing challenges in responding to the increased complexity of need and demand, and financial pressures. They have identified several key areas that require improvements. In partnership, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Cwm Taf Morgannwg and Swansea Bay University Health Boards have recognised the need to continue to transform and improve services so that people can access the right care/support/treatment at the right time, in the right place and in the most efficient and safest way possible.
- At an operational level we saw many examples of local authority and health board practitioners working effectively together. Carers and practitioners told us of the benefits of the new CLDT structure and the reintroduction of the specialist CLDT teams within social care. They acknowledged it is early days and are optimistic that this change will have a positive impact for people with a learning disability. Social care practitioners spoke positively of the new structure and felt it is

going from 'strength to strength.' Some people we spoke with told us that co-location of health and social care practitioners would improve partnership working further.

- Most partnerships are working well at an operational level; however, information is not always shared effectively due to different methods and systems for recording information in the local authority and the health board. This means information regarding people's health and care and support needs is not easily available across partnerships.
- The local authority promotes different types of housing support to enable people to reach their outcomes, and to live as independently as possible in the community.
- A regional approach has been agreed to ensure that young people are supported effectively to achieve their personal well-being outcomes when they approach adulthood. This regional approach will ensure that there is effective co-ordination amongst agencies to ensure the efficient and effective operation of transition planning and implementation across the region.

Delivering Our Priorities - Outcomes, Progress and Challenges

Priority 1 - Developing care accommodation for older and vulnerable people

We have continued to progress the Council's vision and strategy for care accommodation for older and vulnerable people to ensure we create the right service offer that responds to increasing demand and changing needs, enabling more people to live independently in their community.

This includes development of extra care facilities which offers an opportunity for older people to lead a more independent life and prevent unnecessary admissions to residential care. Extra care also enables people to have more control and be more involved in decisions about their environment and the services that they receive.

In 2023/24, construction work resumed in Porth on the new extra care facility. Construction initially started in Spring 2022 but stopped due to the main contractor entering administration in Winter 2022. **Linc Cymru** have appointed a new contractor to resume construction at the site of the former Dan y Mynydd Care Home. Work resumed on site in February 2024 and a revised completion date for the development is Winter 2025. The scheme will bring the former Dan y Mynydd Care Home site back into use by building a state-of-the-art development containing 60 extra care apartments. The four-storey building will include a dining area, a hair salon, an activity room, a day care centre and offices, along with an external car park.

We are also working with **Linc Cymru** to develop a new extra care facility in Mountain Ash. The scheme will be on the site of the former Grand Pavilion, which dates back to 1919 and the design stages of the development have considered this significant history for the proposed scheme. The proposed development will provide 15 high-quality residential dementia care beds, and 25 extra care apartments with additional accessible later-living housing, responding to the demographic needs of the area. Moreover, there will be a host of amenities such as a lounge, dining rooms, a day room, a hair salon and sensory rooms within the scheme. This development will also facilitate a transitional option for those within the scheme, providing them with an opportunity to move from extra care to residential dementia, subject to change in their category of care. This will ensure that individuals can remain in the scheme with continuity of care. In Summer 2023, **two public events** were held so that local residents could find out more about the proposals and help to inform the scheme going forward. The completion date for this development is likely to be between late 2026 and early 2027.

We are also working on the development options of a further care accommodation facilities in Ferndale and Treorchy in line with our strategy to modernise local residential care services which was agreed by Cabinet in **February 2023**. Presently, we are looking to identify suitable land for these developments and will be designed to achieve 'BREEAM' excellence, the world's leading sustainability assessment.

We have also reconfigured the Tegfan Care Home to dementia care only. This has given us the potential to increase our local offer and widen the provision of beds for those with dementia, in line with current and projected demand.

Working with **Cynon Taf Housing Association**, we opened a new six flat supported living scheme in **Treorchy**. These flats provide opportunities for five people living in a predominantly medical setting to move back into the community and into permanent accommodation, with all the support and care they will need to move on with their lives and thrive.

Work has begun on developing a new specialist care accommodation for people with learning disabilities in adulthood and older age, on the **former Bronllwyn Residential Care Home site in Gelli**. The former care home has been demolished and work on site continues following a break on site due to the liquidation of the former demolition contractor. Work is progressing as planned on a supported accommodation scheme as part of the '**Big Shed**' development in Tonypany. The scheme will contain 8 apartments for adults with learning disabilities alongside staff accommodation. We are also progressing design options for a new supported living scheme for people with a learning disability in Church Village. This will involve demolishing the former Garth Olwg Care Home and building on the existing site. Progress has been slower than expected and partners have not yet been identified at this stage.



Extra Care

Case study



Hello, my name is Gillian Bishop, I am 57 years old, I moved to Cwrt Yr Orsaf in October 2022, I have several health conditions and I am wheelchair bound.

Before moving to Cwrt Yr Orsaf I lived in a flat in Treorchy, this flat was very small and my wheelchair could not fit through any of the doors, I was isolated to the living area and had no friends, I was not able to leave the property and only ever seen the carers that called in four times a day to support me and a district nurse in the morning to administer my insulin, this had a huge impact on my mental health and my depression and anxiety escalated.

My social worker told me about Cwrt Yr Orsaf and supported me to go and have a look around, I loved Cwrt Yr Orsaf straight away, I couldn't wait to move in.

Living at Cwrt Yr Orsaf has had a major impact on my health and wellbeing, I am so much happier and have so much more freedom and independence. My flat is much bigger, I have personalised it to my desire, the doors are wide enough for me to travel from room to room, I am also able to do my own laundry with support from care staff now that I can access a kitchen, I was never able to do this in my old flat. I have an automatic front door which I use by remote control, I now leave my flat several times a day on my own.

I have support from RCT care staff who call to me four times a day, they also support me to shower every morning, my shower room has plenty of space and I also have a ceiling track hoist which staff are able to transfer me with ease, I find the hoist comfortable, and the care staff make transfers enjoyable.

I love the care staff that support me, we have such a laugh, they are all lovely, they help me with not only my personal care and transfers but they support me by preparing my snacks and drinks as I am diabetic and unable to do this task myself, I have an emergency call alarm which I wear at all times, I press this alarm in emergencies and staff always answer and call to me if I need them, this gives me a great sense of security whilst living here.

I have made so many friends here at Cwrt Yr Orsaf and every morning and evening we meet up where we all bring a packed lunch and snacks to enjoy and share whilst we chat and watch tv, we play bingo every week and hold tenants' meetings where we discuss and organise events and activities for us all to enjoy, I always take part in the meetings and events.

Included in my tenancy at Cwrt Yr Orsaf is a main meal and desert from the restaurant downstairs, I always go and meet up with all the staff and my friends, I enjoy the foods that I have chosen, me and my friends (who also reside here) have a really good laugh, sometimes if I am not feeling very well I will inform staff and they will delivery my meals to my room to ensure I don't go without.

My needs are definitely being met here at Cwrt Yr Orsaf and more, I was introduced to a befriending agency here and I use this twice weekly, my flat gets cleaned by the service once weekly and also my grocery shopping of my choice gets delivered to my flat.

I was involved in producing my own service delivery plan and sat down with the deputy manager and we discussed what I wanted and how I wanted to be supported whilst living here, if I ever have any concerns or issues or if any of my care and support needs change I know I can go see RCT management and they will do their best to support me in any way possible as they have done in the past.

I am very happy here and happy with the service that is provided to me, I never want to leave.

Priority 2 - Preventing escalation of need and enabling recovery and independence.

We continue to invest in services to prevent escalation of need increasing or enable recovery and independence.

In November 2023, Cabinet approved plans to continue to support people to be as independent as possible by continuing to provide an in house reablement and intermediate care through our Support@Home Service. We completed 1,179 reablement packages between 1st April- 31st March 2024. Of these packages, 1,160 reduced, maintained or mitigated the need for support (98%).

During the 2023/24, our in-house Support@Home services provided 133,655 hours of direct domiciliary care support to 1,766 people, enabling and supporting them to remain as independent as possible. Of these, nearly 26,000 direct service hours were delivered by the short term Intermediate Care and Reablement services, with 75.5% of people becoming independent at the end of our intermediate care support and 79.5% ending independent after reablement support.

Support@Home Service – Service User Feedback

Intermediate Care and Reablement:

- 94% agreed they were fully informed in the planning of their programme of support.
- 97% said they felt they achieved all their goals from our service.
- 100% agreed that dignity and choice was respected at all times.
- 100% agreed they benefitted from our service.
- 99% agreed our service helped them to remain living independently in their home.
- 96% said they have been able to maintain their independence since support ended.

Home Care

- 100% agreed they were treated with dignity and respect.
- 92% agreed our service helped maintain their independence.
- 100% said they were satisfied staff arrived within 30 minutes of their agreed time.

Unpaid Carers

- 100% of people would rate the support provided as Excellent or Very Good.
- 100% said they felt supported in their caring role.

Referrers

- 100% said the service planning response time was Excellent or Very Good.
- 100% rated their confidence in the service provided as Excellent or Very Good.

Staff

- 98% said they felt supported in their role by their supervisor.
- 93% said they were offered sufficient training opportunities in their role.

How reablement supports older people to live in their own home

Case study



Mr H is 89 and his daughter contacted the Single Point of Access team after he was discharged from hospital following a collapse due to low blood pressure when he sustained a broken nose and eye socket. Mr H is also sometimes confused.

Mr H's daughter has moved in with her parents to support her father, but she also works and told the Single Point of Access her father was unable to do anything independently since his discharge and had lost skills and confidence.

At assessment Mr H said he would like to get back to undertaking all personal care and toileting tasks himself, walk without aides, and be able to manage the stairs. These were his goals the Reablement plan was then based on.

After assessment Occupational Therapists provided equipment to aid all bed and toilet chair transfers. Grab rails were installed which enabled Mr H to practice stairs and transfers on and off furniture. Morning and evening calls were set up with reablement staff to practice washing and dressing.

Mr H made good progress and following Reablement intervention:

- He became independently mobile with his zimmer frame.
- Independent walking up and down stairs.
- Independent with all aspects of personal care such as toileting, washing and dressing and progressed to independent showering.

In 2023/24 the short term care and support team completed 824 assessments, of these 85 people received preventative services; 623 were involved in developing a care and support to identify and meet their outcomes; 72 received information and advice; and the remainder either had no care and support needs or were able to meet them in an alternative way. One individual commented: "Due to your involvement I have been able to return to my own home which is what I wanted. Myself and my family have been helped through the various processes to achieve this outcome."

The Adaptations and Community Equipment Team (ACE) allocated 2,849 cases to staff for an assessment during 2023/24. To support individuals to maintain their independence, 3135 pieces of equipment/adaptations were provided to people's homes.

The ACE team received 617 requests from care providers for support with moving and handling issues and completed 678 moving and handling plans, reducing risk and supporting care staff to use equipment effectively and safely to keep people living at home. One individual commented: "I have to say that the service I have received was exceptional. The staff member was so kind, considerate and understanding and helped guide me to ensure that the support aids I needed were identified and have really made a difference to my ability to live independently. The aids were promptly and efficiently installed, and all staff involved were delightful. I would like you to pass on my sincere thanks to all involved."

Adaptations and Community Equipment Team

Case study



Mr X lives alone in a rented ground floor flat, a referral came to the Adaptations and Community Equipment (Ace) Team for a kitchen assessment. Mr X had difficulty carrying out kitchen tasks due to limited space, the kitchen cupboards were not accessible to him, and he was unable to reach the window therefore it was left open constantly.

Mr X received an assessment by an Occupational Therapist and a recommendation was made for the kitchen to be adapted with a view of the works being less intrusive to Mr X whilst still living at the property.

The kitchen wall units were replaced with ones that had powered drop-down baskets so he could reach items more easily and safely. A drawer unit and worktop were removed to allow space for a perching stool to be used. The sink taps were replaced with long handled lever taps as these allowed an easier grip and the window was replaced with an automatic opener/winder.

The adaptation has reduced the risk to Mr X when completing kitchen tasks and has also increased his independence therefore reducing the reliance on his family.

Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) are a non-repayable grant available to finance the cost of adaptations to properties to be able to aid vulnerable or disabled persons to live independently in their home. Examples, include provision of appropriate toilet and bathing facilities and alterations to improve access to and within the property, e.g. ramps, rails, stair lifts etc. The number of DFGs completed increased to 483 in 2023/24 from 336 in 2021/22. On average, it took 329 calendar days to deliver a DFG compared to 369 calendar days in 2022/23.

Customer feedback, once a DFG and housing adaptation has been completed, includes:

- 95% of individuals agree that they feel more confident and independent.
- 97% agree that their quality of life has improved and 97% were overall satisfied.

We are progressing the redesign of the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service operating model within Adult Services to refocus on enhanced early intervention and prevention services. Some elements of the new model have already been progressed, including increased joint working with the Council's Community Development Team and other community services and improvement to referrals processes. A new digital form has been developed with an aim to implementing for First Response colleagues and the general public in Spring 2024.

We continue to maximise new technology and ensure services are accessible and available to people and their families. This includes collaborating with Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil Councils to procure a digital Alarm Receiving Centre solution which will provide more opportunities for broadening the assistive technology that we currently offer that meets the needs of residents. Unfortunately, the initial tender did not progress due to the cost of the new solution being significantly higher than anticipated. Options are being explored regarding the next steps, these include another collaborative tender or a possible direct award to our current provider. It is anticipated that a digital ARC will be in place by the end of the financial year and timescales will depend on which option is

chosen. Until the ARC is in place, we will not be able to progress significantly with our Technology First agenda in Adult Services, but our current service provision will be maintained until a new ARC is in place.

Nevertheless, we continue to explore opportunities for innovative approaches to care delivery and assessment of need and trialled the use of sensors in our short-term direct care services during 2023/24 to see whether it could provide a more accurate and speedier picture of people's needs. The project was a collaboration with Sensei Networks, Centerprise International and Karantis 360 to monitor completion of daily living tasks remotely via sensors installed in people's homes during a pilot period. The evaluation of the project will be ready during 2024/25 and will inform our approach to technology in care further.

Sensei Project

Case study



Mrs Y is living with dementia had been regularly using her Lifeline alarm and the Mobile Responders visited, finding that Mrs Y may have greater mobility than originally thought when her care arrangements were made. The Sensei equipment was installed with agreement from all parties and with support from Mrs Y's allocated social worker. Two movement sensors were placed in the bedroom to determine whether Mrs Y was in fact getting out of her bed independently; an accelerometer was placed on the pipe of the toilet to monitor water flow into the toilet every time this was flushed; a temperature sensor in the bedroom to ensure the room is kept at a safe and comfortable temperature and a door sensor on the front door to monitor each time the door was opened and closed. Due to the airflow mattress a bed mat sensor was not used as it would provide false readings. By installing this equipment, we were able to accurately assess Mrs Y's mobility and independent functioning meaning that her care package could be tailored to further support her independent living. New safety measures were also put in place to ensure Mrs Y was safe when mobilising out of bed independently, reducing her use of the Lifeline alarm.

During 2023/24 1,278 new installations of technology equipment to enable independent living were completed. Of these, 367 installations were for a bespoke Telecare package linked to a care and support plan, aimed at meeting people's care and support needs in innovative and enabling ways by using technology and remote monitoring.

The remainder of the installations were for one of our Lifeline packages, in order for people to live safely and independently at home, allowing people to connect remotely to our Lifeline Monitoring Centre in urgent situations, for example if they fall at home. At the end of March 2024, there were 3,532 live Lifeline connections.

Building on the existing Lifeline Service, we have continued to provide the offer of additional support of a 24/7, 365 days a year mobile responder service. As part of our responder service offer, we will provide assistance in an attempt to avoid conveyances to hospital. During 2023/24 the Responders attended 5,910 visits, of which 2,267 were due to people falling at home. The Mobile Responders were able to use their specialist lifting equipment to help people up, avoiding 2,069 of these people needing an ambulance or admission to hospital. Around 88% of Mobile Responder attendances arrived within the target time of 1 hour.

Priority 3 - Supporting unpaid Carers

We have continued to support unpaid carers to balance their caring roles and maintain quality of life. In 2023/24, 244 carer assessments for adults were undertaken during the year, compared to 300 in 2022/23.

Numbers have now dropped due to less demand reinforcing our experience that performance in this area is sensitive to awareness raising initiatives amongst the care management teams rather than by carer demand.

- The Carers Support Project delivered 83 events for adult carers during 23/24 with 642 carer attendances. For Young Adult Carers, 18 events were delivered with 155 attendances.
- Consistent demand for carers counselling with 108 referrals received between during the year. Additional capacity was funded via a short-term grant to reduce the waiting time and there were 4 on the waiting list and the end of March 2024, in comparison to 22 at the same time the previous year.
- At the end of March 2024 there were 2,846 adult carers registered with the Carers Support Project and regularly receiving information through the Carer's newsletter.

In 2023/24, we have not made as much progress as we had planned to in reviewing and redesigning the Carers Support Strategy to ensure respite provision is meeting the needs of unpaid carers and the needs of individuals who use services so that people are able

to live in their family homes for longer. Building on consultation which we undertook in 2021, we have worked with unpaid carers to make sure that we understand what unpaid carers require.

However, work has continued in this area and we successfully obtained grant funding to support short break options for unpaid carers as well as awarding a new contract to the Southeast Wales Shared Lives Scheme hosted by Caerphilly Council to deliver our Shared Lives service. This scheme is a well-established and growing partnership which includes Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Newport Council's and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and will offer more flexible forms of respite and expand access for all service user groups. People living in Rhondda Cynon Taf will be able to access arrangements across all the local authority areas as well as the scheme supporting Rhondda Cynon Taf in developing the shared lives service. This flexibility benefits all of the partners and allows the most suitable carer according to the individuals support needs and chosen outcomes.

Carers Support Project

Case study



Mr & Mrs G have a large family made up of adult children and their youngest, a teenager, who has complex needs including autism. For years they went on with their lives unaware of support services available to them. Their mental health deteriorated significantly and they felt they only had each other to confide in.

Mrs G contacted the Carers Support Project in 2022 when she realised the way they were coping was unsustainable and unhealthy for them both. After speaking with staff at the project, who provided lots of reassurance for Mr & Mrs G, they attended their first event. This was a significant step for them; even though they attended together and were provided with an overview of what to expect, they were still recovering from severe anxiety issues.

Mr & Mrs G have become regular attendees at project activities and workshops. They have enjoyed a full range of experiences including emotional support, time out, creative activities and family excursions. On one occasion, Mrs G attended a group session alone when Mr G was unwell indicating a massive, positive shift in her mental state.

Mr & Mrs G say they feel far less isolated, have more confidence to request support and feel happier and more relaxed. In return, this has shaped them to become more resilient and prepared for the future, as they are very realistic that there will be further challenges along the way.

Priority 4 - Promoting Direct Payments

We have continued to promote direct payments as a way of empowering people to be more independent and manage their individual care needs. The number of adults using direct payments to meet their needs have increased to 454 in 2023/24 from 419 in 2022/23, with more than 5,500 hours of support delivered in this way every week.

Following our work with Community Catalyst in 2022/23 we continued to support the development of community micro-enterprises, securing grant funding through the Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver a Micro-enterprises for Care project. A micro-enterprise is a small sole trader business that is autonomous and not directly employed by the person receiving care but able to manage a direct and flexible relationship with their service users. At the end of March 2024 there were 22 individuals using Microenterprises to provide 182 hours of care and support per week via a Direct Payment. There were 16 Microenterprises registered on the RCT Small Good Stuff webpage, with some providing privately arranged care only.

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Micro-enterprise

Case study



Natalie lives in Treorchy and has set up a micro enterprise supporting older people and disabled people through the Community Catalyst project. Covering Rhondda, Cynon and Taf, Natalie helps her clients in a variety of ways with shopping, personal care, odd jobs around the house and sometimes dog walking. Her hours are flexible and fit with her own family life, helping her achieve a good work life balance whilst also providing a much needed service in her community. You can hear about Natalie's experiences in this **video**.



Priority 5 - Commissioning Domiciliary Care

We have continued to work with domiciliary care providers to ensure that people receive good quality home care based on the outcomes they want to achieve and that there is sufficient provision available at the right level to meet demand.

Currently, the Council's 'Support@Home' Service delivers all reablement and intermediate care, but a much smaller proportion of long-term home care (around 10%) – with the majority already commissioned from external providers. In November 2023, **Cabinet approved a redesign of our domiciliary care service model** so that from October 2024, we will commission all long-term home care from external home care providers, as part of a required retender process. This decision was part of proposals for the commissioning of a revised model for long term domiciliary home, which will be based on new geographical zones and focussed on outcomes, instead of call times and tasks.

In addition, the assessed care package for all service users will be maintained and eligible staff currently employed by the Council's 'Support@Home' Service to provide long-term home care will transfer to the new service provider under TUPE legislation as part of a new contract from October 2024. This will ensure continuity of staff support for service users, and job security for staff members with the terms and conditions of their current contracts of employment protected going forward, along with membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme.

The Council has continued to receive fantastic support from our commissioned home care providers who provide, on average, around 15,000 hours of care and support each week to over 1,200 people in their homes. Together, we reduced the number of people waiting for a home care package from 40 in March 2023 to just over 20 in March 2024.

Supporting older people to live in their own homes

Case study



Mr Y is an 80-year-old man who was self-funding a placement in Llantrisant Care home following a stroke which caused a left sided weakness. He required a full hoist for all transfers and was being nursed in bed, he was reliant on carers to meet all his needs. He employed a private physiotherapist whilst at the home to improve his mobility.

A care manager was allocated, and an assessment undertaken that determined what mattered most to Mr Y was being able to leave the care home and be cared for in his own home. Concerns were raised by the care home regarding his mental capacity to make the decision to return home. The care manager undertook a mental capacity assessment regarding the decision and how his care needs would be best met and concluded he had mental capacity to make these decisions.

Joint working with the Community Occupational Therapists, District Nurses, care home staff and Mr Y's family ensured all necessary avenues of support were put in place ready for Mr Y's return home, including appropriate equipment and a package of care. Mr Y returned home on 2nd February 2024, he was able to realise his personal outcome and once again live in his own home which was what mattered most to him.

Priority 6 - Transforming Day Services for older people

We continue the transformation of day services for older people. In December 2023, following a period of consultation and **pre Scrutiny, Cabinet approved** proposals which aim to create a more efficient and effective service offer, providing older people with access to modern facilities, and ensuring better use of Council resources.

The service previously provided at Tonyrefail Day Centre has now moved to a new day centre provision at Cwrt Yr Orsaf extra care in Pontypridd using a phased approach. This was completed by early April 2024, and has not reduced the care provided to people with assessed needs but continues to promote well-being and independence. Staff has also been relocated to

ensure continuity of care. The move has been extremely successful. Individuals and staff are still settling into the new environment, but initial feedback has been very positive. Plans are in progress to combine Trecynon Day Centre and Cwmni Dda Day Centre and renovations will be completed so that future provision will all be provided from Cwmni Dda Day Centre.

Day Services for Older People – Meeting Personal Goals

Case study



Mrs Hannam was referred to day services by her social worker via the community care inbox. From initial conversations, following the referral, we understood that Mrs Hannam had not left the house for some time due to her disability and was very nervous about attending a day centre. Not leaving the house was negatively impacting on her wellbeing and putting a strain on her daughter due to her caring role.

We visited Mrs. Hannam and her family introduced ourselves and chatted informally about the process of the home assessment. We gathered relevant information from Mrs Hannam and involved family to fill in any gaps in order to take a holistic approach. Together we identified that Mrs. Hannam's personal goal was to get out of the house and socialise with like minded peers with similar interests as herself and hopefully make new friends.

We worked in co production with Mrs. Hannam's social worker, family and occupational therapists to arrange for portable ramps to be fitted to the property to remove physical barriers to attending the day centre. Once this was done, we arranged a start date appointed a key worker, drafted a care plan centred around the individual, risk assessed and put safe systems of work in place to ensure we could meet the individual's needs. We then contacted the social worker to change the support at home times to facilitate day services and gave her the start date agreed.

Following Mrs. Hannam's first day at the day centre Mrs Hannam's daughter rang the centre to inform us of the change one day had made to her mother. She said her mum was a different person coming home and could not stop talking about her day.

At her four week review, Mrs. Hannam informed her key worker that she had met her personal goal of getting out of the house, meeting people and making friends. Mrs Hannam then set a new personal goal of bathing at day centre. We contacted her social worker and had this added to her care plan, contacted her daughter to supply toiletries and added bathing to her risk assessment.

We have now carried out a six month review with Mrs. Hannam and she has set a new personal goal of attending two days a week. We worked in co production with the duty team and had this passed by panel. Mrs Hannam has now commenced her second day at centre and her daughter informed us that the family cannot believe the doors day services have opened up to her mother.

Mrs. Hannam's daughter informed us that her mum is a different person since attending day centre, day services has improved her mother's wellbeing, given her as main carer a break from her caring role and she really looks forward to the days her mum attends. She informed us that her mum cannot wait to tell them about her day at centre especially if she has won on the Bingo and counts the days until she next attends. The daughter told us she was worried about the move to Cwrt Yr Orsaf as she did not know how her mum would take it but said her mum had taken it in her stride.

Priority 7 - Transforming Day Services for people with a learning disability

We also continue the transformation of day services as part of our five year **Learning Disability Transformation Programme**, so that people with a learning disability have access to meaningful activity and opportunities in their own communities, including employment to achieve their personal goals and live ordinary lives.

The draft day services strategy was presented to **Cabinet in May 2023** and it was agreed that targeted consultation would take place with people who use day services, their families and carers, staff and other associated stakeholders. This took place throughout the summer, and we supported service users and their families and carers to understand and engage with the consultation process by offering face to face consultations, where requested, and creating an information pack for them to ensure the relevant information was presented in an accessible and clear format.

Taking into account the outcome of the consultation, which was informed by what people told us through the “My Day My Way” engagement **Cabinet agreed** the implementation of the proposed co-produced Day Services Strategy and

operating model for people with a learning disability in November 2023. This remodelling of the Council’s day service provision to a new East and West structure, including smaller community-based groups, will ensure that services are delivered in a way that achieves the best possible individual outcomes for people, based on need and demand, whilst making the best use of Council resources. Further coproduction workshops have been undertaken in respect of the projects currently run within the community by Rhondda Cynon Taf, these were well attended by all stakeholders and the outcome of this will be presented with options suggested to continue to redesign and remodel our day time offer in line with our operating model.

Retendering Supported Living Services for people with a learning disability

We have also successfully re-tendered the Supported Living contracts for people with a Learning Disability with the participation of people with a learning disability. Supported Living Services provide 24/7 supported accommodation for adults with a learning disability, supporting small numbers of people who live in shared houses across Rhondda Cynon Taf. Service users each have their own tenancies, enabling them to continue living in their local communities.

Throughout 2023, we worked on the retendering of our existing Supported Living contracts which were due to expire at the end of March 2024. From the success of My Day My Way, we recognised the importance and value of working in a co-produced way with people with lived experience to shape our services and this has been key to the retendering exercise. The My Home, My Way programme has been co-produced with service users from the service specification, right through to the evaluation of the bids. It has been beneficial to involve users in the process of Service Specification drafting as defining need has been where their knowledge comes in most useful. The tender questions set by the group have been based on their individual knowledge and personal experience of Supported Living Services.

Co-production and the Supported Living Retender – My Home, My Way Programme

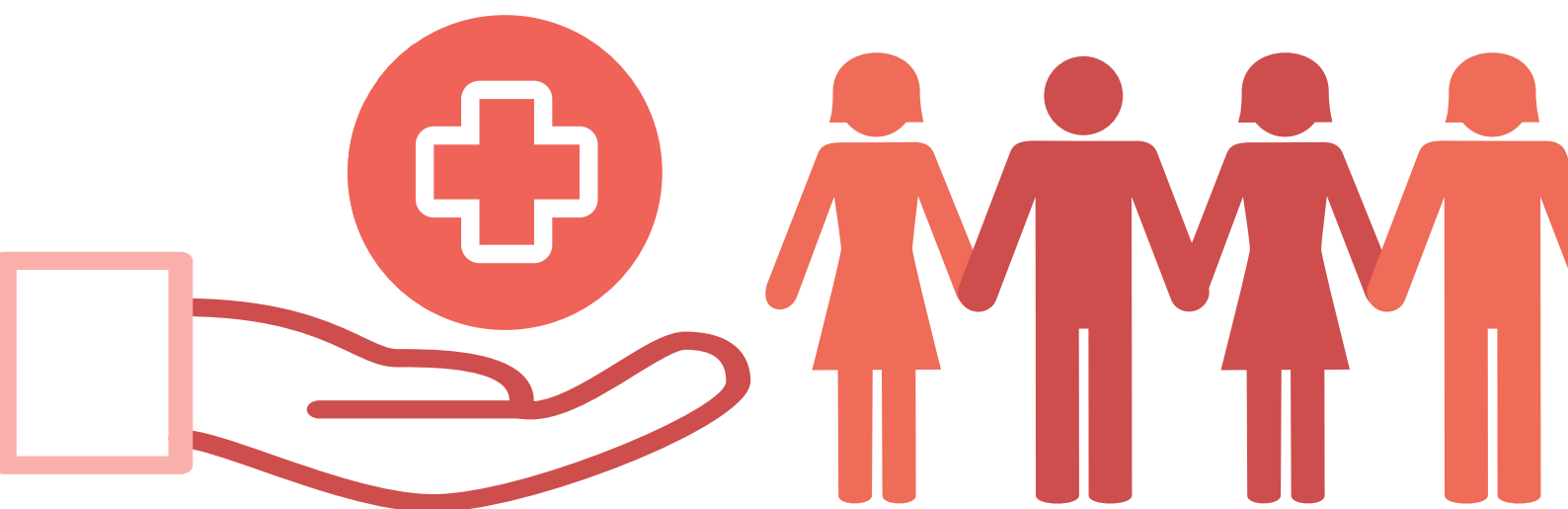
Throughout 2023, workshops were held for people with a learning disability to coproduce two questions as part of their Supported Living re-tender facilitated by our Coproduction Officer and People First. Individuals were given the opportunity to be involved in each stage of development including:

- Developing two retender questions and a case study which would be used as part of the retendering questions.
- Developing a checklist of requirements that would be used to score the provider's responses, in an easy read format, to these questions and a video response to the case study.
- Forming a panel to evaluate the Provider's written responses, in an easy read format to the two questions and case study video response.

Involving users with lived experience in the retender of Supported Living Services has been crucial to the retender of our Rhondda Cynon Taf Supported Living Services. It has been done with great care and the group has been supported by the Coproduction Officer for Adult Services and Cwm Taf People First.

The lead procuring officer has also provided meetings for the group to understand their roles, the role of the My Home, My Way project group, and the nature of the retender evaluation process.

As part of the retendering of Supported Living services, Cabinet agreed to **transfer the Council's remaining nine Supported Living Services to new external providers** from April 2024. This means that the small in-house service that previously provided care to around 10% of the total number of people that receive Supported Living in Rhondda Cynon Taf will now be provided by the new external providers. These changes offer best value and ensure the future long-term sustainability of the service, without reducing its availability to help people who rely upon it. The transfer of the Council's remaining supported living services has been completed, the successful management of this process added to its success with people seeing no changes to their care and support. The contract was awarded on the 1st April 2024 and the co-produced outcome focused contract is the first of its kind, we have moved away from the traditional delivery of services to a banding process which allows flexibility and support to the people who live in supported living and the providers to adapt to meet people's individual outcomes. At present we are working through reviewing each service and will complete this in the first year.



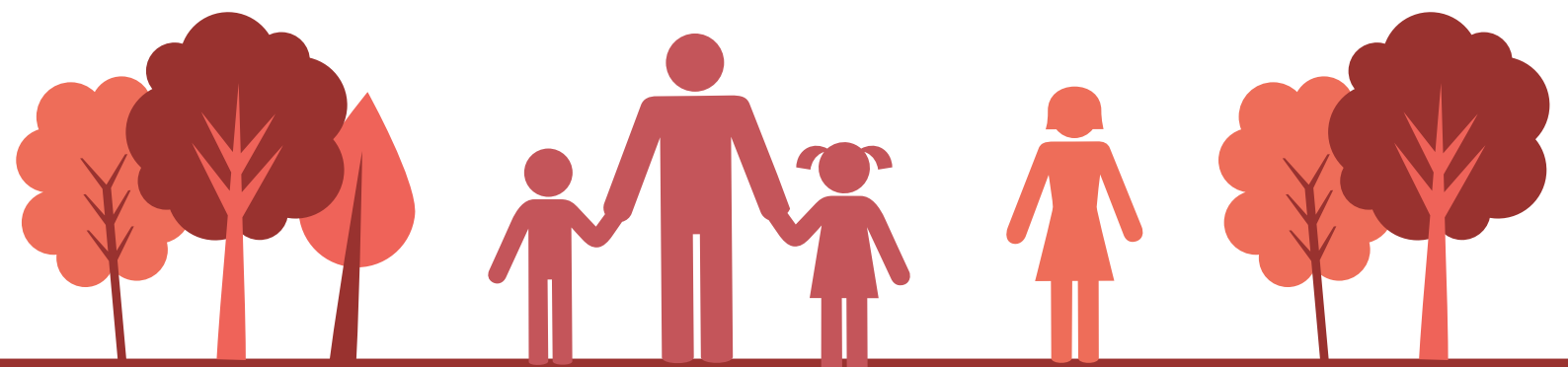


Priority 8 - Supporting hospital discharge.

We have prioritised resources at the hospital interface. This includes a response to all 5 hospitals in Cwm Taf Morgannwg to ensure that the arrangements when the person leaves hospital are safe, appropriate and secured.

Where we can, we support discharges direct from the wards into our services to avoid assessment delays. Allocation to a social worker is only considered where an assessment is needed because the transfer home is not straightforward. Our assessments are part of a multidisciplinary assessments process, and we are working in partnership with our Health Board colleagues to

tackle assessment timescales. The volume of assessments completed each month by our assessment team are falling as we work towards the Discharge to Recover and Assess requirements and despite the volume of assessment activity, the numbers of people who are delayed because they are undergoing social care assessment are relatively low in Rhondda Cynon Taf.



Hospital Discharge Social Work Team

Case study



Rhondda Cynon Taf receives a grant from the Regional Partnership Board to part fund a Hospital Discharge Social Work Team. Being based on site in the hospitals means that it is easier for the social workers to build effective working relationships with staff, patients and their families.

Mrs W (aged 88) was admitted to hospital after a fall at home. Prior to her admission she lived with her son and her grandson and was having a twice a day package of care to support with her morning and evening routine. Mrs W has a diagnosis of dementia and has limited insight into her care and support needs and her limitations. She was assessed as being high risk of falls and has several at home and on the ward. Unfortunately, due to cognition, she is not able to retain safety advice. Since her admission her cognition and general health has declined therefore her care and support needs have increased. The ward no longer feel that a package of care could meet her needs at home even with an increase in this support, therefore allocation of a Social Worker was required to arrange discharge planning.

The social worker's role was to support Mrs W's discharge from hospital and ensure the most safe and timely discharge was co-ordinated, that was proportionate to her care and support needs. During her stay in hospital, she received support from Physiotherapy and Occupational therapy to attempt to get her back to her previous level of mobility. However Due to Mrs W's diagnosis of dementia, she was unable to retain instructions and had become very variable with her mobility on the ward. Mrs W also did not like sitting out in the chair for long periods and would often try to get back into bed herself.

The social worker completed a capacity assessment, and deemed Mrs W to lack mental capacity into her discharge planning/ discharge destination. A best interest meeting was arranged to establish where Mrs W would be discharged. The social worker arranged for an advocate to visit Mrs W to ensure that her wishes and feelings were represented, as Mrs W did not want to attend herself. The advocate visited Mrs W on several occasions to gain her views and wishes. A best interest meeting was held, involving the social worker Mrs W's family, the staff nurse looking after her and the Occupational Therapist and Physiotherapist. The advocate was not able to attend, but emailed Mrs W's wishes so that the social worker could read these out in the meeting, and ensure her wishes were heard and considered.

The outcome of the best interest meeting concluded that Mrs W would be discharged to a placement. Everyone involved in the meeting was in agreement with this and felt that Mrs W would be at a high risk of being re-admitted to hospital due to unintentional self-neglect, health decline and risk of injury from a fall if she were to go home. The social worker ensured families views and concerns were discussed in detail and taken onboard throughout the meeting. I considered all support avenues in which Mrs W's family had tried to keep her safe prior to admission however her cognition and mobility had significantly deteriorated since her admission and family could no longer provide the amount of support required to keep her safe in between calls and overnight. It was also felt that placement would have a positive effect on her mental health and wellbeing as Mrs W had stated she no longer wanted to be alone and liked to be around people.

It is important to acknowledge in this situation that Mrs W's views were very clear that she wanted to return home and this always had to remain at the forefront of the discussion. However, the risks of Mrs W returning home were high compared to the risks of placement and this had already been evidenced therefore was not in her best interests to return home.

A joint discussion was held with Mrs W, her family and myself regarding the outcome of the meeting being placement. The social worker took time and discussed in detail with Mrs W what this decision meant for her and that she would always have people around and not be alone; Mrs W agreed with the decision. The Advocate returned to visit Mrs W to ensure the process was being followed correctly and that Mrs W was still being kept at the centre of this decision.

Mrs W is now settling in well into her new home. Through working collaboratively the social worker was able to reach a point where everyone agreed that a care home placement was the best option, including Mrs W herself. Had Mrs W continued to object, an application to the Court of Protection would have been needed, which may have ended up in a prolonged hospital stay for Mrs W.

Whilst we prioritise resource for hospital discharge, our activity in the community is far more widespread. It is also considered by us to be essential in order to avoid admissions to hospitals in the first place. We have several urgent service responses that are mobilised daily to safeguard people at home including social workers, occupational therapists, reablement, home care or emergency residential care. Integrating these responses with NHS community services, older persons mental health and primary care is a joint priority in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region as a multidisciplinary team approach to co-ordinating treatment alongside our social care and support would be more effective in preventing a conveyance

to hospital. To this end work to implement an integrated community team is progressing and a Regional Director was appointed in November 2023 to provide the leadership and capacity required to drive this work forward 2024/25.

The Stay Well @ Home service is based in Accident and Emergency at the Royal Glamorgan and Prince Charles Hospitals and aims to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions by providing preventative social care services and equipment. During 2023/24 the Stay Well @ Home team received 2,401 referrals, completed 947 assessments and screened and signposted 1,454 people.

Stay Well @ Home Service

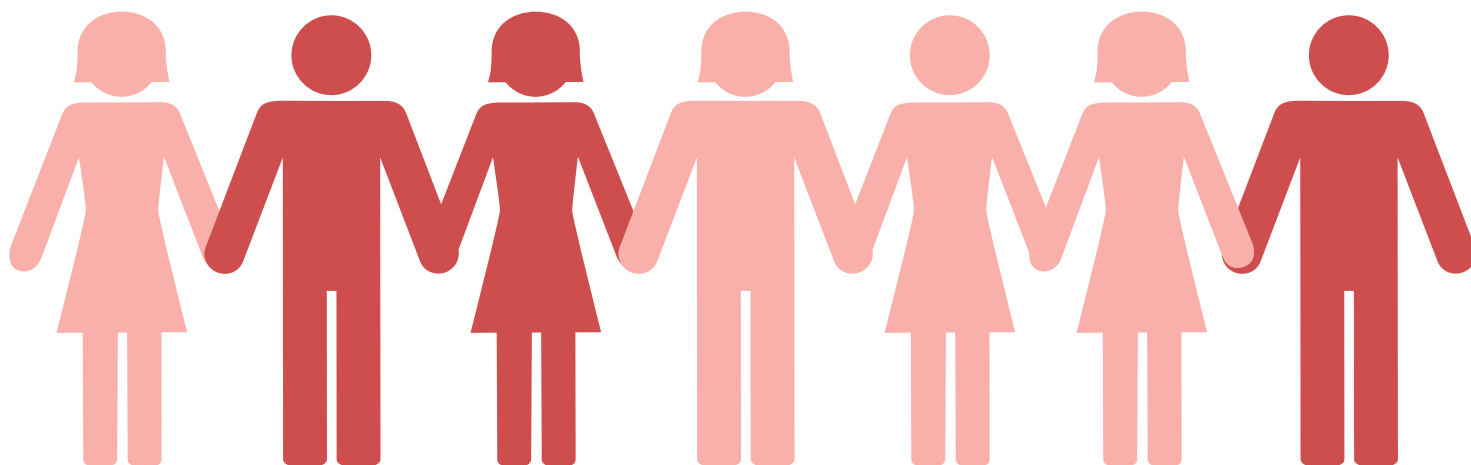
Case study



The Stay Well @ Home service is a hospital-based team of health and social care professionals aiming to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions from A&E by accessing a rapid domiciliary care service and equipment provision to enable people to remain at home. The service operates 365 days a year and has access to domiciliary care support within 4 hours from the Council's in-house Support@Home service.

Mr X presented to A&E at Royal Glamorgan Hospital due to a fall at home. Scans and x-rays showed no medical causes for concern so the Stay Well @ Home team undertook an assessment of Mr X's needs as his mobility had reduced due to his fall. The Support@Home Intermediate Care service provided two care calls a day to assist with daily living tasks such as washing, dressing and meal preparation. A risk assessment was completed as soon as Mr X returned home from hospital and identified equipment to be ordered to reduce the risk of further falls and enable progress towards independence.

After a couple of weeks Mr X has recovered enough for the care calls to be reduced to just three morning calls per week, and a few more weeks saw him independent of care services. The support from the Intermediate Care staff and the equipment had ensured Mr X was able to regain his previous levels of independence and even improved his mobility.



Priority 9 - Supporting the best interests of people living with mental health needs, including dementia

Our work to review and redesign Community Mental Health Services with Health is ongoing. As part of this we will complete a review of current Community Mental Health Services and develop options to redesign our joint service offer to meet current and future long term need and demand pressures.

A new work programme and timescales have been agreed with Health for 2024/25. We continue to work with our regional partners to make improvements to dementia services and considerable opportunities for engagement and consultation has been a feature in this area. Much of the regional work is driven by the **Welsh Government Dementia Standards** but a key development is the local design of the **Dementia connector** which is a new role intended

to assist in the navigation of the health and social care system. The role was informed through engagement and involvement with people living with dementia, and following a procurement process, the contract for delivery across Cwm Taf Morgannwg has been awarded to Age Connects Morgannwg who are currently recruiting and setting up the service with a view to a start date in the new financial year.

Dementia Care Connector

Within Cwm Taf Morgannwg as part of the delivery of the All Wales Dementia Care Pathway of standards we have commissioned Age Connects Morgannwg (ACM) to provide a dementia matters service and deliver Memory and Wellbeing Guides across the region. The memory and wellbeing guide is a dedicated person to support people following their diagnosis regardless of age to assist them to navigate the health and social care system which can all too often be complicated for people living with dementia and their carers.

Rhondda Cynon Taf led a coproduction, engagement and consultation exercise to create the job description and personal specification for the role. As a result we are confident that the memory and wellbeing guide within Cwm Taf Morgannwg meets the needs of people in our region as described by them. We will continue to work with people with lived experience and other stakeholder on the recruitment and evaluation of this pilot which will allow the service to grow organically to best meet the needs of citizens in our region.

ACM have already recruited a programme lead who has been engaging with stakeholders across the region and is actively recruiting further guides to support the work moving forward. Once these people are in place, we will be able to receive referrals from memory services and begin to support people at this point in their journey.

We continue to raise awareness and develop the resident support offer within our communities including through the **Age Friendly Communities project**. In 2023/24, we successfully obtained funding for a Community Dementia Prevention Programme pilot. The Project aimed to increase awareness of dementia within local communities, whilst also preventing the onset of dementia long term. The funding also set out to increased local capacity for the Dementia Friends initiative via the recruitment of additional Dementia Friends Ambassadors. Six Dementia Friends information sessions for funded organisations and groups were held during the period September 2023 to March 2024, creating a total of 110 new Dementia Friends. Alongside this many of the funded organisations and groups accessed alternative or digital Dementia Friends session, with required monitoring confirming 289 Dementia Friends were created via such sessions.

Community Dementia Programme Fund

During 2023/24 our Community Development team received confirmation of funding for a Community Dementia Prevention Programme pilot. Using our knowledge of the groups and existing networks in our communities we identified and invited organisations to apply to take part in the pilot.

Grants of up to £2,000 were available to fund activities that will encourage residents to:

- 1. Be physically active**
- 2. Maintain a healthy weight**
- 3. Be socially active**

A total of 19 projects were successful in securing funding across the county borough. The type of activities that will be provided include intergenerational activities within Porth Community School and Ty Porth Care Home; wellbeing and therapy sessions including mindfulness activities; social activities including coffee mornings and opportunities to take part in low impact exercise including yoga, pilates and strength and balance activity.

The following outcomes were achieved:

- **370 people reporting increased social connections.**
- **327 people reporting improved Mental Health/Wellbeing.**
- **332 people reporting feeling less isolated.**
- **203 people reporting they are more active.**
- **406 people reporting increased awareness of support services.**

As part of monitoring, two groups have reported the following unexpected consequences:

1. Individuals taking part in low impact exercise sessions have enjoyed it so much they have now signed up for additional sessions at the local gym – an environment they previously would not have dared venture, but the sessions have increased confidence and enabled them to attend alongside their new found friends.
2. An unexpected outcome was the huge attendance of our singing sessions. We increased our numbers from 15 to over 60 at some events. They proved to be very successful as people could come with their families which included children, babies, and elderly. People enjoyed singing along to different songs and listening to the local school and choir perform. The sessions linked with several other community groups in and out of the area. We did not expect it to be as successful after speaking to other community groups. We felt that including the schools and personally inviting other community dementia groups was the catalyst for the increase in numbers. We offered a warm, safe environment that was free to attend with refreshments included. We also offered transport to those who struggled with this, which was beneficial to many individuals. One lady said how nice it was to see her mother so happy enjoying the music. She said that for a while she was 'her mother again'. Many spoke about how they used to go to concerts and that attending the sessions felt like that when the choirs sang.

Working with **Adferiad**, a member-led charity that provides help and support for people with mental health, addiction, and co-occurring and complex needs, we opened a bespoke **supported living accommodation in Abergorki**, Treorchy for people with mental health needs or who misuse substances. The Service can support up to five people in self-contained apartments, with a staff office, communal space and accommodation for sleep-in staff. The Service provides support to individuals to be as independent, active and as safe as possible, whilst promoting and protecting their human rights and affording them the very best quality of life. Since opening, three people have stepped down from specialist placements into the facility and we are currently working with a further two people to move into the service should it be determined that the service can meet their needs. Adferiad undertake an outcomes survey with tenants every three months which is linked to our new outcomes focused contract. 100% of tenants reported that living in Abergorki had a positive effect on their wellbeing and that they feel supported to develop positive relationships with staff which supports their recovery.

People reported that they received support to access health care services linking to outcome of maintaining good health, all tenants reported that they feel confident and understood their rights and felt supported. All people reported that their mental health has improved since moving into Abergorki.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) waiting list has continued to rise throughout 2023/24 from 255 in March 2023 to 328 in March 2024 as our commissioned provider only has capacity to complete work that has already been allocated. We will need to consider the on-going challenge of managing DoLS assessment in 2024/25 and beyond.

Our Safeguarding Team manage all adult safeguarding reports into the Cwm Taf Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, making decisions about actions required to protect and promote the wellbeing of adults at risk of abuse or neglect in accordance with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019. In 2023/24, our Safeguarding Team received 2,197

reports with an additional 2,119 Public Protection Notices from South Wales Police and 190 referrals of professionals causing concern. All reports were screened, and safeguarding procedures were triggered where necessary, resulting in 600 Safeguarding enquiries being undertaken and 376 initial multi-agency strategy meetings being held.

Hospital Discharge Social Work Team

Case study



The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) and Adult Safeguarding Teams do not solely work with individuals who are open to social services. This example relates to an individual called Richard who lives in a care home. 'Richard' is 57: he was in hospital for 20 months and then was discharged from hospital to a care home in April 2023. His placement is funded through NHS Continuing Health Care (CHC), which is where someone is assessed as having a primary health care need and the NHS funds all aspects of their care and treatment, including accommodation costs if the person is resident in a care home.

Richard has been assessed as lacking mental capacity in relation to making decisions about how his care and support needs are met. Because of this, Richard is unable to decide where he lives, and he experiences a high level of supervision whilst in the care home; this amounts to a deprivation of his liberty. Best Interest Assessors from the DOLS team are responsible for ensuring that any deprivation of liberty experienced by someone like Richard, is proportionate and in his best interests.

Richard also lacks the capacity to manage his finances. Richard is aware that he has no money available to him and has said that he would like some money in his pocket. Since being in hospital and in the care home, Richard has had no access to money. The benefits that he previously had before going into hospital were managed by his aunt and uncle, but they have said that his benefits were stopped. His aunt was his appointee for the Department of Work and Pensions: his benefits were paid into her account, and she was responsible for his financial affairs. The Best Interest Assessor suspected that there might be financial abuse but had no evidence and there was no one who had the authority to investigate this matter. The DWP has been informed of the concerns. Richard's aunt and uncle were also suspected of financially abusing Richard's mother: she is also resident in a local care home and lacks capacity to manage her financial affairs.

The Best Interest Assessor reported his concerns to the Adult Safeguarding Team. The team's ability to investigate was limited because no-one had the authority to access Richard's bank accounts.

Meanwhile, Richard was not receiving income to which he is entitled. His basic needs were being met but he had no access to personal funds for items such as clothing, toiletries and so on. A best interest meeting was held, attended by the Safeguarding team, and it was agreed that a solicitor would take on appointeeship. This will enable Richard to access his benefit entitlement and safeguard him from risk of future financial abuse.

This year we have collaborated with our partners on early intervention and prevention work to reduce the number of Public Protection Notices issued and referrals to statutory services through the South Wales Police Early Help project. Following a successful pilot in 2022/23, this work has been mainstreamed following funding from South Wales Police. The Early Help app provides Police with a referral pathway when they are attending calls to the public. It aims to ensure that residents that appear vulnerable or in need of support but do not meet

statutory service thresholds are able to be referred for support within the community, quickly. In 2023/24, 252 referrals were received via the South Wales Police Early Help pathway of which 113 received a non-statutory wellbeing assessment, and 71 were referred/signposted to community organisations/groups for support. The non-statutory wellbeing assessment is designed with the resident at the centre of their support, ensuring their needs, goals and outcomes are achieved, which results in them taking control of their own lives and wellbeing.

Impact of South Wales Police Early Help Referral in the community

Case study



Background summary:

The Community Coordinators received several South Wales Police Early Help referrals for J.E referring to her experiencing youth annoyance and being targeted by young people, along with low levels of mental health due to the anniversary of her mother's death. In addition, she was also calling/contacting and engaging with Adult Services Single Point of Access Team and Safeguarding as a result of several PPNs being received.

The Community Coordinator at first, found it difficult to engage with JE and to conduct a What Matters Conversation, however, JE did disclose that she has a Learning Disability. The Community Coordinator made a referral to Adult Services Learning Disability Team and to Signposted Cymru for Mental Health Support. JE was happy with this information and advice and the case was closed.

Due to repeat referrals from South Wales Police, it was evident that JE was not engaging with the services and furthermore, did not meet the threshold within Adult Services Disability Team.

The Community Coordinator arranged a joint Wellbeing Assessment with RCT People First and JE where she expressed her frustration she and her partner were experiencing with young people and feeling targeted due to their disabilities and explained the Police have asked her not to go to the bus station for 6 months as a solution.

During the Wellbeing Assessment JE also explained that she didn't engage with counselling provided by Signposted Cymru as she would like to go back and engage with New Horizons, as she had previously attended courses. RCT People First agreed to action this. Discussion also took place around JE and her partner wanting their own independence and home as she currently still resides with her father. RCT People First explained the process to JE and advised her partner to continue to engage with his Social Worker.

What worked well, what didn't work so well:

It was evident that JE was not engaging well with statutory services and did not know where to go for help other than calling the Police. By building a rapport with JE allowed the Community Coordinator to arrange a joint visit with RCT People First, who would be the right organisation to support JE and make relevant referrals to other advocacy services. Initially signposting JE to these services did not work well as JE needed someone to support her due to her disabilities.

What 'good' or 'success' looks like:

To be in a position where all residents know where to go for information and advice. JE would like to have her own home and become more independent, along with knowing who to turn to for support.

What has been learnt:

Outcomes: JE now has the support that she needs via RCT People First who are the relevant organisation who have the knowledge and experience of support.

Conclusion:

To understand statutory services thresholds and what support is available. The Neighbourhood Network pathways for resident support was vital in this situation.

Vision Products – equipment and supported employment.

Vision Products is a supported business, within Adult Service Department in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which provides a range of diverse services including a windows manufacturing service, technology and servicing service, mobility retail shop and an Integrated Community Equipment Service (ICES) for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region.

It currently employs, trains and supports 96 individuals with a range of disabilities and is a Disability Confident Leader. A number of people are supported through employment, traineeships, volunteering and work experience opportunities.

Celebrating 30 years of Vision Products

In December 2023, an event was held to **celebrate 30 years of Vision Products**. The celebratory events also included the current team at Vision Products undertaking a mural painting project creating a Tree of Diversity, with the help of a local mural artist, as part of the refurbishment of their canteen facility. All staff members contributed to the mural by individually painting their own leaf on the Tree of Diversity, signifying their personal representation. A **video** was recorded to capture the development of the mural painting.

Staff Members from Vision Products, said:

“Diversity doesn’t look like anyone. It looks like everyone. At Vision Product’s we not only care about the community, but also each other, making it an amazing place to work. Here’s to another 30 years - **Paula**”

“I enjoyed being involved and I like to look at the painting whilst in work - **Max**”

“I painted my leaf red as it is my favourite colour, and I can now look at it forever - **Josh**”

“I chose autumn colours and enjoyed working as part of a team to complete the mural - **David**”

“It will be there for the next 30 years; I enjoyed painting it - **Jason**”

The mural painting project was support by **Community Murals CIC**.

One of the key areas of the business is the ICES which delivers services across Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend providing a fully managed service for Social Care, Education and Health through a Section 33 Agreement. This key service contributed to support people to live independently in the community, to have a quicker turnaround for community equipment in particular to facilitate discharge from hospital and to ensure equipment was available when people need it through the collection and recycling of equipment. In 2023/24, ICES performance across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region, included the delivery of around 23,300 items delivered, of which around 5,776 (24.8%) were classed urgent and just under 17,300 items no longer required were collected.

What are our priorities for 2024/25?

1. We will agree, communicate and implement the adult services strategy.
2. We will continue to work positively with CTM to implement an effective and integrated community model to meet the needs of the community and reduce the pressures on acute hospitals.
3. We will implement the adult services accommodation strategy to progress development of extra care and learning disability accommodation.
4. We will implement the co-produced day service offer for people with a learning disability to improve access community-based services and volunteering and employment opportunities.
5. We will implement the remodelling of the older persons day service provision.
6. We will manage the procurement and safe transfer of the home care outcome-based contracts including engagement with service users and staff to include 'what matters' to them into the service specification.
7. We will continue to develop the technology 1st strategy and in particular for 2024/2025 establish a replacement ARC for the Council and prepare for the digital switchover by replacing the lifeline units in people's homes over 2 years.
8. We will evaluate the sensei project and using the information available plan a technology 1st training programme for adult social care staff to consider technology as the 1st option.
9. We will formalise the adult services workforce strategy and continue to implement.
10. We will lead and manage the cultural change programme to support a strength-based outcome focussed approach to adult social care.

section

4

How we do our work?



Our workforce

Our social care workforce is our most important asset without whom high-quality care and support services could not be delivered without an adequate number of well trained, experienced staff with the right skills and approach needed to work with our service offers and effectively in partnership with other organisations. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, we are fortunate to have amongst our social care workforce a talented and committed group of staff – we are incredibly grateful to them.

As in previous years, despite recruitment and retention remaining a corporate priority and the considerable activity that has been guided by our workforce strategies, challenges have continued regarding workforce recruitment and retention. Vacancy rates remain high and we have continued to lose practitioners. However, there have been a number of positive outcomes from this focussed work as evidenced in more detail below.



In Children's Services (Priority 4), our Workforce Strategy includes activities aimed at improving staff wellbeing and maximising the retention of staff.

Some of the initiatives that we have carried out this year include:

- holding biannual Inform and Involve Sessions which aim to keep staff up to date on what's going on within the service, whilst providing an opportunity to get involved. These sessions are also supported by regular electronic staff bulletins.
- introducing '**Reflective Spaces**' for social workers and their teams to support professional wellbeing and resilience
- running an enhanced and ongoing attraction campaign to promote recruitment including creating attraction short videos for social media to recruit social workers Kiera **RCT Childrens Services** ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com))
- establishing a workforce strategy retention sub group to focus on identifying opportunities that address the areas for retention improvement that are highlighted in exit interviews, Inform and Involve sessions and in our practitioners forum meetings.
- continuing our commitment to 'Grow Our Own' by expanding the number of staff supported by the Accredited Case Manager programme, able to be sponsored to access the Open University Social Work Degree.

In Adult Services (Priority 10), we have continued to develop a new Workforce Strategy for Adult Services, in consultation with staff and this will be finalised and implemented in 2024.

Some of initiatives undertaken this year, include:

- continued investment in our long established “Growing our Own” scheme by funding and supporting staff to access the Social Work Degree Course with a guaranteed Social Work role on completion of Registration. 6 staff are currently being supported for adult services
- direct care recruitment has been a priority and whilst improvements have been seen across all areas retention rates continue to challenge providers.
- creation of the Learning Disability teams is complete in addition to the additional care and support team in the Taf central area. The Community review team has also been decommissioned.
- additional Principal Social Worker resources are appointed in Community Mental Health teams.
- in-house Residential Care Home Workforce Group established with significant improvements to staff vacancies and consequently improved capacity achieved.
- we have improved pay & conditions for some staff as well as applied a cost-of-living supplement.
- 4 Apprentices are placed in our residential services.
- the Occupational Therapy review is in progress to maintain ongoing recruitment and retention.
- the Accommodation service has Registered the Residential care home workforce with Social Care Wales within the designated timescale set for registration and the home care service has continued to support the Registration of its workforce.
- introduced staff forums across all services areas to share information and manage effective communication between the staff and their leadership teams

One of our social workers said this about her job:



I qualified as a social worker in August 2021. Since qualifying, I have worked within Adults Services Care and Support team covering part of the Cynon Valley. Since starting my role in this team, I have been supported by colleagues who have a wealth of experience and knowledge and are always happy to help and offer guidance/share ideas when needed. I thoroughly enjoy my role as a Social Worker. I particularly like working with older adults to promote their independence and ensure their care and support needs are being met in a way that they feel works for them. Although the role can be challenging on times, it can also be extremely rewarding when you can see an individual's health and wellbeing improve, when they have access to the community and a sense of belonging, when an individual's quality of life has improved, when someone is living independently with or without support or when an individual is supported to ensure their voice is heard and what matters to them is understood.



We remain concerned regarding the morale and resilience of our workforce as the impact of staffing pressures increase due to workforce challenges, increased demand and complexity, and it is therefore important we to continue to communicate with our staff to make sure we prioritise staff wellbeing effectively.

Workforce recruitment and retention, wellbeing and resilience will remain priority areas, as part of our Childrens and Adults Workforce Strategies, with continued focus over the coming year.

Welsh Language

We continue to be committed to giving people the opportunity to receive services delivered and/or funded by us in Welsh and expect our services to provide the Active Offer, which means providing a service in Welsh without anyone having to ask for it, on every occasion. Our approach reflects the Welsh Language Standards and the Welsh Government's "More than Just Words" Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health and Social Services. We continue to promote an active offer of Welsh Language training for all staff from beginner to improver. Our current Welsh Language proficiency is below.

	None	A1 Entry - Basic understanding	A2 Foundation - Basic conversation. Write short pieces.	B1 Intermediate - Hold an extended conversation. Write fairly accurately.	B2 Advanced - Confidently speak with others. Write detailed structured text.	C1 Proficiency - Fluent in speaking and writing	No in post
Central staff	48	57	10	4	2	9	130
Day services	93	54	9	1	3	5	166
Domiciliary Care	192	93	6	4	8	10	313
Adults Residential	243	110	8	3	9	21	394
Childrens Residential	67	60	5	3	3	8	146
Social Work team Adults	95	96	3	3	7	9	213
Social Work team Childrens	130	158	23	11	11	16	349
Social Work team All ages	7	8	0	0	0	1	16
Supported living	25	12	0	2	2	2	43
	900	648	64	31	46	81	1770

People who prefer to receive services and support through the medium of Welsh are highlighted in our system. The total number of new assessments completed for children during the year was 5,635. There was evidence of the active offer of Welsh in 1,305 cases (23%). The offer was accepted in 18 cases. In Adult Services, the total number of new assessments completed during the year was 5,962. There was evidence of the active offer of Welsh in 5,959 cases (99.9%). The offer was accepted in 40 cases.

Our Finances

The Council has experienced, and continues to experience, significant financial challenges especially in our Adults and Children's Social Services, and these financial pressures are being experienced by all local authorities.

2023/24 has again been an extremely challenging year financially for Social Services as continued increased demand and complexity along with the enduring cost-of-living crisis and high inflation placed substantial pressure on our care providers and service costs.

The net budget for social services for the year was £201.4 million, but the added pressure on the service, mainly relating to increased direct care and placement costs across both Adult and Children's Social Services, resulted in an overspend of £2.5 million following the draw-down of approved earmarked reserves (one-off funding) set aside to manage the risk of additional in-year costs in the above service areas. In the year, we have made use of national grants to manage some service pressures as well as to develop our services in an innovative way

and in partnerships, as referenced throughout this report. Capital funding was also received to progress our accommodation modernisation programmes in both Adult and Children's Social Services.

There is a well-developed financial management process in place across service areas that supports the medium-term financial plan and enables the identification and management of budget risks and opportunities. The Elimination of Profit agenda will be a significant challenge for Children's Services over the next few years, but plans are in place and robust costings are being developed with finance colleagues. Within Adult Services, the main risk will be ensuring sustainable fee increases for commissioned care. In addition, there are significant savings to achieve in 2024/25 within Social Services and there will be a requirement to identify further efficiencies and savings in 2025/26 and onwards across the Council's budgets. This will be an on-going challenge to manage whilst delivering services.

Political and Corporate Leadership, Governance and Accountability

The Council's political and corporate leadership is strong. Social Services continues to be a high priority, receiving strong and proactive support from the Cabinet Members for both Adults and Children's services.

We are accountable through a variety of mechanisms including monthly performance reviews and quality assurance checks, regular discussions with Cabinet Members and senior staff using the data we collect, reports to Council Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees, and Corporate Parenting meetings, and engagement with staff.

Our Partnerships

Partnership working is key to the delivery of high quality and responsive services. We continue to work closely with key partners on an individual and strategic level to improve services and to achieve efficiencies.

We continue to play a significant part in the:

- Regional Partnership Board
- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board
- Regional Learning Disability and other sub-groups
- Cwm Taf Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Partnership
- ICES Partnership Board
- Vale, Valleys and Cardiff Regional Adoption Collaboration
- Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service

In addition, we have a strong record of partnership working and we describe throughout the some of the services and initiatives that we have developed with our partners.

However, as set out in last year's report, there continues to be a need to develop and implement new plans that accelerate the pace of integration of health and social care services with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board. Whilst progress is being made, we currently face challenges in achieving the integrated approach that is required to ensure the health and social system is delivering the outcomes we need and that these essential services are sustainable going forward. This will continue to be addressed as we plan our approach in 2024/25.



Cwm Taf Morgannwg
Bwrdd | **Regional**
Partneriaeth | **Partnership**
Rhanbarthol | **Board**



Cwm Taf Morgannwg
Bwrdd Diogelu
Safeguarding Board

section

5

Promoting and improving the wellbeing of those we help – The six quality standards.



The tables below demonstrate how our priorities are delivering the six quality standards and where more information can be found in the main body of this report:

Quality Standard 1 - Working with people to define and co-produce personal wellbeing outcomes that people wish to achieve.

Our 2023/24 Priorities	Where to find out more in the Director's Report?
We will continue to invest in services to prevent escalation of need increasing or enable recovery and independence.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 2 - Preventing escalation of need and enabling recovery and independence.
We will implement the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy- Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 1 - Implementing the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy.

Our 2024/25 Priorities

1. We will lead and manage the cultural change programme to support a strength-based outcome focussed approach to adult social care.
2. We will formalise the adult services workforce strategy and continue to implement.
3. We will re-design our Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service ('Right Help, Right Place, Right Time' Strategy') alongside stakeholders to be a sustainable service with a strong prevention intention at the front door.
4. We will ensure that Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services' workforce is motivated, engaged and valued; staff have the capacity, skills, competence and confidence to meet the needs of children and families.

Quality Standard 2 - Working with people and partners to protect and promote people's physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing.

Our 2023/24 Priorities	Where to find out more in the Director's Report?
We will continue to work with Health to explore options for the development of an integrated community health and social care locality model.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 8 - Supporting hospital discharge.
Work with Health to improve patient experience and redesign pathways to improve admission avoidance and "home first" services to ensure timely transfers between health and social care settings so that people are in the most appropriate care setting.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 8 - Supporting hospital discharge.
Work with Health to complete review and redesign Community mental health services to provide responsive access and effective mental health support.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 9 - Supporting the best interests of people living with mental health needs, including dementia.
We will implement the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy- Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 1 - Implementing the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy.

Our 2024/25 Priorities

1. We will continue to work positively with CTM to implement an effective and integrated community model to meet the needs of the community and reduce the pressures on acute hospitals.

Quality Standard 3 - Taking steps to protect and safeguard people from abuse, neglect, or harm

Our 2023/24 Priorities	Where to find out more in the Director's Report?
We will implement the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy- Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 1 - Implementing the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy.

Our 2024/25 Priorities

1. We will implement the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy- Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.

Quality Standard 4 - Encouraging and supporting people to learn, develop and participate in society.

Our 2023/24 Priorities	Where to find out more in the Director's Report?
We will co-produce our day services offer for older people to improve access to outreach and community based services that will meet their needs.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 6 - Transforming Day Services for older people.
We will co-produce the transformation of our service offer for people with a learning disability to improve access to meaningful activity and opportunities in their own communities to achieve their personal goals and live ordinary lives.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 7 - Transforming Day Services for people with a learning disability.
We will deliver the Participation strategy which outlines Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services approach to supporting the rights of children, young people, parents, carers, and families in receipt of care and support, to have their voices heard and to actively participate in decisions about their life and help to shape future service developments.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 3 - Promoting engagement and involvement - Delivering our Participation Strategy.

Our 2024/25 Priorities

1. We will implement the co-produced day service offer for people with a learning disability to improve access community-based services and volunteering and employment opportunities.
2. We will implement the remodelling of the older persons day service provision.
3. We will deliver the Participation strategy which outlines Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services approach to supporting the rights of children, young people, parents, carers, and families in receipt of care and support, to have their voices heard and to actively participate in decisions about their life and help to shape future service developments.

Quality Standard 5 - Supporting people to safely develop and maintain healthy domestic, family, and personal relationships.

Our 2023/24 Priorities	Where to find out more in the Director's Report?
We will work with unpaid carers and partners to ensure respite provision is meeting their needs and the needs of individuals who use services so that people are able to live in their family homes for longer.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 3 - Supporting unpaid Carers.
We will implement the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy- Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 1 - Implementing the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy.

Our 2024/25 Priorities

1. We will lead and manage the cultural change programme to support a strength-based outcome focussed approach to adult social care.
2. We will implement the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy- Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.

Quality Standard 6 - Working with and supporting people to achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

Our 2023/24 Priorities	Where to find out more in the Director's Report?
We will continue to progress the Council's vision and strategy for care accommodation for older and vulnerable people to ensure we create the right service offer that responds to increasing demand and changing needs, enabling more people to live independently in their community.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 1 - Developing care accommodation for older and vulnerable people.
We will continue work with domiciliary care providers to ensure that people receive good quality home care based on the outcomes they want to achieve and that there is sufficient provision available at the right level to meet demand.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 5 - Commissioning Domiciliary Care.
We will empower people to commission their own care and support through greater promotion of direct payments.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 4 - Promoting Direct Payments.
We will work with unpaid carers and partners to ensure respite provision is meeting their needs and the needs of individuals who use services so that people are able to live in their family homes for longer.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 3 - Supporting unpaid Carers.
Deliver the Children's Residential Transformation Strategy- Making sure that the Council provides the accommodation and support that our looked after children need.	Further information can be found by clicking this link: Priority 2 - Implementing the Children Looked After Residential Transformation Strategy.

Our 2024/25 Priorities

1. We will implement the adult services accommodation strategy to progress development of extra care and learning disability accommodation.
2. We will manage the procurement and safe transfer of the home care outcome-based contracts including engagement with service users and staff to include 'what matters' to them into the service specification.
3. We will continue to develop the technology 1st strategy and in particular for 2024/2025 establish a replacement ARC for the Council and prepare for the digital switchover by replacing the lifeline units in people's homes over 2 years.
4. We will evaluate the sensei project and using the information available plan a technology 1st training programme for adult social care staff to consider technology as the 1st option.
5. We will deliver the Residential Transformation Strategy- Making sure that the Council provides the accommodation and support that our looked after children need.



Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Annual Director of Social Services Report

2023/24

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Mae'r ddogfen yma ar gael yn y Gymraeg. Mae croeso i chi gyfathrebu â ni yn y Gymraeg.
This document is available in Welsh. You are welcome to communicate with us in Welsh.