

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANNUAL DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT 2024-2025

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.





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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg Mae croeso i chi gyfathrebu â ni yn y Gymraeg

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CHAPTER

DIRECTOR'S SUMMARY

RHONDDA CYNON TAF (OUNTY BOROUGH (OUNGL ANNUAL DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT 2024-2025

Each year, the Council's Director of Social Services is required under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 to publish an annual report on how Rhondda Cynon Taf Council has delivered Social Services demonstrating how our work has promoted and improved the wellbeing of those that we support. The report also details the progress made against each of the priorities we said we would focus on over the past 12 months and these can be found in Chapter 3: Performance Assessment. This year's report is in a new format following updated guidance from Welsh Government.

Like other Social Services Departments across Wales, Rhondda Cynon Taf, is having to balance significant service pressures and increased complexity of need and this is set against a context of sustained recruitment and retention challenges and reducing local authority funding and having to make savings. Whilst Social Services remain a priority for the Council, these challenges are impacting on our ability to manage expectations and meet demand.

Notwithstanding these significant challenges, both our Adult and Children's Services have continued to transform services, working collaboratively, where possible, with our partners and communities to identify opportunities to tackle issues and maximise resources to ensure we have sustainable services that can continue to meet need and our statutory obligations.

In Adult Services, responding to the challenges of long-term financial sustainability of the Council's care homes and identified changing long-term demand in line with our well established Care Accommodation Strategy we again reviewed our in-house care home provision and managed the closure of Caeglas Care Home. Alongside this we continued to take forward our multimillion care accommodation investment programme with a range of new extra care and dementia residential accommodation progressing at Porth, Mountain Ash and Ferndale and specialist learning disability accommodation at Bronllwyn and Church Village.

Our new co-produced 'My Day My Way' learning disability day services offer to improve access to community-based services, volunteering and employment opportunities was taken forward. In addition, we co-produced a new learning disability respite model as the first step to transforming our offer. Alongside this review of respite, we have already increased the number of people using shared lives as an alternative service for care accommodation placement and respite care.

During the year, we managed the procurement and safe transfer of our home care outcome-based contracts, which included engagement with service users and staff to ensure 'what matters' to them was included in our new service specifications. From October 2024, we changed our hospital discharge processes for home care services and re-aligned our service to comply with the timescales indicated in the Welsh Government's Discharge 2 Recover then Assess (D2RA) framework. This has meant a reduction in the assessment delays for discharges that has contributed to the reduction in Pathways of Care Delays (POCD) as well as length of stay in hospital.

Micro-enterprises have continued to be developed to expand local social care options, offering personalised care and increasing community integration. These providers have received positive feedback for job satisfaction and quality of care.

Our Adult Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service has been further developed to fully enhance opportunities to link into community-based preventative services, enablement and early help and progress the use of a digital form online and for the Council's Contact Centre. This resulted in a significant improvement to waiting times for a response to 'what matters' assessments.

Within Children's Services, we have seen a steady reduction in the number of children looked after over recent years and in 2024/25 there was a 6% decrease compared to the previous year (2023/24). The reduction is aligned with our Children Looked After (CLA) Prevention Strategy and the development of a Model of Practice in Children's Services that is one component of the Strategy. The focus is on evidencebased services that provide information, advice and assessment, alongside an early help system designed to prevent the escalation of family issues. This approach enables individuals to make informed choices, take independent measures to support their wellbeing and, when necessary, access targeted interventions that reduce risk and ensure children and young people are protected from harm and abuse. Only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.

Our pre-birth service called Magu has seen Children's Services extend its offer to some of our most vulnerable parents and has demonstrated great outcomes for families and a step change in our approach.

The Corporate Parenting Pledge was endorsed in 2024. As in previous years, we asked a sample of care experienced children how they feel about the care and support they receive. Overall responses were positive, with most respondents stating that they 'felt safe where they lived' (95%) and 'felt well cared for' (96%).

Employment and training opportunities for care experienced young people continued to be delivered through our successful Step in the Right Direction and Care2Work programmes, with positive outcomes in qualifications and employment placements.

Providing sufficient numbers of foster families, children's homes and supported accommodation has remained a priority for Children's Services in 2024/25 and we have continued to focus on making sure that young people are looked after closer to home. Currently, 73% of children who are looked after currently reside in Rhondda Cynon Taf, as result of opening new children's homes and increasing local placements, though reliance on some unregistered settings continues due to supply shortage. Despite continued efforts to increase foster carers and this continuing to be a priority, the number of foster carers has reduced during the year and this is a position that is being experienced more widely across Wales. Meanwhile, we have continued to develop our Council run children's homes.

We have continued to report progress in improving staff skills, support and experience through ambitious workforce development strategies in both Adult and Children's Services. In 2024/25, we continue to embed our Social Work Academy and increased investment in our established "Growing Our Own" scheme, which will see higher numbers of existing staff in social care practitioner roles become qualified social workers.

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 to residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf. None of this could have been achieved without the dedication, resilience and immense efforts of our social services workforce and I want to thank everyone who has ensured that our residents have received the care and support they need. I hope that this report shows the results of their hard and tireless work over the past year.



CONTEXT

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL **ANNUAL DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT 2024-2025**

National Performance Measures

Adults Services

AD/001: The total number of contacts received for adults by statutory social services in 2024/25 were **12,522** – a 7.6% reduction from 13,553 contacts in 2023/24.

AD/002: Of the total number of contacts received, **6,385** contacts (51% of total contacts) were provided advice or assistance in 2024/25, compared to 7,175 (52.9% of total contacts) in 2023/24. A 11% reduction in the total number of contacts received over the past year that were provided advice or assistance.

AD/004: 4,987 new adult assessments were completed in 2024/25 - a 18% reduction from 6,081 in 2023/24.

AD/005: Of the new adult assessments completed:

- a. **1,378** assessed with eligible needs (27.6%) were only able to be met with care and support plan a 7.1% reduction from 1,484 in 2023/24 (24.4% met with care and support plan).
- b. **2,889** assessed with eligible needs (57.9%) were able to be met by any other means a 26% reduction from 3904 in 2023/24 (64.2% met by any other means).
- c. **720** (14.4%) had no eligible needs to be met a 33.3% increase from 540 in 2023/24 (8.9% no eligible need).

AD/012: 4,210 adults had a care and support plan on 31st March 2025 - a 1.7% reduction from 4,282 in 2023/24.

Children's Services

CH/001: The total number of contacts received for children by statutory social services in 2024/25 were **28,372** – a 1.2% increase from 28,035 contacts in 2023/24.

CH/002: Of the total number of contacts received, **11,662** contacts (41.1% of total contacts) were provided advice or assistance in 2024/25, compared to 12,535 (44.7% of total contacts) in 2023/24. A 7% reduction in the total number of contacts received over the past year that were provided advice or assistance.

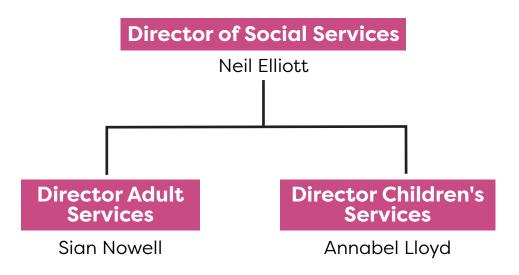
CH/006: 5,605 new children's assessments were completed in 2024/25 - a 0.5% reduction from 5,635 in 2023/24.

CH/007: Of the new children's assessments completed:

- a. **766** assessed with eligible needs (13.7%) were only able to be met with care and support plan a 3.9% reduction from 797 in 2023/24 (14.1% met with care and support plan).
- b. **3,336** assessed with eligible needs (59.5%) were able to be met by any other means a 4.1% increase from 3,205 in 2023/24 (56.9% met by any other means).
- c. **1,503** (26.8%) had no eligible needs to be met a 8% decrease from 1,633 in 2023/24 (29% no eligible need).

CH/015: 2,034 children had a care and support plan on 31st March 2025 - a 12.8% increase from 1,803 in 2023/24.

The Statutory Director of Social Services forms part of the Corporate Senior Leadership Team together with the Council's Chief Executive and other Corporate Directors. The Social Services Directorate's management structure is shown below.



The Council's political and corporate leadership is strong. Social Services continues to be a high priority, receiving strong and proactive support from the Council's Cabinet and the lead Cabinet Member for Health and Social Care and the Senior Leadership Team.

Both Adult and Children's Services have service strategies and service delivery plans developed from a well-established self-service evaluation process that contribute to the People and Communities wellbeing objective of the Council's Corporate Plan Working with our Communities: 2024–2030 and deliver our strategic priorities and support various transformation projects in each Service.

For 2024/25, the Council implemented Transformation Boards for Adult and Children's Services to make decisions and monitor the services transformation to reduce financial pressures and develop sustainable services for the future.

In Social Services, we are also 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 Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees, and Corporate Parenting Board, and engagement with staff.

WORKFORCE

Workforce priorities we have achieved during the year that we planned to do in 2024/25, are shown in the table below.

Priorities we have achieved during the year

We will formalise the adult services workforce strategy and continue to implement.

We will ensure that 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.

There were 1,740 staff employed in Social Services on 31St March 2025. 633 of the staff are employed within Children's Services, 1,065 in Adult Services and 42 in Commissioning and Workforce Development.

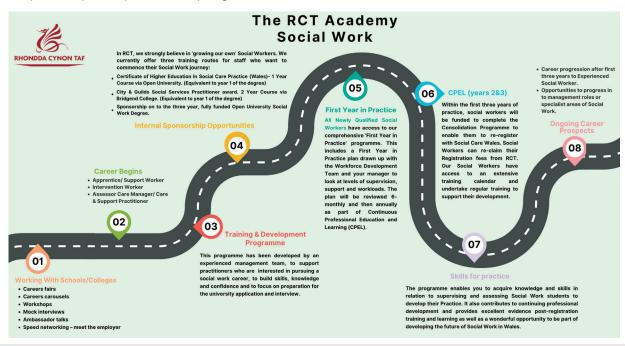
In 2024/25, there was a reduction in staff in Adult Services due to service transformation and the recommissioning of care and support provision from our commissioned independent sector providers instead of providing the services directly.

Within Children's Services staff turnover of social workers improved. In 2023/24, 17 qualified social workers joined Rhondda Cynon Taf, however the same number left. In 2024/25, 15 qualified social workers joined, and the number of leavers almost halved from the year before to 9, giving a net gain of 6 in the year. This has helped to provide increased stability and continuity.

Recruitment and retention remain a corporate priority, and the progress made

in 2024/25 that has been guided by our Adult and Children's Services workforce strategies, includes:

- Improvements to our recruitment marketing including more accessible job adverts, targeted social media adverts, virtual recruitment evenings for social workers and improved information on our website about job opportunities available.
- Development of a Rhondda Cynon Taf Social Work Academy. The Academy endeavours to bring together under one umbrella all the training and development opportunities for our social work practitioners the Council provides.
- Development programmes for principal social workers and CPD opportunities for staff to gain broader experiences to prepare for team manager roles.
- Training and mentoring opportunities for current Heads of Service to enable progression into senior officer roles.



Increased investment in our established "Growing Our Own" scheme, which creates sponsorship opportunities for Adult and Children's Services staff to access the Open University Social Work Degree programme and guarantees a social work role on completion of registration. 4 sponsored staff completed their degrees in 2024 and now work across our social work teams, with a further 8 due to complete their degrees in 2025.

Due to the success of our social work "Growing Our Own" scheme we have developed a similar arrangement in our Sensory Service, where rehabilitation assistants for the Visually Impaired have been funded and supported to undertake the two-year qualification to become a rehabilitation officer for the visually impaired (ROVI). One person qualified in 2025, with another expected to qualify in 2026.

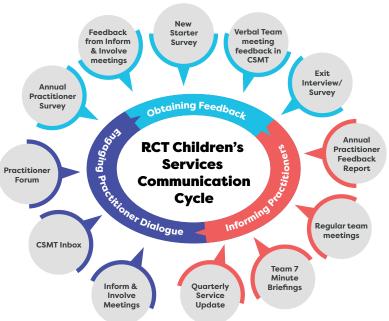
The above developments are now yielding some positive results.

Our overall social worker vacancies in Children's Services are steadily reducing from 37.8% in April 2024 to 32.6% in March 2025 (and from a high of 44% in September 2023).

The sufficient supply of experienced qualified social workers for court and child protection work in Children's Services along with experienced children's residential staff continues to be an area of considerable risk for the Council.

Despite the positive progress made, we know that there is still more work to do and attracting, recruiting and retaining the best people with the right values, attitudes and commitment to work in social care remains a key priority.

We recognise the importance of an engaged, motivated and healthy workforce. Over the last two years, Children's Services has introduced a range of mechanisms through the introduction of a communication cycle to capture the voice of practitioners. The aim of the communication cycle is to improve communication and wellbeing across the service, and it is now firmly embedded.



Through this communication cycle we have been able to establish key themes about 'What we are doing well?' and 'Improving the employee experience'. A Workforce Wellbeing Sub-Group has been established to focus on the areas of improvement highlighted by practitioners and action to date have included commencement of an enhanced flexible working pilot, a focus on practitioner/ team success in the Children's Services newsletter and regular applications for national accolades.

We are aware that the pressures faced by staff including the impact of secondary trauma means that we should remain alert to their support needs. It is therefore important we continue to communicate with our staff to make sure we prioritise staff wellbeing and resilience effectively.

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

2024/25 has again been an extremely challenging year financially for social services as continued demand and increased 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 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 our Social Services. In 2024/25, 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 partnership, as referenced throughout this report. Capital funding was also received to progress our accommodation modernisation programmes in both Adult and Children's 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. Implementation of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025, which received Royal Assent in March 2025 and introduces the Welsh Government's commitment to eliminate

private profit in children's residential and foster care services by 2030 will be a significant challenge for Children's Services over the next few years.

Anticipated levels of Eliminated Profit Grant from Welsh Government are expected to be much lower than the Council needs and we will therefore need to develop new proposals to better match the value of the expected grant. As a result, significant financial risk will need to be carried by the Council, and a reduced implementation plan will have an impact in terms of our achievement of eliminate profit by 2030.

Within Adult Services, the main risk will be ensuring sustainable fee increases for commissioned care, which are exacerbated by insufficient rates of funded nursing care and Continuing Health Care (CHC) funding of care home placements by Heath, putting pressure on the social care system and the financial viability of the care home market, which cannot be sustained.

In addition, there are significant savings to achieve in 2025/26 within Social Services and there will be a requirement to identify further efficiencies and savings in 2026/27 and onwards across the Council's budgets. This will be an on-going challenge to manage whilst delivering services within the context of high demand and increasing complexity.



PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

RHONDDA CYNON TAF (OUNTY BOROUGH (OUNGL ANNUAL DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT 2024-2025

This section provides a self-assessment of our performance for Adult and Children's Services against eight quality standards for each of the following areas: People, Prevention, Partnership and Integration, and Wellbeing.

Welsh Government Quality Standards:

"All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them"

"Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision"

People related priorities we have achieved in Adult and Children's Services during the year that we planned to do in 2024/25, are shown in the table below.

Priorities we have achieved during the year

We will agree, communicate and implement the Adult Services Strategy

We will lead and manage the cultural change programme to support a strength based outcome focussed approach to adult social care

We will implement the co-produced day service offer for people with a learning disability to improve access to community based services and volunteering and employment opportunities

We will implement the remodelling of the older persons day service provision

We will deliver the Participation Strategy which outlines 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

Adult Services

The Council's <u>Cabinet agreed</u> the <u>Adult Social Care Strategy 2024-2030</u> in September 2024 following a targeted public consultation which included a variety of methods e.g. a Let's Talk website, engagement events and the offer of telephone discussions, to encourage as many people to participate as possible. Most responses were positive.

The Strategy sets out our vision, new model and six priorities until 2030, and the outcomes we expect to achieve, alongside our partners and stakeholders, on behalf of the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- We will connect people to their communities.
- 2 We will make it simpler and easier for people to be independent.
- We will support people to have a safe place to live where they feel at home.
- We want people to have a connected system of support.
- We want people to benefit from a well-trained, engaged workforce.
- We will continually improve the standards and sustainability of the service.

We are committed to co-producing solutions with people who use our services, and we will be working with them to determine how we deliver on these priorities, putting us in a strong position to deliver our vision for the people of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

We are driving the cultural change required with our staff by communication of the new model and direction of travel in our overall Adult Services Strategy. This work is intended to transform our approach and embed a strength based and outcome focused culture with the Council. External training was commissioned via the Social Care Workforce Development Partnership for both assessment and provider staff. In additional to formal training opportunities, a number of informal 'lunch and learn' sessions were delivered by members of the Adult Services Management Team, to support assessment staff in undertaking outcome focussed assessments and reviews.

My Day My Way Learning Disability Day Services

Our new co-produced day services model for people with a learning disability was agreed in Cabinet in November 2023 and following a co-produced review of the Council's work-based projects and management of change process our new 'My Day My Way' model will be implemented from April 2025. Social work support will ensure users of service are reviewed alongside the management of change to ensure individual planning for future

support is timely. In addition, our commissioned supported living providers are creating and expanding community-based opportunities for people in the community including provision of some of the previous Council run projects to support the new model of service. Work is also ongoing with 3rd Sector providers to support alignment of informal support to the new model.

Case Study: Abercynon Autism Centre

J has a diagnosed learning disability and autism, J attends Abercynon Autism Centre for 3 days per week, which gives J the opportunity to meet with his friends. J enjoys activities at the Centre; however, much prefers to be outdoors. Staff working at the Centre listened to what J was communicating, and looked at ways to engage with the community, nature, and the outdoors. J visited Cynon Valley Organics (CVO) and had a few tasters of tasks involved, to help out in the running of a community garden and organic project. J has a real connection with the animals at CVO and is particularly fond of the new little kitten.

Also, to access CVO, J enjoys the walk along the path where he is able to say hello to the regular dog walkers and be part of the local community. Developing independence skills further staff identified J likes to litter pick, and have purchased items such as a litter picker, high vis jacket, and waterproof coat to help with litter picking in the local community. Due to J's litter picking he has developed positive relationships with the local community who regularly thank J for his positive work, in keeping the community clean. The icing on the cake for J was when the local Council workers drove past in their van, stopped and thanked J for helping to keep Abercynon tidy. J was "beaming with pride" on being thanked for his positive work, and very much appreciated the great comment!

Older Adult Day Services

Our Older Adult Day Service was reconfigured as planned during 2024. Tonyrefail Day Centre was transferred to Cwrt Yr Orsaf Extra Care in Pontypridd to benefit from the cost efficiencies and modern facilities on that site. Trecynon Day Centre moved to be adjacent to the Cwmni Dda (Dementia) Day Centre situated in the Tegfan Residential Care Home again to benefit from the cost efficiencies. The new service model has provided individuals with a more suitable and enhanced environment, promoting social interaction improving wellbeing and a more integrated model of daytime opportunities.

Micro-Enterprises

We have continued to develop micro-enterprises as part our commitment to expanding the local social care market, increasing choice and control for individuals, and supporting the ageing population in innovative and sustainable ways. Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and supported by Community Catalysts, 34 local micro-enterprises have been set up over the past two years, providing 500 hours of work via direct payments to 56 local individuals.

Micro-enterprises are small, community-based care providers designed to complement traditional home care. They offer a personalised approach, increasing choice and control for individuals with care needs while providing local entrepreneurs with opportunities to work within their communities. Additionally, the introduction of micro-enterprises has significantly enhanced the quality and availability of care services in the community, in addition to any work people choose to pay privately for.

An evaluation which included interviews and focus groups with care recipients, their families, carers, social workers, and Council colleagues, highlighted several key successes:

High Job Satisfaction: Micro-enterprise carers reported significant levels of job satisfaction, attributing this to the flexibility and meaningful nature of their work. They appreciated the ability to spend more time with each individual, fostering deep and respectful two-way relationships.

Positive Feedback: Both care recipients and their families praised the personalised and dignified care provided by micro-enterprises. The consistent presence of the same carer and longer visit times were particularly valued.

Community Integration: Micro-enterprises have been instrumental in building community bonds. Many carers live locally, increasing trust and reliability. They have also improved the bonds between carers and the individuals that they support.

Support from Community Catalysts: The support provided by Community Catalysts has been invaluable in helping micro-enterprises establish and thrive.

Connecting those seeking care and support with Micro-enterprises: The Council's Brokerage Service has been crucial for coordinating care and support for individuals who benefit most from micro-enterprises. The directories where micro-enterprises are listed (Tribe and Small Good Stuff) also enable people to find their own care solutions.

Annual Service User Survey

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 496 people completed the survey compared to 724 people in 2023/24. Overall responses to the survey were positive, as shown in the table below, with most respondents stating that they 'felt safe where they lived' and 'lived in a home that supports their wellbeing'.

SERVICE QUALITY MEASURE: Of the 496 adults who responded to the survey:

93% live in a home that supports their wellbeing

(compared to 95% in 2023/24 and 92% in 2022/23).

65% feel a part of their community

(compared to 71% in 2023/24 and 65% in 2022/23).

92% feel safe

(compared to 95% in 2023/24 and 91% in 2022/23).

90% had the right information or advice when they needed it (compared to 93% in 2023/24 and 86% in 2022/23).

96% have been able to use their everyday language (compared to 94% in 2023/24 and 96% in 2022/23).

98% are happy with the care and support they have had (compared to 95% in 2023/24 and 96% in 2022/23).

80% know who to speak to about their care and support (compared to 84% in 2023/24 and 78% in 2022/23).

94% are happy with their family, friends, and neighbours (compared to 97% in 2023/24 and 93% in 2022/23).

80% said they can do the things important to them (compared to 78% in 2023/24).

90% had been actively involved in decisions about how their care and support was provided (compared to 87% in 2023/24).

98% were treated with dignity and respect

(compared to 99% in 2023/24 and 96% in 2022/23).

66% agreed it was their choice to live in a residential care home (compared to 64% in 2023/24 and 60% in 2022/23).

79% had the advice, help and support that they needed to prepare them for adulthood (compared to 74% in 2023/24). Note: question only answered by 18 to 24 year olds.

We carried out an annual survey with unpaid carers which was completed by 32 unpaid carers compared to 45 in 2023/24. Overall responses to the survey were positive, as shown in the table below, with 100% of unpaid carers responding 'yes' or 'sometimes' that they had been involved in decisions about the care and support provided to the person that they care for.

SERVICE QUALITY MEASURE:

Of the 32 unpaid carers who responded to the survey:

87% said they can do the things important to them (compared to 80% in 2023/24).

72% feel a part of their community (compared to 77% in 2023/24).

88% are happy with their family, friends, and neighbours (compared to 93% in 2023/24).

97% feel safe (compared to 100% in 2023/24).

86% know who to speak to about support (compared to 95% in 2023/24).

97% have been able to use their everyday language (compared to 100% in 2023/24).

100% had been actively involved in decisions about how the care and support was provided for the person that they care for (compared to 87% in 2023/24).

94% had the right information or advice when they needed it (compared to 98% in 2023/24).

100% was treated with dignity and respect (compared to 98% in 2023/24).

87% feel supported to continue in my caring role (compared to 95% in 2023/24).

93% are happy with the support they have (compared to 100% in 2023/24).



Children's Services

In 2024/25, we have improved our <u>Children's Services webpages</u> for parents and carers. The redeveloped website was launched on 1st May 2024 for parents, carers and families and care leavers and a communication plan was developed to promote the website through the Corporate website and the development of posters and a QR code at various locations across Rhondda Cynon Taf. We also co-produced <u>bespoke webpages for children and young people</u> with care experienced children so that information is available in accessible language and format.

Young Carers

We commission a support service for young carers (aged 5-17) which is provided by Action for Children. Specific support is available via an externally funded post for Young Adult Carers (aged 18-25). Sibling carer support (children whose sibling has additional needs) is now provided entirely by Action for Children on a commissioned basis. Over the 2024/25 financial year, 90 young carer groups and 30 sibling carer group sessions have been provided across the County Borough. These group sessions were accessed 468 times by young carers and 279 times by sibling carers. Through the project, 24 free trips to young carers and 20 free trips to our sibling young carers have been offered. The Service has provided 12 family session activities where 35 young carers, parents and siblings attended, and 59 sibling carers, parents and siblings have attended. We have also provided 4 residential and overnight stays which were accessed by 45 young carers and 25 sibling carers.

Case Study: Young Carers

NM joined us as a young carer for her dad, who suffered with COPD. Mam was the main carer at home but then suffered a stroke on Christmas Eve. The outlook was bleak. By some miracle Mam made it out of hospital but had lost all mobility. Dad left the family home and has had little contact since. This catapulted N's caring role into becoming the sole carer for Mam. N must do everything around the home as well as care for Mam. N struggles socially due to her own issues and finds it difficult to interact with peers in groups.

Overview of support received.

- 1 to 1 support
- Group sessions and Workshops
- Time to talk to staff in group's and through the one-2-one sessions
- Residential, trips and activities
- Family support and dealing with carer support services for Mum's care.

Outcomes N achieved whilst receiving support:

1 to 1 support: N has grown in confidence through the support received and started to talk about home, school, and previous bullying within school. Meetings with social workers have also taken place to ensure that both N and Mum get the support needed for Mum to be able to stay at home.

Group sessions: N absolutely loves the group sessions and never misses one. She has slowly integrated herself into little groups of friends. N now interacts more, and this has given her a well needed break from the caring role at home.

Time to talk: N has made use of her time to talk away from home. She has opened up more and discussed things that are important to her. When N has felt she has talked enough, she will change the subject to Pokémon and Anime which are her comfort subjects.

Residential, trips and activities: N has attended residentials and has also attended and enjoyed accessing the trips and activities that the service offers.

N will continue to receive support, which is invaluable to her. N's key worker will also continue to push for a Personal Assistant at home for Mam in order to reduce household tasks for N so that she is able to focus on her schoolwork.

Annual Service User Survey

As in previous years, we have carried out an annual survey which asked a sample of children and young, who had a care and support plan on the day the sample was drawn, how they feel about the care and support they receive. Children and young people are also asked questions about what they do in their spare time and what activities that they would like to do but can't. They are also asked 'Do you have anything else to say that is important to you – your voice matters'. 18% said yes and some children used the free text to provide more detail on this. This information helps us to understand the service user experience more and informs what needs to change.

In total 117 children completed the survey, compared to 169 in 2023/24. Overall responses to the survey were positive, as shown in the table below, with most respondents stating that they 'felt safe where they lived' and 'felt well cared for'.

SERVICE QUALITY MEASURE:

Of the 117 children and young people who responded to the survey:

89% live in a home where they are happy

(compared to 92% in 2023/24 and 90% in 2022/23).

81% feel they belong in the area where they live (compared to 86% in 2023/24 and 84% in 2022/23).

77% know why they have a social worker (compared to 86% in 2023/24).

81% had their views about their care and support listened to (compared to 82% in 2023/24 and 88% in 2022/23).

81% are able to speak to their social workers about things that are important to them (compared to 83% in 2023/24).

96% feel well cared for (compared to 95% in 2023/24).

95% feel safe where they live (compared to 98% in 2023/24 and 95% in 2022/23).

94% have been able to use their everyday language (compared to 94% in 2023/24 and 97% in 2022/23).

72% had advice, help and support that will prepare them for adulthood

(compared to 82% in 2023/24 and 93% in 2022/23). Note: question only answered by 16/17 year-olds only.

Mwy Na Geiriau (More than just words)

We continue to respond effectively to the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards and Welsh Government's "Mwy Na Geiriau (More than just words): A Strategic Framework for Promoting the Welsh Language in Health, Social Services and Social Care" - working closely with colleagues in the Council's Welsh Language Team to ensure we are complying with these requirements. We also monitor our external service providers to ensure their compliance. No issues have been identified.

We make an active offer of communication in Welsh if it is someone's preference. People who prefer to receive services and support through the medium of Welsh are highlighted in our system. All our publications are bilingual, ensuring compliance with the Standards. Staff are aware of the requirements of the Standards and what it means for how they work. We also train and develop staff to encourage them to learn Welsh and provide briefings and reminders on the offer of services in Welsh.

We have worked in partnership with the National Centre for Learning Welsh to secure funding from Social Care Wales to deliver Cwrs Codi Hyder to 7 staff of level 3+ to gain confidence and vocabulary to perform their role in Welsh in the Health and Social Care Sector. Staff have a 1:1 tutor on a weekly basis for a 3 month period with the option of smaller groups for common roles and coffee mornings for peer support and conversation opportunities.

The project has several anticipated benefits; many linked to our Workforce Strategy including:

- Good quality education and training opportunities
- Building capacity of our workforce to meet the demands of the population
- Promoting our active offer
- Increasing opportunities for staff to use
 Welsh on the workplace

Links have also been made with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board Welsh Language leads to identify Welsh speaking wards to scope future joint working initiatives in the language.

The total number of new assessments completed for Adult Services during 2024/25 was 4,911. There was evidence of the active offer of the Welsh Language in all cases (100%). The offer was accepted in 42 cases which is similar compared to previous years. In Children's Services, there was evidence of the active offer of the Welsh language in 1,940 cases which is more than the 1,305 in 2023/24. This is attributable to awareness raising with staff of the need to make an active offer of the use of the Welsh Language. The offer was accepted in 7 cases.

Case Study: Welsh in the Workplace and Promoting Welsh Language Services

Following training on Welsh language impact assessments, the Organisational Change and Transformation Manager in Children's Services took positive action to help staff develop their confidence in using the Welsh language with people and to promote the active offer of care through the medium of Welsh. In implementing the Workforce Strategy, she has emphasised to her team the importance of language choice in the care sector.

This includes registering 7 staff members who speak Welsh but are less confident at using it professionally to attend a specialist course with the National Centre for Learning Welsh to help increase their confidence to provide services in the language.

The Team is also working with Welsh Language Services on developing a promotional video, where they will celebrate their own use of Welsh at work and promote the active offer, in order to both raise awareness of these language rights amongst the public and to encourage more staff to have confidence when using their Welsh at work.



Anti Racist Wales Action Plan

We have endorsed the ambitions set out in the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan: Eliminating racism in the workplace, led by ADSS Cymru and commissioned by the Welsh Government, which aims to tackle racism within the social care workforce.

In 2024/25, members of Children's Services Management Team and other Children's Services practitioners attended Diverse Cymru's Cultural Competency training. This has increased awareness and understanding and promoted further consideration of how to make services more accessible to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community members, as well as more equitable. This is evidenced in the development of Country guides for Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, South Sudan & Syria for practitioners and foster carers who are supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children, to give them information and a greater understanding about the Countries where the young people are from. We have also created guides for Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend Council's to help the young people when they first move to the region.

At the Council's Pentre House Care Home in the heart of the Rhondda Valley, diversity is more than just a demographic - it's a strength. With staff members from various cultural backgrounds, including team members originally from Nigeria, we decided to host our first-ever Culture Swap Day. The event provided an opportunity for the Nigerian team members to share their rich cultural heritage with residents and colleagues, fostering inclusivity, understanding, and joy. The key aims of the Culture Swap Day were:

- To celebrate the Nigerian culture and heritage of staff.
- To create an engaging and educational experience for residents.
- To encourage team bonding and promote diversity, understanding and inclusion in the workplace.

The idea for the Culture Swap Day was born during supervisions, where staff had raised that they found it difficult at times to integrate with the staff team. Additional training around food preparation had been requested, as staff didn't recognise items on the menu. We decided to initiate an event focused on improving cultural awareness and staff cohesion. Nigerian staff members enthusiastically volunteered to lead the initiative. Staff worked together for several weeks, sourcing ingredients, preparing decorations, and creating a playlist of Nigerian Afrobeat and Highlife music. Communication was key, ensuring everyone felt included in the process.

Pentre House came alive with vibrant colours and sounds as the Nigerian staff arrived dressed in traditional attire, including Ankara prints, Gele headwraps, and Agbadas. The atmosphere was warm, festive, and filled with curiosity and excitement. Residents were invited to enjoy:

- A tasting menu featuring but not inclusive of jollof rice, fried plantains, puff-puffs, African fried rice, fried yam, efo riro, akara, (Nigerian baked bread) and moi-moi (a savoury bean pudding).
- Traditional Nigerian music playing in the background by a live band.
- Storytelling sessions where staff and their families shared personal memories of life in Nigeria, covering topics from village life, school, weddings and food customs.
- Dance demonstrations, which encouraged participation from residents and staff.

Some individuals chose to wear African-inspired accessories provided by staff, adding to the sense of celebration and inclusion.

Case Study: Culture Swap Day Pentre House Care Home Feedback

The response from residents and staff was overwhelmingly positive. Residents expressed genuine interest in learning about Nigerian traditions, often asking thoughtful questions and reminiscing about their own travels and cultural experiences.

'The food was absolutely delicious! I've never tasted anything like it, and I loved the music—it made me want to dance,' said one resident, smiling.

'Wow! Just WOW!' commented a family member, 'This has been one of the best events I have ever seen, I am blown away by what the girls have put together'

Colleagues also appreciated the opportunity to connect on a deeper level with their Nigerian peers.

"It was really special to see our colleagues shine and share something so personal. It brought us all closer," noted a staff member.

A staff member wrote in the staff group chat, 'It was amazing to be part of today. It was lovely to be introduced to your wonderful families who I'm sure are extremely proud of you all as we are'

The staff who had planned and arranged the event commented, 'Thank you so much for accepting us just the way we are', with another staff member adding, 'Your acceptance of our cultural heritage and family is forever indelible in our heart. We are glad to have been given the opportunity to show you our beautiful cultural heritage in our music, dressing, food, dance and games.'

The Nigerian Culture Swap Day at Pentre House was more than just a celebration - it was a moment of connection, understanding, and pride. It showcased the power of cultural diversity in creating a vibrant and inclusive care environment. Following its success, Pentre House is now planning a series of Culture Swap Days, with upcoming events to feature Irish, Welsh and Polish traditions, reflecting the diverse heritage of people across the Service.

Welsh Government Quality Standards:

"The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved"

"Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn develop and participate in society"

Prevention related priorities we have achieved in Adult and Children's Services during the year that we planned to do in 2024/25, are shown in the table below.

Priorities we have achieved during the year

We will implement the Adult Services Accommodation Strategy to progress development of extra care and learning disability accommodation.

We will implement the CLA 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.



Adult Services

Care Accommodation

We have continued to progress the Council's Care Accommodation Strategy 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. Expectations of older people are reported to be changing, with more residents wanting to retain their independence in their own home or live in accommodation that provides targeted support for their needs within an apartment style facility, such as extra care housing.

In this context, demand for care home facilities has also changed, with more specialist nursing or dementia care needed for the future. In **February**2025, Cabinet agreed to decommission Ferndale House Care Home and replace it with a modern new care home facility in Ferndale that will better meet the long term needs of the community. It also agreed to decommission Cae Glas Care Home as it was agreed that

existing and future residents needs could be better met in other residential care homes, including in specialist dementia facilities in Tegfan and Parc Newydd.

We are currently progressing the development of several adult care accommodations for older people. This includes:





Construction work has continued on our new extra care provision in Porth, which is expected to be completed and open in May 2026. This development will bring the former Dan y Mynydd Care Home site back into use with the construction of a state-of-the-art development containing 60 apartments, including a dining area, a hair salon, an activity room and a day care centre for older people with frailty.



Working with Linc Cymru, we have continued to develop new care accommodation in Mountain Ash. This is our first development that will include 25 extra care apartments, 15 residential (dementia) care beds and 8 bungalows for older people all on one site which allows for a transitionary form of accommodation (where appropriate) with potential for move on at the site as their needs progress. The development also includes communal dining and

lounge areas, gardens, a hair salon and an activity room and is expected to be completed and open in Autumn 2027.

FERNDALE

The development of a new 32 bed Residential Dementia Care Home on the Old Chubb Factory site was **agreed by Cabinet in September 2024**. Following a public consultation exercise, Cabinet also agreed in **January 2025** to delay the decommissioning of Ferndale House Care Home until the new home is completed. Groundwork has commenced and work towards planning is progressing. The development is expected to be completed and open in Spring 2028.



As well as our long term and on-going programme of investment in care accommodation provision for older people, we continue to invest in modern care accommodation for people with a learning disability, including:

BRONLLWYN

Work has continued on the development of a new specialist care accommodation for people with learning disabilities in adulthood and older age, on the <u>former</u> <u>Bronllwyn Residential Care Home site in Gelli</u>. The development is expected to be completed and open in July 2026.

The contractor has established a very good relationship with the nursery and primary education settings nearby. It has sponsored the 'Bumbles of Honeywood' programme, which is developing the entrepreneurial skills of young people with Cylch Meithrin Bronllwyn, while it has also provided high-visibility tabards for nursery and primary pupils attending the schools. During the programme, the children will learn Key Life Skills, develop their Pupil Voice, explore what Enterprise means and learn about Financial Literacy as well as supporting them to become Environmentally Responsible Global Citizens.

GARTH OLWG

We are progressing design options for a new supported living scheme for people with a learning disability in Church Village. The former Garth Olwg Care Home has been demolished and plans for 22 learning disability supported accommodation flats and day centre have been agreed. Progress has been slower than expected and partners have not yet been identified at this stage.

Reablement

We have continued to invest in services to prevent escalation of need increasing or enable recovery and independence. In 2024/25, we completed 1,038 reablement packages, of which, 1,017 reduced, maintained or mitigated the need for support (98%).

In February 2025, Jeremy Miles MS, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, and Dawn Bowden MS, Minister for Children and Social Care, visited Rachel, a local resident who had been previously supported by the Council's Reablement Team, at her home. This visit celebrated additional funding announced to support the 50-day challenge, specifically aimed at enhancing reablement services.

Case Study: How reablement supports people to regain independence - Rachel's Story

Rachel, who suffered a stroke in 2023, has made remarkable progress with the support of the reablement team. Initially told she would never walk again, Rachel has regained her ability to walk, stand, and even perform daily tasks independently. Her inspiring journey has been previously featured in a **video** by WeCare Wales, showcasing the significant impact of reablement services on Rachel's recovery.

During 2024/25, our in-house Support@Home services provided 73,803 hours of direct domiciliary care support to 1,383 people, enabling and supporting them to remain as independent as possible. These figures were affected by the transfer of long-term domiciliary care to the independent sector in October 2024. Nevertheless, the direct service hours for short term care increased to 44,576 over the year, with 57% of people becoming independent at the end of our support.

Adaptation and Community Equipment

The Adaptations and Community
Equipment Team completed 1,517
assessments during 2024/25, with an additional 660 moving and handling assessments completed, reducing risk and supporting care staff to use equipment effectively and safely to keep people living at home.
Additionally, to support people to maintain their independence for longer at home, Vision Products delivered

5,975 pieces of equipment to Rhondda Cynon Taf residents and collected 6,726 items of equipment for recycling during the financial year.

During the year, 832 works of adaptation were completed in people's homes to support people to remain living at home safely and independently, 437 of these being funded via the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

Case Study: Adaptation and Community Equipment

Mr J had limited access to the community due to his reduced function and mobility which increased the difficulty to access the external steps of his home safely and independently. Similarly, negotiating the internal stairs proved difficult and as a result he had been sleeping on the sofa within the ground floor for many months.

An occupational therapy assessment was completed and an external stairlift was recommended to enable safe access to and from the community via a DFG. In addition, an internal stairlift was recommended with a grab rail located to the top of the stairs to offer stability when elevating into standing.

The adaptations will meet Mr J's existing and long-term needs, reducing the risk of falls and promoting independence around the home and when accessing the community.

The Sensory Team completed 332 assessments during 2024/25, with 83 Certificates of Vision Impairment being registered. The Team supported 186 people through a rehabilitation programme to achieve independence in an identified task.

Case Study: Sensory Team

Mr C had worn two NHS hearing aids for the last 5 years and he also experienced tinnitus in his right ear. Mr C was unable to hear the television despite it being on high volume, this was causing issues at home as family member were finding it difficult to cope with the volume of the TV. A hearing impairment assessment was completed by the sensory worker, and a Sonumaxx PR Headset was issued, allowing Mr C to hear the TV at a volume more comfortable for all family members. Mr C also advised that he was unable to hear people knocking at the front door when he was in the kitchen and a suitable portable doorbell was provided on assessment. The sensory equipment provided enhanced Mr C independence.

Respite

Respite provision is a vital service for families caring and supporting a family member at home. This allows them to have a break from their caring responsibilities and to recharge knowing their loved one is being supported in a safe and caring environment that promotes a positive experience and outcome.

Case Study: Respite

M is 73 years of age; living with a dementia in the community with support from a package of care and family. M lives at home with her husband, B is M's primary carer. B was struggling with his own health needs and the role as primary carer became increasingly challenging for B; with M's cognitive decline and needing increased levels of supervision and support. M was withdrawn; struggling to sleep at night and this was also having an impact on B who was increasingly fatigued.

The family identified the impact caring for M full time was having on B and approached Adult Services to enquire about respite care. M's care manager and the family began the process of accessing respite for M and B with some apprehension and reluctance.

In advance of her respite stay, a day assessment was completed to provide a better understanding of M's care and support needs and how her support and independence could be maintained in the unfamiliar care home environment. M spent the day at the Care Home prior to her respite stay to plan for her care needs. During her respite stay, M engaged with other residents and also participated in activities organised by the Home. This appeared to enhance M's wellbeing and resulted in her experiencing better-quality rest at night.

M's sons came to visit her during her respite stay and they were surprised to see M interacting with other residents and staff, stating that at home she would sit and not engage. They were able to spend quality time with M without the anxiety of her safety and wellbeing be compromised. When they were informed that M was sleeping, eating and drinking well and not expressing any distress about being away from her home M's sons expressed a feeling of relief and reassurance.

M's first respite experience in February 2025 was a positive one for her, her unpaid carer and family, her son advised they went home and told their dad, 'Mam's like a different person'.

Supporting Inclusive Employment

<u>Vision Products</u> is the Council's supported business and a Disability Leader, which provides a range of diverse services. It champions inclusivity by tailoring opportunities for people and currently employs, trains and supports 90 individuals with a range of disabilities. A number of these people are supported through employment, traineeships, volunteering and work experience opportunities.

Case Study: Supporting inclusive employment

Referred to Vision Products in 2014 by Elite, D entered a traineeship program with limited work experience and challenges associated with Dyslexia and Dyspraxia. Through a comprehensive work trial, Vision Products observed D, had in-depth conversations with him about his strengths and aspirations, and actively asked how they could best support him to achieve his full potential. This proactive approach allowed Vision Products to develop a tailored plan designed specifically to meet D's needs and goals.

Vision Products provided an environment uniquely tailored to empower D, offering not just employment but genuine growth, enabling D to flourish. Upon completing the traineeship program, D applied for and successfully secured a permanent part-time position as a PVCu Production Operative at Vision Products - a significant milestone in his career.

D's story didn't end with his own development. Over time, he stepped into a mentorship role, training new colleagues and supporting their growth. His efforts reflect his personal and professional progress, as well as his dedication to fostering collaboration and skill-building in others.

D's journey showcases the positive effect Vision Products' inclusive practices have not only on individuals but on the organisation as a whole. D is an invaluable team member of Vision Products. While the journey with people with learning difficulties or other disabilities can take time, D's experience proves that the outcomes are very rewarding. His success is a testament to the importance of investing in people, fostering their growth, and embracing the unique strengths they bring to the workplace.



Children's Services

Children Looked After

The overall count of CLA in Rhondda Cynon Taf has reduced but it remains high in the national comparison. At the end of March 2025, we had 611 CLA compared to 637 in 2024, 624 in 2023, 655 in 2022, and 717 in 2020. This shows a positive trend over time. In Rhondda Cynon Taf most looked after children live with relative carers.

However, this is a difficult and sometimes unpredictable area of business for the Council, and in addition to poverty, domestic abuse, substances and poor parental mental health, other factors that currently influence the rate at which children become looked after include the transfer of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and in the impact for children and families of exploitation.

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 against the four development areas that are identified in our **Children**

Looked After (CLA) Prevention Strategy 2022/25 which are:

1

Development of Pre-birth Team: MAGU

We have developed better pre-birth support for our most vulnerable families including those who are themselves care experienced or have had another child already removed from their care, through our Magu Team. A written evaluation including next steps for the Service was completed in June 2024 and found that:

- There had been a 22% reduction in children under the age of 1 becoming looked after
- 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 (11%) being supported by Magu ended in separation. Previous rates have been at between 30 to 40% separation.
- Several very positive outcomes have been achieved on cases where Magu has been 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.

A <u>progress report</u> was provided to Corporate Parenting Board in January 2025.

2

Developing the support of Kinship Carers

In 2024/25, we created a new Kinship and Special Guardianship Order Support Team to ensure equity of support for all carers. Currently data shows an increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders from 323 in March 2024 to 333 in March 2025. 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 have continued to commission **Kinship Cymru** to offer a **Kinship Connected** service to improve outcomes for special guardians and other kinship carers. 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.

3

Developing our Model of Practice

We have implemented a new model of practice for social workers and staff working with families that have been referred to Children's Services. The new model will strengthen practice, leading to safe reduction of entries to care, provide timely and responsive intervention to families to keep them together, de-escalating need and risk, safeguarding children and safely reducing the number of children who become looked after.

The three key pillars of our practice are Relationships, Collaboration and being Trauma Informed.

A training programme has been developed for practitioners and is currently being rolled out.



4

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. In line with our revised Reunification Strategy, we have continued to provide resources to work with parents when they have been separated from children to, where possible, reunify children home who have spent some time being looked after by the Council. In 2024/25, of the 149 children who ceased to be looked after, 79 children were returned home (53%). This is positive and more than in 2023/24, when of the 119 children who ceased to be looked after, 50 children were returned home (42%).

The CLA Prevention Strategy is being implemented, and some positive results have been noted above, but we have ambition to see further progress in the number of families with care and support needs remaining a family unit. A **progress report** was presented to Corporate Parenting Board in September 2024.

My Voice My Review

In 2024/25, some key developments in the Reviewing Team have included the revision of the CLA review of arrangements, My Voice My Review and quality assurance.

The revised CLA review of arrangements was piloted using BETA (WCCIS) and went live in September 2024. The document has a key focus on the child's voice, rights and lived experience and review of the outcomes record in the care and support plan. The document is swifter to complete and lends itself to a summary style of writing. Data collated from the review of arrangements document is available electronically via Power BI. This aids greatly with data collection and swifter thematic analysis of the data that is captured within our reviews for children looked after.

Through our quality assurance work we have identified areas for improvement which has included, in addition to participation, the recording of communication with Guardians and mid-point reviews.

The My Voice My Review consultation document for each child and their review continues to be sent to all agencies in advance of a CLA review. This is aimed at actively encouraging those who may have a close working relationship to the child such as teaching staff, IROs, residential staff, fostering and social workers to support the child to complete the consultation should they wish to do so. A QR code is also included in the email correspondence for swift access to the document. A Welsh version is also

available. An easy read version has been in development; and whilst some delays have been experienced related to security within the Widgit App, this is now resolved, and it is agreed that this work can progress to ensure the My Voice My Review is inclusive of all children.

Consultations have continued during the year with children, residential staff and practitioners. Other avenues such as social media, foster carer coffee morning, the young person drop in and liaising with a Pioneer Foster Carer to aid with raising awareness of My Voice My Review are just some ideas that have been explored. It is hoped that these avenues of raising awareness of My Voice My Review will encourage children and young people and/or their parents and carers and practitioners to support them to complete the My Voice My Review Form and attend CLA reviews.

The impact of this work can be seen in the increasing numbers of children that completed the My Voice My Review document, 42 in quarter 1 2024/25 compared to 83 in quarter 2 2024/25. In total 250 children have completed their own consultation document for their review, which is 20% of the CLA reviews (1227) that were held during the year for children over the age of 5 years old. The development of Power BI has aided greatly with the collation of data during 2024/25, and this will enable us to understand the impact of our work going forward.

Resilient Families Service

We have continued to provide support to families as early as possible to increase resilience and prevent the need for statutory services. In 2024/25, we engaged with a total of 1,175 families. 88% of these families (1,034) had improved resilience following completion of their work with our Resilient Families Service. This is slightly more than in 2023/24 when 85% (1,195) reported improved resilience.

Case Study: Family feedback on the Resilient Families Service

"Resilient families have shown us that there is non-judgemental help for families who, like us are struggling with children's behaviours and also our responses to those behaviours, and how there is further support out there."

"Without this opportunity I would still be in the same situation, wish I knew about it sooner, it has been life changing for us."

"Thank you for your support - I think if funding was taken from you guys it would be detrimental to families in RCT. I've found support from you very positive."

"Thank you for all your help our experience of RFS has been excellent. Both myself and my son have benefited from the support."

"All the support staff have been easy to talk to and I always felt listened to and never judged."

"It has been nice having someone to talk to and open up to and to explore challenges and discuss strategies for managing behaviour. Highly recommended service, both ladies that came to visit ourselves, made us all feel safe to be able to put our concerns across, weren't judgemental which made us feel happy to discuss anything with them both. Have felt supported and broke down a barrier with services. Children are a lot more expressive around their emotions and feelings, and behaviour is getting better which makes it a happier house."

"Knowing also that I can come back to work with you again to have someone to stand by me when things are difficult is great and has given me more confidence. Thank you for everything it has been great."

Welsh Government Quality Standards:

"Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people"

"People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners"

Partnership and Integration related priorities we have achieved in Adult and Children's services during the year that we planned to do in 2024/25, are shown in the table below.

Priorities we have achieved during the year

We will continue to work positively with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board to implement an effective and integrated community health model to meet the needs of the community and reduce the pressures on acute hospitals.

We will re-design our IAA Service alongside stakeholders to be a sustainable service with a strong prevention intention at the front door.

We operate in a highly interconnected space and have continued to engage in meaningful partnership work with a whole range of organisations and people on an individual and strategic level. During the year, Adult and Children's Services has continued to play a significant role in the regional partnership boards and partnership groups, bringing effective leadership and scrutiny to them.

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.

Adult Services

Pathways of Care

From October 2024, the home care framework contract and service specification were fully revised and hospital discharge requirements streamlined to reflect a home first approach. Our previous contract required a Social Services and Wellbeing Act assessment and a care and support plan to be completed by Adult Services prior to the long term home care service starting. This inevitably created a delay beyond the 48-hour timescale for Pathway 1 discharges regardless of home care provider capacity.

Our new contract supports the use of the Electronic Transfer of Care (EToC) as a proportionate and trusted assessment for our commissioned providers to support discharge directly on its receipt. Adult Services visits the person within 72 hours of discharge to ensure the Social Services and Wellbeing Act assessment is complete, but this is now achieved in the person's own home. Whilst the transfer of the contract did have a negative effect on home care performance initially as our commissioned providers focussed on the safe transfer of their service users and staff, since November 2024 capacity has been steadily improving and has meant a reduction in the assessment delays for discharges that has contributed to the reduction in someone's length of stay in hospital.

In April 2024, the average number of days delay was 22.6 days for 177 individuals; by March 2025 this had reduced to 20.8 days for 152 individuals. However, Health data around POCD have shown an increase in the number of people experiencing delays:

 whilst awaiting social worker allocation (43 in 2024/25 compared to 34 in 2023/24)

- starting a new care home package (279 in 2024/25 compared to 170 in 2023/24)
- availability of care home placements, both residential (50 in 2024/25 compared to 39 in 2023/24) and nursing (108 in 2023/24 compared to 58 in 2023/24).

This performance reflects the increasing complexity of cases and high demand. Work will continue with Health to improve pathways of care and reduce these delays.

The Stay Well @ Home Team (SW@HT), based in the Royal Glamorgan and Prince Charles Hospitals, are a team of occupational therapists and social workers who complete assessments with people in Hospital A&E and CDU Departments. The main aim is to prevent unnecessary admissions onto a ward and enable people to return home with an intermediate care service if needed to support them to regain their independence in daily living tasks. SW@HT operates 365 days a year up until 20:00 each day.

Case Study: SW@HT

Mrs. S brought in by ambulance to Royal Glamorgan Hospital and a referral was made to the SW@HT for an assessment to identify her current level of need and what support may be required to assist in facilitating a safe hospital discharge to own home. After her assessment, Mrs. S was discharged home with an intermediate package of care - achieving the following outcomes:

- SW@HT IAA assessment and discharged to intermediate care service in own home prevents unnecessary use of a hospital bed.
- Reduced risk of acquired hospital infection.
- Reduced potential of becoming de-conditioned with long stay in hospital.
- Enable to maintain independence to function in own home environment.

Integrated Community Care System

Progress continues to be made to implement an urgent health and social care community response although slower than we planned. There is no fundamental disagreement on the integrated community care system model but events and partner capacity to respond to competing priorities has stalled any significant progress. Integrated community teams and services to support older people remains a regional shared aim and further work to establish a more detailed joint business case and legal agreement prior to this change is planned in 2025/26.



National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support

National Framework for the Commissioning of Care and Support in Wales and the statutory code of practice that came into force in September 2024, and we are positively working towards compliance against the seven principles and ten standards of the framework.

Adult Services invested in long term contracts with key service providers to develop effective partnerships in the delivery of our duties for our service users. Key amongst those are the supported living and home care providers but our commissioning approach has been to nurture effective partnerships and performance with the full range of care home, direct payment, advocacy, community support, micro-enterprise and care and repair services.

Case Study: Safe at Home Service

Adult Services has a Service Level Agreement with Care and Repair for provision of a Safe at Home Service to support homeowners and private tenants to have minor aids provided, such as grab rails, chair raisers and raised toilet seats, as quickly as possible without the need for a full assessment from Social Services.

In 2024/25, the Safe at Home Service received 1,499 referrals, of which 1,060 were received directly from social care staff and the remaining referrals were covered by Care and Repair Trusted Assessors via a direct referral from SPA. Of those who responded to the satisfaction survey during the period, 98% said their issue had been resolved and 98% felt the service had improved their independence and quality of life.

Age Friendly Status

In April 2024, the Council was recognised as an **age-friendly community** after becoming a member of the World Health Organisation's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. The network is a global movement of communities, cities, and other sub-national levels of government that are striving to better meet the needs of older residents. We promoted and celebrated International Day of Older Persons which this year focused on Ageing with Dignity.



Dementia Projects

Following the success of the Community Dementia Prevention Programme Fund pilot, additional funding was made available in 2024/25 to groups and organisations across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. The fund was made available to build awareness of the needs of people with dementia and their carers, and capacity in Dementia Friends training. It supported community groups to undertake small scale community activities that support dementia risk reduction activities in line with steps 1 to 3 of the Dementia Action Plan for Wales.

In 2024/25, the Older Persons
Coordinator hosted 9 Dementia Friends information sessions for funded organisations and groups, creating an additional 118 new Dementia Friends.
Alongside this, many of the funded organisations and groups accessed alternative or digital Dementia Friends sessions, creating another 348
Dementia Friends.

Due to a lack of available training for potential Dementia Friends
Ambassadors, 43 individuals from the funded groups and organisations across Cwm Taf Morgannwg have committed to undertake the relevant training to take on this role.

Further funding to support Age Friendly Activity was also made available and supported a total of 18 community groups with funding up to £2,000 per group.

A summary of monitored outcomes along with the total number beneficiaries achieved through the funding made available in 2024/25 are shown below:

- Number of 50+ beneficiaries: 1309
- Number reporting increased social connections: 1062
- Number reporting improved Mental Health/Wellbeing: 751
- Number reporting feeling less isolated: 983
- Number reporting they are more active: 729
- Number reporting increased awareness of support services: 718

Responding to Climate Change and Supporting Biodiversity

We recognise the role that Social Services has in reducing the Council's carbon footprint, supporting local biodiversity and adapting to the risks posed by Climate Change. For example, all our new accommodation developments use modern construction methods and aim to maximise outdoor garden space for the health, wellbeing and environmental benefits of its residents for both now and in the future. Considerations for carbon reduction and tackling climate change are at the forefront of our developments.

Case Study: Biodiversity at the new Bronllwyn care home development

This new development will have the below features in addition to not having any gas provision:

- Rain gardens located on the boundary with the school, which cascade down the natural slope of the site. All rain gardens will be provided with drought and water tolerant plants.
- Swales located to the northeast corner of the site will be planted with wildflower seeds and trees planted to the side and along the length of the Swale, to compensate for the removal of the existing Birch trees.
- Other planting in and around the courtyard area will consist of native hedgerow, a meadow and lawns enhanced with low growing wildflowers.
- The refuse store will be constructed to provide a green roof.
- All opportunities have been taken to provide greenery where there is not a need for hard standing.
- Bird and bat boxes will be located at high level around the building as advised by the ecologist.

The specification used to re-tender contracts for long-term domiciliary care included specific requirements around zoning, ensuring that only one commissioned provider is responsible for the care delivery in a defined locality. This avoids several care providers attending properties in the same street and provides efficiencies in terms of planning work. The specification also contained requirements around increased

availability of walking routes to support the decarbonisation in frontline care delivery and to support recruitment.

We also actively encourage our social care staff to use our electric vehicles, as opposed to their own vehicles when travelling or undertaking visits. This is key in reducing our emissions and to align with our corporate priorities and to the Council's Decarbonisation Strategy (2023-2025).

Children's Services

Right Help, Right Time, Right Place Strategy

In April 2024, <u>Cabinet agreed</u> our Right Help, Right Time, Right Place Strategy. Informed by our IAA Service Review, this strategy and implementation plan aims to redesign, alongside stakeholders, our front-door to be a sustainable service in the context of continuing high levels of demand with a strong prevention focused response. We will work closely with our partners, and communities, to ensure that children and families can access trusted and high-quality information, advice, and assistance as close to their initial point of contact as possible. The last year has been another challenging one for the Service, with a continued pattern of high and increasing demand.

In 2024/25, 28,372 contacts were received by our IAA Service. This was a slight increase on the 28,035 contacts received in 2023/24, of which 5,276 (18.5%) of contacts proceeded to a proportionate assessment and of those 573 were referred to our Intensive Intervention Teams and 3,144 resulted in No Further Action or signposting to other services.

Regional Exploitation Strategy

Children's Services have continued to contribute significantly to the development of the Regional Exploitation Strategy through the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board. We have been fully committed to raising awareness and knowledge on exploitation and successfully delivered safeguarding training on exploitation and serious violence to Councillors. This training raised awareness on the various contexts of harm, the methods of grooming, vulnerabilities and signs of harm, the impact on victims, victim blaming language and included the voice of a child and parent with lived experience. The training also raised the profile of the recently approved Exploitation Strategy. This will be the theme of the whole Service and Children's Services mandatory summer safeguarding sessions in 2025.

New Single Unified Safeguarding Process

We have been fully committed to the new Single Unified Safeguarding Process (SUSR) process and committed staff across Social Services to attend the chair, reviewer and panel training. We have contributed to the revised terms of reference for the SUSR Review Group and supported the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board to reinstate and further develop an Improving Practice Delivery Group to ensure robust reviewing and monitoring process of recommendations and actions arising from learning to improve practice.

In Social Services, we continue to engage in various roles in SUSR, child and adult practice reviews, domestic homicide reviews and the pilot offensive weapon homicide review. Learning and good practice from reviews is valued and shared via management forums on a regular basis and cascaded in a number of formats, including team meetings, inform and involve sessions, 7-minute briefings and newsletters. In Children's Services we also hold mandatory summer safeguarding sessions to ensure key messages from reviews, audits and wider national work enabling space for practitioners to reflect on effective practice and learning.

WELLBEING

Welsh Government Quality Standards:

"People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm"

"People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible"

Wellbeing related priorities we have achieved or partly achieved in Adult and Children's Services during the year that we planned to do in 2024/25, are shown in the table below.

Priorities we have achieved during the year

We will manage the procurement and safe transfer of the home care based contracts including engagement with service users and staff to include 'what matters' to them in the service specification.

We will continue to develop the Technology 1st Strategy and 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.

We will evaluate the Sensei Project and using the information available, plan a Technology 1st training programme for adult social services staff to consider technology as the first option.

We will deliver the Residential Transformation Strategy, making sure that the Council provides accommodation and support that our looked after children need.

Adult Services

Home Care

In 2023/24, Cabinet agreed to commission all long-term home care from external providers from the 1st October 2024. During 2024, extensive engagement took place with individuals who use home care and their families and unpaid carers. This engagement included surveys and in-person engagement events. Individuals and unpaid carers also developed questions for the retendering and participated in evaluating the submission documents to inform the development of the tender specification and the transfer process. The procurement of a new home care contract and TUPE transfer of staff from the in-house home care service was successfully completed on 1st October 2024.

In total, 67 staff transferred from the in-house provision to external providers, with many more transferring between external providers as a result of the new geographically zoned tender lots, with around 1,300 packages of care changing providers. The home care contracts issued in 2024 included requirements within its specification for our commissioned providers to actively consider and work with 3rd sector organisations in their area to enhance the wellbeing of their service users.



Digital / New Technology Initiatives

We have continued to maximise new technology and ensure services are accessible and available to people and their families. An Adult Services Technology 1st Strategy has been agreed and will be progressed in 2025/26 along with training plan.

Following a small trial in 2023/24, we received the results of a Proof of Value evaluation on our joint project with Sensei Networks, Centerprise International and Karantis 360. The aim of the trial was to understand the potential of an "Internet of Things" and Al enabled technology to improve the quality of social care services and the potential to reduce operational costs. The trial involved testing the use of sensors with a small number of service users to monitor completion of daily living tasks remotely via sensors installed in their homes. Unfortunately, indicative findings from the evaluation were limited and further testing is required in a different environment to determine the usefulness of this technology in assessments of care needs.

In 2024/25, 1,301 new installations of technology equipment to enable independent living were completed, an increase of 23 compared to the previous year. Of these, 334 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 2025, there were 3,896 live Lifeline connections.

Additionally, during the year, we secured a new digital Alarm Receiving Centre, as part of our work to complete the digital switchover of our telecare system prior to the national deadline in 2027.

Mobile Responder Service

Building on our existing Lifeline Service offer, we have continued to provide a Mobile Responder Service 24/7, 365 days a year. The main function of the Service is to provide a response when a lifeline alarm has been triggered and limit the number of calls attended by the Welsh Ambulance Service as well avoid unnecessary hospital admissions and enable lifeline users to remain living safely at home.

All front-line Service staff have been trained by the Welsh Ambulance Service and our Workforce Development Service on how to use the "I Stumble" model, and equipment to use when a person has fallen.

During 2024/25, the Service attended 4,848 visits, of which 2,238 were due to people falling at home. The Service was able to use their specialist lifting equipment to help people up, avoiding 2,053 falls-related conveyances to hospital. Around 96% of mobile responder attendances arrived within the 1-hour target, an increase of 8% compared to the previous year.

Case Study: Mobile Responder Service

Our Lifeline Monitoring Centre was unable to get a response from the person who activated their alarm, so our Mobile Responder Service was contacted, and they immediately attended the property. On arrival they entered the property using the key safe and found the person on the kitchen floor.

Using "I Stumble" the person was assessed as having no injuries and therefore assisted with specialist equipment into a sitting position and supported to their recliner chair. Prior to leaving the property, the person was settled, safe, and had their lifeline pendant and a cup of tea! The Lifeline Contact Centre was updated and they informed the next of kin.

The following outcomes were achieved:

- Lifeline Monitoring Centre and Mobile Responder Service rapid response and attendance to property.
- Prevention of the person remaining on the floor for a prolonged period.
- Reassurance to the person, making sure they were safe and next of kin informed.
- Welsh Ambulance Service attendance prevented and admission to hospital avoided.

No further action was required, and the person remains independently at home.

Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) assessment waiting list increased from 328 people to 515 people in 2024/25 and in part was due to difficulties in recruiting temporary staff into this specialist role. The waiting list was highlighted in the joint Learning Disability Service Inspection undertaken by Care Inspectorate Wales and Health Inspectorate Wales in February 2024. We will consider the on-going challenge of managing DoLS assessments in 2025/26 and an improvement plan is in place.

The demand within the Adult Safeguarding Team has remained high this year:

- 1503 adult at risk reports received in 2024/25 compared to 1180 in the previous year
- 741 safeguarding reports progressed to S126 enquires, an increase from 598 in the previous year
- 79.8% of these were completed within 7 working days, which is a reduction on the previous year (82.44%) and reflects the increased level of activity in the Team
- 289 professional concern referrals received in 2024/25, an increase on 191 for the previous year. 55.7% of these resulted in a strategy discussion and 16 were upheld
- One care home provider was managed via escalating concerns

Case Study: Adult at Risk

People involved (not actual names):

- Lisa (diagnosis of severe learning disability and autism)
- Julian (father and alleged perpetrator)
- Bev (mother not an adult at risk but vulnerable)
- Karen (sister not an adult at risk but vulnerable)

Referrals to the Adult Safeguarding Team from the Learning Disability Social Work Team and from Karen's access to work service, identified the following concerns:

- Julian putting up barriers regarding Lisa accessing services and likely neglect and abuse
- New behaviours shown by Lisa, who appeared to be trying to communicate distress
- Concerns of domestic abuse in the home

Initial s126 enquiries identified the threshold for safeguarding was met. After several multi-agency meetings, social work and domestic abuse interventions and Court of Protection hearings, a Court of Protection Welfare Order was made for Lisa to be removed from the family home to respite together with coordination of domestic abuse services to support Bev and Karen into a refuge for their safety.

Lisa is now well settled into long term supported accommodation. Bev and Karen are living together independently with support from Domestic Violence Services.

Children's Services

For those children that cannot remain with their families, we want to make sure that they can be looked after closer to home. In 2024/25, 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. The Strategy brings together work under:

- Foster Wales RCT seeking to recruit and retain local authority foster carers.
- Developing the Council's Children's Homes in line with a needs analysis.
- Placement Commissioning Strategy setting out our commissioning intention and informing work with providers.
- 16+ Accommodation and Support Strategy – working towards sufficient supply of suitable supported accommodation.

A **progress report** was presented to Community Services Scrutiny Committee in December 2024.

Through the Strategy, we are developing 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 2024/25, we have opened two new children's homes, recruited and trained

staff for these new facilities as well as refurbishing a third property which is due to be registered as a children's home in May 2025.

Positively, of the 611 CLA, 73% reside in Rhondda Cynon Taf (closer to home). Of the 302 placements that began in 2024/25, 63% were placed in Rhondda Cynon Taf (closer to home). 20 children have been placed in in-house children's homes in March 2025 compared to 19 in March 2024. The number of children placed outside of Wales has also fallen from 5% in March 2024 to 2% in March 2025.

Despite these positive developments, it has again been necessary to rely on a small number of Operating Without Registration (OWR) settings where the unacceptable alternative would be to provide no accommodation and care for the young person concerned. This is due to there being insufficient supply of suitable children's homes and supported accommodation. The Council's **Corporate Parenting Board** received a report from the Institute of Public Care in September 2024, which reviewed these arrangements and provided considerable assurance and useful pointers for development that have been integrated into plans.

Foster Wales RCT is the Council's Fostering Service. In line with our Residential Transformation Strategy, in 2024/25 we continued to work to increase the supply and skill of foster carers in Rhondda Cynon Taf. There are currently 357 children in local authority foster care compared to 368 in March 2024. We need more foster families and continue to prioritise targeted recruitment of foster carers to meet this identified need within our communities.

We appointed a recruitment officer to drive this improvement in 2024/25 and micro targeted smaller communities across the County Borough to ensure effective layered marketing activities. This included social media and marketing campaigns including 'Meet the Team' events in our communities, which has led to an increase in recruitment activities. However, this activity is yet to translate into an increase in foster carers.

In 2024/25, there were a total of 248 foster carers (124 mainstream and 124 kinship) in Rhondda Cynon Taf. This compares to 268 in 2023/24 (128 mainstream and 140 kinship). We will continue to focus on increasing the number of foster carers in line with our costed plans. To find out more about Foster Wales you can read our **Quality of Care Report** that was presented to our Corporate Parenting Board.

Progress towards eliminating profit and sufficiency has been made, but the pace and scale of change has been affected by operational pressures, resource requirements, and time. The availability of on-going Welsh Government funding, alongside Council resources and a sufficiently skilled workforce have a strong relationship with the feasibility of delivering national policy goals in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

In the short term, the future shape of residential and foster care provision in Rhondda Cynon Taf will continue to be a mixed economy approach of externally commissioned services from providers with a range of business models, and internal provision to achieve sufficiency. We will continue to re-balance and reduce our reliance on externally commissioned 'for-profit' services, reviewing sufficiency as Rhondda Cynon Taf foster and residential services develop. However, when we have clearer information regarding 'for-profit providers' future business intentions, we will re-consider our next steps in this regard.

Corporate Parenting Pledge

In April 2024, the Corporate Parenting Pledge for Rhondda Cynon Taf was **endorsed by the Cabinet**. There is a strong commitment to support and promote the wellbeing of care experienced children and young people. Through the signing of the Welsh Government's Corporate Parenting Charter: "A Promise from Wales" and adoption of the Corporate Parenting Pledge for Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Council is clearly demonstrating this commitment.

Our consultations with children and young people have informed the development of the 7 priorities that underpin the Corporate Parenting Pledge for Rhondda Cynon Taf. These are:

- 1. Ensuring that children and young people feel well cared for and supported.
- 2. Having a voice to develop and improve services as part of our 'You said, we will, we did...' feedback loop and to let you know how we have made improvements for your care and support.
- 3. Access to mental health and well-being support.
- 4. A stable home that is comfortable and safe whilst being in care and when leaving care.
- 5. Accessible information and support for independent living.
- 6. Improving outcomes for education, training and employment.
- 7. Celebrating children and young people's achievements to develop current and future aspirations.

A **report** containing a summary of the activity undertaken during the year to take forward The Pledge was presented to Corporate Parenting Board in January 2025.

Employment, Education and Training Opportunities for Care Experienced Children

We have continued 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 April 2025.



Case Study: Step in the Right Direction Traineeship Programme

This is 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 in a variety of Council Departments and have the support needed to gain the work experience and training required to help them gain employment at the end of the programme.

8 Trainees were recruited in 2024/25 and the following qualifications/working towards achieved:

- 1 x NPLQ (National Pool Lifeguard Qualification)
- 3 x Gym Instructor Level 2
- 1x Childcare Level 2
- 1 x Plant and Dumper Truck Licence
- 1 x Social Care Level 2

EE successfully secured a place on Step in the Right Direction in September 2020 on placement within ICT. He then went on to secure a place on our apprenticeship programme and in February 2025 was awarded Apprentice of the Year Gold Winner Award at Success Through Skills Annual Award Event in Cardiff.

Case Study: Care2Work

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. A summary of outcomes achieved in 2024/25 is shown below:

Referrals - 93

Secured employment - 6

Entered further education - 15

Achieved a qualification - 19

Completed a Care2Work course - 19

Work experience and volunteering - 10

Summer Employability Course

The Care2Work Team deliver a six week programme for care experienced young people delivering employability skills and offering work experience opportunities. This year the Team collaborated with Cambrian Village Trust and Tonypandy Town Council to offer our young people work experience opportunities in a variety of settings in Tonypandy Town Centre. Key outcomes achieved, include:

- 12 Young people successfully completed the programme
- **12** Young people achieved qualifications (First Aid and Customer Service)
- 11 young people attended work experience
- 11 Young people enrolled onto College/Training

Safeguarding Children & Young People

The number of contacts that proceed to an assessment is relatively low at 21%. This is relatively stable when compared to 2023/24 data. This year there has been a focus across the Cwm Taf Morgannwa region on strengthening the offer of prevention, early intervention and signposting (where appropriate), internal quality assurance work on Wales Safeguarding Procedures determinations (thresholds) and the development of Multi-Agency Children's Services threshold guidance to support shared understanding of threshold decision making and eligibility support.

There has been continued development and implementation of our social work models of practice with a key focus on strengths, relationships, collaboration, trauma informed, whole family approaches. These developments are in line with the recommendations of the CIW and Estyn Rapid Review of Child Protection Arrangements.

A revised Child Safeguarding Referral Form and support guidance was signed off by the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board in December 2024. It is hoped these will assist further in the provision of the right support at the right time, quality referrals and a shared understanding of agency decision making. Cases proceeding to child protection enquiries has decreased and this is in line with the model of practice approaches discussed above, ensuring interventions with families are based on what matters to them, ensuring proportionate decision making and earlier prevention and intervention to prevent escalation into child protection processes. As such, there has been a reduction in the number of Children on the Child Protection Register from 331 at the end of March 2024 to 309 at the end of March 2025.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

There has been an increase in the number of unaccompanied child refugees (UASC) who have entered our care from 28 (11 UASC children under 18 and 17 over 18) in March 2024 to a total of 37 (10 UASC children under 18 and 27 over 18s) at the end of March 2025 via the UK National 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.

Case Study: M's Journey

M arrived in the UK aged 15 from Sudan on the 11th July 2022. He left Sudan in June 2021, and hitchhiked to Chad for 6 months, Libya for 4 months, Italy for a month, before reaching France and travelling to the UK by boat. He advised that he was forced to leave Sudan due to death threats made towards him, as he was caught up in the tribal conflict.

As part of the National Transfer Scheme, he was appointed to Rhondda Cynon Taf, and a social worker from the 16+ Team was allocated to him. His initial assessment was undertaken by Kent Intake Team and M was placed in temporary foster care in Hounslow in August 2022. This placement broke down in January 2023.

We had secured a rental property near the University of South Wales, for UASC young people. The 16+ Team were concerned about moving M from a busy, multi-cultural area near London, to a small Welsh Valleys Town. However, positive outcomes have been achieved:

- M is supported in the property by a stable staff team who he is getting to know.
- The area has a more diverse population as it's near the University. It is only 11 miles from Cardiff, where he attends the Mosque, and can shop for his Halal diet.
- M continues to learn English via ESOL classes, including online and via TV, and conversations with staff.
- He plays football for the 16+ Drop in Team in Pobl League.
- M attends the gym with staff 3-4 times per week.
- He now has an excellent relationship with his Social Worker
- M recently attended the National Citizen Service 5-day course, building on self-esteem, life skills, and confidence.
- He has undertaken two nature photography courses, and we have purchased a camera for him.
- He has recently had a long weekend in a cottage in Tenby with agency staff and had a fantastic time and was really appreciative.
- M has just started Cathays High School Sixth Form and is loving it there!

Adult Services

- Invest in digital and community equipment to support and reduce demand for formal care, developing our assistive technology offer to enable people to remain as independent as possible within their own homes.
- Work with individuals to find new ways of doing things for themselves so that they maximise choice and control over their lives.
- Work in partnership with Children's Services to ensure the transition for young people and their parents/carers into Adult Services is a positive experience that appropriately supports a progression to independence and autonomy.
- Work in partnership with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board to implement an integrated community health and social care service that can co-ordinate an effective and seamless approach, either as an urgent response to acute illness or crisis or to manage chronic and long-term health and social care needs. Linked to this is an integrated approach to supporting timely hospital discharge.
- Provide an effective assessment service to assist people achieve what matters
 to them. Where waiting lists for assessment are necessary, we will continually
 review according to agreed risk criteria and establish escalation processes to
 focussed resources on those in greatest need and at most risk of harm.
- Develop a range of daytime opportunities and day services for people with eligible needs. Our key aim is to assist people into mainstream community opportunities. However, this may not be appropriate or accessible to people with more complex needs. Our responsibility will be to provide or commission a range of opportunities within our available resources and ensure we facilitate the connection for people to a service that can help them achieve the best outcome.
- Deliver our Adult Social Care Workforce Strategy and supporting action plans to have the workforce capacity to meet the demands of the population
- Make sure people with learning disabilities have access to accommodation with support that enables them to live as full and independent a life as possible in the community.
- Increase and improve flexible, responsive accommodation options for older people.
- Where people recover their health and their ability to manage their own living arrangements is restored, we will support them to move on to more appropriate accommodation in a timely way.

Children's Services

- Our Right Help, Right Time, Right Place Strategy to re-design alongside stakeholders our front-door to be a sustainable service with a strong prevention focused response.
- Workforce Strategy 2021-2024 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.
- CLA Prevention Services Targeting evidence based services towards family support to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after.
- Making sure that the young people who need residential care are looked after close to home in quality settings where they can thrive and that they are looked after by a stable, resilient, skill and well supported staff group. The work includes 2 co-dependent areas:
 - Foster Wales
 - Care Leaver Accommodation and Support Strategy





OTHER INFORMATION

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL **ANNUAL DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES REPORT 2024-2025**

a) Inspection and reviews

What do our inspectors say about our Adult Services?

 Support@Home Service (This Service includes Home Care, Intermediate Care, Rehabilitation Service and Extra Care)

The original Care Inspectorate Wales inspection of the Support@Home Service took place in December 2023 and highlighted some excellent practice, including safe recruitment of staff; good relationships with people who are generally happy with the service they receive; and staff who feel supported in their role. Some improvements identified included frequency of reviews of personal plans and ensuring community-based deprivations of liberty are lawful.

A further inspection took place in December 2024, and it was found that progress had been made in relation to Deprivation of Liberty Standards although there was still work to do in some areas to ensure personal plans are regularly reviewed so that extent to which people's outcomes are being achieved is understood.

What do our inspectors say about our Children's Services?

CIW Fostering Service Inspection November 2023

Inspection actions have been partially achieved with a significant reduction in the number of out of timescale reviews from 168 to 31, with 29 of those 31 reviews having commenced.

The fostering inspection recommendations are part of an action plan delivering on service restructure to meet the recommendations to improve quality of management support provided and more equitable team sizes. Annual review timescales are also improving with support from agency staff to clear the backlog.

• Children's Homes: CIW Quality of Care Inspection Reports 2024/25:

Most reports have been positive, demonstrating that our residential homes are consistently delivering high quality care in a challenging environment. However, an Inspection of Ystrad Fechan has resulted in Priority Action Notices that are being addressed through extensive refurbishment work.

Youth Justice Service

In May 2024 Cwm Taf Youth Justice Service was inspected by HMIP across three broad areas:

- the arrangements for organisational delivery of the service
- the quality of work done with children sentenced by the courts
- the quality of out-of-court disposal work

The <u>HMIP Inspection report</u> was published on 20th August 2024 and Cwm Taf YJS achieved an overall rating of 'Good'. HMIP also inspected the quality of the YJS Resettlement Policy and provision, which was also rated as 'Good', but this wasn't included as part of the overall ratings. A service development Improvement action plan to address the recommendations within the HMIP report has been agreed and this will be monitored and reviewed by both the YJS Management Board and Youth Justice Board (YJB).

b) Complaints and representations

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 year and in the three previous years.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of complaints received	57	74	79
Number of compliments received	70	90	81

Most complaints received for adult social care are made by carers and relatives on behalf of the individual receiving the service. Three complaints were received via advocates with one complaint being received via Llais Cymru. Whilst not currently recorded a high proportion of these complaints are received in relation to adults that by nature of their, age, disability or mental capacity have protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

The Customer Feedback, Engagement and Complaints Team along with Adult Services strive to ensure that those individuals needs are considered throughput the complaints process and that any identified safeguarding concerns are addressed promptly through the appropriate safeguarding procedure.

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.

An example of this is feedback from families through complaints and comments received that related to both non-residential and residential charging and the anxiety and stress cited by them in navigating the financial assessment and charging process. Several issues including inconsistent advice by partner agencies (health), lack of information and non-engagement with the assessment process were identified and a new post was introduced and successfully appointed to in 2024/25 to assist families through the charging process thus improving the timeliness of assessments as well as identifying and disseminating good practice across Adult Social Care.

Complaints relating to finance issues has been scrutinised by the Council's Governance and Audit committee following the issues raised in the 2023/24 complaints annual report.

In line with recommendations from "Challenging adult social care decisions in England and Wales (equalityhumanrights.com)" public information is being made available on the Council's website advising of an individual right to challenge a decision and the outcome of an assessment or eligibility decision. Arrangements for an appeals policy and a clear process for dealing with these challenges is in development with regional partners and will be available in 2026.

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.

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number of complaints received	70	89	83
Number of compliments received	75	55	43

The number of complaints for Children's Services in overall terms remain low for this period and consistent with last year. 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.

The main source of complaints was received from parents/carers with only one representation being received from a child and young person via our commissioned advocacy provider. Two complaints were received from parents one through the commissioned parental advocacy provider and one through Llais Cymru.

Complaints in this period have highlighted a number of areas for further consideration as to how services and support to children and families can be further developed to most effectively meet their needs. The following themes have been identified.

- Parental Advocacy Whilst it is positive that Children's Services commission Advocacy Support for families engaged in the Child Protection Process a small number of complaints have highlighted that information is not always disseminated to families and that there can be delays in referrals. This existing information is being reviewed along with the process for ensuring families have the right information in a timely way and that referrals are made promptly to ensure advocates have ample opportunity to seek the view of parents prior to conference.
- Carer's assessments Complaints this year have raised the issues of carers assessment being considered in circumstances where a more holistic assessment of family's needs may have identified young people with a caring role. Whilst complaints in relation to this issue were low the issues were raised from formal independent complaint investigations and will be considered further in 2025/26.

Additionally, engaging with fathers was an issue highlighted in 2023/24 following a number of stage 2 complaints from fathers who reported feeling that they were not being treated fairly and that their views were not given due consideration. Whilst not all complaints were upheld it was acknowledged that practitioners on occasions found engaging absent fathers in particular more challenging and subsequently in 2024/25 a webinar/video training session was developed to assist practitioners in considering some of the potential barriers to working with fathers as well as consideration of good practice in this area,

c) Referencing other sources of information

The Council's Corporate Plan 'Working With Our Communities'
Council Performance Report 31st March 2025

RCTCBC Self-Assessment 2023/24

Annual Equality Report 2023/24

d) Glossary of terms

Term/Acronym	Description
Reablement / Rehabilitation / Interim care	This short-term care is sometimes called intermediate care, or aftercare. Reablement is a type of care that helps people relearn how to do daily activities, like cooking meals and washing. It is provided by local authorities with the aim of mitigating the need for long term care and support.
Domiciliary Care / Domiciliary Support Service / Home Care	Domiciliary care, also known as "care at home", refers to a broad range of care services provided in a person's own home. It can include assistance with day-to-day living and certain health care issues for the elderly.
Residential Care Home / Nursing Home	A residential care home provides accommodation and 24-hour personal care and support to the older people and others who may find it difficult to manage daily life at home. Both a residential care home and nursing home provide care and support 24 hours a day, however the main difference is that a nursing home is able to provide a higher level of care. Nursing homes have qualified nurses on-site around the clock to provide medical care as needed whereas residential homes help people with personal care and support them to engage in physical activity.

Term/Acronym	Description
Care Experienced Children	Care experienced is an umbrella term which can mean children / young people who are: • Looked after at home through a Care Order • Looked after away from home in a residential children's house, in a foster placement or in a kinship placement (Looked After or Non-Looked After) • Previously looked after, where at some point in their lives they have had any of the above experiences. The child / young person may never have been formally looked after.
Care Leaver	In Wales, care leavers are individuals who have been in the care of the local authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 and have left care on or after their 16th birthday. The support provided to care leavers is intended to be equivalent to what a child who has not been looked after might reasonably expect from their parents.
Children Looked After (CLA)	Children and young people who are 'looked after' don't live with their parents, either temporarily or permanently, because for many reasons they can't safely take care of them.
Safeguarding	Safeguarding is about protecting children and adults from abuse or neglect and educating those around them to recognise the signs and dangers.
Wales Safeguarding Procedures	They detail the essential roles and responsibilities for practitioners to ensure that they safeguard children and adults who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Provides a useful glossary of safeguarding terms: Safeguarding Wales .
Performance and Improvement Framework: Measuring activity and performance data	This sets out a framework of metrics covering adults, children, and carers, which must be collected and submitted to Welsh Government together with anonymised person-level data and aggregated data on specific aspects of social care. It states local authorities should also gather their own data to understand better how the local delivery of social care is working according to local priorities.

Glossary of terms

Term/Acronym	Description
Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)	CIW is the social care provider regulator. They will register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.
Social Care Wales (SCW)	SCW is the workforce regulator. As part of this they register and set standards for the care and support workforce and develop the workforce. SCW also has an improvement remit, by which they will share good practice, set priorities for research and provide information for the public and other organisations.
Resident / Citizen	A person whose usual residence is within the local authority boundary
Service User	A person who is accessing social services.
Shared Lives / Adult Placement Scheme	Shared Lives Schemes – also known as adult placements – are a family-based way of supporting a vulnerable person's housing needs. This type of supportive accommodation can be the ideal stepping stone on the way to independent living. This sharing arrangement is often referred to as 'shared lives'.
Direct Payments	Direct payments are issued to individuals to allow them to pay for their own care. They are a way that local authorities can help to meet individual's eligible need for care and support, or a carer's need for support. They are a way for people to arrange their own care and support.
Supported Living / Accommodation	Supported living accommodation is a type of housing that provides personal care, support or supervision to help people live independently. The care and support are separate from the housing contract. The accommodation can be shared or single, depending on the needs and preferences of the occupants.

Glossary of terms	
Term/Acronym	Description
Unpaid Carer	An unpaid carer is someone who provides care and support to family members, friends, or neighbours who are affected by disability, physical or mental ill-health, frailty, or substance misuse. The carer does not need to be living with the person they care for.
Young Carer	A young carer is an unpaid carer who is up to the age of 18. They may be providing care and support to parents, siblings or other family members.
Care and Support Plan	A care and support plan is a document that sets out what has been discussed during a social care needs assessment and what is going to happen as a result. It is a plan which a local authority is required to prepare and maintain under section 54 (1) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
Carer's Support Plan	If unpaid carers have needs that are eligible for support, the local authority has a statutory duty to plan for and meet those needs by providing a 'Carer's Support Plan.' Where eligible needs for support are identified for the unpaid carer, local authorities must ensure these needs are met.
Advocacy	Advocates in social care are independent from the local authority (local council) and the NHS. They are trained to help people understand their rights, express their views and wishes, and help make sure their voice is heard.
Prevention and Early Intervention	Prevention and early intervention are forms of support aimed at improving outcomes for people or preventing escalating need or risk. They are also sometimes referred to as early help or preventative services.
The Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014	The Regulations which introduced a new two stage process to deal with complaints and representations about local authority social services. It brings the process for social services in line with the Model Concerns and Complaints Policy and Guidance and the NHS Complaints Procedure Putting Things Right.

Term/Acronym	Description
Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)	The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) is a legal procedure in the UK designed to protect vulnerable people in care settings. It applies to adults who lack the mental capacity to give consent to their care arrangements and need to be deprived of their liberty. DoLS ensures that those who cannot consent to their care are protected when their arrangements deprive them of their liberty. It will be replaced by Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) in the future.
Mwy Na Geiriau / More than words	More than just words is a strategy and delivery plan to aim to improve the quality of care for individuals living in a bilingual country.
Extra care	The provision of a domiciliary care package to an individual living in supported living/accommodation.
Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan (ARWAP)	The Welsh government plan to tackle racism and make 'meaningful and measurable changes' to the lives of BAME people in Wales. The plan aims to make Wales an anti-racist country by 2030.
Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA)	Refer to contacts and referrals – consent and level of information recorded – link to proportionate assessment
Not in education, employment or training (NEET)	NEET stands for "Not in Education, Employment, or Training". It refers to young people who are neither engaged in education or vocational training nor in paid employment. NEET individuals may experience social and economic disadvantage.
Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014	The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 is a law that aims to improve the well-being of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, and to transform social services in Wales.
Micro-enterprises	Micro-enterprises are small, community-based care providers designed to complement traditional home care. They offer a personalised approach, increasing choice and control for individuals with care needs while providing local entrepreneurs with opportunities to work within their communities.