



**CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

COMMITTEE SUMMONS

C.Hanagan
Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale CF40 2XX

Meeting Contact: Claire Hendy - Senior Democratic Services Officer (07385 401935)

YOU ARE SUMMONED to a meeting of **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** to be held on **WEDNESDAY, 21ST JULY, 2021** at **5.00 PM.**

Non Committee Members and Members of the public may request the facility to address the Committee at their meetings on the business listed although facilitation of this request is at the discretion of the Chair. It is kindly asked that such notification is made to Democratic Services by Monday, 19 July 2021 on the contact details listed above, including stipulating whether the address will be in Welsh or English.

AGENDA

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1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

To Welcome Members and receive any apologies

2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

To receive disclosures of personal interest from Members in accordance with the Code of Conduct

Note:

1. Members are requested to identify the item number and subject matter that their interest relates to and signify the nature of the personal interest: and
2. Where Members withdraw from a meeting as a consequence of the

disclosure of a prejudicial interest they must notify the Chairman when they leave.

3. MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee held on :

- 3rd March 2021
- 24th March 2021
- 21st April 2021

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REPORTS OF DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS

4. CONSULTATION LINKS

Information is provided in respect of relevant [consultations](#) for consideration by the Committee.

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2021/2022

To Consider and agree the Work Programme for 2021 - 2022

27 - 38

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

6. DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT

To consider the Director of Social Services Draft Annual Report (Pre-Scrutiny)

39 - 94

7. CARE INSPECTORATE WALES (CIW) ASSURANCE CHECK 2021

To consider the fining letter from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) of their assurance Check of the Council's Social Services.

95 - 114

8. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION SERVICE : AN OVERVIEW OF THE SUPPORT AND PROVISION DURING COVID - 19

To receive a report from the Children and Young People's Services Manager

115 - 144

REPORTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES

9. SUMMER TERM UPDATE IN RELATION TO EDUCATION'S LATEST POSITION IN RESPONSE TO COVID- 19

To consider the report of the Director of Education and Inclusion Services.

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10. CHAIR'S REVIEW AND CLOSE

To reflect on the meeting and actions to be taken forward.

11. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider any items, which the Chairman, by reason of special circumstances, is of the opinion should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency

Service Director of Democratic Services & Communication

Circulation:-

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee (County Borough Councillor S. Rees-Owen and County Borough J Edwards respectively)

County Borough Councillors:

Councillor J Brencher, Councillor A Calvert, Councillor S Evans, Councillor A Fox, Councillor E Griffiths, Councillor D Owen-Jones, Councillor S Morgans, Councillor S Powell, Councillor M Powell, Councillor G Stacey, Councillor S Trask and Councillor D Williams

Co-Opted Members:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mrs R Nicholls, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr M Cleverley
Ms A Jones, Representing UNITE
Mr C Jones, Representing GMB
Mrs C Jones, Representing the National Union of Teachers and Teachers' Panel
Mr D Price, Representing UNISON
Mr A Rickett, Voting Diocesan Authorities' Representative

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on
Wednesday, 3 March 2021 at 5.00 pm .

County Borough Councillors - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor S Evans
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor A Calvert	Councillor S Powell
Councillor M Powell	Councillor M Griffiths
Councillor D Owen-Jones	Councillor S Morgans
Councillor G Stacey	Councillor L Walker

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mrs R. Nicholls, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Mr A Wilkins, Director of Legal Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor W Lewis – Vice- Chair Overview and Scrutiny

67 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair Welcome Members and Officers to the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Apologies were received from the following County Borough Councillor L De-Vet, it was also acknowledged that County Borough Councillor H Fychan would join the meeting late due to work commitments.

68 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

Cwm Taf Morgannwg Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service(CAMHS) Update

The Chair welcomed Ms K Burton CAMHS Manager and Dr A Munoz-solomando to the Committee and explained that Officers from both Children's Services and Education Services are also present if there are any questions relating to these areas.

Members were presented with a Power Point presentation from the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

The newly appointed Service Manager explained that the presentation would provide Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the work carried out by the Service over the last 12 Months, along with New Investment, Key Improvements and the future vision and plans for the Cwm Taf Morgannwg CAMHS.

Members were reminded that CAMHS is not one entity but made of many services working together to provide a service for the mental health and wellbeing of all that need it. Below are some of the areas that exist within the service:

- Single Point of Access;(SPOA)
- Primary CAHMS(PCAMHS)
- Specialist CAHMS (SCAMHS)
- Crisis Team;
- Community Intensive Therapy Team (CITT)
- First Episode Psychosis (FEP)
- Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service (YPDS)

The Service Manager explained that there is a vast range of clinical staff, Consultants, Speciality Doctors, Trainee Doctors, Psychologists, Therapists, Family Therapists, Nurses , Social Workers, Specialist Pharmacists, Dieticians, Administration staff who all work together to provide a service for our young people who need support.

Members were presented with an update of new investment that the service has received from Welsh Government. It was explained that Welsh Government had invested a great deal in the service. The Eating Disorder service has recently received investment which is pleasing to see and the Clinical Lead explained that there is a priority on a National level with regards to eating disorders and explained the new funding will help develop the eating disorder team which aims to ensure we have the right pathway for our children and young people.

It was explained Welsh Government has allocated new money for across Wales from April 2021. The sum of £ 5.4 million has been allocated specifically to CAMHS for the whole of Wales, however we don't know how this is going to be distributed at present but hopefully we will be able to update you in the near future.

Members were also informed of the development of the wellbeing service and the work that has been put in place from the funding received by ICF.

In respect of key improvements Ms Burton explained that a new management

team has been set up to help turn the service around and there are exciting times ahead. There is a renewed focus on joint working opportunities, working with local authorities and building relationships with partner agencies is a main focus.

Members were pleased to see the progress of the development of the wellbeing and emotional wellbeing service and were keen to learn about the KOOTH online therapy service. Open access with a go live date for the 12th April 2021 with loads of information on line where children will have another area for young people to go to.

Members were also informed of the key improvements with regards to waiting times. It was explained that the demand reduced at the start of Covid and has rapidly increased since September, with a further increase expected.

Members were provided with the following figure show waiting times:

- **PCAMHS** - April 2019 362 children and young people were waiting, with the longest wait of 29 weeks, February 2021 51 children and young people were waiting (reducing) average wait of 3 weeks.
- **SCAHMS** - November 2020, 326 children and young people waiting, February 2021, 120 children and young people waiting (reducing) average wait of 3 weeks; this is continuing to reduce which is some fantastic news.

The Officers also explained how the service has managed and developed during Covid, It was explained that CAMHS has maintained a service throughout Covid and we have continued to provide an ongoing face to face service 7 days a week for those that need to access the crisis service. An online service has been developed called “attend anywhere” to ensure there is a face to face support in a safe environment with committed and caring staff available for support.

The officers continued and highlighted to the Committee the key improvements for the service. It was explained that the Service redesign is to improve patient experience, right place right time. To ensure there is a single point of access so that all referrals consultations and advice with CAMHS professionals is at hand. Staff moved into multi - disciplinary locality teams merging primary and secondary CAMHS so there is continuity across the service and reducing waiting times.

Finally the Service Manager CAMHS provided Members with the future vision and plans for the Service. With a remarkable amount of change and the expected increase of demand due to Covid there are lots of things rapidly changing and we will work to try and respond to these demands. Meaningfully working with children and young people to ensure we are working with them going forward.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their very informative and enlightening presentation and asked the Director of Children Services and Officers from Education and Inclusion Services for their overview on the service and collaborative working.

The Chair continued and opened up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

A Member thanked the Officer for their presentation and asked for clarity on two points firstly how do we make a referral and what the process for a parent to refer and secondly the Member wanted clarity on the lack of inpatient beds for eating disorders within Wales as he was under the understanding there wasn't any. In response the Service Manager clarified that there are 2 regional inpatient facilities in Wales, one based at the Princess of Wales hospital and another in North Wales. She continued to explain there several other routes the service use for some of our young people which include paediatric wards within hospitals, adult age appropriate beds for older teenagers 16+ along with commissioning private beds at other facilities depending on the situation. We receive referrals from professionals, who may be working with the young person.

Another Member thanked the Officers for the update and put forward a number of questions. With regards to waiting times the Member asked if the Committee could receive data in relation to the waiting times for follow up appointments and not just the initial appointment as this would give Members a better picture of the continued support of the Service. Also the Member was interested in what emergency support was available for parents and carers to access at a time of need and how easy is for parents to call on support when a child is going through some form of crisis.

The Service Manager thanked the Member for her question and explained the process in place with regards to waiting times, it was explained that there is 2 types of data that is published for the public viewing, one is the initial 28 days data and secondly further data is published in respect of the follow up appointment. The Service Manager explained that internal data within SCAMHS is not required to be published as there are many internal services that may work with the families which have different waiting times. Going forward Members would receive extra data as requested.

Another concern for Members was the issue lack of continuity of staff, Members felt young people need to have security and strong relationships with staff. Officers explained that staffing has been a challenge around the South Wales Region and work is being done to develop a fluid approach across CAMHS.

Members asked for any compliments and complaints received by the service be added to the report when it is next presented to Committee.

Another Member asked if the Committee could receive data in respect of breakdown of the ages and demographics etc. so that the Committee look to see if there were any other ways the Local Authority could help and support going forward to address the issues.

In response the Service Manager explained that going forward age and demographic is going to be a priority when looking at service planning, the Service Manager continued and explained that mental health just like Covid can affect any one from any social economic background and the Service is continually working to improve the health and wellbeing of all along with the Health Board.

In relation to the 3rd Sector provision Dr Munoz-solomando explained that resources are different in all areas of Cwm Taf Morgannwg and some areas have vast numbers of organisation where other have very little and to keep track

of these organisation can become very difficult. It was suggested that a mapping task group would help to guide people and the service to the right areas and in turn encourage involvement where necessary.

Members continued to ask questions relating to future plans, and the increasing challenges that the service may face due to the effects of the pandemic. A Member asked what relationship you have with the Consortium we have a basic tool kit to share with schools and also that young people could access themselves. The Service Manager explained that there is an online platform which launches on the 12th April called KOOOTH which gives advice and counselling for young people.

Other Members put forward questions and observation with regards to school based counselling service and wellbeing support within schools along with recruitment of staff within the service, and discussed the work being carried out to address the ALNET changes.

Members thanked the Officers from the CAHMS Service for a very informative discussion and found it pleasing to see that there is new Management structure and procedures in place to turn the Service around.

The Chair thanked both officers and Member for their input in to the meeting and RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the presentation;
- Receive an updating report in respect of the progress made by the Service in the Autumn;
- Receive data in respect of age and demographics of young people accessing the service;
- Receive a report in respect of Complaints and Compliments for the service.

70 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Members for the input and explained the next meeting will be held on the 24th March 2020.

This meeting closed at 7.20 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on
Wednesday, 24 March 2021 at 5.00 pm .

County Borough Councillors - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Members in attendance:-

Councillor S. Rees-Owen (Chair)

Councillor J Edwards	Councillor S Evans
Councillor J Brencher	Councillor H Fychan
Councillor A Calvert	Councillor S Powell
Councillor M Griffiths	Councillor D Owen-Jones
Councillor S Morgans	Councillor L De Vet
Councillor L Walker	

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services
Mr D Williams, Head of Attendance and Wellbeing Service
Ms C Jones, Head of Access & Inclusion
Ms C Edwards, Head of Service Transformation And Data Systems

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor W Lewis

71 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair welcomed Members and Officer to the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Apologies were received from the following, County Borough Councillor G Stacey, Co-opted Voting Members Ms R Nicholls and Mr L Patterson, It was also noted that Councillor S Powell would be leaving the meeting early and that due to work commitments Councillor H Fychan would be late attending.

72 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

73 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 27th January 2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

74 Matters Arising

Minute No: 49 - The Chair informed Members that the Cabinet and Scrutiny Chair engagement Session had yet to take place and would report back to Members once it had been confirmed.

Minute No 50- The Chair informed Members that the data in respect of digital learners and the FSM data would be presented to Members as part of a termly update from officers going forward.

75 Consultation Links

The Democratic Services Officer referenced the open consultation links that are available on both the Welsh Government Website and the RCTCBC Website and reminded Members of the procedure that is in place to participate if they so wish.

The Chair reminded Members that on behalf of the Committee the Chair along with Officers input participated in the Welsh Government Consultation in respect of the School Improvement Guidance and explained that as soon as any information has been received Members will be updated with the findings.

Members **RESLOVED** to Note the Consultations links provided.

76 Update on the Implementation of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (2018) in RCTCBC

The Head of Inclusion Services explained that the purpose of the report was to provide Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update on the implementation of the ALNET (Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal) Act (2018) along with providing Members with information on the implications of the new legislation for the Council from a local perspective.

Members were reminded that considerable changes are planned in Wales in relation to the statutory provision required to meet the needs of learners within Special Educational Needs (SEN) / Additional Learning Needs (ALN) with the implementation of new legislation, the ALNET Act (2018), in September 2021. The ALNET (Wales) Act 2018 (The 2018 Act) received Royal Assent in January 2018.

The Head of Inclusion Services continued and explained that the new statutory framework is underpinned by three overarching objectives:

- A unified legislated frame work to support all children of compulsory school age or below with additional learning needs (ALN) and to support young people with ALN who are in school or further Education (FE);
- An integrated , collaborative process of assessment, planning and

- monitoring of support provided to ALN learners which facilitates early , timely and effective interventions; and
- A fair and transparent system for providing information and advice, and for resolving concerns and appeals.

The Officer went on to explain that the new ALN system is expected to be implemented over a three year period. The implementation period is expected to run from September 2021 to August 2024. However Welsh Government is yet to publish its revised implementation timetable following its decision to delay its original implementation over three years from September 2020.

Members were provided with an overview from a local context, it was explained that Local Authorities and all those who work with children and young people with SEN must ensure that they continue to comply with duties placed upon them by the Education Act 1996 and continue to have regard to the SEN Code of Practice for Wales (2002).

It was highlighted to Members that during the three year implementation period from September 2021 local authorities will need to implement the new ALN system in parallel to the current SEN system which will gradually be phased out. The Officer continued and explained that to support its implementation the act introduces three new statutory roles which took effect from 4th January 2021 these are:

- **Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo) ;**
- **Early Years Additional Learning Needs Lead Officer (EYALNLO);**
- **Designated Education Clinical Lead Officer (DECLO).**

Members were also informed that Welsh Government is providing financial assistance to support the implementation of the Act through a £20M package funding. A substantial proportion of funding is being used to support workforce development.

The Chair thanked the Officers and opened up the meeting for Members questions and observations.

A Member thanked the Officer for the report and asked for clarity in relation to what the local authority has done so far with regards to preparation for the implementation of the act and what as an authority is still left to do. The Member gave some examples “there is a statutory requirement that ALNCo’s were to be in position by January “has this happened and also governor training what has been done to ensure governors are updated.

In response the Officer explained that governors have been made aware of timescales of the implementation and governor training has been provided. The Officer highlighted that there was a regional event that took place recently where by 300 governors participated, there is also written information available for governors to consider and the Central South Consortium have information on the Hwb.

The Officer continued to explain that a robust professional learning programme for ALNCo’s has been put in place by the local authority in conjunction with the ALN transformational lead. This includes a series of ANCo forum events and cluster-based working groups. The Officer continued to explain various ways the authority are planning to support the implementation of the new legislation

through the use of grant funding. The Member thanked Officers for the response and highlighted that identifying the development needs for schools was crucial to the success of the above..

Members raised questions in relation to the timing of the implementation and how Head teachers and ALNCOs were coping especially with situation of change during Covid and the shift to blended learning etc.

In response the Officer explained that Welsh Government has stated that there would be no further delay and the phased implementation will need to be delivered. The Officer highlighted that it is pleasing to note the positive engagement of ALNCOs in the online ALNCO forums.

Further questions were put forward around possible delays to referrals from access and inclusion services due to the reforms. Members felt that it would be beneficial for the Committee to receive a progress report so that the Committee could understand what the service has done so far, how the service has managed the implementation and any identified priorities for development, including consideration of how the Committee could support moving forward.

In respect of staff's wellbeing Members wanted to know what mechanisms are being put in place to support school staff who are leading on implementing the new system, especially when considering the various pressures that they may face. Members also asked how best practice is shared between schools to support schools who need additional support and guidance to adjust to the changes.

The Officer explained that there were no anticipated delays in respect of referrals. In respect of wellbeing, it was explained that Headteachers will monitor staff's workloads and there are processes and support mechanisms in place to support staff, including ALNCO's. The Officer informed Members of the work carried out in respect of best practice and reported that all schools had been required to undertake an ALN Readiness Audit to identify priorities for improvement at a school, cluster and local authority level. This work will be supported collaboratively with CSC and the Transformational Lead.

After further scrutiny Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report ;
- Receive a progress report at a future meeting
- Receive a report from the Transformational Lead

77 School Admissions Annual Report

The Head of Service Transformation presented Members with a summary of the annual school admissions process. Members were reminded that a report was provided for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in February 2020, which detailed the Council's school admissions process. The Officer continued and explained that the report before them provides Members with an update on developments within school admissions in the last 12 months along with planned development for the next round of admissions.

Members were reminded of process in place for routine admissions. It was explained that in September individual letters are annually sent to parent/ carer(s) of every pupil registered in nursery, year 2 in an infant school and year 6. The letter details their User Identification Number and application process that they need to undertake to apply for a school place for the following September. It was also explained that the information is also provided to the Welsh Medium primary schools in Merthyr Tydfil and two schools in the Vale of Glamorgan for children who plan to attend schools in RCT (e.g. Ysgol Gyfun Rhydywyn and Y Pant Comprehensive School).

In relation to application made for academic year 2020 /21 the local authority processed 8782 applications of which 7188 (i.e. 81.85%) were applied for on line. There were 1302 pre- nursery, 2352 nursery, 2534 reception, 71 junior and 2523 year 7 applications.

Members were also reminded that within RCT there are 8 voluntary aided (church) schools and the administration for these schools have been formulated by the schools governing bodies and admission requests are approved by the relevant governing bodies.

Members were pleased to see that of the 7310 applications made for nursery, reception, junior and year 7 children 98.95% were offered their first preference. Members also considered the pre- nursery figures.

Members were also presented with information in relation to admissions for the year 2020/21. In respect of the all through schools Members were informed that children already attending an all through school, do not need to apply for a secondary school, unless the wish to attend a different secondary school. Children will still have to apply for a pre-nursery, nursery and reception place at the relevant time. Members were given information in relation to timetabling for 2021/2022, waiting lists, admissions at other times, Welsh Medium Transfers and special educational needs.

The Officer continued and presented Members with information in respect of the Fair Access Protocol this ensures that appropriate protocols are in place for admitting children considered hard to place so that unplaced children, especially the most vulnerable are offered suitable school places promptly. It was explained that in the academic year 2019/2020, 40 children were brought forward to discuss and placements made. Of the 40, 16 were managed moves, 24 were parental in year- transfers.

After scrutinising the information within the report Members presented Officers with questions and observations in respect of school admissions, A Member ask question in respect of the in year transfer and the number of FSM pupils for 2019/20, the Member asked if there had any specific reason for this high percentage figure for this. Officers explained that if required I can look again at the breakdown however we are limited to what we can breakdown. Members continued to question for what is procedures are in place for new developments

Following further discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Receive additional information when presenting the report at a future meeting.

78 **Unauthorised Absence & Post -16 Attendance report**

The Service Director Legal Services explained to Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee the purpose behind the report put before them.

It was explained that at the meeting of the Audit Committee on the 20th October 2020 Members were presented with 'Finalised Audit Assignment Report' where a number of priorities were identified relating to 'Attendance, Referrals and Intervention' and post 16 Planning and Funding.

It was explained that after consideration of the report the Audit Committee agreed that Officers from the Education and Inclusion Services attend the Audit Committee meeting in November to discuss the findings as a result of this discussion Members of the Audit Committee felt that issues regarding attendance and post 16 attendance should be referred to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.

The Service Director Legal Services introduced the Head of the Attendance and Wellbeing Service who continued to present the report. It was explained that the main concerns from the report surrounded unauthorised absence levels for statutory school aged children and for post 16 settings, settings not always maintaining class registers for academic lessons as well as Key Skills/ Welsh Baccalaureate lessons.

Members were presented with tables which showed Primary and Secondary schools absence rates for Members to consider. Members were also informed that data setting for 2019/20 and 2020/2021 we not complete due to the Covid 19 pandemic. It was explained that as expected during this period, absence levels have increased drastically at the onset of the pandemic and subsequently in this academic year. The Officer continued and explained that various changes have been made to coding guidance during this time from Welsh Government. In respect of the increase in unauthorised absences at both phases officers highlighted that this seems to be a consequence of parental/ pupil anxiety and refusal to return to school , where this refusal has continued schools have begun to unauthorise absences where there are no mitigating circumstances.

The Head of the attendance and Wellbeing Services outlined the work that has been done within the service to support the key areas. All schools are on a three day rota for visits and staff will attempt to establish contact to determine the reason behind absences/ non engagement and work with families to support them.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing presented Members with an update in respect of post 16 attendance practices. It was explained that the original audit into this subject was not attendance focused, however a concern raised during the audit that attendance registers were not always completed in academic lessons as well as key skills/ Welsh baccalaureate lesson and learners were leaving site at various times without being challenged.

It was explained that post 16 attendance is not statutory therefore we do not ordinarily report on attendance at this level within annual attendance progress reports and similarly there is no Welsh Government requirement to collect data for post 16 learners.

The Head of Attendance and Wellbeing continued and explained that there is still a need to maintain safeguarding practices. Schools with Post 16 provision have been encouraged to ensure safeguarding practices are considered and pupils adhere to these practices. The schools and pupils have been reminded that any Post 16 learner leaving the school site must sign –out and unexplained absences should be acted upon.

In conclusion the officer explained that unauthorised absence levels have increased during this time however this is expected as settings have responded to changes that have been outlined in the report. The Covid 19 pandemic has changed the expectation of settings for post 16 learners to remain on site in libraries etc. The Officer continued and commented that hopefully going forward when educational settings return to more normal operating procedures and the guidance around risk of transmission reduces then we can revisit schools to consider this aspect.

Finally the Head of Attendance and Wellbeing highlighted to Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee that the service will work with internal audit to consider an audit aimed at Post 16 attendance practices to determine where further improvements have been made.

The Chair thanked officers and before opening up for questions and observation Members asked when the Service would carry out the said audit, it was explained that this would happen as soon as we are able and revisit at the start of the next academic year.

Members thanked the Officer for the report and put forward their questions, a Member asked if Coleg Y Cymoedd has experienced the same as other Post - 16 provision. The Officer explained that Coleg Y Cymoedd is run differently to school provision and students are only expected to be on college site during their lessons. The Officer continued and explained that the concern of the audit was that there was no record of pupils leaving the school site at 6th Form levels.

Another Member asked if the concerns around a specific setting in 4.1 of the report relating to high level of unauthorised absences in that one setting had been address as this was a concern for the Committee. In response the Officer informed Members of the family engagement pilot scheme that had been put in place in schools and this is showing a lot of improvements in that area.

The Vice Chair of the Committee asked whether the Service had considered looking at digital platforms in respect of signing in and out of school which could be used as a safeguarding process. Officer replied and stated that this may be away we could look to take this forward.

After further consideration of the Report Members RESOLVED to:

- Receive the findings of the internal audit in respect to attendance and make any recommendations to Cabinet in the future;
- Reconvene the FPN Working group to address any extra

information before concluding its findings;

- To consider the digital platforms for recording attendance in respect of post 16 pupils;
- Provide the Audit Committee with an update from the Committee after consideration of the Internal audit of the attendance for post 16 pupil.

79 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked both Members and Officers for their time and contribution to the meeting and explained that the next meeting would be held on the 24th April 2021.

This meeting closed at 6.55 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held
on Wednesday, 21 April 2021 at 5.00 pm .

**County Borough Councillors - Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Members in attendance:-**

Councillor J Edwards (Chair)

Councillor J Brencher Councillor A Calvert
Councillor M Griffiths Councillor L De Vet
Councillor L Walker

Co-Opted Members in attendance:-

Mr J Fish, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mrs R. Nicholls, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative
Mr L Patterson, Voting Elected Parent / Governor Representative

Officers in attendance:-

Mr P Nicholls, Service Director, Legal Services
Mr P Mee, Group Director Community & Children's Services
Ms A Lloyd, Service Director, Children's Services
Ms G Davies, Director of Education and Inclusion Services

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor W Lewis

80 Welcome and Apologies

The Vice Chair Councillor J Edwards explained to Members that she would be Chairing the Committee this evening due to the Chair having work commitments. The Vice Chair read a statement out from Councillor Rees – Owen thanking Members and Officers for all their hard work throughout the year which been challenging due to the Pandemic.

Apologies were received from County Borough Councillors S. Rees Owen, S Evans, H Fychan and G. Stacey.

The Chair explained to Members of the Committee that Agenda Item 7 would not be presented at this evening's meeting due to unforeseen circumstances, it was explained that the report would be presented at a future meeting in the next Municipal Year.

81 Declaration of Interest

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, there were no declarations made pertaining to the agenda.

82 Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the 03/02/2021 and 24/02/2021 as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

83 Consultation Links

The Senior Democratic Services Officer referenced the consultation links, which were available through the 'RCT Scrutiny' website. The Officer reminded Members that Information is provided in respect of relevant consultations for consideration by the Committee, which are circulated on a monthly basis by the Scrutiny Research Officer

84 UPDATE OF EDUCATION'S LATEST POSITION IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services thanked Members for the opportunity to provide an update on the most recent changes in Education during the spring term in response to the ever changing COVID-19 position.

The Director of Education reminded Members of the previous actions taken by the Welsh Government and continued to explain that on the 5th February, the Education Minister announced that schools would begin a phased return for foundation phase from 22nd February. Learners in nursery, Year 1 and Year 2 were able to return to their school setting by the end of that week.

Members were informed that on the 3rd March, the Education Minister announced that further year groups would be able to return to school from the 15th March. The Director of Education explained that the following arrangements applied to all schools in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

- All **foundation phase learners (i.e., nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 2)** continued to attend school throughout the phased introduction of new year groups back in to school.
- Arrangements for the phased return of learners in **Key Stage 2 (i.e., Years 3, 4, 5 and 6)** commenced on the 15th of March 2021.

- Arrangements for the phased return of learners in **Years 11 and 13** commenced on the 15th of March 2021.
- Flexibility was offered to secondary schools, all-through schools and PRUs to provide access to the onsite education provision for learners in **Years 10 and 12** from the 15th of March 2021 onwards.
- Learners in **Years 7, 8 and 9** were to access at least one check-in on school premises prior to the Easter break.
- **Vulnerable learners** and the **children of critical workers** continued to access face to face education in school until their year group returned to school.
- Remote learning continued to be provided for **self-isolating learners** and those **year groups not accessing face to face learning** in school.

Members were presented with an overview of the remote learning within the County Borough. It was explained that schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf have implemented a variety of remote learning options and opportunities and with support from the Council's school improvement officers. CSC has also provided comprehensive professional learning opportunities.

The Director of Education and Inclusion Services also updated Members on the work that has been carried out to ensure no learner is digitally excluded.

It was explained that from the start of the pandemic, digitally excluded learners who did not have access to an appropriate internet connected device and/or internet connection have been supported with devices to engage in online learning activities. The Director highlighted that an audit of digitally excluded learners was refreshed this academic year to identify any new families that have moved into the area or were experiencing challenges in accessing education remotely. Data showed a total of 2,868 devices were provided to DELs in 2019/2020 academic year and a further 2,570 were provided to newly identified DELs in NCY 1 – 13 between January 2021 and March 2021. Members were pleased to see that Welsh Government will make a further 4,456 Chromebooks available to Rhondda Cynon Taf in May 2021 and the plan will be to prioritise further learners that are eligible for free school meals.

Members were also presented with an update in respect of the following areas:

- Examinations
- Business Continuity Plans
- Health and Safety
- Managing Confirmed Cases

- Lateral Flow Testing
- Attendance
- Partnership Working
- Free School Meal Provision
- Breakfast Club Provision
- Childcare Settings

In conclusion, the Director of Education and Inclusion Services informed Members that going forward a termly update report could be provided to Members to encapsulate all of the key changes and the wide-ranging documentation sent to schools to ensure that they are kept abreast of national and local changes.

The Chair thanked the Officer for a very comprehensive report and opened up the meeting for Members questions and observation.

A Member asked a question regarding the Lateral Flow Test and asked if there is any data available on the take up of tests across schools.

The Member also asked where the service is in terms of a recovery plan, and if there is any plans to extend term times to enable pupils to catch up during the summer. Also, from a governance point of view are there any suggestion for returning to schools in the near future for hands on support for schools as at present the engagement with schools are being done remotely.

In response to the take up of the lateral flow test, the Director explained that at present there is no data collated as the use of the lateral flow test is not compulsory. Officers could review the data we have and could make this available to Members if required.

In respect of plan for recovery, the Director highlighted that many statutory regulations have been temporarily suspended due to the pandemic and this makes it difficult to plan ahead. However, the Directorate is currently self-evaluating which will help with forward strategic planning. It was also explained that the impact of Covid on outcomes is being assessed at a school level. The Director continued to explain the key priorities that the Authority is working on to ensure our schools are effectively supported to manage the situation moving forward.

In respect of governance, the Officer explained that this will continue virtually, and engagement levels had been good

In reference to moderation processes, Members raised the importance of consistency of approaches particularly in relation to year 6 learners. The Member also asked a question in respect of ventilation within our schools, especially in older school buildings where space seemed to be area of concern. The Member referenced the strategic planning and asked if there had been any consideration to adapting the Swedish model whereby formal lesson times have been reduced and summer outdoor

classrooms have been their main focus. Performance and wellbeing has shown to be better as a result of these approaches. The ALN responsibility for teachers is a concern and some staff are thinking of leaving the Authority because of the pressures.

Officers replied, with regards to the ALNET Act there are many changes ahead and that we have been preparing for these changes for a number of years. It was suggested that it would be beneficial if the Transformation Lead came to the committee to update Members on the work that is being done both nationally and regionally. The Director explained that we were fortunate in RCT to have high levels of specialist provision. In respect of ventilation, the Officer explained there has been an exercise carried out within our schools in relation to this, and funding had been received from Welsh Government to improve school buildings so that risks could be minimised e.g. Many schools across RCT have received funding for canopies to extend the outside learning environment. Outdoor learning has been occurring extensively in our schools and forest schools' programmes are in place in some settings. The Officers continued to highlight that the SHEP (School Holiday Enrichment Programme) will be in place to support vulnerable families throughout the summer.

In respect of moderation, Officers updated Members what is in place for schools to prepare learning for transition. Schools have effective tracking systems throughout the County Borough, and this ensures that reliable data is provided on transition.

Further questions and observations were put forward and after a lengthy discussion Member RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the content of the report;
- Receive an update from the ALNET Transformational Lead on the work in place for the implementation of the Act;
- Receive a report updating Members on the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP)

85 Children's Services Covid 19 Recovery and Contingency Planning

The Director of Children's Services thanked Members for the opportunity to provide the Committee with an overview of the response by Children's Services to the continuing impact of the pandemic, recovery and contingency planning.

The Director of Children's Services reminded Members of the previous reports Members have received in recent months and continued to explain that since December the service has moved forward with some focussed improvement and development work during this period and is beginning to respond to the adjustments to restrictions at the exit of the lockdown.

The Director continued to highlight that there continues to be uncertainty about the specific mid and long term impact of the Pandemic for vulnerable families, however given the rate of referrals and the conditions families face which in many cases are understood to compound adversity, the service is sadly projecting increasing demand, whilst working to connect as many families as possible to early help or preventative services.

The Director provided an overview for Members to get a better understand of the Service areas under the following headings:

- Children's Services Critical Approach;
- How Are we Doing;
- Service Improvement;

Members were also provided with information in respect of critical business services which include:

- Access to Services and Family Support;
- Safeguarding Duties;
- Children Looked After; and
- Youth Offending

After concluding her report the Director welcomed Members questions and observations.

A Member thanked the officer for her report and asked for clarity in relation to 4.7 of the report that Children's Services have terminated the commissioned external resources to increase social work capacity in the Intensive Intervention Service. Also the Member reference section 5 of the report and wanted to understand the reason behind the decrease in new child protection registrations as there is an increase in domestic violence which would surely effect the safety and wellbeing of children.

In response the Director explained that social work vacancies and retention has been a problem across the region and the Authority had commissioned outside agencies to increase capacity, this had worked in the initial stages however the provider could not continue to provide a good enough service and therefore the contract had ended. Recruitment is a challenge and work is being carried to address this at present.

With regards to the Child Protection Register the Director informed the Member of the processes that are in place. It was explained that there is a 10% increase at the front door and some with complex issues. It was also explained that not all cases end up on the register as there are care and support packages that are put in place to support families and this may be enough support and placing on the Child Protection Register would not always be necessary. However we will need to keep a close eye going forward.

Other Members put forward questions regarding care leavers' and what support would be provided the service for care leavers especially in the

situation were are in at present, also questions were raised over data relating to Children Looked After and asked for clarity on the 25% increase in the number of care leavers and asked if this is due to the age of the young person or were there any other factors. The Director explained that the increase represent numbers that have become 18, also the number of child been adopted. The Director also highlighted that reunification of families is also a factor and great deal of intervention work with families has meant child have been able to return to family units.

Further questions were put forward and after in depth discussion Members RESOLVED to:

- Acknowledge the information within the report

86 Youth Engagement and Participation Service: An Overview of Support and Provision During Covid -19

Members RESOLVED to defer the item to a future meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee.

87 Chair's Review and Close

The Chair thanked Members and Officer for participating in the Meeting and wished them well.

88 Urgent Business

Resolved to note there was no urgent items.

This meeting closed at 6.45 pm

**CLLR S REES-OWEN
CHAIR.**

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21ST JULY 2021

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22**

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATIONS**

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to agree its Work Programme for the 2021/22 Municipal Year

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:-

- 2.1 Review and agree the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for the Municipal Year 2021/22 as attached at Appendix A
- 2.2 Agree that the Work Programme be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure the items identified for inclusion are relevant and that any additional referrals are incorporated.
- 2.3 Consider and determine any other matters that members may wish to scrutinise over this period.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is proposed that Members of the Scrutiny Committee have the opportunity to consider its work programme for the 2021/22 municipal year and that the proposed work programme allows for an element of flexibility and taking into

account any additional consultative documents or legislative matters requiring attention.

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 4.1 As Members will recall, the Scrutiny Work Programmes have a reduced number of meetings for this Municipal Year to allow for the work to be timetabled with the best use of resources available. This will allow for a more flexible approach to recognise the needs of emerging priorities and provides opportunity for Scrutiny Working Groups to be taken forward and training provision where requested.
- 4.2 The work programme should reflect the committee's aims and objectives as well as add value to the work of the Council. It is up to the Committee to agree the items for inclusion in its work programme, but ideas are brought together from a number of sources to assist members in their choices. It is important that all Members have the opportunity to put forward items for consideration.
- 4.3 Recently, 1-1 Engagement sessions have been undertaken to provide an opportunity for the respective Cabinet Members, Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs and Scrutiny lead Officers to discuss their respective work programmes, identify any key topics for inclusion and enhance dialogue and the flow of information between Cabinet and Scrutiny.
- 4.4 There are a number of areas which will be revisited in 2021/22 where work commenced during the previous municipal year or where strands of work are ongoing.
- 4.5 Other principles which have been taken into account:
- The work programme represents a mixed selection of topics;
 - It meets deadlines in relation to other Council meetings and those of external partners;
 - Consideration as to whether the topic duplicates review activity which is taking place elsewhere; and
 - Flexibility- to ensure that new topics can be factored in and changes accounted for

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications arising from this report and no Equality Impact Assessment is deemed necessary for the purposes of this report.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The considerations and comments of Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs as well as the relevant cabinet members and lead officers have been sought in respect of the draft Scrutiny Work Programme and it is for Members of Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to agree the proposed items at this meeting

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 There are no legal implications as a result of the recommendations set out in the report.

9. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 9.1 The proposals to address the WAO report proposals includes arrangements to strengthen the Council's consideration and scrutiny of its work, through 'the lens of the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act'. These arrangements will be embedded into the business of the Council as set out in the Policy Statement agreed by Cabinet on [2 November 2016](#).
- 9.2 The proposals outlined within the report will work to ensure a sustainable and robust scrutiny structure is in place which will effectively challenge policy decisions taken forward.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Council is continuing its work to strengthen its scrutiny arrangements and these enhancements support the council in responding to the findings arising from the recent WAO report and will further strengthen governance and accountability arrangements.

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SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMMES

Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee

'Holding the Executive to account in respect of all three priorities within the Council's Corporate Plan....Economy (Building a strong economy), People (Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone), Place (Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work).'

Each of the Council's Scrutiny Committees is responsible for setting and agreeing its own work programme by identifying a list of themes and topics which fall under the remit of each individual Scrutiny Committee. Following discussion with the Chair, Vice Chair and Scrutiny Members a practical, realistic and timetabled programme can then be developed.

The scrutiny forward work programmes should provide a clear rationale as to why particular issues have been selected; be outcome focussed; ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements.

Throughout the year, there are a number of ways in which additional issues can be considered for inclusion in the Scrutiny Work Programme and ideas for inclusion may come from a number of sources such as:-

- Individual Councillors;
- Performance or budget monitoring information;
- Inspection reports;
- Referrals from Council (such as Notices of Motion), Cabinet/Audit or other scrutiny committees;
- Service users;
- Monitoring the implementation of recommendations previously made by the Committee; and
- Local Residents

The Cabinet is also required to produce forward work programmes and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee keeps abreast of forthcoming items or topics which may enable scrutiny to be involved in the development of Council policy prior to its formal consideration by Cabinet. It is important to bear in mind that an element of flexibility is applied to each individual work programme that provides Committees with the capacity to scrutinise new / urgent issues that arise during the year.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE					
Date/Time	Overarching Item	Officer	Cabinet Member	Invited/ In attendance	Scrutiny Focus
21st July 2021	2021/22 Work Programme	Service Director, Communications & Democratic Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Service. Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member Children's Services		Scrutiny & Challenge – For Members to consider the work programme for the 2021/ 2022 Municipal year
	YEPS Service Report (Carried Over from 2020/2021)	Children & Young People's Service Manager	Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member Children's Services	Jess Allen , Bedwyn Harries, Zoe Lancelott	Scrutiny & Challenge – For Members to scrutinise the work carried out by the YEPS Service during the Covid 19 pandemic and beyond.
	Director of Social Services Draft Annual Report	Group Director Community and Children's Services Director of Children's Services	Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member Children's Service.		Pre – Scrutiny To Scrutinise and make any recommendations to the report before presenting to Cabinet.
	CIW LETTER IN RESPECT OF THE RECENT ASSURANCE CHECKS	Group Director Community and Children's Services Director of Children's Services.	Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member Children's Service.		To receive the letter from Care Inspectorate Wales in respect of the recent inspection. And receive the action plan in September's Meeting of the

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE					
Date/Time	Overarching Item	Officer	Cabinet Member	Invited/ In attendance	Scrutiny Focus
	Summer Term Update in relation to Education's latest position in response to Covid-19	Director of Education and Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services.	Andrea Richards	To receive and update on the schools position in response to Covid – 19. Members to consider if there is any specific areas to consider further
22nd September 2021	GATSBY PROJECT REPORT	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Service	Kate Owen	<i>To receive an update on the Gatsby project and consider any specific areas that need further in depth scrutiny</i>
	School Holiday Enrichment Programme	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Service	Andrea Richards	<i>To receive an update on SHEP</i>
22nd September 2021	Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Report(Outlining themes from CIW Assurance Visit and update on action plans and 16+ inspection)	Director of Children's Services	Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member Children's Services		<i>For Members to consider the inspection and agree specific areas to scrutinise throughout the municipal year.</i>

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE					
Date/Time	Overarching Item	Officer	Cabinet Member	Invited/ In attendance	Scrutiny Focus
	Kinship Care Report (N.O.M)	Head of Children Looked After		Cllr Hooper & Cllr J James (Mover and Seconder of the Motion)	<i>To scrutinise the information and consider next Steps</i>
13th October 2021	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Report (CAMHS)	Service Manger CAMHS, Director of Children's Services , Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Service. Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member Children's Services		To consider the work of the CAMHS and consider any areas of the service Members wish to Focus on in depth
13th October 2021	Early Years Transformation Programme	Director of Children's Services Director of Public Health, Protection and Community Services	Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member Children's Services	Zoe Lancelott	Pre Scrutiny of the Early Years Transformation Programme
13th October	WESP Consultation	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services Cllr G Hopkins Cabinet Member Welsh Language	Grace Zecca-Hanagan Steffan Gealy	To participate in the public Consultation regarding WESP

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE					
Date/Time	Overarching Item	Officer	Cabinet Member	Invited/ In attendance	Scrutiny Focus
13th October	Update on Post 16 & Attendance	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Service	Dan Williams	<i>To receive an update on the Post 16 Audit (Members to inform Audit Committee of their Recommendation)</i>
8th December 2021	Children Looked After Prevention Strategy	Director of Children's Services	Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member for Children's Services		<i>Scrutiny of the CLA Prevention Strategy</i>
8th December 2021	Resilient Families Service	Director of Children's Services Head of Wellbeing & Resilience	Cllr C Leyshon Cabinet Member for Children's Services	Zoe Lancelott	<i>Scrutiny & Challenge – To Scrutinise the work of the Resilient Families Service and consider if there is an area of the Service that needs further scrutiny over the next Municipal Year.</i>
8th December 2021	Breakfast Clubs	Director of Education & Inclusion Service	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services	Lisa Gorringe	<i>To receive an overview of breakfast club provision and consider any areas for further Scrutiny</i>

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date/Time	Overarching Item	Officer	Cabinet Member	Invited/ In attendance	Scrutiny Focus
26 th January 2022	CSC Training on the new Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability Framework	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services	Clare Seery	Update on the new guidance and changes in statutory regulations for schools and governing bodies caused by the pandemic.
26 th January 2022	CSC School Improvement Support	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services	Tim Britton Sarah Corcoran Clare Seery Steve Davies Andy Hurley	<i>To receive an overview of CSC moving forward</i>
26 th January 2022	FPN Working Group Report	Director of Education & Inclusion Services		Dan Williams Claire Jones	<i>To consider and Approve the report and recommendations of the FPN Working Group</i>
26 th January					

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE					
Date/Time	Overarching Item	Officer	Cabinet Member	Invited/ In attendance	Scrutiny Focus
16 th March 2022	School Admissions	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services	Catrin Edwards	<i>To acknowledge and consider annual school admissions processes and in year transfers</i>
16 th March 2022	Childcare Sufficiency Audit	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services	Denise Humphries Andrea Richards	<i>Scrutiny of the audit undertaken in line with WG requirements</i>
16 th March 2022	School based Counselling	Director of Education & Inclusion Services	Cllr J Rosser Cabinet Member Education and Inclusion Services	Ceri Jones	<i>To scrutinise and comment on provision of school based counselling</i>

Other Areas for exploration:-

- Natasha's Law (AR)
- Update on Y1 of implementation of ALNET (CJ) (LJ)
- Update on grant activities re: Whole School Approaches to Emotional and Mental Health Wellbeing / Wellbeing Strategy – perhaps a contribution from SI / CSC about regional developments re: wellbeing and the new curriculum (CJ)
- Period Dignity - Some previous discussion of this with Scrutiny and whether they wanted a report/were going to revisit as a working group instead. Would likely need to be towards the later part of the year in order for us to survey schools/pupils again (DW)
- Advocacy Service
- 16+ Accommodation

**INFORMATION – ANNUAL REPORT –
Annual Complaints and Complements Report
Annual Cwm Taf Safeguarding Report
YOS Annual Report
Annual Adoption Report**

On-going Working Groups:

- FPN Working Group

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22**

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

21ST JULY 2021

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

Agenda Item No.
DRAFT DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

Author: Paul Mee, Group Director, Community & Children's Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 includes in Part 8 a Code of Practice with regards to the role of the Director of Social Services.
- 1.2 This replaces Statutory Guidance issued in June 2009 regarding the Duties and Accountabilities of Directors of Social Services in Wales and includes an ongoing requirement for the Director of Social Services to publish an Annual Report.
- 1.3 The Code of Practice states that the Director of Social Services must prepare and publish an annual report about the exercise of the Local Authority's social services functions and that this annual report must be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of a financial year.
- 1.4 The annual report must evaluate the performance of the Local Authority in relation to the delivery of its social services functions in respect of that year and include lessons learned. It must also set out objectives in relation to promoting the wellbeing of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, for the forthcoming year.
- 1.5 The purpose of this report is to present the first draft of this revised reporting framework for Scrutiny Members' consideration prior to its content being made available for public consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the draft Rhondda Cynon Taf Director of Social Services Annual Report (Appendix 1) and scrutinise its contents.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To meet the statutory requirements on the Director of Social Services and ensure the report is circulated for public consultation.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The Director of Social Services must prepare and publish an Annual Report about the exercise of the Local Authority's Social Services functions. This annual report must be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of a financial year and address the following requirements:

- It must evaluate the performance of the local authority in relation to the delivery of its social services functions in respect of that year and include lessons learned.
- It should be presented in such a way as to set out how the Local Authority has achieved the six quality standards in relation to well-being outcomes as described in the *code of practice in relation to measuring social services performance*, issued under section 145 of the Act.
- It must include details of the extent to which the authority has acted in accordance with relevant requirements for assessing and meeting needs (Part 3 and 4 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014)
- It must set out how the Local Authority has exercised relevant requirements contained in the code of practice so as to provide:
 - a) Assurances in terms of structural arrangements within the Local Authority that enable good governance and strong accountability.
 - b) Assurances in relation to effective partnership working via Partnership Boards.
 - c) Assurances in relation to safeguarding arrangements.
 - d) Information in relation to the performance of the handling and investigation of complaints and representations.
 - e) A response to any inspections undertaken in relation to social services functions.

- 4.2 The Welsh Government is committed to the delivery of high-quality health, social services and social care services that are centred on users' needs. *More than just words* is its strategic framework to realise this aim.

- 4.3 Directors of Social Services are, therefore, required to provide an update on Welsh language provision and their implementation of *More than just words* as part of the annual report.

- 4.4 It is important that the views of service users in relation to the way the Local Authority has discharged its social services functions are included in the annual report. People, including children, who have experience of

using care and support services, the parents of children who have care and support needs, and carers in the local authority area must be engaged in the process of producing an annual report and the annual report must set out how the Local Authority has engaged with people in its production.

4.5 Annual reports are a way for local authorities to demonstrate accountability to citizens and should, therefore, be accessible to people, including service users. The Director of Social Services should, therefore, ensure that annual reports are not overly long and are written in a clear and concise way.

4.6 To ensure effective accountability, the annual report must be presented to the Council by the Director of Social Services, a copy of the published annual report sent to Welsh Ministers and copies made available on the local authority website.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no implications associated with this report.

6. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

6.1 This draft report will be subjected to a formal consultation the results of which will be considered in finalising this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

7.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

8.1 The Annual Director's report is required under Part 8 of The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

9. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

9.1 The Annual Director's Report publishes the delivery, performance, risks and planned improvements of the Social Services function in the Council. As such it provides the public with a summary of the Directorates performance in meeting the corporate priorities for its Social Services.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 The Director of Social Services Annual Report 2020/21 sets out how the Council's Social Services performed last year, highlighting the direction and priorities we have set for the year ahead.

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**Rhondda Cynon Taf
County Borough Council**

DRAFT VERSION

**Director of Social Services
Statutory Annual Report
2020-21**

June 2021

1

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report, which is a statutory requirement under the Code of Practice issued under Part 8 of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014. It describes how we have exercised our functions, our performance during the year, and developments and action taken to further improve our services and support.
- 1.2 The summary reflects progress against priorities set out in the previous annual report. It differs from previous reports insofar as it also contains a specific chapter setting out our response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has spanned the entire year. The report also sets new priorities for the coming year as part of our ongoing programme of continuous improvement.
- 1.3 Social care is one of the Council's most important functions and a significant responsibility. We have a skilled and experienced workforce committed to meeting the needs for our residents for care and support and, where necessary, protecting them from harm. Our goal is not only to keep people safe but also to improve their well-being. This includes older people who we help to live safely and independently in their own home for as long as possible. And we help children and young people to get the best possible start in life to be able to fulfil their potential.

Our priorities and values

- 1.4 A significant part of what we do is governed by law. This includes the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, both of which have requirements for action to improve people's wellbeing and prevention through partnership and collaboration between organisations. Listening to, and involving, people in decisions which affect them, and the way services are designed and operated is also a priority.
- 1.5 We are committed to meeting the care and support needs of all those who need our help, and the wider community, particularly:
 - People with learning disabilities
 - Older people with complex needs and long-term conditions, including dementia.
 - Carers, including young carers.
 - Families and individual members of families
 - Children with complex needs due to disability and illness.
 - People with physical impairment and / or sensory impairments
 - People who have experienced adverse childhood experiences.
- 1.6 We know the following are important to people:
 - Helping to meet people's needs and doing what matters to them.
 - Preventing problems from happening in the first place.
 - Where problems occur, preventing them from getting worse.
 - Providing people with good quality information, advice, and assistance.
 - Helping people to access services and support so they can connect with others in their community.
 - Working closely with other organisations to providing seamless delivery of services.
- 1.7 Our broad approach is to prevent problems from happening in the first place or, if problems have occurred, to stop them from getting worse. We work towards maximising people's independence, providing the minimum support they need to live safely, preferably in their own

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home. We do this by working with other organisations and by developing more integrated services.

- 1.8 Ensuring more young people with complex disabilities can live as independently as possible in their own homes is a priority, as is creating opportunities for them to engage in education, training, culture, and the arts, thus helping them to grow in independence. Overall, the Council aims to help our residents to be active and healthy, benefitting from our leisure facilities, theatres, libraries and heritage sites, parks, and open spaces.
- 1.9 We are committed to children having the best start in life, with opportunities to fulfil their potential. Helping children who become looked after by us is a particular priority. Our core values are:
 - All children have a right to a family life. Where possible, this should be within the child's birth family.
 - Where it is not possible for a child to live with its birth parents, we will explore alternatives within their wider birth family or family friends.
 - Where children need to be looked after by us as their local authority, our aim is for them to be placed with a safe, stable, and loving alternative family.
 - Where possible, children will be placed with their siblings.
 - When decisions are made about the permanent placement of a child, their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, and language will be respected.
 - Permanence and stability is important to give a sense of belonging, and to the continuity of relationships as well as the continuity of where the child lives.

What is in this report?

- 1.10 This report provides an overview of our performance in 2020-21. It explains what we have delivered through our day-to-day services, and developments during the year to enable us to do more to meet people's needs now and in the future. Given the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, which extended over the whole year, this year's report also includes a summary of our response. We are accountable to the residents of Rhondda Cynon Taf and this report helps us to fulfil this by being open about what we are doing and why, and what we have achieved.
- 1.11 **Part 2** provides an overview of what our Adult Services and Children's Services delivered and achieved during the year. The impacts of the pandemic and how we responded is described in **Part 3**, while **Part 4** explains how people are shaping our services and what we do.
- 1.12 **Part 5** explains how we work with people and what have done to improve their well-being. It also says what we have done to protect and safeguard people from abuse, neglect and harm, and to help people develop and maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships.
- 1.13 **Part 6** explains how we operate as a department including our workforce, our financial resources and how we plan, and our partnership working with other organisations. On the last page of this report, **Part 7** provides sources of information for further reading if required.

2. Overview of performance

- 2.1 I am pleased to present my first statutory annual report as Group Director for Community and Children's Services. In doing so, I must pay tribute to my predecessor, Giovanni Isingrini, who led the service throughout 2020 and for several years previously.
- 2.2 The last year, which has been dominated by the pandemic, has been unprecedented. The outbreak of Covid-19 in January 2020 led to the first national lockdown on 24 March 2020, immediately before the start of the period covered by this report. The entire year has been one of immense challenge, responding to the considerable impacts it has had, not only on the children, young people, families, and older people who rely on our services, but also on our staff and their families. At the outset, I must pay tribute to them for the incredible way they respond to the crisis and their dedication and commitment to doing as much as possible to continuing to deliver services and support in unprecedented circumstances. My thanks also extend to many other staff from other parts of the Council and the many volunteers from our communities who helped us in social care, and to the Council's elected members for their support.
- 2.3 We were under no illusion about the impact the pandemic would have. Our main priorities were to
- Keep our most vulnerable people, with care and support needs, safe and well in the community.
 - Maintain our essential services.
 - Ensure the flow through hospital so that people who are the most unwell can be cared for.
 - Develop a community service that can respond quickly to help people who may be isolated and in need of support, such as the new hubs.
- 2.4 The pandemic struck as we were in the process of writing the annual report for 2019-20. The seriousness of the outbreak was matched by the magnificent response of our staff and many others. However, the challenges ahead were recognised, and so too was the potential for it to get much worse before it got better, which indeed it did. In the last report, we outlined what steps we were taking in response to the pandemic and explained a more detailed report on how we responded would be included in this year's report. Part 3 of this report is dedicated to our Covid-19 response, highlighting the impacts on people who use our services, on our staff, and the action taken to continue to deliver care throughout the year.
- 2.5 Throughout the pandemic, we continued to engage with people who use our services and the public more generally using a variety of contact methods. This included surveys, virtual meetings, telephone contact and, where necessary, face to face contact, taking steps to minimise the risk to individuals, their families, and our staff.
- 2.6 We have listened to people's views. Thanks to the commitment and efforts of our teams, we were able to maintain some level of services which play a vital role in helping individuals, such as those for people with learning disabilities, families, and their carers so they could get help for respite and in crisis situations.
- 2.7 As a result of views expressed, we also changed our original decision to decommission two residential care homes and will refocus their use to help meeting the increasing demand for care and support for people with complex needs, including dementia, for respite care, and to allow reablement in residential settings.
- 2.8 Through our Wellbeing Pathway for children and young people, we have developed a more integrated approach for delivering services and support. The integrated service provision of

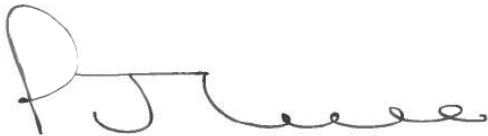
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our Community Wellbeing and Resilience service enabled it to be proactive in responding effectively to the challenges of the pandemic.

- 2.9 Improving young people's access to information, advice, and guidance was one of the priorities for the year. Given the pandemic, we stepped up our developments. In the first national lockdown, and with the involvement of staff, we undertook a rapid transformation of the way we delivered services. We assessed the needs and requirements of young people who were confined to their homes and used the information to reallocate resources and to develop contingency plans. We were able to make a virtual youth services offer within 72 hours of lockdown commencing and this was followed up by many more developments including a radical overhaul of our online information and advice and interactive issues-based support via a chat service, zoom sessions, Instagram, and Facebook Live sessions. Our Resilient Families service also used innovative ways to support families across the County. Following risk assessment, staff continued their face to face work where appropriate.
- 2.10 Foster carers play a vitally important role in caring for some of our most vulnerable children. During the pandemic foster carers stepped up to the challenge and supported young people despite the difficulties that pandemic restrictions inevitably caused. I am immensely grateful for the role they have played.
- 2.11 The pandemic has also had a significant impact on unpaid carers within our communities. Many carers found their roles changed significantly overnight, with the normal support networks unavailable, whilst others took on caring roles for the first time. I am also hugely grateful to support provided by our unpaid carers and we have had to find new ways of supporting carers of all ages and this support will need to continue into the future.
- 2.12 Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we saw slightly fewer children needing to be added to the Child Protection Register during the year, and a small but welcome reduction in the number of children who needed to be taken into care. We will continue to devote attention to safely reducing the number of children looked after as a priority.
- 2.13 Everyone will be fully aware of the profound impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on care homes. Despite this, all care homes continued to provide care and support to their residents throughout the pandemic. While there has been a real focus on protecting vulnerable adults in care homes, we should not lose sight of the support and services that are given to vulnerable adults in the community – those in living supported accommodation and those receiving day services and respite and domiciliary care at home.
- 2.14 We continue to work in partnership with [Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board](#) and our commissioned providers to support individuals, with care and support needs, to discharge safely from hospital and ensure people were able to return home from hospital as quickly as possible.
- 2.15 Our teams continued to work closely with our partners. We supported our independent providers of residential and domiciliary care and support in several ways. At the request of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, we created additional temporary step-down recovery beds to support an anticipated surge in patients admitted to hospitals because of coronavirus and who then need to be discharged.
- 2.16 Our new Assistive Technology Service, which started just before the first lockdown, uses technology to provide a 24-hour response to support people in their own homes for non-medical emergencies through our Mobile Responder Service. Over the course of the year, the Mobile Responder Service made more than 5,500 visits, providing a variety of support from assisting with non-injured falls and emergency personal care. This prevented more than 3,800 calls being made to emergency services, thus making a significant contribution to reducing the demand on those already-stretched services.

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- 2.17 With the help of our partners, we have also managed to keep on track our programme of work to refocus the use of our residential care homes and to develop more modern housing which can support the needs of residents as they get older. Our second Extra Care development in Aberaman opened in May 2020 and our third, which is in Pontypridd, is on schedule for completion this summer.
- 2.18 Our ability to manage through the pandemic is testament to the dedication, commitment, and efforts of our staff, not only in social services but across the whole of the Council, and to the support we received from elected members. Being faced with an unprecedented situation required rapid responses to considering and implementing different ways of doing this, and faster decision making, both of which happened. We have learnt much from the experience, and we will utilise this to maintain some of the changes we have made, to develop further ways of improving the care and support we provide to the County's residents, and the support we provide to our staff, who underpin everything we do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Mee', with a large initial 'P' and a long horizontal stroke.

Paul Mee
Group Director for Community and Children's Services

3. Our response to the Covid pandemic

3.1 This section summarises the Council's response to the pandemic between March 2020 and April 2021, the pressures we faced, and the action taken, with the fundamental aim of maintaining care and support to those who need it. In doing so, we are putting on record the huge efforts made by all our staff, the many local volunteers who helped us, and the changes made to ways of working to continue to deliver as much care and support as possible to those who needed it.

The start of the challenge

3.2 At the start of the lockdown, the only operational and administrative buildings which remained open were those required to support social care, homelessness, and frontline service provision. Working from home using remote technology was the default position for most staff, with a significant council-wide lesson learnt; when necessary, a huge amount can be achieved in an extremely short time if everyone pulls together.

3.3 Within a week, the council enabled more than 3,000 workers to have the technology to work from home. This change which would typically have taken a few years to achieve in normal operating circumstances.

3.4 Throughout the pandemic, the response by our staff across adult and children's services prioritised the most vulnerable and their carers to stay safe and well in the community, responding to urgent and immediate care and support requirements, and safeguarding.

3.5 Proactively supporting care providers, including residential care homes, to respond to the risks associated with the coronavirus to deliver quality services safely was also vital. Risk assessments were undertaken for any face-to-face contact with families, and staff were provided with personal protective equipment. The priorities were safeguarding children, supporting children looked after and residential homes, and continuing work with other organisations such as courts.

The impact on our staff

3.6 Most key service functions continued but with reduced staffing levels, where on average, more than 1,600 Council staff were unavailable for work due to sickness or underlying health conditions, self-isolating; shielding or living with someone who needs to be shielded. However, many staff offered to undertake different roles.

3.7 Around 3,000 employees responded to a council-wide survey to say they would undertake work in the care sector and in other essential services. At that point, 365 members of staff were assigned to the Care sector and another 200 assigned to the Community Hubs.

3.8 What we noticed was a significant increase in meals for elderly people, with 635 people receiving daily meals in their homes, emergency childcare for those most vulnerable, with on average 420 children attending the provision provided by the Council for critical workers and vulnerable learners daily, 130 of whom are vulnerable.

3.9 Despite the impact of the pandemic, staff continued to provide social care services to vulnerable people in difficult circumstances in people's own homes, residential homes, nursing homes, supported living and hostels. However, we quickly recognised the potential impact on staff, many of whom were working in difficult circumstances. The Council arranged a Well-Being Helpline and counselling service to help staff who were feeling worried, anxious, or isolated. Mindful of the same pressures on others, the services were also made available to

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staff working for independent care providers. As we emerge from the pandemic, we are mindful about the potential ongoing impact on our staff.

The impact on adults needing support

- 3.10 The Council's Adult Services and its providers had been supporting more than 4,000 vulnerable people in their homes and in care settings every day since the outbreak started. Inevitably, there had been disruption to some services, and this was expected to continue for the foreseeable future.
- 3.11 Assessments of people's needs continued to take a person-centred approach as far as practicable. Workloads across Adult Services remained high, and caseloads become increasingly more complex and as result waiting lists in some service areas have developed/been exacerbated. However, these have continued to be risk assessed and the priority status of those people waiting for a service reviewed. Plans are in place to reduce these waiting lists. External support was commissioned in response to the need for more assessment.
- 3.12 Everyone will be fully aware of the profound impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on care homes. Despite this, all care homes continued to provide care and support to their residents throughout the pandemic. The separation from family and friends has been a difficult issue for many people living in care homes who in normal circumstances would have contact with relatives and friends. The Council, and care home providers, recognised the importance of visiting to residents and their families, and we continued to review risk assessments and arrangements for visiting through the pandemic in light of Welsh Government Guidance and a Covid-19 outbreak at individual care home. The Council and care home providers supported opportunities, where possible, with virtual visits and calls through various forms of technology to ensure residents, where possible, remain connected with family members.
- 3.13 During the year all Supporting Living providers have been required to deliver new and innovative ways of working to mitigate the negative impact on service delivery, including managing additional "stay back" for those accessing day service pre-pandemic and the use and roll out digital technology. All providers have been highly successful managing Covid-19 throughout the pandemic. The service has facilitated multiple moves, reassessments, and hospital discharges. Individuals have also been supported to maintain positive contact with families and friends in line with guidance, which has resulted in consistently safe schemes with happy and healthy individuals who are now able to see their loved ones face-to-face once more.
- 3.14 Delivering domiciliary care at home during the pandemic has been immensely challenging. Our priority was delivering care and support to those who relied on us. Our dedicated front-line workers had to work within national guidance and we needed to protect people who were receiving support, their carers, and our staff against transmission of the virus. Over the course of the year, some individual care and support packages were affected, which may have impacted on either the frequency or the timing of the visits. Although, we put in place the necessary precautions to minimise disruption to services and to be to deliver care and support services safely.
- 3.15 During the pandemic, Adult Services continued to provide reduced day service provision, including the successful introduction of outreach services for older people, depending on need and risk throughout the pandemic. The situation was similar for respite services. We have now started to reopen day services and respite further as the pandemic eases, although our offer is still reduced compared to pre-covid provision and this will continue until existing guidance changes or more service provision is made available. To counter this, we have continued to

ensure, where required, that there is alternative care and support at home for people affected by the reduced service offer.

- 3.16 Hospital discharges continued to be prioritised. Adult Services staff assisted the NHS with step-down services for people leaving hospital to give hospitals more capacity to deal with Covid 19 patients. The Council's new Extra Care facility in Aberaman opened at the beginning of May and people started moving in. The facility also provided some temporary respite accommodation to enable step up/down from people's own homes where needed.
- 3.17 The period since the beginning of December 2020 was demanding, the Additional Winter Protection Plan funds made available by the Welsh Government were utilised to increase social work assessment and home care capacity, which had a positive impact on discharges. Care homes were supporting the admission of patients from hospital where they could provide appropriate care safely. That said, further outbreaks and subsequent national restrictions placed on admissions was limiting care home placements, particularly those for nursing and dementia. This meant some discharges took much longer to complete.
- 3.18 Between the end of October and 31st March 2021, 655 hospital discharges were supported. The success of this response was considered testament to the strength of the established partnership with the health board and providers.
- 3.19 As part of the coordinated national effort to cope with the pandemic, we reported weekly to the Welsh Government. The reports considered our ability to operate, our ability to place adults with a care plan into residential care, and our ability to provide care to people in their own home. We rated our status on each as green, amber or red.
- 3.20 Our ability to operate was green if we had some staff absent but where we could still manage to provide cover for most services. It was amber when some staff were absent, and we were still able to provide cover but where some services were being moderately affected. The red status would have reflected significant numbers of staff absent with cover available only for critical services.
- 3.21 Fortunately, we did not find ourselves in the red zone at all. During the year the most challenging times were from May to mid-July and then from November to mid-January, where we classified our status as amber, which mirrored the more challenging period of responding to the pandemic.
- 3.22 The pattern was broadly similar for our assessment of our ability to place adults who had a care plan into residential care and to provide care at home.
- 3.23 The amber status for providing care at home reflected high demand for home care as people with more complex care packages were supported to live at home rather than in a care home. This put pressure on supply and capacity in some areas of the county at "peak call" times. Where necessary, support was provided by the in-house Support @Home Service as a short-term measure where there was a lack of capacity in the independent sector. This helped avoid significant delays to care being delivered.
- 3.24 For placements into residential care, the amber status reflected limited capacity across residential and dementia residential care capacity due to some homes not accepting admissions and delays by the NHS to test patients prior to discharge and before admitting them from the community. There was a limited number of available short-term respite beds, in particular for people with dementia. The position reflected the limited capacity across the nursing care sector and in particular dementia nursing.

The impact on carers needing support

- 3.25 The pandemic had a considerable impact on most carers. Some people and their carers decided to decline services because of concerns about infection. As the pandemic continued, the incidence of this decreased, resulting in more people asking for help and less reluctance to reduce the level of care and support at home.
- 3.26 What we were able to do was to ensure a range of support to carers, including one-to-one telephone support to carers throughout the pandemic, virtual support activities such as social events, learning events. and opportunities to improve mental and physical wellbeing. Project staff have also delivered various packs with at-home activities including art and wellness packs.
- 3.27 The “Happy @ Home” grant allowed carers to apply for up to £300 for items to boost their wellbeing at home. This proved extremely popular. Personal protective equipment was also distributed for carers to use.
- 3.28 The Carers Counselling service experienced high demand, and successfully obtained short-term additional funding until the end of March 2021 to help to reduce the waiting list.
- 3.29 A pilot project launched in 2020 to improve the uptake of, and process for, carer assessments, called “Carer Conversations” was audited, highlighting excellent practice, and identifying areas of further work.

The impact on children needing support

- 3.30 Children’s Services, the (School) Attendance & Wellbeing Service and individual schools kept in touch with the most vulnerable children and families. The Council’s education psychologists and specialist teachers provided support, advice and guidance to individuals and families who needed it to help cope with what were stressful and uncertain times.
- 3.31 The aim was to resume the full range of services as soon as practically possible. Plans were made to review safeguarding issues with more direct contact with children, families, and adults, review the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children, young people, adults, and families, complete court work and review care and support plans..
- 3.32 In summary, statistics for the year show the increased demand on services but, at the same time and despite the restrictions and challenges of the pandemic, encouraging progress in meeting the needs of children and young people.
- 3.33 Children’s Services experienced a 10% increase in the number of contacts in the previous year (17,782). Of these, 786 related to a safeguarding issue.
- 3.34 At the start of the reporting period covered by this report, 31 March 2020, there were 717 children in the county who were being looked after. By the end of the reporting period, on 31 March 2021, the number had fallen to 695; a 3% decrease.
- 3.35 The rate in children looked after per 10,000 population has fallen from 143.1 to 138.7. Over the course of the year, there was a 17% decrease in the number of children who became looked after during the year. There was a 25% increase in the number of children looked after who left care, and a 20% increase in the number of care leavers requiring support.
- 3.36 Over the year, 592 children were added to the Child Protection Register, which is a small reduction (1%) from the previous year. The number of children on the register at the start of

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the reporting period was 463. While the number increased during the year, by the end of March this year it had fallen to 425; an 8% decrease.

- 3.37 Staff from the Council's Youth Participation and Engagement Services helped in the Council's children's homes, working with children and young people during the working week, evenings, and weekends. This strengthened the working relationships between teams and has informed future service improvements as part of the service's recovery plan. Additional help was also commissioned to increase the capacity of social work in Intensive Intervention Services, which was suffering from vacancies.
- 3.38 Child Protection Conferences and Children Looked After reviews were taking place virtually, attended by partner organisations and family members where possible. Youth Engagement and Participation Service staff remained in secondary schools and the learner pathway was still in place to ensure young people who are struggling to return to school have the support to do so, and to re-engage with school and learning.
- 3.39 Over the course of the year, weekly reports were also submitted to the Welsh Government for Children's services. Similar to adult services, we were asked to assess our ability to operate according to a traffic light system, where we were in green if we had some staff absence, but were managing to provide cover for most services, amber if we had staff absent and some services were moderately affected, but were still able to provide cover. The red status, which didn't occur, was where significant numbers of staff were absent and we were only able to cover critical services.
- 3.40 Apart from a brief period in both June and August when we were in amber, the rest year was assessed as green demonstrating a high degree of resilience in our service delivery even when the pandemic was at its most challenging.

What have we learnt?

- 3.41 We have learnt a lot since March 2020. We know that whilst contingency planning is important, new thinking is needed to ensure that we are agile enough to respond, accepting that it is possible to transform some areas of business almost immediately. We also know that a crisis can bring out the best in people, strengthening joint working / team working, a "can do" approach, and an "all in this together" philosophy.
- 3.42 We have had to make decisions and act quickly. We know that priority setting is vital to deploying resources effectively, particularly when having to match limited capacity to needs, but with the ability to flex to manage uncertainty, and recognising that leadership is about being prepared to allow risks to be taken. We should never underestimate the importance of keeping in touch with service users and carers to help ensure they receive the help they need.
- 3.43 Throughout the pandemic both Adult Services and Children's Services continued to deliver against their statutory duties. The period however has shown us what we can do over and above merely adhering to those duties.
- 3.44 Although the pandemic has had so many negative impacts, the experience has generated considerable learning about ways of working, organisational culture, and ability to change and adapt. Equally if not more important, a spotlight has been shone on the vital role social care plays in helping people to live safely and as independently as possible. Hopefully, this will result in greater recognition and appreciation of the value of staff who deliver care with rewards to strengthen the sector and its workforce.

4. How are people shaping our services?

- 4.1 Reaching out to people who use our services and to the public more widely to get their views on the needs of people and on future services and support is a central to the way we work. The restrictions imposed during the pandemic have made it challenging to do this over the last year.
- 4.2 Within Social Services, and across the Council, huge efforts were made to keep in touch with people through information and awareness raising, social media, surveys, and feedback questionnaires. Inevitably, there were fewer face to face meetings during this year, but they did take place when necessary for people's wellbeing or to ensure their safeguarding. We have also made considerable use of personal telephone contacts and virtual meetings over the internet.

What did we plan to do in 2020-21?

- 4.3 We said we would:
 - Develop and fully implement, across all Service Areas, a systematic and collaborative process for capturing the views of service users and their families about the impact of our support and services and inform service development and change.
 - Continue to promote engagement with children and young people and partner agencies to ensure coproduction and that the voice of the child is heard including developing an action plan to meet the needs of young people identified within the "Your Voice" survey.

Capturing the views of those who use our services and their families

- 4.4 We capture feedback on our services in different ways. They include the use of feedback forms and surveys to measure the quality of our services and to determine what outcomes we achieve for people to meet their care and support needs. Letters received with compliments or complaints are also recorded, with the latter being reviewed to identify what might be done to further improve our services. Our services are also regulated and are therefore subject to inspection by the Regulator, the Care Inspectorate Wales.
- 4.5 During Autumn 2020, as part of the development of our Learning Disability Transformation Programme, we engaged people with a learning disability and their family and carers along with social work and care staff and our commissioned providers to learn from their experiences through the pandemic and to explore their perspectives on current and future service delivery offers, in particular day opportunities. This engagement activity will be built upon and inform development of learning disability service in 2021/22
- 4.6 In September 2020, we undertook a "Parenting through Covid-19" survey. It sought to establish what support families may need as a direct result of the pandemic. The survey was widely circulated via our partner organisations and digital platforms. The findings informed our work to re-commission parenting services from September 2021.
- 4.7 Informal surveys via social media platforms and well as discussions on a one-to-one basis during case work has helped to capture their views of the impact of the pandemic on children and young people, their families and wider community.
- 4.8 Our Youth Engagement and Participation Service provided opportunities for young people to complete several consultation activities during the pandemic. These included informal surveys and formal consultation events. A formal consultation was rolled out in June 2020 to capture the views of young people on the support offered by the service throughout the lockdown. We also promoted the Children's Commissioner for Wales' "Coronavirus and Me" All-Wales surveys in June 2020 and February 2021.

- 4.9 One example of our work to capture feedback from users of services and the public more generally included online and offline consultation with more than 1,000 people (n=1,044). Respondents were asked to state which services they would want to protect from an increase in fees and charges in 2021-22. Most respondents (55%) felt charges for adult social care non-residential care services should be one of the services for which fees and charges should be frozen. Respondents were also provided with a list of Council services and asked to choose which services should be protected and prioritised for any additional resources in 2021-22. The top 3 services that respondents wanted to protect and prioritise were: Children's Social Care Services (95.5%); Schools (92.1%); Public Health (91.9%).

Engaging with children and young people

- 4.10 The regular meetings of our "Your Voice" survey sub-groups as part of action to take forward the findings of the 2018 survey were suspended because of the pandemic. The work was able to resume in summer 2020. To reduce duplication during a period of uncertainty, the sub-groups were subsumed into the established Youth Support Services Strategy sub-groups, and an action plan covering both. The groups meet quarterly, and work is underway across all domains to ensure the pre-identified and emerging needs of young people are being met.
- 4.11 We have explored the development of a mobile phone application to connect social care teams and care experienced young people who are aged 16 and over. A scoping exercise has been commissioned to establish the potential benefits and how it could be used. Social care staff and care experienced young people were involved in interviews and discussions to inform a report for the region. The findings of the report will inform the next steps.
- 4.12 Informal engagement with young people was conducted during street-based sessions across the county borough. Staff engaged with young people they met on the streets, asking them what opportunities, provision, and activities they would like to see in their local area once lockdown restrictions have eased. The discussions have informed the service's recovery plan for the coming year.

How people have influenced our decisions

- 4.13 The extensive public consultation we undertook on the future of our eleven Council-run residential care homes is a good example of us listening to people's views. Our original proposal was the keep seven of the homes open, refocusing them on meeting complex needs (including dementia), residential reablement and respite care. We proposed to decommission four homes.
- 4.14 As a result of feedback received during our engagement and consultation activities, we decided to keep two more homes open: Garth Olwg in Church Village and Ystradfechan in Treorchy. They will also be refocused to help meet increasing demands for care and support for people with complex needs, including dementia, for respite care to help carers, and to allow residential reablement.

What do people think of our services?













- 4.15 We analyse the findings of reviews, evaluations, the results of surveys, the views expressed in consultations and people's comments when they contact us with complaints or to compliment us and use the information to further improve the services we deliver. Both our Adults Services and Children's Services teams undertake self-assessment exercises. These assessments ensure we monitor what we are achieving and where we can improve.
- 4.16 The following table provides the results of this year's survey for Adult Services, comparing data over the last five years. The survey was based on a sample of adults aged 18 and over who

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had a care and support plan on the day the sample was drawn. It measures things which people tell us are important to them.

Table 1: Key service quality measures, Adult Services, 2017-18 to 2020-21

(%)

	Statement	2017 - 2018	2018 - 2019	2019 - 2020	2020 - 2021	Change this year/last
1	I live in a home that supports my wellbeing	89	93	92	94	
2	I can do the things that are important to me	50	77	85	86	
3	I feel a part of my community	52	69	77	74	
4	I am happy with support from my family, friends, neighbours	88	97	96	93	
5	I feel safe	79	94	95	92	
6	I know who to contact about my care and support	79	83	87	85	
7	I have received the right information or advice when I needed it	75	91	92	92	
8	I have been actively involved in discussions about how my care and support was provided	78	90	88	92	
9	I was able to communicate in my preferred language	94	95	95	96	
10	I was treated with dignity and respect	91	97	99	98	
11	I am happy with the care and support I have received	84	97	97	96	
12	It was my choice to live in a residential care home	60	56	57	61	

Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council














Note: Percentages based on adults who answered each question with "Yes" or "Sometimes". Figures have been rounded.

4.17 In five of the measures, there were slight improvements from last year. In six of the measures, the survey results show a slight reduction in the levels of confidence. This could well be linked to peoples' experiences of the pandemic, feeling less safe and less connected to their community and families/neighbours.

4.18 The following table provides the results of this year's survey for Children's Services and those from the four previous years. The survey was based on children who had a care and support plan on the day the sample was drawn.

Table 2: Key service quality measures, Children’s Services, 2017-18 to 2020-21

(%)

	Statement	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	Change this year/last
1	I live in a home where I am happy	99	98	97	98	
2	I am happy with the people I live with	99	99	97	100	
3	I can do the things I like to do	100	96	96	97	
4	I feel I belong in the area where I live	92	92	92	94	
5	I am happy with my family, friends, and neighbours	97	98	95	98	
6	I feel safe	99	96	97	97	
7	I know who to speak to about my care and support	94	94	95	94	
8	I have had the right information or advice when I needed it	92	89	90	95	
9	My views about my care and support have been listened to	98	93	92	93	
10	I have been able to use my everyday language	99	98	98	99	
11	I was treated with respect	98	98	98	97	
12	I am happy with the care and support I have had	97	96	97	97	
13	I have had advice, help and support that will prepare me for adulthood (16 and 17 year-olds only)	86	90	77	82	

Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Note: Percentages based on children who answered each question with “Yes” or “Sometimes”. Figures have been rounded.

4.19 Of the thirteen service quality measures, performance was better this year in nine and slightly lower this year in two. In the context of the challenges of a pandemic when children and young people would have had their education, family and social lives affected, these results show some signs of encouragement.

4.20 More than 4 out of 5 parents (84%) said they had been actively involved in all decisions about how their child’s/children’s care and support was provided, maintaining last year’s performance which was also 84%.

4.21 In 2020-21, 37 carers responded to our questionnaire. The key highlights were:

- 20 (54%) said they were able to live in a home that best supported their well-being

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- 8 (22%) said that they could do the things that are important to them whereas 14 (38%) said that this was true sometimes

Complaints and compliments

4.22 Where, occasionally, we have not been able to meet people’s expectations, we use the feedback to learn what we can do better. Where necessary, we make changes to do this. The following table summarises the number of complaints and compliments received this year and in the four previous years.

Table 3: Number of complaints and compliments received, Adult Services and Children’s Services, 2016-17 to 2020-21

		2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Adult Services	No, of complaints received	82	51	56	54	25
	No, of compliments received	102	102	124	93	91
Children’s Services	No, of complaints received	106	114	32	59	29
	No, of compliments received	62	41	39	59	93
Total	No. of complaints received	188	165	88	113	54
	No. of compliments received	164	143	163	152	184

Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

4.23 This year saw the lowest number of complaints in the last 5 years and the highest number of compliments. Given the challenges of maintaining services and delivering new support during the pandemic and the impact it has had on residents, this is encouraging. It is, without doubt, a reflection on the huge efforts by staff from across the Council.

Welsh language

4.24 In 2011, the last Census for which results are available, nearly 28,000 people who live in the county speak Welsh, which is slightly more than 1 in 10 of the population. The results of this year’s Census will, in due course, reveal whether this has changed and if so, to what extent. However, irrespective of the actual number, we are committed to giving people the opportunity to receive services and services funded by us in Welsh. In 2021 when the results of the Census are available, we will further consider steps to enhance this.

4.25 As an example of our current commitment, this year, an active offer to provide the service in Welsh was made in 99.9% of the 7,010 new assessments of care and support needs for adults; with the offer accepted in 123 cases. For assessments of adult carers’ needs, the offer was made in each of the 374 cases.

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4.26 Our approach reflects the Welsh Language Standards and the Welsh Government's "Follow-on Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health and Social Services." The Council's tender and contract processes list all the applicable Welsh Language Standards required of services we commission, which ensures the Welsh Language is an integral part of commissioning. Monitoring officers ensure compliance as part of our monitoring of independently run care homes.

5. Promoting and improving the wellbeing of people we help

- 5.1 In addition to the care and support we provide from our own services, we work closely with many other organisations to help vulnerable children, young people, adults, and families. Our goal is to meet their care and support needs and to help them to improve their wellbeing.
- 5.2 Our work is framed by action set out in the Cwm Taf Regional Plan 2018-23ⁱⁱ, which identifies what we need to do to meet the needs of our population. Aside from the challenges of helping people through the pandemic, which were highlighted earlier in this report, we now face many challenges in meeting people's ongoing needs. There is increasing demand for our services, and we expect further increases in future. We are continuing to see people who need help with more complex needs.
- 5.3 This section of the report summarises action taken over the course of the year to deliver services and support and on what we planned to do this year to improve how we help meet people's needs. It also reflects some adjustments to service delivery considering restrictions imposed to manage the pandemic.

(a) Working with people to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve

What did we plan to do in 2020-21?

- 5.4 We said we would:
 - Review the delivery of integrated services for children, young people and families delivered by the Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service.
 - Improve access to information, advice and assistance provision for children, young people and families within local communities.
 - Implement the new universal needs-based Early Years delivery model in RCT.
 - Develop a model of support for Kinship Carers.

How far did we succeed and what difference did we make?

Reviewing the delivery of integrated services

- 5.5 Our integrated Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service was proactive in responding effectively to the challenges of the pandemic. New delivery methods of, and pathways for, delivering support were developed. The creation of the Wellbeing Pathway for Children and Young People alongside schools and the Attendance and Wellbeing Service is a good example. It has resulted in a single pathway to support children and young people, and families with the return to school.
- 5.6 Similar ways of using an integrated approach were developed during the lockdown to help identify vulnerable children and families who were not maintaining contact with their school(s). Our use of Capita One system across the service facilitated good communication across teams when families are receiving a package of interventions from different sources. Other developments include virtual play sessions by the Children and Young People's Service in response to needs identified by the Resilient Families Service.

- 5.7 The Welsh Government's White Paper which seeks to strengthen regional partnership working emphasises the importance of more work to deliver more integrated services. This agenda will continue develop as strategic partners explore how the needs of adults, children and carers can be met by pulling together. Ensuring our staff can share the experience of joint working will be important along with those areas of improvement we are committed to, such as the development of community services that support people to live longer in their own homes.

Improving access to support

- 5.8 Improving young people's access to information, advice, and guidance was set as one of the priorities for the year. The pandemic meant we needed to accelerate our work and introduce developments faster than initially planned. During the first national lockdown, we undertook a rapid transformation of the way we delivered services. To do this required the active engagement of staff across the service to effect cultural change. The work was supported by managers who were confident to let staff take calculated risks in effecting the changes. We focused on those who use our services, assessing the needs and requirements of young people who were confined to their homes. This information was then used to reallocate resources and to develop contingency plans.
- 5.9 Our previous work on service innovation, and the confidence of our staff in understanding the needs of young people, resulted in a virtual youth work offer being available to young people within 72 hours of the lockdown commencing. The realigned, online, offer was a significant increase in the volume of information, advice, and guidance, as well as universal activities available to young people via the website (www.wicid.tv) and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube). The offer was delivered by our Youth Engagement and Participation Service with significant contributions from our partners, including sexual health teams, substance misuse organisations, and commissioned providers.
- 5.10 The service became available 24 hours a day every day on our website. It became a "one stop shop" for all the information a young person may need, with signposting to other sites where necessary. In addition, interactive issue-based support was offered through chat service, zoom sessions, Instagram, and Facebook Live sessions. With the help of professional teams and partners, information online underwent a radical overhaul. This resulted in up-to-date support spanning all the issues young people may have been experiencing in lockdown. Our monitoring data shows significant levels of online engagement with users in addition to the 1:1 support for over 1,000 young people delivered remotely.
- 5.11 Our Resilient Families Service Parenting Team used innovative ways to support families across the county. Parenting, and the Talk and Play Team, posted weekly videos on the Family Information Service Facebook pages. These pages were viewed far and wide. Between April and September, a wide range of video materials were filmed and posted to our Family Information Service Facebook page. They included 38 parenting support videos and 2 pre-recorded parenting programmes. Other videos included 27 to help parents with a child's early language, 35 story time videos and 15 song time videos. Between them, they had a combined total of nearly 83,000 views.
- 5.12 The level of engagement highlighted the need for the Resilient Families Service to develop its own website to ensure the online presence remains as interactive and accessible as possible. The Parenting Team has also adapted pilot programmes to deliver these online with small groups of parents. These proved successful and have been rolled out to cover broader parenting programmes. The team also linked with community groups such as Valley Kids and CBS to provide regular weekly online support sessions.

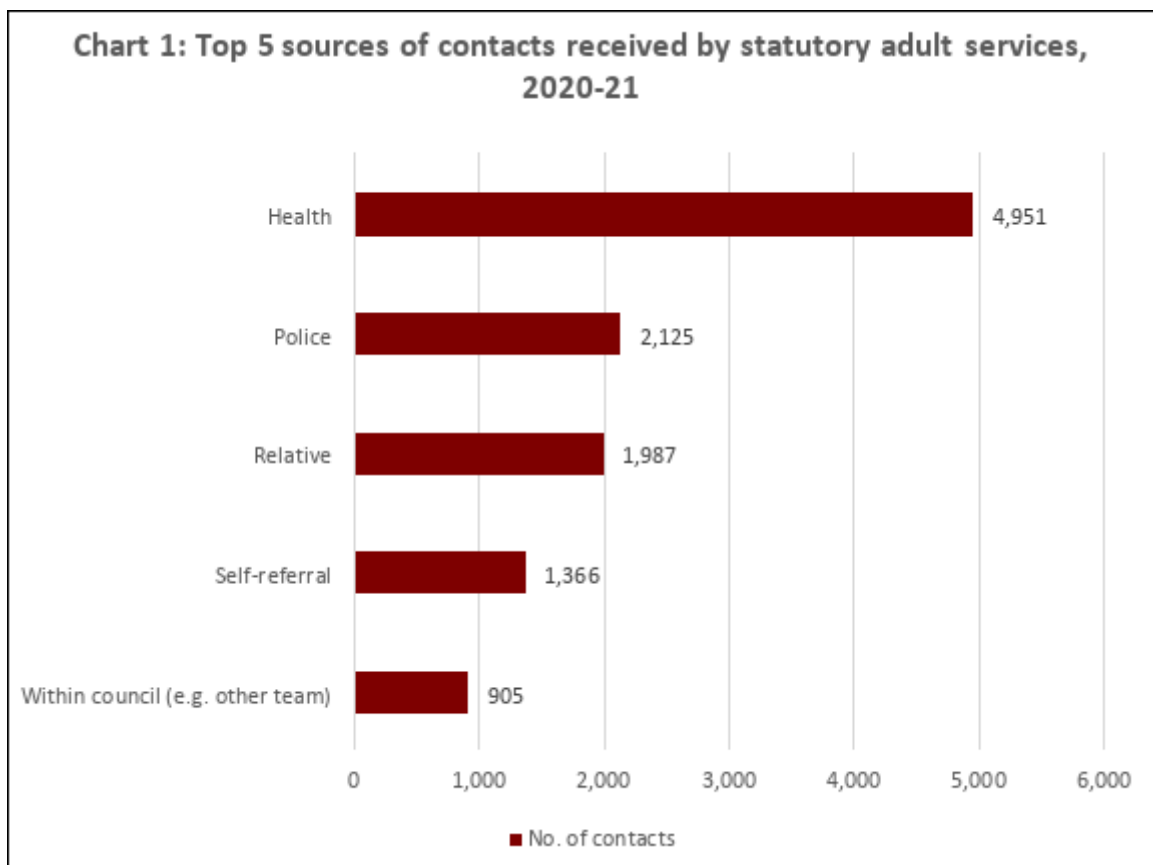
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New Early Years delivery model

- 5.13 The new needs-based delivery model for Early Years services, for those aged 0-7 years, is a joint pilot project by the Welsh Government and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board. It is exploring how services might be reconfigured within existing budgets to achieve more integration and effective transition between services. It is also aiming for better coordination, planning, and commissioning of services.
- 5.14 Unfortunately, the pandemic delayed the start of the Resilience and Wellbeing Health programme, which is the final part of the model to be implemented, until the beginning of October. An external evaluation of the formative stages of the project has been commissioned and a report is expected in May 2021.

Information, Advice and Assistance Services for adults

- 5.15 Adult Services' First Response Service has been fully operational throughout the pandemic, along with Adult Services' Single Point of Access (SPA) - our Information, Advice and Assistance Service. Maintaining and enhancing this core function prevented any disruption to this service for Rhondda Cynon Taf residents and provided a single point of contact for professionals.
- 5.16 During the year, we received 12,176 contacts for adult services. The top five sources of referral can be seen in the following chart.



Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

- 5.17 We provided 9,369 adults with information, advice, and assistance.
- 5.18 We completed 7,010 new assessments of care and support needs for adults.

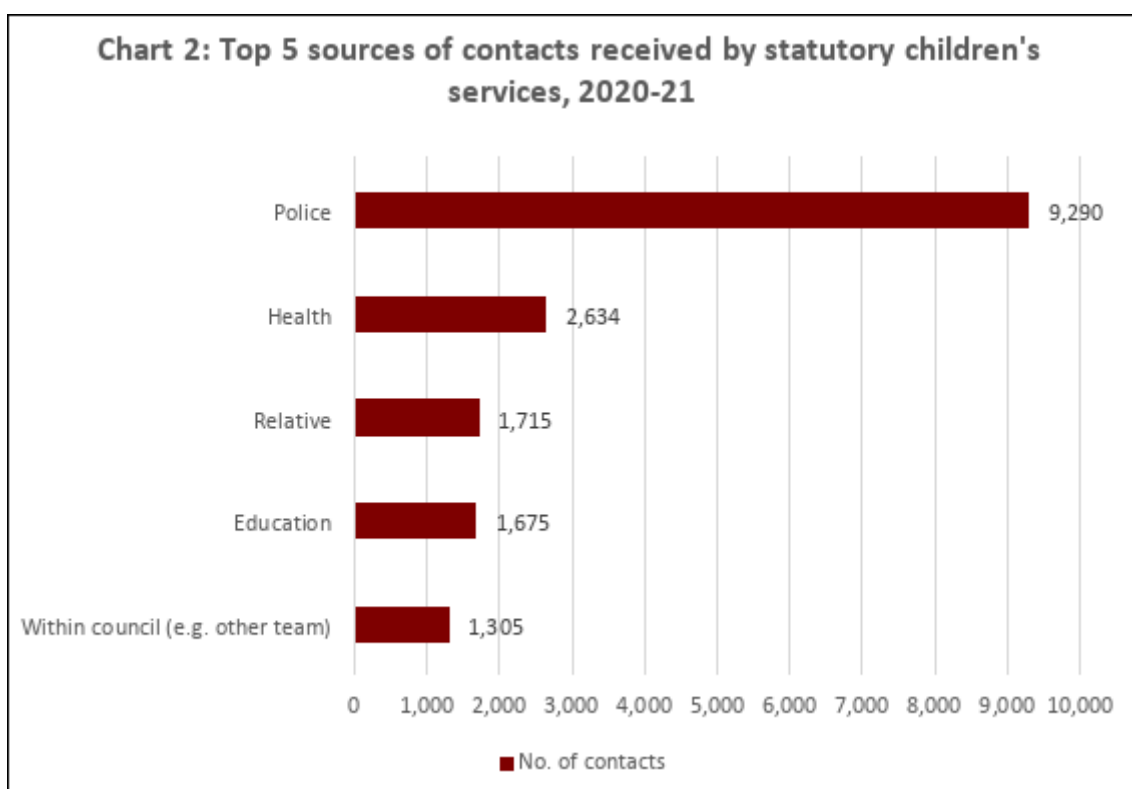
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5.19 During the year, 2,983 care and support plans were reviewed. This is lower than the 3,787 reviewed the previous year. Of all reviews in 2020-21, 35% were completed within an agreed timescale, which is a slight increase on the figure of 32% in 2019-20.

5.20 We started 1,473 services for adults during the year, the majority of which (1,033) were for domiciliary care. Of the remainder, 433 were for residential care and 7 for day care services.

Information, Advice and Assistance Services for children and young people

5.21 During the year, we received 19,489 contacts with children's social services, a 10% increase on the number of contacts in the previous year (17,782). In 98% of cases, a decision on the need for advice or assistance was made by the end of the next working day. The top five sources of referral can be seen in the following chart.



Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

5.22 We provided information, advice, or assistance to 8,110 children and families. This compares to 5,261 the previous year and 5,670 in 2018-19. This is an increase of 54% over the total provided in the previous year.

5.23 Over the course of the year, 4,987 new assessments were undertaken. In 18% of cases, the needs could only be met by way of a care and support plan. In most cases (64%), the individual's needs could be met by other means while in the remaining 18% of cases, it was determined there were not eligible needs to meet.

5.24 The number of children with a care and support plan on 31 March 2021 was 1,609.

5.25 A review of 5,213 children's care and support plans and provision of financial support were due during the year. Of these, 1,837 were for children looked after and 1,136 were child protection cases. We completed 83% of all reviews due within the statutory timescales.

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Supporting carers

5.26 Carers of all ages play a vital role. Their own wellbeing is also important and sometimes they too need to be supported in what they do. We are committed to doing as much as we can to help. Our priorities include:

- Identifying carers of all ages and recognising the vital contribution they make to looking after people who need support.
- Providing up to date, relevant, and timely information, advice and assistance to all carers.
- Providing support to meet the needs of all carers.
- Giving carers a voice, with more choice and control over their lives.

5.27 Back in June 2019, Care Inspectorate Wales identified the following priorities for improvement:

- To consistently recognise carers' roles and to ensure the voice of the carer is heard; with improved support for carers tailored to enable them to achieve their own wellbeing outcomes.
- Ensure teams working with people with longer term needs satisfactorily manage the volume of work and ensure people's needs are appropriately reviewed.

5.28 In response, we appointed a strategic lead for carers. This means responsibility for all carers and related issues, including young carers, young adult carers and adult carers, now sits under one person, which has enabled us to bring about a more co-ordinated approach to supporting carers. Our staff now work flexibly across all the services we provide for carers.

5.29 In Adult Services, our new "Carers Conversation", which we developed to improve our engagement with carers and what we offer, became more important during the pandemic because carers became even more isolated. An improved dialogue has proved effective at supporting them, leading to better conversations, an uptake in assessments, increased support, and improved outcomes. We have kept in touch with more than 1,500 carers via a newsletter which has provided them with Covid-19 related advice and information, including an offer of PPE in the earlier stages of the pandemic. We also launched a small grant programme to support carers. This has proved successful, and we are planning to continue it in future years.

5.30 During the year, we received 193 referrals for information, advice, and assistance for adult carers, either self-referrals or from professionals making the referral on behalf of them.

5.31 There were 374 needs assessment for carers over the course of the year, which is an increase of 14% on the figure of 328 undertaken the previous year. Of the assessments made, 56 were met with a care and support plan. The needs of 229 carers could be met by other means and in 89 cases, the assessments determined there were no needs to meet.

5.32 During the year, 67 care and support plans for adult carers were due for review, of which 31% were reviewed within the statutory timescales to which we work.

Supporting Kinship Carers

5.33 Our planned model of support is not yet been implemented but the service is continuing to work towards this. A consultation exercise has been undertaken with kinship carers in the county to inform the approach and the model will be developed based on the priorities that are identified by the carers.

Supporting young carers

- 5.34 Helping young carers is also a key priority. We have a dedicated Young Carer Assessor in the Information, Advice and Assistance function of Children's Services. This helps ensure we meet our statutory obligations for the assessment and monitoring of young carers. We have also achieved greater integration between our carers team and the services of Action for Children, which we commissioned specifically to support young carers. We also have a dedicated support worker for young adult carers aged 18-25.
- 5.35 Since the first lockdown, the Action for Children service was based primarily on virtual support. However, individual face-to-face support continued to be provided for the most vulnerable young carers. In between lockdowns, group sessions were able to restart, providing a break away from home for some young people. Every month since March 2020, Action for Children posted to young carers different packages, including games, equipment, treats and gifts to help them through what were difficult times.
- 5.36 During the year, we received 76 referrals for young carers or from professionals making the contact on their behalf. We provided information, advice, and assistance in 70 cases.
- 5.37 We undertake assessments of young carer's needs and, where necessary, prepare care and support plans. After plans have been put in place, we are also required to undertake reviews of existing plans within a set timescale. The pandemic had a significant impact. Assessments had to be completed over the telephone. This is not ideal as it hampered our efforts to form a working relationship with the family, but it did enable immediate needs to be identified and support to be provided or referrals made. During the year, we undertook 66 assessments of the need for support for young carers. This is less than the 87 undertaken the previous year. Of these, 59% resulted in the preparation of a care and support plan. This compares with 71% in 2019-20.
- 5.38 During the year, 117 care and support plans and support plans for young carers were due to be reviewed during the year, of which 97% were reviewed within statutory timescales. Due to pandemic restrictions, reviews were completed by telephone and enabled our staff to carry out welfare checks and to identify any support needed.

Resilient Families Service

- 5.39 Our Resilient Families Programme responds to people's needs by delivering support as early as possible after the need has been identified. Our Assessment Brokerage and Review Team undertakes assessments of families referred, creating an individual plan for each family. It also reviews the plan to ensure the work has been done. Working in partnership with other organisations, it aims to resolve problems without the need for statutory services.
- 5.40 Our Families Plus Team works with families where the children are at the edge of needing formal, statutory, care. Intensive support is provided to reduce the level of risk within the family. We have another specialist team which works with any family where the learning, physical or neuro-developmental needs of a child is impacting on family life. Our Parenting Support Team focuses on the development of early language and communication skills through play as well as helping families to develop their parenting skills to manage their children's needs in a productive and positive way.
- 5.41 When the pandemic hit, we reconfigured the service. Face to face contacts were restricted to families at highest risk. This was done using a risk assessment system based on needs; for example, families who needed continual support, those who needed some support and periodic contact to check how they were, which could be done virtually, and families for whom support could be suspended temporarily. The latter were earmarked for contact when

lockdown was lifted. Some families said they did not want virtual support and opted to wait for restrictions to be lifted. As the lockdown extended, families' needs escalated. We reviewed our risk assessments of families fortnightly. Where face to face contact was necessary, steps were taken to protect the health of families, children, and our staff.

- 5.42 Before the pandemic, two Community Hubs were operating in the county with several others in development. The Resilient Families Service had established a presence in the Community Hubs, trialing drop-in sessions and information for families to provide information advice and assistance. These were also trialed in local schools to highlight the service and what it can provide. This activity had to stop during the first lock down when face to face contact ceased and the operation of Community Hubs was suspended.
- 5.43 In response to the pandemic, seven Community Resilience Hubs were set up by the Council in March 2020 to co-ordinate support for the most vulnerable individuals and families including those required to shield during the pandemic. The Resilient Families Service and the Youth Engagement and Participation Service were key partners in setting up this new support. The Resilient Families Service modified its operations to link with the Hubs to help deliver food parcels, activity packs, and to help families with other needs, such as collecting prescriptions. The service also linked with community groups to provide families with iPads for home-schooling and Christmas presents. During 2020-21, our community resilience service worked through 3,962 cases and closed 3,865 (97.5%).
- 5.44 Plans to expand the number of venues used for community support were affected by the pandemic and led us to focus on maintaining contact with existing venues. For much of the year, community-based support was not possible. However, most families identified as having high needs received interventions online. Where possible, opportunities were provided for families in communities where they live after involvement with the service. The community support element of the service held 131 community-based sessions and 518 one to one support sessions. The total number of contacts with the team was 1,476, with 129 families accessing the Resilient Families' Service. Four young carers were also supported.

Case Study – Resilient Families Service

The service received a family referral from our Children's Services. The mother, who was isolated from family, was struggling to cope with her son, for whom she was the sole carer. Her mental health was affecting her emotional wellbeing and had led to self-harm. She was struggling with routines and setting boundaries for her son. An intervention worker was allocated to help the mother to build her parenting skills. Moving closer to her family was also a priority for her.

Help was given to develop the mother's confidence and self-esteem and to reduce her social isolation. She was referred to New Pathways, which supports people with mental health issues. She was also put in touch with the local Councillor for the area where she has support networks to support a potential move. The support worker secured 15 hours of pre-school education placement to give the mother a break, and worked with her to reduce anxieties and the trigger points (e.g. leaving the house, crowds) and how she could overcome them. Action was also taken, amongst other things, to provide health visitor support and to promote her son's development.

Over the weeks, the mother left her home more often, still feeling anxious on times but not as much as before. She is continuing to do the daily living tasks such as shopping and daily recreational activities with her son by going to the local park and for walks. She is very happy with the support received. She said that when she received a call from the intervention worker, she would smile, knowing that she was receiving appropriate help and was being listened to. She felt she had built enough resilience to end her involvement with the service but if needed, will re-engage.

Engaging with Children Looked After

- 5.45 The National Advocacy Framework ensures all children and young people have access to, and an “active offer” of, advocacy. This ensures they know when and why decisions are made about their care and how to get help in making sure professionals know their wishes and feelings and take account of them in decision making.
- 5.46 We are required to conduct a review meeting within 28 days of a child becoming looked after or after having an unplanned change of placement, and further reviews after 3 and 6 months. There are also requirements for children who receive a series of short breaks. Family plans, which are prepared by our Integrated Family Support Service are held three times per year.
- 5.47 The pandemic changed the way the advocacy service worked. Most advocacy “visits” were conducted virtually by telephone or video calls. This caused relatively little disruption to the older young people as this happened before Covid and many prefer this form of communication. It was more difficult for children under 8 years of age.
- 5.48 The advocacy provider Tros Gynnal reported that 61 “active offer” referrals were received during the year; 52 meetings took place, and 42 young people were helped with issues-based advocacy by an independent professional advocate. Most of the active offers (47) were to children on the child protection register. Every young person referred for an active offer was contacted within 48 hours. Just under 9 out of 10 (87%) were seen within 5 working days.
- 5.49 In all, 132 children and young people were referred for issues-based advocacy in 2020-21, 80 of whom were first time users of the service. 60 were children looked after and 56 were on the child protection register. Self-referral was most frequently the means of accessing the service (76) followed by social services (38) and Independent Reviewing Officers (12), who are appointed for every child in care.

Direct Payments

- 5.50 Direct payments give people an opportunity to have more choice, control and independence in managing their own care and support needs. Our role is to promote Direct Payments to help people to take up the option of managing their own arrangements. It doesn't work for everyone, but we have seen a steady growth in the number of people using this option over the last few years.
- 5.51 The following table shows the progress we have made in supporting the uptake of Direct Payments over the past five years:

Table 4: Take-up of Direct Payments, RCT, 2016-17 to 2020-21

(number)

Children's Services		Adult Services	
2016-17	127	2016-17	339
2017-18	134	2017-18	358
2018-19	154	2018-19	373
2019-20	172	2019-20	402
2020-21	167	2020-21	400

Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

- 5.52 The table shows the take up of direct payments for both adults and children in 2020-21 was almost the same as that in the previous year. The percentage of children with a care and support plan on 31 March 2021 where needs are met via Direct Payment (167) is 10.4% of all children with a care and support plan. The percentage of adults with a care and support plan on 31 March 2021 where needs are met via Direct Payment (400) is 10.2%.
- 5.53 Adult Services' First Response Service has been fully operational throughout the pandemic, along with Adult Services' Single Point of Access (SPA) - our Information, Advice and Assistance Service. Maintaining and enhancing this core function prevented any disruption to this service for Rhondda Cynon Taf residents and provided a single point of contact for professionals.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

- Continuously evaluate and develop our early help service
- Strengthen family support services that safely prevent entries to care
- Continue to embed the new carers conversation approach to ensure the support offered to unpaid carers to maintain their caring role and quality of life is personalised to individual need
- Continue to empower more people to commission their own care and support through greater promotion of direct payments
- Further enhance commissioning and delivery models to improve access to, and support engagement in, early intervention and prevention services for children and young people and families to reduce the demand for statutory services.

(b) Working with people and partners to protect and promote people's physical and mental health and emotional well-being

What did we plan to do in 2020-21?

5.54 In 2020-21, we said we would:

- Continue to support children into adulthood, focusing on reducing the figures for year 11, 12, and 13 school leavers not in education, employment, or training by reviewing the joint working arrangements between the Youth Engagement and Participation Service, schools, education data team, Careers Wales, and training providers.

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- Implement a new model of Community Mental Health Services

How far did we succeed and what difference did we make?

Supporting independent living

- 5.55 Funding from the Welsh Government enabled us to enhance our telephone-based “Lifeline” service by including a Mobile Responder service. It started in January 2020 just before the pandemic, using assistive technology to provide a 24-hour mobile response service to support people in their own homes by responding to non-medical emergencies. The service has a dedicated team of domiciliary care workers who have received specialist training to support non-injured fallers.
- 5.56 The new model is a whole system approach focused on promoting independence. The Mobile Responders assist in situations such as falls where no injury is reported, but where there is difficulty getting back up, or personal care emergencies, and for welfare checks. It means unnecessary calls to the Welsh Ambulance Service can be avoided as can unnecessary admission to hospital.
- 5.57 The service has provided a critical response to individuals who would otherwise have needed a paramedic or an informal carer to provide support. It has been invaluable in helping to keep people safe at home, particularly during the pandemic. It has also provided families with reassurance their loved ones will receive the right response in the event they trigger their Lifeline.
- 5.58 In 2020-21, the service undertook 5,528 visits after being called out. The team provided a variety of support ranging from assisting with non-injured falls and emergency personal care. They attended 97% of all calls within 1 hour of receiving the request. Their work meant 3,842 calls to emergency services were avoided, thus making a significant contribution to reducing the demand on those already-stretched services.

Case Study – Assistive Technology

Responders attended a property after the “Lifeline” alarm was triggered. There was no verbal response from Mrs A, who is over 80 and who lives alone. Upon arrival, responders found Mrs A, who is also blind, had fallen and was on the bedroom floor.

Responder staff carried out a risk assessment and established Mrs A had not sustained any injuries. They proceeded to help her from the floor using specialist equipment and ensured she was safe and well. Following their observations and discussions with Mrs A’s sister, the responders felt that, because Mrs A was so unsteady on her feet and risked further falls, more regular, ongoing, help was required to help her with performing daily tasks. A referral was made directly to the StayWell@Home2 out of hours access point as the call was completed on a Saturday. They arranged for the Council’s Support @home Rehabilitation service to help Mrs A with the essential tasks during her morning routine, such as washing, dressing and preparing breakfast.

Following this intervention, an ongoing service review was commissioned for Mrs A as it became apparent that she had not been managing for a long period of time. If this had not been addressed by the Mobile Responders with an onward referral, Mrs A may have hit a crisis point, which could have potentially resulted in an admission and a more costly social care intervention.

- 5.59 The service was disrupted by the pandemic, as the initial lockdown restrictions started to ease in July 2020, we were able to resume full implementation of our new “Lifeline+” assistive

technology service. While the first response element of the service continued to operate flexibly throughout the period and provided a level of resilience and reassurance to residents, our plans to introduce the proactive calling element had to be delayed. In early 2021, we started to undertake wellbeing calls to individuals who have previously received an enabling service and who had left the care of Adult Services. The telephone calls check a person's wellbeing and aims to detect any change in the individual's circumstances before a crisis develops. The project is initially working with small numbers and is being developed as a "proof of concept", linked to our use of Assistive Technology as part of regional transformation developments.

Preventing unnecessary admissions to hospital

5.60 Our "Stay well@ Home 2" service, which commenced in early 2020, is designed to meet people's needs at home. It helps to prevent admission to hospital wherever possible thus reducing the demands on the NHS.

5.61 The service continued during the pandemic although there was a marked change in the demand for support, so the service was reduced operationally to reflect this. Full operation, 7 days a week including out of hours, restarted at the beginning of July. We worked with our partners to develop and implement winter plans. The continuing pandemic meant the service was an important means of to reducing unnecessary attendance to hospital by helping people to remain safely at home. This helped reduce demand on the already stretched Royal Glamorgan Hospital and on the Welsh Ambulance Service.

5.62 After assessment the services which might be offered include:

- Domiciliary care.
- Occupational therapy assessments, which can result in provision of equipment, information and advice, and a programme of rehabilitation.
- RCT Vision Products which can deliver equipment, move furniture, or fit a "keysafe" to enable services to access an individual's home.
- Temporary accommodation by way of "Step-up beds" when 24-hour care is required to avoid an admission hospital.
- Home nursing, which can support an individual's health needs in their home.
- The health board's "Your Medication" team which assess pharmaceutical needs.
- Community services such as Age Connect and Care and Repair to support services to be able to keep someone safe at home.

5.63 The model has, via a Single Point of Access, extended the access to services by GPs, District Nurses, and the Welsh Ambulance Service from 5 days a week to 7 days a week, with extended opening hours to 8.00 p.m. The ability to access assessment and rapid response preventative and rehabilitative services helps avoid any unnecessary conveyancing or admissions to hospitals.

Case study – Stay well@Home2 service

The Single Point of Access received a telephone call from a GP asking for a package of support for a 78-year-old who had a urinary tract infection. The person was very unwell and unable to get up and move themselves. The GP was considering admitting the person to hospital. A privately arranged care provider was already involved for the purpose of giving medication. The GP prescribed antibiotics, which it was agreed the care provider would ensure the person would take as required. Within two and half hours of the beginning of the initial phone call with the GP:

- *The necessary assessments were conducted with the GP and with family involvement.*

- *An occupational therapist visited the house. Equipment was provided to supplement the care package and to help to support the person to move about. A mobile commode was also provided.*
- *A package of care and support was arranged for four times a day as requested, which began the same evening.*
- *Vision Products visited the house the same evening to bring the person's bed downstairs.*

The immediate outcome was the person avoided the need to be admitted hospital. At the two-week review, they were able to move around with only the use of a stick and the care package was reduced.

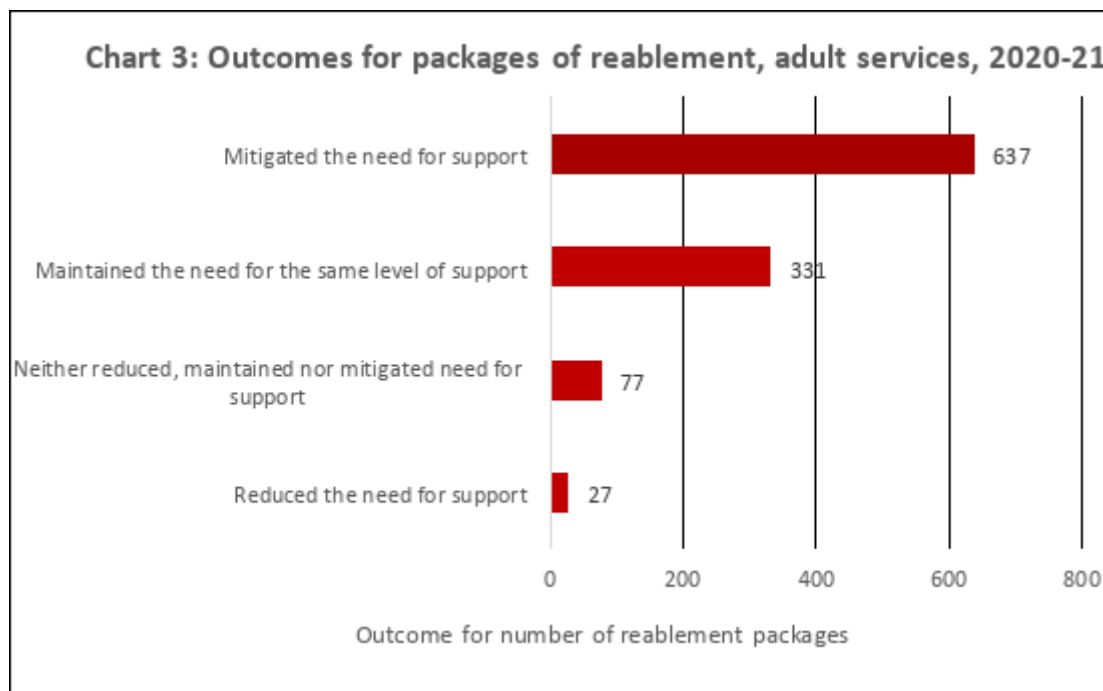
- 5.64 The target for assessing the situation and agreeing a response with the referring professional is within 4 hours from being notified by the Single Point of Access. This year, 94% of referrals achieved the target. Referrals to third sector community services such as Age Connect and Care and Repair are also made 'in hours' to help statutory agencies to be able to keep someone at home. Feedback from professionals and people who have been supported by a service has been positive. 98% of professionals rated the service as "Good" or "Excellent". 90% of people who were supported and 92% of carers also rated the service received as "Good" or "Excellent".
- 5.65 There has been additional pressure on adult services from looking after more poorly residents with complex needs at home to avoid a hospital admission. Pressures have also been experienced because of people being discharged earlier from hospital who would, pre-pandemic, have remained in hospital for a longer treatment time or recovery period. This did result in some waiting lists increasing during the year, although towards the end of the period covered by this report, they did start to reduce. Assessments and delivering services also require more time due to the requirements of PPE and risk assessments. We have seen "urgent" orders for aids and equipment more than double over the past year, and requests for equipment which reflect more complex needs on the part of those who need care and support. We have prioritised those who are most in need.

Delayed transfers of care

- 5.66 We have continued to work closely with the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board to reduce delays in people being discharged from hospital. It remains one of our priorities.
- 5.67 At the start of the period covered by this report, the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board asked the Council to create additional temporary step-down recovery beds to support an anticipated surge in patients admitted to hospitals and who then need to be discharged from hospital. In response, we used our Danymynydd home in Porth and our Bronllwyn home in Gelli to create dedicated additional bed capacity. Both these homes had the smallest numbers of residents, which therefore minimised the impact on individuals. After discussion with their families and carers, all residents were moved safely to other homes.
- 5.68 As it turned out, the anticipated surge in demand for additional bed capacity did not materialise and only a small number of admissions were made to Danymynydd and Bronllwyn at the height of the pandemic. Considering this, and after consultation with residents and their families, and in their best interests, the temporary residents living there were transferred to other residential care homes. This enabled us to utilise our limited resources more effectively, providing additional support to our other residential care homes.
- 5.69 The demands for hospital discharge continues to be challenging but since January this year, had stabilised. A number of outbreaks of Covid-19 in care homes had limited placement opportunities, which meant some discharges have taken longer to complete.

Reablement

5.70 Reablement helps people to remain living in their home safely and independently by providing intermediate care and rehabilitation services, specialist equipment and aids and, if necessary, adaptations to the home. It is available to anyone aged 18 and over and is free of charge up to six weeks. If support is needed longer, charges are made in accordance with our policy on charging for non-residential social servicesⁱⁱ.



Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

5.71 Our Reablement Service completed packages of support for 1,072 people over the course of the year, which is almost the same as the 1,058 assisted the previous year. The outcomes of the packages of packages of reablement support completed during the year are highlighted in the above chart.

5.72 During the year, we reviewed and redesign our Support @Home Service to develop a new intake model to support people to return to independence as soon as is appropriate and be less dependent on commissioned services. This new service will be introduced on a phased basis in 2021/22.

Community Mental Health Services

5.73 During year we continued to work in partnership with Health to jointly provide Community Mental Health Services, although our work to implement a new model has been delayed due to the pandemic. The Council's Independent Living Service was re-prioritised to offer support to the Community Mental Health Teams and provide additional support and monitoring for people during Covid-19. During the pandemic we continued to support the development of the Dewi Sant Hospital site to offer joined up Community Mental Health Services and the Taf Community Mental Health Team will move there to in June 2021.

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5.74 We also reviewed and launched a new dedicated hospital Advanced Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP) provision across our CMHT Service and combined rotas to offer more sustainability for community based support across Rhondda and Taf.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

- Develop our therapeutic services for children who are looked after
- The community well-being and resilience service will continue to proactively support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children, young people, families and staff as a result of the pandemic
- Continue to invest in reablement and intermediate care services to enable recovery and independence or prevent escalation of need increasing
- Continue to work with Health to complete review and redesign Community mental health services to provide responsive access and effective mental health support.
- Build on the learning over the Covid-19 pandemic to maximise the continued use of new technology and ensure services are accessible and available to people and their families

(c) Taking steps to protect and safeguard people from abuse, neglect or harm

What did we plan to do in 2020-21?

5.75 In 2020-21, we said we would:

- Implement the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Work Plan.
- Continue to work towards reducing the number of children looked after, reducing numbers as per Welsh Governments reduction initiative.
- Promote engagement with children looked after and partners agencies to ensure co-production and that the voice of children and young people is heard.
- The implementation of Liberty Protection Safeguards.

How far did we succeed and what difference did we make?

5.76 Safeguarding people and reducing the chances of them encountering harm takes a variety of forms. Most of our statutory work in social care is about ensuring that we safeguard the most at risk, children and older people in particular. In addition to those areas which we have detailed in this section of the report we have also been engaged in delivering improvements where people face other forms of harm.

5.77 Prior to the pandemic Rhondda Cynon Taf along with other communities faced a period of heavy rainfall and flooding, leading to some families seeing their homes unfit for habitation and many experienced a risk to their wellbeing.

5.78 The Council's Community Development Team, as part of its work under the Integrated Care Fund, is developing Community Rest Places. This is an emergency response for each electoral ward identifying community leaders and accessible community venues for potential emergency

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rest places in event of floods or other emergencies for refreshments, access to advice and possible overnight stays should home not be habitable. Once finalised this will be used to produce ward level emergency response plans for 2021-22.

Safeguarding

5.79 Where information gathered from a referral of a child or young person or from an assessment results in a social worker suspecting the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm, a strategy discussion meeting is held. The discussion leads to a decision whether to initiate enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. These are commonly known as “Section 47 enquiries” and local authority social workers have a duty to lead them, supported by the police, health professionals, teachers and other relevant professionals as part of a multi-agency approach. The enquiries decide whether action is necessary to safeguard the child and to promote their welfare, and what type of action.

5.80 In 2020-21, a total of 2,134 initial strategy meetings for children were concluded. The number of strategy meetings held during the year which progressed to Section 47 enquiries was 1,517, and 616 of the enquiries completed during the year progressed to an initial Child Protection Conference.

5.81 During the year, Children’s Services undertook the following audits:

- Case audit in our Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service on rates of contact with young people and families, quality of case recordings and compliance with processes, and the step-up and down processes.
- Intensive Intervention Service which considered samples of cases in which children are subject to Section 76 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, and a sample of contacts received via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and our Information, Advice and Assistance Service to understand the increase in proportion of referrals where there was no further action.
- Review of Revocation of Placement Orders
- Case audit in our Edge of Care services on rates of contact with children, young people and families, evidence of recognition of risk, planning, safeguarding action, and evidence that additional support/resources that families/ children might require are being identified and sourced.
- Case audit in our Reviewing Service on observation of staff practice in Initial and Review Conferences and Children Looked After Reviews
- Quality of Care reports have been provided by our Fostering Service in relation to Fostering and Children’s Homes and there has been an audit of placement ends and placement stability between April 2020 and mid-February 2021.
- Case audit in our Youth Offending Service on service user engagement and self-evaluation processes and a Transition Policy which includes a trauma informed approach.
- Case audit in our Emergency Duty Team Service on child protection medicals, strategy meetings and related issues during out of normal working hours.

In addition to the above, several individual audits of children’s cases were undertaken and the organisation that reviewed our children looked after strategy included a deep dive into 70

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cases. Supervision audits were also undertaken to ensure staff support. The team has also contributed to Safeguarding Board Child Practice Reviews and multi-agency audits, such as the management of safeguarding cases involving domestic abuse, and multi-agency review of data identifying an increase in re-registration rate.

Child protection

5.82 During the year, 592 children were added to the Child Protection Register, which is marginally less (-1%) than the 598 added during 2019-20. In the same period, 629 children were removed from the register.

5.83 On 31 March 2021, 426 children in the area were on the Child Protection Register. This compares to 464 a year earlier; a decrease of 8%. This continued a downward trend from 498 in March 2019 and 502 in March 2018.

5.84 Children who were placed on the register during the year for reasons of neglect reduced from 198 in 2019-20 to 188 this year. Those on the register because of emotional abuse increased from 296 in 2020 to 321 this year.

Supporting children looked after

5.85 The total number of children being looked after at 31 March 2021 was 695, a 3% decrease on the total of 717 who were being looked after a year earlier.

5.86 Over the course of the year, 148 children became looked after, a 17% decrease on the previous year (179 in 2019-20).

5.87 The rate in children looked after per 10,000 population has fallen from 143.1 to 138.7.

5.88 During the year, we commissioned the Institute of Public Care to undertake an independent evaluation of our strategy for looked after children. The study work, which reflects our approach to continuous improvement, focused on the way our existing approach was:

- Continuing to improve the edge of care support for families to safely prevent children from needing to become looked after.
- Safely helping children to leave statutory care to go home or into a Special Guardianship Order / adoptive / kinship placement and to support them to thrive there.

5.89 The report made the following recommendations:

- Further exploration, development, and co-production of an evidence-based model of social work practice - a clear strength based and outcome focused model of intervention which is consistent across the service and underpins the "RCT way of working".
- Review and development of pre-birth services, which can prevent separation at or soon after birth.
- Review and overhaul of the support offer to parents who have had children removed from their care and/or are care experienced.
- Exploration and further development of the support offer to children and young people at the edge of care and those returning home, including work towards a more integrated approach with partner agencies.
- Development of a coherent reunification strategy and approach.

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- Strengthened arrangements for supporting kinship and Special Guardianship Order carers.

5.90 We will take forward the findings of report, in the 2021-22 financial year.

Fostering

5.91 Recruiting and retaining foster carers is a challenge and there is a significant financial impact in having to use independent foster agencies. There can also be a risk of instability for the child, who may have to move out of their local area, change schools, friendship groups and support networks. The lack of local authority foster carers can lead to a lack of suitable placements for children who may have a range of complex needs, resulting in poor placement matching and instability. A dedicated recruitment telephone line, in addition to a new regional fostering website and live web-chat function helps potential applicants.

During the year we registered 11 new mainstream RCT foster cares, a much smaller number than what is required but an impressive 45% increase on the prior year's performance.

5.92 Our new training and support package became operational in April 2020, providing a development route for foster carers to increase their skills and knowledge. We have Pioneer Foster Carers who offer peer support and advice to approved foster carers and assist with the skills development of prospective carers. We also have a therapeutic training programme for all foster cares called "Confidence in Care".

Adoption

5.93 During the year, 20 adoption placements were made. This is less than the figure of 27 recorded the previous year, and the figures in the previous two years of 45 and 31, respectively.

Adult Safeguarding

5.94 During the year, the Adult Safeguarding Team received 4,714 reports of an adult suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect. Of these, 2,999 (63.6%) were received directly from the police. The total number of reports received was approximately 7% higher than the 4,378 reports received the previous year. This reversed slightly the declining trend that had been seen in 2018-19 (4,699 reports) and 2017-18 (5,060 reports).

5.95 Of the 4,714 reports 49% were suspected cases of neglect and 28% emotional or psychological abuse.

5.96 Adult protection enquiries were made in 574 cases (12%). In nearly 9 out of ten cases (89%), the enquiry was completed within 7 days. This is a slight improvement on the 2019-20 figure of 84.7%. In 204 cases, it was determined that additional action needed to be taken.

5.97 In Adult Services, a decision was made with our safeguarding partners to suspend routine audit work during the pandemic. However, one audit was undertaken during the year - the "Effectiveness of Adult Safeguarding During Covid", which was a retrospective audit of 30 cases from the first 10 months of the pandemic, with positive outcomes.

Liberty protection safeguards

5.98 We work in partnership with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council on matters relating to the deprivation of people's liberty and the associated safeguards. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the need for virtual assessments, we achieved a greater number of assessments this year than the previous one. However, a waiting list is still in operation, albeit reduced in length. We have allocated additional funding to clear outstanding assessments in readiness

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for the implementation of the new Liberty Protection Safeguards. These will replace the current Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards in England and Wales. The date for implementation, which was October 2021, has been put back to April 2022.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

- Demonstrate progress in implementing the recommendations of the evaluation of our strategy for supporting children looked after.
- Implement the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Annual Plan, specifically to deliver against the three identified strategic priorities:
 - i. Ensure an effective response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – this concerns our approach to multi agency working; completing those task that were delayed due to the pandemic; re-engaging with vulnerable isolated people; learning from the experiences at our care homes and the well-being of our workforce and responding to the expected increase in demand.
 - ii. Strengthening safeguarding links to other partnerships in the region – this recognises safeguarding is everyone’s business and working arrangements need to be strengthened with the Community Safety partnership and Together for Mental Health partnerships in particular
 - iii. An improved approach to public protection concerns – very much our core activity and identifies several key areas for service development – exploitation, modern slavery and trafficking and contextual safeguarding.
- Work with Partners to deliver new Liberty Protection Safeguards from April 2022

(d) Encouraging and supporting people to learn, develop and participate in society

What did we plan to do in 2020-21?

5.99 We said we would:

- Present options for the remodeling of learning disability day services
- Further build a presence of the Resilient Families Service and the Children and Young People Service within the Community Hubs to raise awareness of services on offer and deliver support activities within localities.

How far did we succeed and what difference did we make?

Learning Disability Day Services

5.100 We recognise the vital role day services play in the lives of people with learning disabilities, their families and their carers. We were able to provide some day services throughout the pandemic and successfully introduced outreach services for older people as an alternative means of delivery. Services and support were delivered based on assessed need and risk. As we end the reporting year, our offer is still reduced compared to pre-covid provision and this will continue until existing guidance changes or more service provision is made available.

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To counter this, we continue to ensure that where required, there is alternative care and support at home for people affected by the reduced service.

- 5.101 During the pandemic, we launched our Learning Disability Transformation project, which will help improve what we offer to people with a learning disability. At the heart of its development is working with individuals and the development of a citizen's panel. This will inform the implementation of the project as will what we do to engage with people who have a learning disability, their parents and their carers about the experience with advocacy and support during the pandemic. It will also cover Direct Payments and our current day service offer. We also have ongoing training and development in hand which is looking into alternative ways of working for our staff, focusing on building on the strengths of the people we support.
- 5.102 The reform of our day services will be considered by the Council's Cabinet in July 2021. This will continue our engagement on a new service delivery model.

Community Hubs

- 5.103 Community Hubs provide a range of services in one or more closely located buildings in priority neighbourhoods. Bringing services together provides a better service and create economies of scale for staffing and building costs, which makes them more sustainable. The Hubs use the neighbourhood network of third sector providers to enhance the range of support services. We established a Resilient Families Service presence in the Community Hubs, as we have outlined elsewhere in this report. Our activities had to stop during the first lock down when face to face contact ceased and the operation of Community Hubs was suspended.
- 5.104 In response to the pandemic, at the end of March 2020, seven Community resilience Hubs were set up across the county to co-ordinate support for the most vulnerable individuals and families. Excellent links were established with Adult Services, including the development of new pathways to provide residents with a coordinated professional service. This included low level, but essential, support such as medication collection, food deliveries, dog walking, welfare calls etc., providing a critical lifeline for Shielders, in particular.
- 5.105 Whilst the Community Resilience Hubs was managed outside of Adult Services a joined up approach was essential as we recognised there were some individuals who were shielding and would require more support as a short-term preventative measure. This second group were identified as:
- not requiring a longer-term care and support plan, but required someone to safely cross the threshold
 - had for various reasons lost their usual support mechanisms and couldn't manage with the main volunteer service
 - had become temporarily unwell or unable to support themselves
- 5.106 For those residents an "enhanced" volunteer service was developed on a temporary basis managed by Adult Services to support those individuals and prevent the need for longer term services. Using redeployed staff, Adult Services coordinated this support until the pandemic pressures eased, or other support was identified.

Community-based support

- 5.107 We have three Community Co-ordinators operating in the Cynon, Taff Ely, and Rhondda parts of the County. The posts are funded by the Welsh Government's Integrated Care Fund. Another co-ordinator work with primary care practices across the whole area. The coordinators engage with people in communities and provide information, advice and

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signpost to local community groups, activities, and services, building strong local networks. As such, they complement our development of Community Hubs.

5.108 In total during 2020-21, Community Co-ordinators responded to direct requests from 3,956 residents and co-ordinated the following responses over the year:

- 2,829 were allocated to a member of Council staff.
- 282 were allocated to a Community Resilience Volunteer.
- 343 were referred to partner organisations.

5.109 The impact of this has been to reduce the need for the intervention of statutory services, reducing the risk of the NHS facing additional pressures and providing information and support to vulnerable residents during the pandemic.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

- Children's Services will review its participation strategy, making sure that service user's experiences of the service are heard and that they help shape future developments
- The looked after education service will commence implementation of the Additional Learning Needs Act reforms
- Children's Services will review its participation strategy, making sure that service user's experiences of the service are heard and that they help shape future developments
- Subject to Cabinet approval, Adult Services will continue to engage with people with a learning disability, their families and carers, staff and partners to co-produce a new day opportunities strategy.
- Work with partners and specialist organisations to specifically target and engage with groups of clients who have a disability or learning disability to increase referrals into employment support Prosser.

e) Supporting people to safely develop and maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships

What did we plan to do in 2020-21?

5.110 We said we would:

- Further build a presence of all Community Well-being and Resilience services within the Community Hubs to raise awareness of service on offer for and deliver support to activities within localities.
- Review commissioning activities considering the further developments around the Children and Communities Grant and funding flexibilities/alignment.
- Secure ministerial approval for the Early Years transformation proposals and the implementation of a universal needs-based approach for Early Years services across RCT.

How far did we succeed and what difference did we make?

Building a presence in Community Hubs

- 5.111 Our work on Community Hubs and steps we took to manage the impact of Covid on their operation and on the people who use them was covered in previous sections of the report.

Reviewing commissioning

- 5.112 The pandemic was a significant influence on approach to review commissioning. Our priority was to ensure financial stability for third sector providers during the pandemic. Therefore, we decided to postpone action to finalise the 2020-21 contracts. Instead, we rolled over 2019-20 contracts for the first half of the year. This gave us the opportunity to work alongside our existing providers to develop innovative and bespoke joint service-delivery models, which were responsive to the emerging needs of families because of lockdown. It also gave us time to assess what was required and what was possible for the remainder of the financial year, and to review and finalise 2020-21 contracts in time for implementation this period.
- 5.113 This year, we rationalised contracts for Women's Aid and Citizen's Advice Bureau where both organisations had contracts with two different funding streams: the Children and Communities Grant and the Housing Support Grant. For the Citizen's Advice Bureau, we extended the action to encompass several other contracts it had with a number of different service areas across the Council. The result is a single contractual arrangement with the Council.
- 5.114 We also moved to an outcomes-based commissioning model, re-organising and refocusing our staffing and capacity within the Commissioning Team. The team, now renamed the Funding Flexibilities Team forms part of the broader Programme Alignment Team. Because all seven of the programmes within the Children and Communities Grant sit in one Directorate, which is supported by a single Commissioning Team and a central finance team, our administrative functions are already lean. We have made further efficiencies in terms of reducing the administrative burden associated with attaching specific staff posts to individual grants for reporting purposes and by utilising joint commissioning across programmes to reduce the number of individual contracts which require monitoring. During the year, the Funding Flexibilities Team played a pivotal role in ensuring that developments and changes to grant funding arrangements were communicated to stakeholders.

Transforming Early Years support

- 5.115 Ministerial approval for piloting the transformation of the Early Years provision was received at the start of the financial year. The pilot, which spans the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area, includes the reorganisation of Health Visiting services in the county. The Wellbeing and Resilience Health Programme was launched in October 2020. It aims to provide enhanced health visiting services across the county. Underpinning the programme is the Resilient Families Service as the single integrated delivery model for family support in the area.
- 5.116 After a training needs analysis in autumn 2020, 49 Health visitors and 20 nursery nurses were trained for the Resilience and Wellbeing programme. Between January and March this year. New contracts have been issued for Health Visiting and Resilient Families Service Health specialists including Specialist Health Visitors, Community Nursery Nurses, Midwives, Speech and Language Therapist and Occupational Therapist. This will reinforce partnership working arrangements. The new approach integrates work across Council services, Health and third sector services.
- 5.117 Inevitably, the pandemic had a significant impact on the delivery of the programme due to reduced staff numbers, the need for some staff to be redeployed, and minimal opportunities for face-to-face contacts.
- 5.118 In the period 1 October 2020 to 31 March 2021:

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- 487 children aged 20 months received an assessment; 4 were referred to specialist services for further assessment and support, i.e. paediatrician, neurodevelopmental team, educational psychology, enhanced play team.
- 137 antenatal contacts were made during this period.
- 460 children were referred to the Resilient Families Service: 144 for specific early intervention and assessment, and 316 for family support.
- Of the 316 referred for family support, 138 (43%) were identified by as requiring universal health visitor support, 157 (50%) for enhanced support and 21 (7%) for intensive support.

5.119 The number of referrals was lower than anticipated due to restrictions on face-to-face visits because of the pandemic. The health visiting service restarted face to face visits in mid-April, and an increase in referrals to RFS is anticipated over the next year.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

- Work alongside partners to develop our continuing transformation strategy in relation to Early years Provision
- To continue to improve the resilience of residents and communities by working in partnership to strengthen the Neighbourhood Networks model, ensuring residents have the opportunity to influence decisions, activities and services in their communities which promote health and well-being.

(f) Working with and supporting people to achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs

What did we say we would do in 2020-21?

5.120 We said we would:

- Implement the Trauma Recovery Model in internal residential and foster care services.
- Work with providers to develop placement sufficiency in line with our Placement Commissioning Strategy/ Market Position Statement.
- Further improve the capacity and performance of independent domiciliary care providers to put in place sustainable local solutions.

How far did we succeed and what difference did we make?

Implementing the Trauma Recovery Model

5.121 The Trauma Recovery Model is an evidence based structured approach to help professionals care for traumatised young people and vulnerable adults and support them towards recovery. It is particularly useful to help those young people who have complex needs, including children who have been exposed to multiple adverse childhood experiences.

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5.122 Our work to embed this approach commenced in early 2020 with a series of workshops for all staff in our residential children's homes and a selection of social workers across front-line services and fostering. Our Educational Psychology team and Therapeutic Families Team for children who are looked after also attended the training. They also undertook specific training on the enhanced case management approach. Another event was planned but was unable to take place due to the pandemic. However, in the interim, our providers offered virtual consultation sessions to staff to help work to embed the model to continue across our children's services provision. The approach is now our preferred model of practice within our three children's homes. Its implementation in our fostering service has been delayed because of Covid but will be progressed as soon as circumstances allow.

Develop placement sufficiency

5.123 We developed a placement commissioning strategy in late 2019 and published a Market Position statement this year. The strategy sets priorities for development in our placement service for children looked after and what we commission from external providers to 2022.

5.124 It draws together the different strands of placement commissioning. This creates a clear vision which underpins our approach to commissioning and thus ensures our corporate planning is suitably aligned. Our priority areas are to:

- Recruit more foster carers able to meet the more complex needs of children and young people.
- Provide more in-house residential placements in the local area to meet need.
- Provide better support packages to carers to encourage them to apply for Special Guardianship Orders rather than be kinship foster carers.
- Provide a range of accommodation for 16+ and care leavers.
- Improve our commissioning processes for external placements, including integrated commissioning with key partners.
- Develop a reunification model to return young people safely to their family members.

5.125 Our goal is to develop placement sufficiency helps to address the Welsh Government's concerns about placements being made by local authorities out of their own county. While there will occasionally be a need for a placement to be made outside Rhondda Cynon Taf, this will be based on meeting the specific needs of the child or young person.

5.126 Our Carn Ingli children's residential home in Aberdare is an example of how we are avoiding the need for children to be placed outside the county. It was developed in 2019 with additional financial support from the Welsh Government. It provides transitional accommodation for children whose needs are best met through a specified model of care. The home has adopted a trauma informed approach to offer positive interventions and stability to the young people who are accommodated there. Placements can be at the point of crisis intervention or where breakdowns in occur in other placements. Due to Covid, the home provided fewer placements than project this year. That said, for four of the children placed there during the year, it helped avoid the alternatives, which was placement outside Wales or no other placement identified or available to meet their needs.

5.127 During the year, we carried out engagement meetings with providers to discuss our placement commissioning strategy and market position statement. With Covid there were minimal opportunities to meet. We now have a programme of virtual engagement events planned for the beginning of the 2021-22 year as part of our efforts to increase our level of engagement with fostering and residential providers across the County to achieve our goal.

Supporting independent domiciliary care providers

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- 5.128 The pandemic caused us to change our plans to address this priority during the year. While our intention was to work with independent sector domiciliary care providers to further improve capacity and performance by putting in place sustainable local solutions, we instead focused on providing support – advice, guidance and financial – to help them manage through the pandemic and to cope with its impact.

Helping children with complex needs

- 5.129 A concept paper was developed in summer 2020 to consider the region's needs for residential accommodation for children looked after who have more complex emotional needs. These young people do not meet the thresholds for interventions by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services ("CAMHS") but do require more intensive and specialist interventions in psychologically informed environments to support their wellbeing. Capital funding of £55,000 has been made available within the region to support a feasibility study to explore the viability of such a service.
- 5.130 At the time of writing this report, we and our regional partners are awaiting approval of a bid for funding to support the development of a model of safe accommodation for children and young people with the most complex emotional needs. This responds to the work of the Children's Commissioner for Wales and the 'No Wrong Door' Report, which was published in July last year.
- 5.131 We have also been working with our regional partners to commission a third sector provider to deliver therapeutic interventions for children looked after. The support is designed to help children who are in foster care with consistent placement breakdown and children and young people who have plans for adoption. The service has been tendered and it is hoped a contractor will be appointed with a view to services commencing in summer 2021.

Providing better accommodation options for older people

- 5.132 Over recent years, we have been implementing a £50 million investment plan to develop 300 Extra Care places across RCT as a modern form of housing which can better meet the support needs of residents as they get older.
- 5.133 In December 2020, after an extensive consultation exercise, a decision was made on the future of the Council's residential care homes. The seven care homes proposed to stay open would be refocused on complex needs (including dementia), residential reablement and respite care. These would be joined by two more homes, Garth Olwg in Church Village and Ystradfechan in Treorchy. While originally earmarked for closure, as a result of feedback from the public consultation, they would also remain open and be refocused on complex needs (including dementia), residential reablement and respite care.
- 5.134 The proposal to decommission the residential care home at Danymynydd, Porth, and to redevelop the site to provide for a new 60-bed housing scheme was also agreed by the Council. This is in line with our commitment to modernising accommodation options for older people by using the Extra Care housing approach. Funding for the redevelopment was agreed by the Council's Cabinet in March 2021. Demolition of the home is planned for May this year. Subject to planning approval, construction is due to start in the Autumn.
- 5.135 In December 2020, there were 37 residential care homes in the County, of which 11 were operated by the Council. The number of homes increased by one since the previous year when the Fairfields Care Home with 19 residential and residential dementia beds opened in June in Trealaw. The total number of homes will now reduce to 35 because of the number of Council-run homes reducing from eleven to nine.

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- 5.136 We have made considerable progress on developing new models of accommodation for older people, to meet rising demand and people's expectations. It responds to the Cwm Taf Joint Commissioning Statement for Older People's Services (2015-2025), which helped identify what accommodation and support people will need in future. We are using Extra Care to rebalance our accommodation provision from institutional residential care.
- 5.137 Our third Extra Care accommodation, the 60 apartment Cwrt yr Orsaf facility in Pontypridd, is due to be completed in summer 2021. This follows our first development in Talbot Green in 2016 and second in Aberaman which opened in May 2020. In our new venture, we have worked closely with Linc Cymru, our partner on the project, and the contractor. Despite the significant challenges posed by the pandemic, solid progress has been made and it is still scheduled to open in summer this year.
- 5.138 Due to planning restrictions on the Council's Bronwydd site in Porth, we explored alternative locations for a 60-apartment facility. As mentioned above, the decision was made this year to decommission the residential care home at Danymynydd, Porth and to redevelop the site for this purpose.
- 5.139 For our development in Treorchy, options continue to be considered with our partners Linc Cymru and the Cwm Taf University Health Board. Progress has been delayed by the pandemic and our need to prioritise progress on the above schemes. Our discussions with partners on the development discussions will restart in the coming year. The same will happen for our planned development in Mountain Ash, where our initial development options did not prove to be feasible.

Learning disabilities

- 5.140 We have undertaken further work to develop supported housing schemes to help people with learning disabilities to live more independently in their communities. A new development in Treorchy was completed in Autumn 2020 and residents moved in from January 2021 after telecare equipment had been installed.
- 5.141 The development of supported housing in Mountain Ash continued to make good progress through the pandemic and is scheduled to complete in late spring 2021. In preparation for this, in January this year, we started to make assessments of new tenants with the aim of people moving in over the Summer.
- 5.142 As part of our strategy to remodel our residential care homes, which is highlighted earlier in this report, we have decommissioned our Bronllwyn care home in Gelli. We will develop the site to provide additional specialist accommodation with care to support people with learning disabilities in adulthood and older age.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

- Develop close to home accommodation services for looked after young people.
- Continue to work with domiciliary care providers to restart development of an outcomes based domiciliary care approach and to ensure there is sufficient provision available at the right level to meet demand and deliver good quality home care
- Continue to work with Linc Cymru to deliver the Council's extra care housing development programme and enable more people to live independently in their own home

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- Work with Housing Strategy to continue to develop a range of modern fit for purpose supported housing options for people that meets their assessed needs and is supported, where possible, by access to community facilities

6. How we do what we do

Our workforce and how we support their professional roles

- 6.1 The past 12 months has been like no other. We have always said that our workforce is our most important asset without whom high-quality services could not be delivered. Their resilience and dedication at a time of great uncertainty and challenge has been incredible, We continue to need an adequate workforce of well-trained, experienced staff with the right skills and approach needed to work with citizens and effectively in partnership with other organisations, and this challenge will remain with us for some time and especially in the context of how we continue to respond to the pandemic.
- 6.2 In last year's report we said we would:
- Develop a recruitment and retention strategy specifically for Children Services to ensure sufficiency of skilled staff.
 - Development of overarching workforce development strategy for Adult Services.
 - Reduce sickness/absence rates.
- 6.3 Recruitment and retention of qualified social workers remains a significant challenge for Children's Services, which is further exacerbated by shortages in the labour market of qualified and experienced social work practitioners. The focus on the pandemic means that this work remains a priority as we plan the next 12 months.
- 6.4 At the time of writing this report, the Children's Service's Intensive Intervention service had approximately 30 Social Work/Senior Practitioner vacancies. This equates to a vacancy rate of 29%. The vacancy rate has remained consistently high at around 30% for a time, which places the workforce under sustained pressure.
- 6.5 Despite the pressure of vacancies there has been some excellent performance over the year responding to the pandemic. Inevitably, there have been unintended consequences, which includes national issues with recruitment and retention at the same time as additional demands falling on services.
- 6.6 A review of pay for social workers is underway, and we have maintained arrangements for the payment of an interim market supplement. We plan to consult on the outcome of the review in June 2021. A wider review of workforce development is planned later in the year after implementation of the pay review.
- 6.7 The increasing levels of activity and demand being managed by our services and the anticipated further increase in demand as we emerge from the Covid 19 pandemic; will make the financial pressure on the service unsustainable and will cause a considerable pressure on the financial position of the authority.
- 6.8 The Council's five-year Workforce Planⁱⁱⁱ which is in place until 2022 is the framework for our approach and drives the improvements we are seeking in our workforce across adults and children's social services. It has five aims:
- Developing a flexible and agile workforce that shares organisational knowledge.
 - Recruiting and retaining the best talent to create a diverse workforce.
 - Leadership and management development.
 - Enabling a high performing, engaged, and committed workforce.
 - Supporting the health and well-being of our workforce to maximise attendance.

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- 6.9 As part of the development of the Council's budget for 2021-22 it was agreed that £50,000 would be allocated for Well-being support programmes to be developed and extended, which will support those working in social care alongside their colleagues across the organisation.
- 6.10 Our staff are without doubt our most valued asset – they are the front face of the Council and represent and uphold our key values as public servants. We recognise the challenges faced by staff and have ensured that we continue to support their welfare and wellbeing. The additional resource proposed will enable us to expand upon the current support programmes we have in place and further develop these programmes across the workforce.
- 6.11 A staff well-being week was held in December 2020, which included a programme of events designed to give staff the opportunity to focus on their physical and emotional wellbeing given the impact of the Pandemic. Feedback is being considered as part of the Workforce Strategy to maintain the focus on the wellbeing of staff during the pandemic.
- 6.12 In Adult Services the social care workforce has been extraordinary during the pandemic, and it has had a significant impact on people working in social care; particularly those working in residential care. Whilst we have started to notice some stabilisation in staff absence and signs of an improvement, the intense pressure on these workers and the impact on their current and future mental health and wellbeing continues to be a source of concern.
- 6.13 We have kept our elected Members updated of the work undertaken with Human Resources to ensure our staff is appropriately supported, via counselling, wellbeing, and Occupational Health Services to ensure our workforce is appropriately supported. This work has been of assistance to staff across adult and children's social services.
- 6.14 Some examples to date included:
- Human Resources staff allocated to specific employees to keep in touch with via telephone on a weekly basis (where identified as in need of specific support).
 - Care homes given direct access to a senior counsellor for specialised support where staff experienced sudden or traumatic events.
 - A new dedicated wellbeing helpline available to all staff to access via telephone or email. The wellbeing line offers support for both employee physical and mental wellbeing covering a range of topics such as mental and physical wellbeing, nutrition, sleep, and weight management.
 - Occupational Health have continued to provide a clinical service for counselling, nurse, doctor, physiotherapy, and health surveillance via telephone (and more recently a restricted face to face appointments).
 - A dedicated area was created on RCT Source with a range of support information for staff e.g. information of Covid-19 guidance, wellbeing area, nutrition, sleep and working from home.
 - A dedicated 7-day Covid testing booking line for key workers and their families was introduced to increase the availability of testing capacity.
 - Occupational Health have introduced the flu campaign, in support of the national drive to encourage people to take up the flu vaccine.
- 6.15 This work has continued in the short term, but over the medium to longer-term, we remain concerned about the physical and mental toil the pandemic will have taken, and we are examining new ways with Human Resources and Health to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on this workforce group. Social Care Wales is also expediting the wellbeing theme of the

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national integrated workforce strategy and it is going to be vitally important that all the support mechanisms are in place to aid workforce recovery.

6.16 We continue to provide strategic support for the development of the workforce which is also supported by our performance Management framework which defines expectations at all levels to include Staff supervision. Supervision is in place at all levels and is considered effective in terms of case management.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

6.17 We are planning to:

- Deliver services anticipating demand associated with the pandemic will impact local families.
- Have an engaged, motivated, and healthy workforce with the physical resources they need to do their job effectively, and able to access to resources which support and strengthen their emotional and physical resilience.
- Deliver an attractive recruitment campaign for Adult and Children's Services.
- Develop a pay structure that reflects qualifications, responsibilities, and the ability to take on more complex /challenging work.
- Develop an agile working environment across Adults and Children's Services which optimises the way we work.
- Invest in IT systems to support connectivity.

6.18 As members of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Social Care Workforce Development Partnership, we will implement the annual workplan for 2021- 22. This sets out a number of priorities, most of which will be incorporated into local actions:

- Enable the workforce to meet regulatory requirements for qualification and/or registration.
- Supporting the training, development, and qualification of social care managers.
- Implementing qualifying and post-qualifying programmes for social work.
- Support frontline social care workers to develop their skills.
- Supporting developments which lead to digital solutions for the delivery of learning, development, and qualifications.
- Equipping our workforce to work effectively alongside carers and raising awareness of good practice in carer needs assessments.

Our financial resources and how we plan

6.19 The Council continues to support and prioritise Adult and Children's Services but within significant cost pressures. This is evident in the budget decisions taken by elected Members.

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- 6.20 To manage these ongoing budget pressures, we continue to focus for example on prevention services, promoting independence, right sizing care packages, improved use of technology and maximising the use of grant monies to support new opportunities.
- 6.21 We also have in place Quality Assurance Panels to oversee commissioning decisions to ensure challenge and consistency in the quality of assessment outcomes and cost-effective care. The funding of joint packages of care with the NHS continue to be robustly challenged. Arrangements for learning disability cases are being reviewed with NHS colleagues to address existing backlogs and to ensure decisions are timelier and people's needs, and outcomes are met by the most appropriate and cost-effective care package.
- 6.22 Our Specialist Placements Panel oversees specialist accommodation and community-based decisions and monitors individual case move-on.
- 6.23 In Children's Services the service continues to implement robust and manageable budget strategies to ensure timely identification of budget efficiency and such processes include a rigorous scrutiny process via our Group Management Team of which the Head of Finance is a member.
- 6.24 The Council budget for 2021-22, included £1,359,000 for education and inclusion services, £200,000 for Public Health and Protection to increase resilience in the service and allow additional resources to be employed, and an additional £50,000 would be allocated for Well-being support programmes.
- 6.25 The overall budget proposed an increase of £8,689,000 for Community and Children's Services from £162,681,000 in 2020-21 to £171,370,000, which includes social care, to help alleviate the key pressures that we face, and to help focus on supporting our recovery.
- 6.26 In addition to consulting with elected members we also did an extensive public consultation which included:
- An online questionnaire with 1,044 survey responses received.
 - A virtual engagement session with members of the Older Persons Advisory Group and Disability Forum.
 - The Council's Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee and the School Budget Forum were consulted, and engagement with the Community Liaison Committee.
 - We held 5 virtual sessions and spoke to pupils from St John Baptist Church In Wales High School, Aberdare Community School, Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and Y Pant Comprehensive School. We also engaged with learners from Coleg Y Cymoedd in Aberdare, Rhondda and Treforest campuses.
 - Over 1,100 people were engaged in the phase 1 budget consultation process.

Our partnership working, political and corporate leadership, governance, and accountability

- 6.27 Social Services continues to remain a priority for the Council, receiving strong and proactive support from the Cabinet Members for both Adults and Children's services, especially in the past year as we have responded to the challenge of the pandemic.
- 6.28 The engagement and involvement of elected members is positive. Naturally, much of their scrutiny has been focused on the response to the pandemic ensuring democratic oversight to

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ensure that we have kept people safe and services on track, and this has been the case with the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and also the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee.

6.29 In last year's report we said we would:

- Contribute to more joint learning between health and social care staff as part of a joint evaluation and learning framework for the Welsh Government's Transformation Fund
- Work with Third sector partners to consider alternative service models, such as social enterprise and user led organisations such as co-operatives.

6.30 Our Corporate Plan for 2020 – 2024 sets out the Council's overall vision and contains three specific objectives to which social care services and our partnership working will continue to contribute. Whilst this strategic direction is important operationally, we have been managing the additional demands and priorities on our work during 2020-21.

6.31 We are accountable through a variety of mechanisms including:

- Monthly performance reviews and quality assurance checks
- Regular discussions with Cabinet Members and senior staff
- Reports to Council Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees, and Corporate Parenting meetings
- Regular engagement with staff by operational and senior managers to improve communications and to allow concerns, developments, suggestions, and ideas to be discussed.

6.32 During the past year we have also reported weekly, from early May 2020 to the end of March 2021, to Welsh Government on the managed response to the pandemic, how we have responded to a range of contacts from the public and the ability of the service to keep adults and children safe.

6.33 Partnership working to improve services and to achieve efficiencies remains an important part of our work in both Adult and Children's Services. We continue to play a significant part in the:

- Regional Partnership Board, which includes Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Bridgend County Borough Council, the Cwm Taf University Health Board, and colleagues from Housing and Third Sector organisations.
- Work of the regional Safeguarding Board, which has continued to deliver opportunities for improvements in practice both within and between agencies.

6.34 To ensure a robust regional cross agency response to the pandemic a regional partnership governance structure was established to deliver the Welsh Government's Test, Trace, Protect programme. In August 2020, we published a COVID-19 Prevention and Response Plan, as an over-arching strategic plan setting out the approach to prevention and response. The Action Plan supporting the strategy was to compliment Public Health Wales' objectives to:

- Prevent the spread of disease through contact tracing and case management.
- Ensure sampling and testing of different people in Wales.
- Secure population surveillance.

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- 6.35 We have also continued to make a significant contribution to the work of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board. During the past year working in partnership, for example, the Board has continued its work in sharing the learning of reviews and audits, developed a regional response to the Welsh Government's National Action Plan on Child Sexual Abuse, and undertaken work to assess how the region can better respond to suicide and self-harm.
- 6.36 We continue to lead the Cwm Taf Reflect Project, which works with young women who have had children removed from their care, and the Regional Advocacy Service, and also chair the "Together for Mental Health" Partnership Board for Children and Young people working with South Wales Police on the implementation of the Early Action Programme.

What are our priorities for 2021-22?

- To accelerate the pace of integration of health and social care services across the Cwm Taf Morgannwg region.
- To review the projects and programmes delivered through Integrated Care Fund and Transformation Funding to ensure they are delivering the outcomes we need and that essential services are sustainable going forward.
- Continue to support the Test Trace Protect programme, supporting the Regional Strategic Oversight Group and Incident Management Team established to coordinate and oversee our response to the pandemic.

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7. Sources of information

7.1 This page provides links to sources of information on the services and support mentioned in this report.

Services and support

7.2 For support in the area:

- **Adult Social Services Care and Support**
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/AdultsandOlderPeople/AdultSocialServicesCareandSupport/AdultSocialServicesCareandSupport.aspx>
- **Children and Families**
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/ChildrenandFamilies/ChildrenandFamilies.aspx>
- You can search “Dewis Cymru” for community-based services to support you and your family <https://www.dewis.wales/>

Council meetings

7.3 Full information on councillors and meetings of the Council is available on the Council’s website: <https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings.aspx>.

7.4 Meetings of the Cabinet, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee are particularly relevant to this report. Agendas, papers, and decision reports can be accessed via the following web pages:

- **Cabinet:**
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/Committees/Cabinet.aspx>
- **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/Committees/ChildrenandYoungPeopleScrutinyCommittee.aspx>
- **Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee**
<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/Committees/HealthandWellbeingScrutinyCommittee.aspx>

References

ⁱ Your Life Your Care (April 2018) A survey of the views of looked after children and young people aged 4-18yrs in Rhondda Cynon Taf

ⁱⁱ Charging for Non-Residential Social Services policy

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Resident/AdultsandOlderPeople/Helpoliveathome/RelatedDocuments/ChargingforNonResidentialSocialServices.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Workforce Plan 2017-2022, Rhondda Cynon Taf

<https://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/WorkforcePlan/RelatedDocuments/WorkforcePlan20172022.pdf>

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**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22**

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

21st JULY 2021

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

Agenda Item No.

**CARE INSPECTORATE WALES
(CIW) - ASSURANCE CHECK
2021**

Author: Paul Mee, Group Director, Community & Children's Services

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to share with Members the finding letter from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) in respect of their recent assurance check of the Council's Social Services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the contents of the finding letter from CIW at Appendix I and scrutinise its contents.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide assurance to Members regarding how well the Council's social services helps and supports adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being following the recent assurance check undertaken by CIW.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In March 2020 CIW suspended its routine programme of inspections in response to the Covid-19 pandemic to enable local authorities to focus their attention on responding to the challenging circumstances of the pandemic. A revised programme of assurance checks recommenced in September 2020.

- 4.2 The Council has received a summary of the findings of the assurance check undertaken on 24th to 28th May 2021 and this is reproduced for Member's attention at Appendix I.

- 4.3 The assurance check considered safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services, the safety of services they access and the safety and well-being of people who work in services. Key lines of enquiry were focused on the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014:
- People - Voice and Control,
 - Prevention,
 - Well-being,
 - Partnerships and Integration.
- 4.4 The methodology is described in the CIW letter and included the review of documentation supplied; CIW inspectors spoke to people receiving care and support; a review of 36 case files; nine cases tracking interviews with practitioners; surveys and interviews with practitioners, senior managers and Cabinet Members.
- 4.5 The findings letter identified strengths and areas for improvement that will be incorporated into the Council's improvement plans and our progress monitored.
- 4.6 Members will be pleased to see that the findings letter identified many strengths across both Adult and Children's Services. The findings letter provides a high level of assurance that the Council continued to meet its statutory duties in respect of social services throughout the pandemic and provided high quality services to adults and children with a focus of safety and well-being.
- 4.7 The areas for improvement identified by CIW concern:
- Recruitment & retention of a stable workforce
 - Closely monitor the reduction of waiting lists
 - Placement sufficiency in Children Services
- 4.8 These areas for improvement are all priorities identified by the Council and are reflected in our Delivery Plans for 2021/22.

5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no implications associated with this report.

6. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 There are no consultation implication arising from this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 CIW are the independent regulator of social care and childcare in Wales. CIW register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.
- 8.2 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 gives CIW powers to review the way in which local authorities discharge their social services functions.
- 8.3 The Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 gives CIW powers to register and/or inspect providers of social care services in Wales.

9. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 9.1 It is critically important that CIW and elected members are assured that the Council's social services are meeting their statutory duties and in doing so contributing towards the Council's corporate priorities and well-being goals.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The CIW assurance check provides the Council with a high level of assurance regarding how well the Council is discharging its statutory duties in respect of social services and providing help and support to adults and children to protect safety and promote well-being. This has been achieved during the extremely challenging circumstances of the pandemic and reflects the commitment, hard work and resilience of our workforce.
- 10.2 In addition to identifying many strengths across both Adult and Children's Services, as expected, a few areas for improvement have been identified which are prioritised through our Delivery Plans and action improvement plans.

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Paul Mee
Rheolwr Grŵp – Gwasanaethau Cymuned a Gwasanaethau
i Blant
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Rhondda Cynon Taf
Y Pafiliynau
Parc Hen Lofa'r Cambrian
Cwm Clydach
Tonypandy
Rhondda Cynon Taf

Dyddiad / Date: 8 Gorffennaf 2021

Annwyl Gyfarwyddwr,

Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru (AGC) – Archwiliad Sicrwydd 2021: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Rhondda Cynon Taf

Mae'r llythyr hwn yn crynhoi canfyddiadau ein archwiliad sicrwydd a gynhaliwyd rhwng 24 Mai a 28 Mai 2021. Pwrpas yr archwiliad sicrwydd hwn oedd gweld pa mor dda y mae gwasanaethau cymdeithasol yr awdurdod lleol yn parhau i helpu a chefnogi oedolion a phlant, gan ganolbwyntio ar ddiogelwch a llesiant.

Trosolwg

Ym mis Mawrth 2020, gohiriodd AGC ei rhaglen arferol mewn ymateb i bandemig COVID-19 er mwyn galluogi darparwyr ac awdurdodau lleol i ganolbwyntio'n llawn ar ymateb i'r amgylchiadau heriol. Ailddechreuodd rhaglen ddiwygiedig o wiriadau sicrwydd ym mis Medi.

Gwnaethom ystyried diogelwch a llesiant y bobl sy'n defnyddio gwasanaethau, neu y gall fod angen iddynt eu defnyddio, diogelwch y gwasanaethau y maent yn eu defnyddio a diogelwch a llesiant y bobl sy'n gweithio yn y gwasanaethau hynny. Roedd ein prif lwybrau ymholi yn seiliedig ar bedair egwyddor Deddf Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol a Llesiant (Cymru) 2014. Rydym wedi trefnu ein canfyddiadau gan gyfeirio at y pedair egwyddor: Pobl – Llais a Rheolaeth, Atal, Llesiant, Partneriaethau ac Integreiddio.

Gwnaethom ganolbwyntio ar y canlynol:

1. Pa mor dda y mae'r awdurdod lleol yn cyflawni ei swyddogaethau statudol o ran cadw pobl y mae angen gofal a chymorth arnynt a gofalyr y mae angen cymorth arnynt yn ddiogel, a hyrwyddo eu llesiant, yn ystod y pandemig?

Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru (AGC)
Swyddfa Llywodraeth Cymru
Sarn Mynach
Cyffordd Llandudno
LL31 9RZ
www.arolygiaethgofal.cymru

☎ 0300 790 0126
✉ CIW@gov.wales

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)
Welsh Government Office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ
www.careinspectorate.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

2. Beth mae'r awdurdod lleol yn ei wneud fel nad oes angen i blant dderbyn gofal; ac a yw plant yn dychwelyd adref i'w teuluoedd yn ddigon cyflym, lle mae'n ddiogel iddynt wneud hynny?

Crynodeb o'r canfyddiadau a blaenoriaethau ar gyfer gwella

Pobl – llais a rheolaeth – Gwnaethom ofyn: Pa mor dda y mae'r awdurdod lleol yn sicrhau bod lleisiau pobl, gofalwyr ac ymarferwyr yn cael eu clywed, eu bod yn gwneud dewisiadau ar sail gwybodaeth, ac yn cynnal rheolaeth dros eu bywydau, gan gydbwysu hefyd yr argymhellion a'r gofynion a wnaed gan Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru a Llywodraeth Cymru er mwyn cyfyngu ar ledaeniad COVID-19?

Roedd yr awdurdod lleol wedi nodi'n glir ei fwriad strategol a gweithredol i gefnogi pobl ifanc agored i niwed, oedolion a gofalwyr drwy gydol pandemig COVID-19 (y pandemig). Mae'r arweinwyr wedi parhau i gadw golwg ar y sefyllfa gyfnewidiol o ran COVID-19, ac o ganlyniad ceir cynlluniau clir ac ymarfer/ymatebion arloesol i ymdrin â'r heriau cysylltiedig. Mae'r arweinwyr a'r uwch-reolwyr yn parhau i roi ystyriaeth gyson i'r hyn sy'n gweithio'n dda ac i wahanol ffyrdd o weithio yn sgil y pandemig, ac maent yn bwriadu parhau i ddefnyddio'r dulliau hyn.

Bu cyfradd haint COVID-19 yn Rhondda Cynon Taf yn uchel iawn. Mae'r awdurdod lleol yn gweld cynnydd yn y galw am wasanaethau ac anghenion sy'n fwy cymhleth, gan gynnwys anghenion sy'n gysylltiedig ag iechyd meddwl a llesiant emosiynol pobl. Mae'r awdurdod lleol yn parhau i gydweithio â phartneriaid i feithrin a chefnogi cymunedau cryf.

Dywedodd y bobl wrthym fod yr awdurdod lleol wedi cadw mewn cysylltiad â nhw, a hynny mewn ffordd ddiogel, drwy gydol y pandemig. Clywsom am y ffordd roedd technoleg gwybodaeth wedi cael ei defnyddio i gadw mewn cysylltiad â phobl a datblygu ffyrdd newydd o ddarparu gwasanaethau. Roedd yr awdurdod lleol wedi cysylltu â phobl drwy ddulliau rhithwir yn ogystal â wyneb-yn-wyneb lle bo angen, ac wedi asesu'r risgiau sydd ynghlwm wrth wneud hynny fel y bo'n briodol.

Dywedodd y bobl wrthym ei bod yn hawdd cysylltu â'r awdurdod lleol yn gyffredinol; roeddent yn teimlo bod pobl yn gwrando arnynt, a'u bod yn cael eu trin ag urddas a pharch. Roeddent yn gallu trafod y cymorth sydd ar gael iddynt ac roeddent o'r farn bod y wybodaeth, y cyngor neu'r cymorth a oedd yn cael ei ddarparu gan yr awdurdod lleol yn ddefnyddiol. Gwelsom enghreifftiau o bobl yn cael cyngor yn briodol ac yn cael eu cyfeirio at wasanaethau/asiantaethau eraill.

Yn gyffredinol, gwelsom fod yr awdurdod lleol yn ceisio barn pobl a bod pobl yn cael eu cynnwys yn y gwaith o lunio asesiadau a chynllunio gofal a chymorth. Roedd recordiadau achosion yn amrywio o ran cofnodi cyfraniad yr unigolyn dan sylw. Caiff y bobl gyfleoedd i wneud sylwadau ar y gwasanaethau y maent yn eu cael.

Gwelsom fod dull gweithredu seiliedig ar ganlyniadau wedi'i ymgorffori mewn ymarfer yn y gwasanaethau oedolion, a bod hyn yn cefnogi trefniadau cyd-gynhyrchu a nodi canlyniadau personol. Roedd materion yn ymwneud â chydsyniad, eiriolaeth, galluedd meddyliol a budd pennaf yn cael eu hystyried fel mater o drefn yn gynnar yn y broses ymgysylltu. Roedd y wybodaeth a gasglwyd yn cael ei defnyddio'n briodol i lywio asesiadau a chynlluniau gofal a chymorth.

Roedd y ffeiliau a welsom yn y gwasanaethau plant yn cynnwys tystiolaeth bod gwybodaeth yn cael ei chasglu i adlewyrchu amgylchiadau'r plentyn. Roedd gwybodaeth yn cael ei rhannu rhwng asiantaethau lle y bo angen. Gwelsom fod gan yr ymarferwyr a'r swyddogion adolygu annibynnol ddealltwriaeth o amgylchiadau a phrofiadau'r plant a'r teuluoedd roeddent yn gweithio gyda nhw. Roedd yr ymarferwyr yn ystyried eiriolaeth yn gyson ac yn ei chynnig. Mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi nod bod angen gwneud mwy o waith yn y gwasanaethau plant er mwyn ymgorffori model ymarfer gwaith cymdeithasol sy'n seiliedig ar gryfderau ac sy'n canolbwyntio ar ganlyniadau. Mae'n hanfodol bod y model ymarfer yn sicrhau pwyslais parhaus ar gynnydd a phrofiadau'r plant a bod proses sicrhau ansawdd gadarn yn cael ei rhoi ar waith sy'n mesur effaith y model.

Gwelsom enghreifftiau o ofalwyr yn cael cynnig asesiad gofalwr ac o farn gofalwyr yn cael ei hadlewyrchu mewn recordiadau. Mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi nodi gofalwyr y mae angen rhagor o gymorth arnynt ac wedi adrodd am gynnydd o tua 30% yn fwy o asesiadau gofalwyr eleni o gymharu â'r un cyfnod yn y flwyddyn flaenorol. Dywedodd yr awdurdod lleol wrthym fod gwaith i gefnogi gofalwyr wedi parhau drwy gydol y pandemig, er i hynny gael ei wneud weithiau mewn ffyrdd gwahanol a llai dwys. Er enghraifft, roedd y gofalwyr wedi cael eu cefnogi drwy adnoddau ar-lein a dyfeisiau, ac roedd gwasanaeth cwnsela ar gael iddynt. Disgrifiodd yr ymarferwyr y ffordd y cysylltwyd â'r gofalwyr a sut y daethpwyd i gytundeb ynghylch sut a phryd y byddai/y gallai gofal a chymorth gael eu darparu.

Caiff y bobl y cyfle i deilwra a rheoli eu cymorth eu hunain drwy ddefnyddio taliadau uniongyrchol. Gwelsom enghreifftiau o daliadau uniongyrchol yn cael eu cynnig a'u derbyn, gan helpu i roi hyblygrwydd i'r bobl a rheolaeth dros y gofal a'r cymorth roeddent yn eu cael. Roedd tystiolaeth bod yr awdurdod yn defnyddio taliadau uniongyrchol mewn ffordd ymatebol er mwyn darparu dull cymorth amgen.

Mae sicrhau llesiant y staff yn flaenoriaeth allweddol i'r arweinwyr a'r uwch-reolwyr. Gwelsom enghreifftiau cadarnhaol o lesiant y staff yn cael ei hybu. Roedd enghreifftiau o hyn yn cynnwys prosesau hunan-atgyfeirio fel bod modd i'r staff fanteisio ar gyfleusterau iechyd galwedigaethol, sesiynau ymwybyddiaeth ofalgar a sesiynau cwnsela. Gwelsom fod morâl y staff yn dda ar y cyfan. Dywedodd y staff wrthym eu bod yn teimlo bod eu cydweithwyr a'u rheolwyr yn eu cefnogi i wneud eu gwaith, a dywedodd y mwyafrif ohonynt eu bod yn gallu ymdopi â'u llwyth achosion. Disgrifiodd rhai aelodau o'r staff y gwnaethom siarad â nhw ddull gweithredu 'ati gyda'n gilydd' yn ystod y pandemig, a oedd, yn eu barn nhw, yn eu helpu i weithio'n dda fel tîm, gyda phwyslais clir ar bobl y mae angen gofal a

chymorth arnynt. Clywsom am staff a oedd yn gweithio'n hyblyg i sicrhau canlyniadau cadarnhaol i'r bobl.

Atal – Gwnaethom ofyn: I ba raddau y mae'r awdurdod lleol yn llwyddo i hybu prosesau atal a lleihau'r angen am fwy o gymorth neu gymorth ffurfiol gan asiantaethau statudol?

Gwelsom fod dull atal integredig a chadarnhaol ar waith. Gwelsom enghreifftiau o weithwyr proffesiynol ac asiantaethau yn rhannu gwybodaeth ac yn nodi plant a/neu oedolion yr oedd angen eu hamddiffyn a'u helpu, ac yn gwneud atgyfeiriadau priodol i'r gwasanaethau cymdeithasol. Roedd ymateb prydlon i risgiau ac anghenion uniongyrchol. Roedd yr awdurdod lleol wedi nodi bod angen rhagor o waith/hyfforddiant yn y gwasanaethau oedolion er mwyn sicrhau bod canlyniadau posibl risgiau a nodwyd yn cael eu cydnabod yn gyson, a bod y camau priodol ac amserol angenrheidiol yn cael eu cymryd i liniaru'r risgiau lle bo angen.

Mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi parhau i gynnal ffocws strategol da ar atal, cynaliadwyedd y farchnad a datblygu gwasanaethau yn ystod y pandemig. Roedd enghreifftiau o ddatblygu gwasanaethau parhaus yn cynnwys dechrau cynnal cynadleddau grŵp teulu a datblygu rhagor o lety Gofal Ychwanegol. Mae'r gwaith a gynlluniwyd wedi parhau mewn perthynas ag aifodolu/trawsnewid rhai timau/gwasanaethau, gyda'r nod o wella profiad defnyddwyr y gwasanaethau.

Mae rhestrau aros mewn rhai meysydd gwasanaeth gan gynnwys y gwasanaeth synhwyrdd, y gwasanaeth addasiadau a chyfarpar cymunedol, a gofal a chymorth. Dywedodd yr awdurdod lleol fod rhestrau aros wedi datblygu/wedi gwaethygu o ganlyniad i gynnydd yn a galw a bylchau mewn rhai timau. Mae'r rheolwyr yn rhagweithiol yn y ffordd y maent yn monitro'r bobl hynny sy'n aros am wasanaeth, yn cynnal asesiad risg ac yn adolygu eu statws blaenoriaeth. Mae cynlluniau ar waith i leihau rhestrau aros. Bydd angen i'r awdurdod barhau i fonitro'r maes hwn yn ofalus er mwyn nodi cynnydd ac unrhyw faterion sy'n dod i'r amlwg.

Mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi rhoi 'Strategaeth Plant sy'n Derbyn Gofal' ar waith gyda'r nod o leihau nifer y plant sy'n derbyn gofal, sydd yn flaenoriaeth a gydnabyddir gan yr awdurdod lleol. Yn ystod y flwyddyn ddiwethaf, mae gostyngiad graddol wedi bod yn nifer y plant sy'n dechrau derbyn gofal. Mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi comisiynu darn o waith annibynnol i adolygu'r strategaeth er mwyn nodi unrhyw fylchau yn y gwasanaethau a meysydd ar gyfer dysgu. Mae gan yr uwch-reolwyr a'r swyddogion ddealltwriaeth dda o broffil y plant sy'n derbyn gofal ar hyn o bryd a gwybodaeth dda amdano, ac maent yn gwbl ymrwymedig i'r agenda atal. Maent yn awyddus i ddatblygu eu hopsiynau ar gyfer ymateb i sefyllfaoedd cymhleth, yn arbennig i'r bobl ifanc hynny ag anghenion cymhleth iawn, ac maent yn mynd ati i gynnal astudiaeth ddichonoldeb mewn perthynas ag ehangu eu darpariaeth breswyl. Mae gwaith yn mynd rhagddo ar hyn o bryd mewn perthynas â'r llwybr llety i bobl sy'n gadael gofal. Bydd angen i'r awdurdod barhau i fonitro'r maes hwn yn ofalus er mwyn nodi cynnydd ac unrhyw faterion sy'n dod i'r amlwg.

Yn y gwasanaethau oedolion, nodwyd gennym fod seilweithiau cefnogol ar waith ym mhob agwedd ar ofal cymdeithasol a gofal iechyd, yn ogystal â systemau cyflenwi cysylltiedig. Gwelsom dystiolaeth o gydweithio, a oedd yn cynnwys enghreifftiau cadarnhaol o bobl yn cael eu cefnogi i gael eu rhyddhau o'r ysbyty ac enghreifftiau eraill o bobl yn cael eu cefnogi gartref i sicrhau na fydd yn rhaid iddynt gael eu derbyn i'r ysbyty nac i ofal preswyl. O ganlyniad i gyfraniad amserol yr holl weithwyr proffesiynol, sicrhawyd bod gwasanaethau a chyfarpar ar gael i'r bobl fel bod modd iddynt gyflawni'r hyn sy'n bwysig iddynt.

Partneriaeth ac Integreiddio – Gwnaethom ofyn: I ba raddau y mae'r awdurdod lleol yn gallu sicrhau ei hun ei fod yn achub ar gyfleoedd i weithio mewn partneriaeth mewn ffordd gadarnhaol, er mwyn gwneud y gorau o gynlluniau sy'n canolbwyntio ar yr unigolyn a sicrhau y darperir gwasanaethau integredig a'u bod yn gynaliadwy?

Mae ymrwymiad clir i gydweithio ym mhob rhan o Gyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Rhondda Cynon Taf. Roedd yn amlwg bod cydberthnasau â phartneriaid wedi cael eu hatgyfnerthu yn ystod y pandemig.

Dywedodd y darparwyr wrthym am ddulliau cyfathrebu da a chyfarfodydd cadarnhaol a gynhaliwyd â chynrychiolwyr yr awdurdod lleol yn ystod y pandemig. Gwnaethant sylwadau ar y ffordd roedd y sector wedi elwa ar yr arweinyddiaeth a'r cymorth amserol a roddwyd gan yr awdurdod lleol. Mae dulliau cyfathrebu a phrosesau rhannu gwybodaeth effeithiol wedi cefnogi'r gwaith agos a wnaed gyda darparwyr annibynnol. Dywedodd y darparwyr wrthym fod diwylliant o ymddiriedaeth wedi datblygu. Dywedodd un o'r darparwyr, *“There has been a lot more working together with organisations and that can only be better for the individuals we support”* (Rydym wedi bod yn cydweithio llawer mwy â sefydliadau, a gall hynny ond fod yn well i'r unigolion rydym yn eu cefnogi).

Roedd trefniadau gweithio mewn partneriaeth yn amlwg iawn yn yr Hwb Diogelu Amlasiantaeth (MASH). Roedd gan y MASH gydberthnasau sefydledig â phartneriaid. Drwy gydweithio gweithredol rhwng gweithwyr amlasiantaethol proffesiynol, sicrhawyd bod gwaith effeithiol yn cael ei wneud o ran rhannu gwybodaeth, a nodi a monitro anghenion a risgiau plant ac oedolion. Roedd gwybodaeth yn cael ei chasglu'n brydlon ym mhob rhan o'r grŵp amlasiantaeth ac yn cael ei defnyddio i lywio penderfyniadau a chymau gweithredu mewn perthynas â llesiant a diogelwch pobl.

Clywsom am enghreifftiau cadarnhaol o gydweithio a gweithio mewn partneriaeth rhwng yr awdurdod lleol a'i bartneriaid er mwyn cefnogi llesiant y bobl. Roedd enghreifftiau o hyn yn cynnwys defnyddio gwirfoddolwyr i gefnogi pobl gyda thasgau megis mynd â'r ci am dro a chasglu bwyd, a'r Llwybr Llesiant Integredig a ddatblygwyd rhwng y gwasanaethau plant, gwasanaethau addysg a chynhwysiant a darparwyr cwnsela er mwyn sicrhau bod plant sy'n agored i niwed yn cael eu cefnogi drwy gydol y pandemig.

Ar lefel unigol, clywsom am enghreifftiau cadarnhaol o gydberthnasau gwaith da rhwng gweithwyr proffesiynol a phobl sy'n derbyn gofal a/neu gymorth. Roedd eu hymarfer yn

barchus a gwelsom fod y staff yn ymdrechu i ddeall amgylchiadau'r bobl ac i'w cefnogi i gyflawni eu canlyniadau personol.

Llesiant – Gwnaethom ofyn: I ba raddau y mae'r awdurdod lleol yn hybu llesiant, gan sicrhau bod pobl yn aros yn ddiogel ac yn cyflawni canlyniadau cadarnhaol sydd o bwys iddynt?

Mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi arfer ei swyddogaethau o dan Ddeddf Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol a Llesiant (Cymru) 2014; mae wedi gwneud ymdrechion i sicrhau ei fod yn cyfrannu'n gadarnhaol at lesiant pobl y mae angen gofal a chymorth arnynt a gofalwyr y mae angen cymorth arnynt. Ar lefel unigol mae hyn wedi cynnwys holi'r unigolion am eu dymuniadau a'u teimladau, gweithio mewn partneriaeth â phobl i ddatblygu atebion creadigol er mwyn cyflawni'r canlyniadau a nodwyd ganddynt eu hunain a hybu/sicrhau eu llesiant.

Mae angen gwneud gwelliannau i sicrhau bod yr awdurdod lleol yn cyflawni ei ddyletswyddau statudol yn gyson. Yn y gwasanaethau oedolion, bu oedi wrth gwblhau rhai asesiadau ac adolygiadau. Cawsom wybod bod sawl rheswm dros hyn gan gynnwys galw cynyddol a bylchau/swyddi gwag mewn rhai timau. Mae'r rheolwyr yn monitro, yn asesu risgiau ac yn blaenoriaethu'r bobl hynny sy'n aros am asesiad/adolygiad yn rheolaidd. Roedd camau wedi cael eu cymryd er mwyn cynyddu capasiti i fynd i'r afael â'r oedi wrth gwblhau adolygiadau.

Yn ystod y pandemig, mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi bwrw ati i ddatblygu, addasu a darparu gwasanaethau mewn ffyrdd gwahanol er mwyn hybu llesiant pobl. Gwelsom enghreifftiau o gynlluniau wrth gefn a blaenoriaethu'r gwasanaethau a ddarperir. Clywsom am nifer o enghreifftiau cadarnhaol o'r modd roedd y gwasanaethau/ cymorth a oedd yn cael eu darparu wedi gwneud cyfraniad cadarnhaol i ddiogelwch a llesiant llawer o bobl yn ystod y pandemig. Roedd enghreifftiau o hyn yn cynnwys y gwasanaeth ymatebwyr symudol â'r nod o atal galwadau diangen i'r gwasanaethau brys, cymorth allgymorth, pecynnau gweithgareddau chwarae, ac ail-bennu swyddi 120 o aelodau o'r staff i ddod i gysylltiad â phobl ar y rhestr o unigolion a warchodir.

Gwelsom ymatebion amserol i ymholiadau diogelu. Roedd dulliau gweithredu'r ymarferwyr yn ystyrion ac yn drefnus ac roedd partneriaid a gweithwyr proffesiynol yn cael eu cynnwys, lle y bo'n berthnasol. Yn gyffredinol, roedd risgiau a chryfderau'n cael eu hystyried, ac roedd cynlluniau diogelwch clir yn cael eu rhoi ar waith er mwyn lliniaru risgiau a/neu anghenion a nodwyd. Mae'r gwaith o oruchwylio oedolion a allai fod yn wynebu risg wedi cael ei wella drwy roi proses ar waith sy'n golygu bod y tîm diogelu yn goruchwylio nifer o achosion lle mae sawl hysbysiad diogelu'r cyhoedd yn dod i law.

Mae recriwtio a chadw gweithlu sefydlog yn parhau'n flaenoriaeth i'r awdurdod lleol. Roedd swyddi gwag mewn rhai timau. Roedd materion o ran capasiti, ynghyd â chymhlethdod achosion, yn achosi pwysau yn rhai o'r timau. Roedd y rheolwyr wedi ceisio cynyddu capasiti yn y timau hyn, ac mae gwaith yn mynd rhagddo mewn perthynas â rhoi

strategaeth gweithlu ar waith, sy'n cynnwys y nod o gael gweithlu gyda digon o staff, sydd â'r gwerthoedd, y sgiliau a'r hyder sydd eu hangen i ddiwallu anghenion plant ac oedolion yn Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Dull:

- gwnaethom adolygu'r ddogfennaeth a ddarparwyd gan yr awdurdod lleol
- gwnaethom siarad â phobl a oedd yn derbyn, neu a oedd wedi derbyn, gofal a chymorth, gan gynnwys pobl ifanc â phrofiad o'r system gofal
- gwnaethom edrych ar 36 o ffeiliau achos
- gwnaethom gynnal naw cyfweiliad olrhain achosion ag ymarferwyr
- gwnaethom gynnal arolygon i; bobl oedd â phrofiad o ofal a chymorth, darparwyr, sefydliadau trydydd sector, staff, arweinwyr diogelu, yr heddlu a gweithwyr addysg a gofal iechyd proffesiynol
- gwnaethom siarad ag ymarferwyr, rheolwyr, darparwyr, penaethiaid gwasanaeth, cyfarwyddwr, aelodau etholedig a phartneriaid

Y Camau Nesaf

Rydym wedi nodi cryfderau a meysydd i'w gwella. Byddwn yn adolygu cynnydd y meysydd hyn drwy ein cyfarfodydd adolygu gwerthuso perfformiad â'r penaethiaid gwasanaeth a'r cyfarwyddwr. Rydym yn disgwyl y bydd y meysydd i'w gwella a nodwyd gennym yn cael eu cynnwys yng nghynlluniau gwella'r awdurdod lleol. Hoffem ddiolch i bawb a wnaeth ein helpu i gynnal y archwiliad sicrwydd hwn ac i'r bobl a'r staff hynny a siaradodd â ni.

Gweler ein Hysbysiad Preifatrwydd yn <https://arolygiaethgofal.cymru/sut-rydym-yn-defnyddioch-gwybodaeth-bersonol>

Yn gywir,



Lou Bushell-Bauers

Pennaeth Arolygu Awdurdodau Lleol
Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru

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Paul Mee
Group Director – Community and Children’s Services
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Cambrian Park
Clydach Vale
Tonypandy
RCT
CF40 2XX

Dyddiad/Date: 8 July 2021

Dear Director,

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) – Assurance Check 2021: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

This letter summarises the findings of our assurance check on 24 to 28 May 2021. The purpose of this assurance check was to review how well local authority social services continue to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being.

Overview

In March 2020, CIW suspended its routine programme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable local authorities and providers to focus fully on responding to the challenging circumstances. A revised programme of assurance checks recommenced in September.

We considered safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services, the safety of services they access and the safety and well-being of people who work in services. Our key lines of enquiry were focused on the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. We have aligned our findings to the four principles: People - Voice and Control, Prevention, Well-being, Partnerships and Integration.

Our focus was on:

1. How well is the local authority discharging its statutory functions to keep people who need care and support and carers who need support, safe and promote their well-being during the pandemic?

Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru (AGC)
Swyddfa Llywodraeth Cymru
Sarn Mynach
Cyffordd Llandudno
LL31 9RZ
www.arolygiaethgofal.cymru

☎ 0300 790 0126
✉ CIW@gov.wales

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)
Welsh Government Office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ
www.careinspectorate.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

2. What is the local authority doing to prevent the need for children to come into care; and are children returning home to their families quickly enough where safe to do so?

Summary of findings and priorities for improvement

People - voice and control - We asked: How well is the local authority ensuring people, carers and practitioners are having their voices heard, making informed choices, and maintaining control over their lives. While, also balancing the recommendations and requirements made by Public Health Wales and Welsh Government to limit the spread of COVID-19?

The local authority had made clear its strategic and operational intent to support vulnerable young people, adults and carers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (the pandemic). Leaders have maintained a line of sight on the changing COVID-19 landscape, resulting in clear plans and innovative practice/responses to address the challenges presented. Leaders and senior managers continue to keep under review what is working well and different ways of working because of the pandemic, which they intend to take forward.

The COVID-19 infection rate in Rhondda Cynon Taf has been particularly high. The local authority is seeing an increase in demand for services and increased complexity of need, including in relation to people's mental health and emotional well-being. The local authority is continuing to work collaboratively with partners to build and support community resilience.

People told us how the local authority had maintained safe contact throughout the pandemic. We heard how information technology had been used to maintain contact with people and develop new types of service delivery. Contact had been undertaken virtually, face-to-face where required, and risk assessed as appropriate to do so.

People told us it was generally easy to contact the local authority; they felt listened to and were treated with dignity and respect. They were able to discuss the support available to them and found the information, advice and or assistance provided by the local authority was useful. We saw examples of people being appropriately provided with advice and signposted to other services/agencies.

Overall, we found people's views are sought and they are involved in assessments and care and support planning. Case recordings were variable in respect of capturing the person's involvement. People are provided with opportunities to comment on the services they receive.

In adults services we found an outcome-focused approach embedded in practice, this supported co-production and identification of personal outcomes. Matters relating to consent, advocacy, mental capacity, and best interests were routinely considered at an

early stage in the engagement process. The information gained was used appropriately to inform assessments and care and support planning.

The children's services files we viewed contained evidence of information gathering to represent the child's circumstances. Where required there was an exchange of information between agencies. We found practitioners and independent reviewing officers (IROs) had an understanding of the circumstances and experiences of the children and families they were working with. Practitioners routinely considered and made the offer of advocacy. The local authority has identified further work is required in children's services to embed a model of social work practice that is strengths-based and outcome focused. It is critical that the model of practice ensures a continuous focus on children's progress and experiences and a strong quality assurance process is implemented that measures the impact of the model.

We saw examples of carers being offered a carer's assessment and carer's views represented in recordings. The local authority has identified carers requiring additional support and they reported an increase of approximately 30% more carer's assessments completed than in the same period the previous year. The local authority told us work to support carers has continued throughout the pandemic, albeit sometimes in reduced and different ways. For example, carers had been supported with online resources and provision of devices and had access to a counselling service. Practitioners described how carers had been contacted and agreement reached on how and when care and support would/could be provided.

People are given the opportunity to tailor and manage their own support through use of direct payments. We saw examples of direct payments being offered and taken up, helping people to have flexibility and control over the care and support they received. There was evidence of the authority using direct payments responsively as a means of providing an alternative method of support.

Ensuring staff well-being is a key priority for leaders and senior managers. We saw positive examples of the promotion of staff well-being. Examples included a self-referral process for staff to access occupational health, mindfulness sessions, and availability of counselling. We found staff morale was generally good. Staff told us they felt supported by colleagues and managers to do their job, and a majority said their caseloads were manageable. Some staff we spoke with described an 'all hands on deck' approach during the pandemic, which they said helped them work well as a team, with a clear focus on people who need care and support. We heard of staff working flexibly to ensure positive outcomes for people.

Prevention - We asked: To what extent is the local authority successful in promoting prevention and reducing need for increased or formal support from statutory agencies?

We found a positive integrated approach to prevention. We saw examples of professionals and agencies sharing information and identifying children and/or adults in need of help and

protection and making appropriate referrals to social services. There was a prompt response to immediate presenting risk and need. The local authority had identified further work/training was required in adults services, to ensure potential consequences of identified risk are consistently recognised and where necessary appropriate and timely action is taken to mitigate risk.

There has continued to be a good strategic focus on prevention, market sustainability and development of services during the pandemic. Examples of continued service development included the implementation of family group conferencing and development of additional Extra Care accommodation. Planned work has continued in regards to the remodelling/transformation of some teams/services, aimed at improving service user experience.

There are waiting lists in some service areas including the sensory service, the adaptations and community equipment service, and care and support. The local authority reported waiting lists had developed/been exacerbated by an increase in demand and gaps in some teams. Managers are proactive in how they monitor, risk assess, and review the priority status of those people waiting for a service. Plans are in place to reduce waiting lists. This is an area the authority will need to continue to closely monitor in order to identify progress and any emergent issues.

The local authority has implemented a 'Children Looked After Strategy' with the aim to safely reduce the number of children looked after, which is a recognised priority for the local authority. In the last year there has been a gradual reduction in the numbers of children becoming looked after. The local authority has commissioned an independent piece of work to review the strategy to identify any service gaps and areas for learning. Senior managers and officers have a good understanding and knowledge of the profile of children currently looked after and are strongly committed to the preventative agenda. They are looking to develop their options for responding to crisis situations, particularly for those young people with very complex needs, and are undertaking a feasibility study in relation to expanding their residential provision. Work is underway in relation to the accommodation pathway for care leavers. This is an area the authority will need to continue to closely monitor in order to identify progress and any emergent issues.

In adults services we found supportive infrastructures across social and health care, and aligned delivery systems. We saw evidence of joint working, which included positive examples of people being supported to discharge from hospital and other examples of people being supported at home to avoid the need for admission to hospital or residential care. Timely involvement of all relevant professionals' ensured services and equipment were made available to help people achieve what matters to them.

Partnership and Integration - We asked: To what extent is the local authority able to assure itself opportunities for partnership working are positively exploited to maximise person centred planning and ensure integrated service delivery and service sustainability?

There is a clear commitment to collaborative working across Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC). It was apparent relationships with partners had been strengthened during the pandemic.

Providers told us of good communication and positive meetings held with local authority representatives during the pandemic. They commented on how the sector had benefited from timely guidance and support provided by the local authority. Close working with independent providers has been supported by effective communication and sharing of information. Providers told us a culture of trust had developed. One provider commented, *“There has been a lot more working together with organisations and that can only be better for the individuals we support.”*

Partnership working was particularly prominent in the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub). The MASH had well-established relationships with partners. Operational co-operation between multi-agency professionals ensured effective working in relation to sharing information, identifying and monitoring children and adults’ needs and risks. Information was gathered promptly across the multi-agency group and this was used to inform decisions and actions in relation to people’s well-being and safety.

We heard of positive examples of collaboration and partnership between the local authority and its partners to support people’s well-being. Examples included the use of volunteers to support people with tasks such as dog walking and food collection, and the Integrated Wellbeing Pathway developed between children’s services, education and inclusion services and counselling providers to ensure vulnerable children were supported throughout the pandemic.

On an individual level, we heard of positive examples of good working relationships between professionals and people receiving care and or support. Practice was respectful and we saw efforts made by staff to understand people’s circumstances and to support people to meet their own personal outcomes.

Well-being - We asked: To what extent is the local authority promoting well-being, ensuring people maintain their safety and achieve positive outcomes that matter to them?

The local authority has exercised its functions under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; it has strived to ensure it makes a positive contribution to the well-being of people who need care and support and carers who need support. At an individual level this has included seeking out the person’s wishes and feelings working in partnership with people to develop creative solutions to meet their self-identified outcomes and promoting/securing their well-being.

Improvements are needed to ensure the local authority consistently meets its statutory duties. In adults services, we found delays in completion of some assessments and reviews. We were informed this was due to a number of factors including increased demand and gaps/vacancies in some teams. Managers regularly monitor, risk assess and

prioritise those people waiting for an assessment/review. Action had been taken to increase capacity in order to address the delay in completion of reviews.

During the pandemic the local authority has proactively developed, adapted and delivered services in different ways to promote people's well-being. We saw examples of contingency planning and prioritisation of service provision. We heard of many positive examples of how the provision of services/support had made a positive contribution to the safety and well-being of many people during the pandemic. Examples included the mobile responder service aimed at preventing calls to emergency services, provision of outreach support, provision of play activity packs, and 120 staff members who were re-deployed to make contact with those people on the shielded list.

We saw timely responses to safeguarding enquiries. The practitioner's approaches were considered and well organised and partners and professionals were included, where relevant. Overall, there was consideration of risks and strengths and clear safety plans put in place to mitigate risks and or needs identified. The oversight of adults potentially at risk had been strengthened by implementation of a process in which the safeguarding team have oversight of cases where multiple public protection notifications are received.

Recruitment and retention of a stable workforce remains a priority for the local authority. There were vacancies in some teams. Capacity issues coupled with case complexity was causing pressure in some teams. Managers had sought to increase capacity within these teams and work is ongoing in relation to implementation of a workforce strategy, which includes the aim to have a workforce in sufficient numbers with the right values, knowledge, skills and confidence to meet the needs of the children and adults in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Method:

- we reviewed documentation supplied by the local authority
- we spoke with people who were receiving or had received care and support, including care experienced young people
- we reviewed 36 case files
- we held nine case tracking interviews with practitioners
- we administered surveys to; people who had experience of care and support, providers, third sector organisations, staff, safeguarding leads, police, education and healthcare professionals
- we spoke with practitioners, managers, providers, heads of service, director, elected members and partners

Next Steps

We have identified strengths and areas for improvement. We will review the progress of these areas through our performance evaluation review meetings with the heads of service and director. We expect the areas of improvement we have identified to be included in the

local authority's improvement plans. We would like to extend our thanks to all those who helped with the arrangements for this assurance check and to those people and staff who spoke with us.

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Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lou Bushell-Bauers', written in a cursive style.

Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection
Care Inspectorate Wales

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

21st APRIL 2021

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item No:

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

**YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND
PARTICIPATION SERVICE: AN
OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT AND
PROVISION DURING COVID-19**

Author: Jessica Allen, Children and Young People's Service Manager
Email: Jessica.allen@rctcbc.gov.uk

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an overview of the support the Youth Engagement and Participation Service has offered young people during the Covid-19 period, whether directly or indirectly via partner agencies.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Scrutinise and comment on the information contained within this report.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 At the request of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, this report is being presented to Members to raise their awareness of the nature and impact of the Youth Engagement and Participation Service's targeted support and youth work provision offered to young people over the past 12 months.
- 3.2 The aim of this report is to give Members a clear understanding of the needs of young people at the present time and provide an opportunity

for Members to contribute towards the service's recovery plan that will support young people to recover from the impact of the pandemic

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 On 23rd March 2020, the Youth Engagement and Participation Service suspended all face-to-face work with young people and colleagues, as a direct result of the country entering lockdown.
- 4.2 The Covid-19 restrictions required staff to demonstrate personal resilience in the practical implementation of emergency contingency plans to manage crisis, whilst at the same time predict and plan for the longer term impact on young people.
- 4.3 The situation required transforming the service's delivery methods almost overnight; this was only possible due to the active engagement of staff across the Youth Engagement and Participation Service to effect cultural change, supported by their managers who were confident to let staff take measured risks.
- 4.4 Focusing on service users, the team was tasked to assess needs and identify requirements, which were then used to reallocate resources and develop contingency plans. Their previous engagement in service innovation and their confidence to use their expertise and knowledge of the needs of young people resulted in a comprehensive youth offer of both targeted and universal services to assist young people process and manage their situation.
- 4.5 The Service has demonstrated its ability to anticipate the immediate, mid-term and longer term impact of Covid-19 on young people, through the number and range of projects it has undertaken over the last 12 months and the plans in place to continue to develop youth work provision over the coming months.

5. OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITY DURING COVID-19

- 5.1 **Referral work:** The service's core work over the past 12 months has been its referral work, supporting identified young people on a 1:1 basis. Despite lockdown restrictions, the service has amended its delivery model to offer dedicated and targeted support to young people remotely. This included text messages, WhatsApp, telephone and Zoom calls. In exceptional circumstances, if a young person was deemed to be at crisis point and remote support was not effective, face-to-face meetings have been authorised in Covid-secure environments.

Resilience assessments and subsequent action plans continued to be undertaken at the start of intervention, where possible, to provide clarity on the issues the individual was facing and provide guidance on the support plan being offered.

From the first day of lockdown, open cases have been routinely assessed and categorised to ensure those most at risk received enhanced support, time and attention from the youth workers. This practice has continued throughout all lockdown periods.

5.2 Mental health and wellbeing support: Many young people's mental health and wellbeing has been adversely affected by Covid-19 for a variety of reasons. This impact is likely to continue for a prolonged period of time as a legacy of the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, the service invested in additional capacity in their team of Mental Health and Wellbeing Officers within YEPS. The team work directly with young people who are referred to the service for support to improve their mental health where they don't reach the threshold for other services, like CAMHS. In exceptional cases, the team will work with individuals who are open to CAMHS but require further additional support within their community or school on a more frequent basis than the health appointments. The staff employed within this team are qualified youth workers who have received enhanced training to be able to assist young people with their specific wellbeing needs.

5.3 Wellbeing packs: Packs have been sent out to over 200 young people struggling with the social restrictions and those referred for support through the Integrated Wellbeing Pathway. These packs included:

- Life journals
- Affirmation cards
- Art pads
- Colouring pens
- Stress ball
- Chatter box – provide daily tips on supporting wellbeing

Feedback has been positive and the life journals will become a legacy of the pandemic, to be used with future referrals as appropriate.

5.4 Reflective practice sessions: The service has been working in partnership with Education Psychology Service (EPS) colleagues, who have provided reflective practice sessions for the YEPS's Mental Health and Wellbeing Officers (MHWOs). These reflective sessions have offered the MHWOs the opportunity to develop their knowledge

and skills to more effectively support young people with mental health concerns. The clinical expertise of the EPS has assisted the MHWOs to consider the needs of young people in an alternative way and challenged the officers to develop more targeted plans for individual young people. These sessions will continue as part of the legacy of Covid-19, and a similar model of professional support is being investigated for other YEPS staff.

- 5.5 **Emergency childcare hubs:** The service was an active partner in the delivery of the emergency childcare hubs from March to June 2020. Staff were deployed to key hubs where there were a high number of secondary aged young people attending, either as children of key workers or vulnerable individuals. The staff supported the staffing of the hubs, delivering activities not only to attendees aged 11 years and above, but also supporting those under 11 years as well. The key hubs supported were Ysgol Nantgwyn and Heol y Celyn. The wider service collated activity packs and delivered to each school on a weekly basis, offering staff the flexibility to use the resources with the children and young people.
- 5.6 **School-based support:** At times when secondary schools have been operational, the Youth Engagement Officers have continued to base themselves on their allocated school sites, to ensure they are visible and accessible to the learners. When schools returned to sites in June and July 2020 and again from September to December 2020, the YEOs undertook their usual duties to support learners via offering support on a 1:1 basis (referral work); group work where a common need or issue was identified, such as managing anxiety about returning to school; targeted work for young people impacted by suicide; etc. After school sessions were offered to all schools in line with their Covid-19 risk assessments, where pupils could come together to participate in an activity as long as they remained within their bubble. An example of this is a Year 7 friendship group, to help pupils get to know their new classmates as many other social activities had been suspended.
- 5.7 **Summer holiday childcare:** Following the success of the emergency childcare hubs, the Council committed to the provision of childcare throughout the summer holiday period for children of key workers and vulnerable individuals. The YEP Service facilitated and delivered the summer holiday childcare programme across six hubs (Darran Park, Hawthorn, Penywaun, Porth, Tonyrefail and Ynysboeth), in conjunction with Leisure Services and internal Education and Inclusion Service teams. 336 spaces were available across the hubs, with an average

attendance of 160 daily. In total, 3677 attendances were recorded at the hubs over the five-week period.

The staff led the delivery of the programme across the six sites for five weeks of the holidays, offering children and young people exciting and safe activities, supported by a select number of Covid-secure external providers. Activities included sporting activities, pyrography, clay model art, wellbeing/mindfulness, to name a few, and each were tailored for the age range of the group they were working with. The feedback from parents, carers, professionals and the children and young people was overwhelmingly positive.

- 5.8 **Integrated Wellbeing Pathway:** The Attendance and Wellbeing Service (AWS) and YEPS jointly developed the Integrated Wellbeing Pathway in response to the reported needs of young people as they were due to return to school following the first lockdown period. The pathway provides a continuation of support for young people who are experiencing heightened levels of anxiety about returning to school during the pandemic.

Young people who were at risk of not returning to school were identified by the school who informed the AWS. The AWS conducted Wellbeing Response Visits to the family home to ascertain the reason for the individual not returning to school. If, during the discussion with the family, it is identified that the young person was nervous or anxious about returning, the AWS would make a referral to YEPS for virtual sessions to build the young person's confidence so they felt ready to return to school.

The referral was managed over a series of sessions and provided the opportunity for the individual to work through a programme of support with the young person. This programme included mindfulness practices, sleeping techniques, positive affirmations, and understanding stress and how to manage it.

The additional capacity was funded by additional School-Based Counselling funding from Welsh Government, to provide an alternative option to counselling. For full details, see Appendix 1.

- 5.9 **Enhanced EET programme:** School leavers' exit from mainstream education has been significantly affected by Covid-19, leaving many without a destination or clear progression plan for their future. Therefore, the service, with input from schools, Careers Wales and the Gatsby Project workers in HR, developed an enhanced support programme to offer current year 11 pupils, 2019/20 leavers and

electively home educated a range of interventions to help them identify an appropriate further education, employment or training opportunity. Such interventions included virtual support session with individuals identified as at risk of becoming NEET; coffee mornings with career advisors; virtual volunteering experience days; virtual employment days, including CV writing skills, interview techniques; developing the basic skills of those in work to ensure they continue to be employable in the post-Covid world.

5.10 Tackling youth homelessness: Preventing youth homelessness continues to be a priority for the service, and whilst the number of young people presenting as homeless has reduced over the past year, it is likely that there are many young people who do not have a permanent residence and are temporarily living with other family members or friends. The service continues to develop its universal interventions to reduce the risk of homelessness, like awareness sessions and education programmes to improve life skills. It has also piloted a project with Llamau, to identify those most at risk of becoming homeless in the future. The learning from this pilot project will be used to develop an identification tool that can be rolled out to all schools during academic year 2021/22. Once identified, YEPS will provide a series of young person-centred and family interventions to improve relationships that allow the young person to remain within the family home.

5.11 Street-based youth work: From October 2020, the service entirely re-focused its community youth offer to deliver street-based youth work across the county borough. This was in response to the escalation of young people's needs who are seeking a trusted adult/support during the pandemic.

The service is currently deploying up to four teams every evening to the key localities across RCT where young people are known to frequent. Youth workers have been keen to establish this method of engaging with young people whilst other community options are suspended due to Covid-19 restrictions. This work has been well-received by young people with 2785 contacts made in the Autumn alone. The staff engaged with young people to ask them how they were managing in lockdown, what they feel the issues they are facing and what they would like to see in their local communities to support them. Responses such as re-opening youth clubs and after school provision was a primary request, alongside additional mental health and wellbeing support, better outdoor shelters and street lighting, and access to the condom card scheme. This feedback has helped the service to formulate its recovery plan for the coming 12 months, including adding capacity to key provision offered by the service.

- 5.12 **Other community provision:** During the street-based sessions, staff have started to establish new relationships with local businesses to consider what they are able to offer young people in their own area. For example, in Treorchy, a supermarket has offered YEPS the use of a parcel of land for free to develop as a safe outdoor space for young people to congregate and for the service to host outdoor activities, such as street dance. In addition, discussions are underway about the use of tennis courts in the area for additional physical activities hosted by both YEPS and external partners to offer several sporting activities throughout the week. This work was suspended during each lockdown period, but work will continue with the relevant organisations once it is safe to do so.
- 5.13 **Staff support in children's homes:** Covid-19 regulations have meant that most frontline services in RCT have seen a staffing shortage at some point over the past 12 months, as staff have had to self-isolate when they develop symptoms. This has resulted in cross-team working to ensure that essential services can continue to be provided despite staff sickness. YEPS staff have provided staffing support in the Council's children's homes at such times, working with children and young people in these homes during the working week, evenings and weekends. This practice has strengthened the working relationships between these teams and has informed service improvements for the future as part of the service's recovery plan.
- 5.14 **Commissioned mobile youth clubs:** Utilising core budget and external capital grants, the service commissioned two vehicles to act as mobile youth clubs. The vehicles will provide the opportunity for a hub in a locality where access to a suitable permanent venue is not available. They can be used as mobile youth clubs, as the base for community activities like fun days and street-based youth work, as well as a hub for use at times when an immediate response is required within a community. The vehicles will be in full use by the service and its partners from April 2021 onwards.
- 5.15 **Virtual youth offer:** Transforming service delivery methods required the active engagement of staff across the service to effect cultural change, supported by managers who were confident to let staff take measured risks. Focusing on service users, the team was tasked to assess needs and identify requirements, which were then used to reallocate resources and develop contingency plans. Their previous engagement in service innovation and their confidence to use their expertise and knowledge of the needs of young people resulted in a virtual youth work offer available within 72 hours of lockdown

commencing. Service data demonstrates significant levels of online engagement with users in addition to the 1:1 support for over 1000 young people delivered remotely.

The service realigned its online offer, with a significant increase in the volume of information, advice and guidance, as well as universal activities available to young people via the website (www.wicid.tv) and social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) The comprehensive offer was delivered by YEPS with significant contributions from delivery partners including sexual health teams, substance misuse organisations, and commissioned providers.

- 5.16 **Youth fora:** the service has been proactive in consulting with young people throughout the pandemic. From seeking opinions during 1:1 sessions to surveys on social media platforms, YEPS staff have been committed to listening to young people to inform service developments.

To further inform the service's decisions on future developments, officers have worked to transfer the physical local youth fora into online sessions. The three local youth fora have met eight times to discuss the concerns young people have as a result of Covid and the support they would like to see implemented as part of the service's recovery plan. In addition, the fora met with, discussed and contributed towards:

- Votes@16 campaign *#yepsisthisyourfirsttime*
- Police and Crime Commissioner's "Young Voice Conversation" and the development of their young people's website
- Safer Wales "Champions of Wales" project
- Jigsaw Project, looking at how girls and women have been impacted by Covid-19
- Poetry Project, to create a series of short poems to change the negative views of young people within their wider community.

- 5.17 **Workforce development:** The pandemic has required the service to be dynamic and quickly adapt to the emerging needs of young people. Reviewing the levels of engagement and reporting rising levels of needs, the service has been able to review its staffing requirements to meet the future needs of young people. As such, the service commenced a management of change process in February 2021, realigning its priorities to the current and future needs of young people and adding capacity to the service in key areas where more additional staffing hours will be needed.

Furthermore, the service has made a firm commitment to the upskilling of the youth workforce across RCT, not only for Council employed youth workers but for those working in our partner organisations, such as third sector and housing partners and also community members.

Delivering youth work qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3, this commitment will not only benefit community members and organisations but most importantly the young people with whom they will be supporting.

In January 2021, the service appointed two youth work apprentices. Throughout their two-year contract, they will work in all areas of the service and gain Level 2 and 3 qualifications in Youth and Community Work.

6. IMPACT TO DATE

6.1 Over the course of the year, 2020/21, the service has provided targeted support to:

- 1035 individual young people on a 1:1 basis through its referral work, which includes 784 new referrals accepted during the year. The number of referred open cases peaked at 504 in November 2020.

6.2 In addition to this, the service has provided open access opportunities to young people to the level of:

- 250 exciting virtual activity programmes for young people to take part in during lockdown, totalling 708 individual sessions;
- 1,521 individual young people attended these sessions over the year, who attended 3292 times in total;
- 124 street-based sessions in the Autumn 2020 (they weren't introduced until October 2020 and had to be suspended in December 2020) and during those sessions, officers made contact with 2785 young people on the streets of RCT.

6.3 For a breakdown of these figures by month, please see Appendix 2.

7. YOUNG PEOPLE'S FEEDBACK

7.1 Over the course of the year, there have been multiple opportunities for young people to provide their opinion on the issues they are facing and the provision they would like to see in the future.

7.2 Throughout June 2020, Rhondda Cynon Taf's Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) launched its Covid-19 Response Consultation to capture the views of young people aged 11-25 on the support offered by YEPS throughout the Covid-19 Lockdown. There were 125 respondents and the results included:

- 68% stated they felt happy or very happy at that time;
- 60% stated they enjoyed or really enjoyed being at home during lockdown;
- 71% stated they felt bored during lockdown;
- 34% stated they felt lonely during lockdown;
- 29% state they felt anxious during lockdown;
- 28% stated they felt sad and worried during lockdown.
- 79% stated the worst part of lockdown was not being able to see their friends;
- 56% stated the worst part was not being able to go to school or getting help with their school work.

For all response, see the full consultation report in Appendix 3.

7.3 During the street-based sessions in Autumn 2020, staff actively sought the young people's views on future developments, with the responses including:

- Better access to information, advice and guidance;
- Youth clubs to reopen;
- Commence trips and activities in line with pre-Covid programmes;
- Resumption of the condom card scheme;
- Improved street lighting;
- Install street shelters, with benches and access to wifi;
- New skateparks.

7.4 Young people's feedback informed the service's delivery plan over the past year and will continue to influence the recovery plan from April 2021 onwards.

8. STAFF FEEDBACK

8.1 The need for change, respond promptly to critical events and advocate for young people's need has never been required more than in the past 12 months. Covid-19 has required staff to demonstrate personal resilience in the practical implementation of emergency contingency plans to manage crisis, whilst at the same time predict and plan for the longer term impact on young people.

8.2 Management were conscious of the pressure placed on staff and have provided additional opportunities for individuals to discuss the impact the pandemic is having on their workloads and their own wellbeing. Opportunities include more frequent virtual meetings, informal team time for officers to come together to share their experiences both within

work on their personal lives and expanded the use of messaging facilities.

8.3 Furthermore, staff have had the chance to respond to formal questionnaires to gain service-wide experiences and use the information to better support staff going forward. In May 2020, a snap survey was promoted to all full time YEPS staff, of which 34 responded. An overview of the responses included:

- 72% responded to say they were feeling 6 or above (scale 1 low – 10 excellent);
 - Many felt positive and relaxed about the opportunity to work from home;
 - Staff were excited to be involved in new projects and lead on innovative ideas;
 - Some stated they felt isolated, trapped and bored at home;
- 59% responded to say that they were enjoying the alternative way of working more than the previous way of working (rated it 6 or above);
- 66% stated they enjoyed the flexible working hours and virtual meetings;
- 63% stated that working from home was beneficial/productive for them;
- 59% stated they felt they could be more creative;
- 36% stated they felt anxious about having to work in different ways and areas of the service than they normally work.

As part of the survey, staff were asked what areas of the new ways of working should be continued when lockdown is lifted. Responses included:

- Maintain an element of virtual work between staff (meetings) and with young people;
- Working with other agencies more regularly than previously able to;
- More regular staff 'check ins';
- More opportunities for home working.

Staff were also asked what areas of the new ways of working should NOT continue after lockdown is lifted. Responses included:

- Virtual work should be balanced with face-to-face work as remote working is not always beneficial;
- Supervision sessions to be in-person, not virtual.

9. RECOVERY PLAN – NEXT STEPS

- 9.1 The work of the service over the coming 6-12 months will be centred around key deliverables:
- Engagement with schools to offer universal and targeted support to pupils onsite;
 - Enhanced engagement with communities, both with the young people who live there and local businesses and organisations who can offer their own services to young people;
 - Specialist support for young people aged 16 years and above, including support into education, employment and training, preventing homelessness and support to build resilience;
 - Wellbeing (including mental health) support for young people;
 - Consultation with young people and the promotion of their rights and entitlements;
 - Enhanced digital youth offer, offering information, advice and guidance, as well as universal and targeted activities via online platforms.
- 9.2 The management of change process will be complete by the end of April 2021 will deliver additional capacity in the key priority areas. This includes realigning the priorities of the service into school and community engagement; young people’s wellbeing; young people’s rights; and 16+ support. It also enhances the service’s capacity for 1:1 work with young people as it is acknowledged that there will be more need of this targeted work as a result of Covid-19.
- 9.3 In April 2020, the service received additional investment from the Council’s Cabinet to grow and the develop the community element of the service to deliver youth work 5 evenings a week and at weekends, in multiple locations. This initiated the development of the Safe Space initiative to support the creation of community based young people friendly locations, supported by local businesses and organisations where young people could get information, advice and assistance safely. Whilst put on hold during the pandemic, the development of the Safe Space initiative will continue to be implemented as restrictions ease.
- 9.4 School-based support will be a priority for the service. Youth workers will continue operate from secondary and through-school sites for part of their contracted hours. This will ensure the workers are visible and accessible to the majority of 11 – 16 year olds in RCT. The officer in each secondary school will provide targeted support to those referred

to them, as well as issue-based group work, including positive wellbeing, tackling anti-social behaviour and support into a post-16 destination upon leaving school.

- 9.5 Developing a comprehensive programme of community-based youth work is a significant priority for the service going forward. Engagement with the local community will be key to achieving this, both in terms of individuals and organisations, and the service has been reconfigured to ensure this priority can be achieved and maintained.

Street-based youth work will continue beyond the pandemic, as it has been vital in reaching young people that otherwise would not have been known to the service. The feedback from interactions with these young people will be used to inform service developments and ensure that their needs are met in the future.

Youth clubs will be reintroduced once it is safe to do so and will complement the street-based youth work as it will be provision to signpost the young people in to. The geographical location of youth clubs will be reviewed and if necessary revised in line with feedback and take up.

A full community youth offer that meets all the needs of young people across RCT cannot be met by the YEP Service alone. Therefore, a key part of this priority will be building relationships with local businesses, voluntary sector organisations and individuals to jointly plan and implement a sustainable youth work offer within each locality. These plans will be tailored to the needs within the local areas, complementing what is already available without duplication.

- 9.6 Thanks to the Council's financial investment in the service, coupled with successful grant bids, the Youth Engagement and Participation Service has commissioned two vehicles to be used as mobile youth clubs/hubs. The vehicles provide the service with the ability to bring youth support and provision to all areas of RCT, even if there are no suitable venues in the local area. They include seating areas, laptop connection, wifi and television screens (for use in playing presentations, games consoles and much more) within the heated vehicle itself, whilst also offering a covered outdoor space on the platform accessed by large bifold doors. It is a perfect space for use all year round and also covid-secure, as the doors can remain open, providing shelter from the elements with full ventilation.

These will be used to fill historical gaps in community provision, where there have not been suitable venues to host youth activities. They can host internal activities such as general youth clubs activities, gaming sessions, arts and crafts sessions, and well as more targeted provision like one-to-one support for young people in a confidential space and pre-employment activities like CV writing, job application support and interview techniques. Within a few steps, the outdoor space allows youth workers to simultaneously host these indoor sessions alongside outdoor chill out zones, film nights, sporting and leisure activities, to name a few.

They will also act as bases for use during community events, as well as during times when an immediate response is required within a community, such as following a public incident.

- 9.7 Additional mental health and wellbeing support will be required by young people as a result of the pandemic. The number of young people actively seeking assistance from a trusted adult in relation to their poor mental health has risen significantly over the past 12 months, and as such the service has responded by enhancing its capacity within the service to be able to provide additional support. These staff work closely with the Education Psychology Service, have developed their working links with CAMHS and will continue with their own professional development to ensure they have the skills and expertise to provide the correct support to young people struggling with their wellbeing.
- 9.8 Workforce development is a key priority for the service. The aim is to ensure it is fit to support the emerging needs of young people as they recover from the pandemic, whilst also providing training opportunities for future youth workers to ensure succession plans can be fulfilled. The development opportunities will not only be offered to internal staff but will also commit to the investment of staff/volunteers in external partners/organisations for the benefit of young people across RCT, regardless of the organisation they wish to engage with.
- 9.9 The workforce development priority will include a comprehensive volunteer training programme to cultivate a skilled and flexible local workforce.
- 9.10 The work of the enhanced education, employment and training programme (prevention of NEETs agenda) will continue to be rolled out, reviewed and revised in line with the changing needs of school leavers. As part of the new 16+ Support Team, a team of officers will be involved in the delivery of a continuum of support for school leavers,

from pre-employment activities, to applying and accessing college and university courses, to general life skills and support with wellbeing.

- 9.11 Virtual youth fora will continue to be embedded over the coming months. Part of the discussions at these fora will include their future operational model, considering young people's opinions as to whether they should be in-person or virtual meetings, or a hybrid model to allow those who are unable to attend a physical meeting to contribute. Gaining young people's views will be as important as ever as the service transitions from emergency planning into the resumption of normal practice. The service understands the needs of young people will be greater and more diverse than pre-pandemic, and in order to swiftly and effectively meet these needs, young people need to be the driving force behind the necessary service developments.
- 9.12 Whilst the 12-month data depicts a declining trend in the number of young people presenting to statutory services as homeless, this likely masks a larger issue within our local communities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there many young people are currently living with friends and other family members on a temporary basis, since their relationship at home became too strained in lockdown. Furthermore, it is likely that as young people find it difficult to secure an education, employment or training destination post-July, further family breakdowns may occur.

Therefore, the service, together with key partners like the Housing teams, are developing a youth homelessness prevention strategy. This strategy ranges from early intervention provision, such as a universal education programme and identification methods to recognise those most at risk of becoming homeless to offer support at an early point, to intensive support for those presenting as homeless and either supporting their to re-engage with their families or support them into appropriate housing.

- 9.13 The Council has made a commitment to developing a prevention strategy, focusing on preventing children and young people taking part in anti-social behaviour and crime. Building on the initial Safe Spaces concept, this is a joint endeavour between YEPS, Community Safety Partnership and the Youth Offending Service initially, and will be widened to include additional partners such as the Police as the work develops.
- 9.14 Building on the Safe Space initiative noted in 9.3 and linked to the above priority is the need to improve the wider community's perception of young people. It is widely recognised that some young people's

activities are interpreted to be anti-social in nature, when this is not always the case. Therefore, this priority will be focused on building relationships between different members of the community through intergenerational projects, links with community groups and promoting of positive work and achievements of young people.

- 9.15 Following the service's involvement in the delivery of the emergency childcare hubs last summer and based on the assumption that full-service delivery will not resume before July, the YEP Service is planning its covid-compliant summer holiday programme. This will involve face-to-face activities, as well as virtual provision. This programme will continue to account for the 1:1 sessions the youth workers will still need to carry out to support their open cases, but will also provide more universal access to fun, exciting and supportive opportunities to young people across RCT.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Referral work with young people in need of dedicated 1:1 support has been the focus of the service's work over the past 12 months. This has included support with mental health concerns, as well as those who are confined to their homes due to shielding.
- 10.2 In times of crisis, the team have been able to request a face-to-face meeting with young people in need of it to reduce the risk to themselves and/or others, albeit in a Covid-secure environment.
- 10.3 Vulnerable young people, including those with additional learning needs, were prioritised for support in the emergency childcare hubs and summer holiday childcare provision.
- 10.4 This report, its findings and the subsequent actions are fully inclusive of all young people from across Rhondda Cynon Taf. Service developments arising from this report will have positive outcomes for all young people.

11. CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 11.1 Throughout the past 12 months, all work that has been undertaken has been based upon consultation responses from young people, contribution from our internal youth workers and feedback from key delivery partners, such as Children's Services, Health and Education colleagues, as a result of their own work with young people across RCT.

11.2 In line with the Council's Management of Change policy and procedures, both staff and Trade Unions have been fully consulted throughout the process of service change to deliver additional staffing capacity in key priority areas.

12. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

12.1 The service has maximised the opportunities to utilise Covid-specific funding over the past 12 months to add capacity to the service when it was most required.

12.2 Additional capital funding was secured to purchase the new mobile youth club vehicles.

12.3 In conjunction with Education and Inclusion Services, the service secured funding to support young people in need of support either pre- or post-school based counselling. The funding supported the service's contribution to the Integrated Wellbeing Pathway, by allowing the appointment of an additional youth worker to offer wellbeing-type interventions to those experiencing severe anxiety about returning to, and engaging in, school.

12.2 Going forward, the service is confident it can meet the priorities as outlined in this report from existing budgets. The additional investment in the Service from the Council's Cabinet in April 2020 and the recent service changes allow the service developments to be implemented and the anticipated outcomes to be realised without the need for additional funding.

13. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

13.1 There are no legal implications that need to be considered concerning the report.

13.2 Going forward, the service will need to continue to operate in line with Covid-19 regulations to keep staff, young people and community members safe and supported.

14. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

14.1 The appropriate provision for young people aged 11 – 25 years across Rhondda Cynon Taf will make a positive contribution towards the Council's Corporate Plan vision of '*a County Borough that has high aspirations, is confident and promotes opportunity for all*', as it will deliver against the specific priorities of '*People - Promoting*

independence and positive lives for everyone and 'Place - Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live and work'.

14.2 Young people are a key cohort of our community as they are the next generation of Rhondda Cynon Taf. As such, they are a priority group under The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It is felt that this report, the survey findings and the subsequent developments that are occurring as a result, will contribute to all of the seven elements that the Act is aiming to achieve:

1. A prosperous Wales;
2. A resilient Wales;
3. A more equal Wales;
4. A healthier Wales;
5. A Wales of cohesive communities;
6. A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh language;
7. A globally responsible Wales.

15. CONCLUSION

12.1 The Service has demonstrated its ability to anticipate the immediate, mid-term and longer term impact of Covid-19 on young people, through the number and range of successful projects it has undertaken over the last 12 months and the plans in place to continue to develop youth work provision over the coming months.

12.3 It is recognised that young people wish for face-to-face services to be reinstated as soon as it is safe to do so, and the service will champion the resumption of services on their behalf.

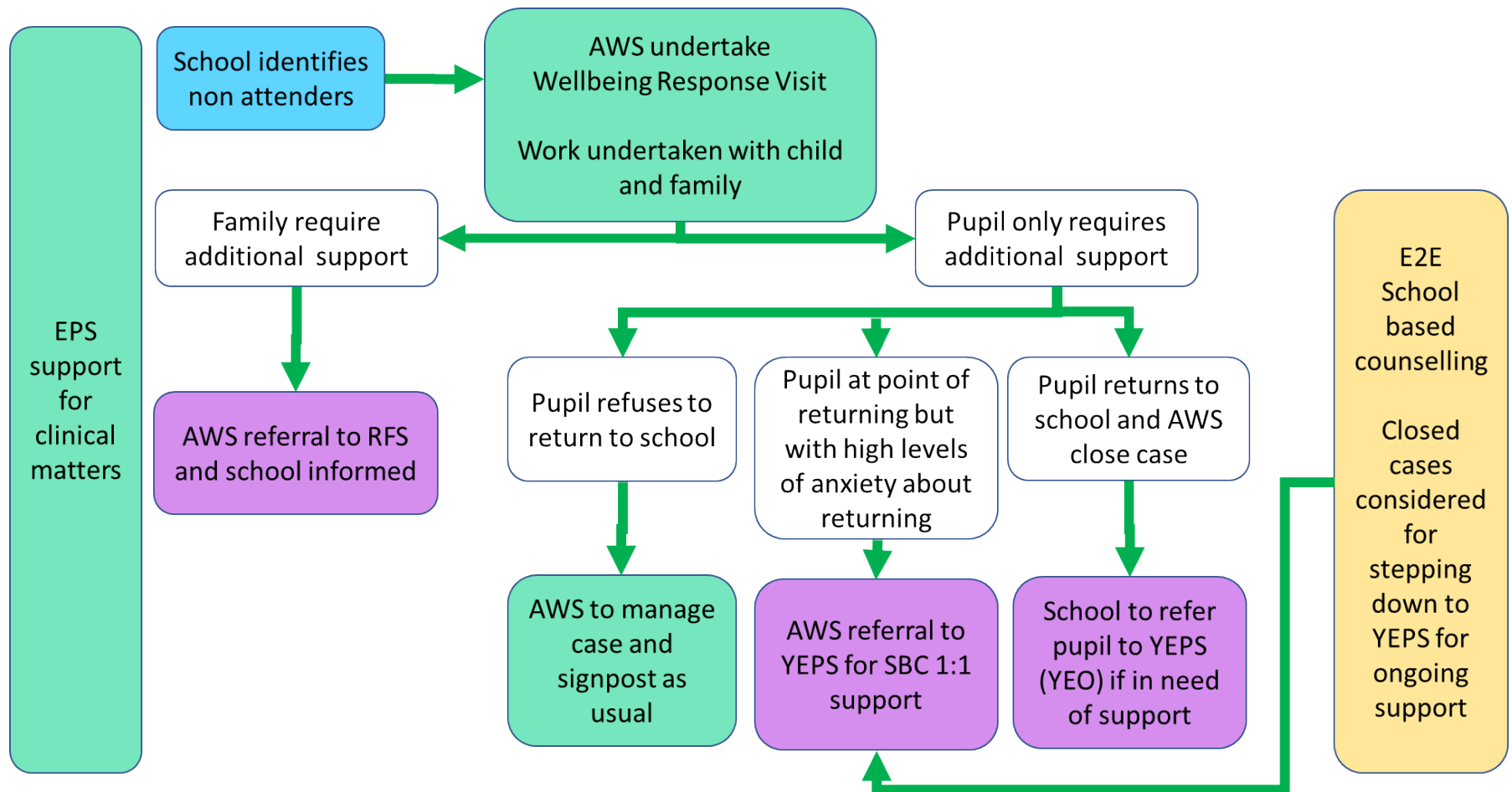
12.4 Young people have provided positive feedback on their experiences with the new virtual platforms developed during Covid-19, leading to these being mainstreamed alongside the re-introduction of in-person provision and support.

12.5 The priorities cannot be achieved without competent and effective staff, hence the service's commitment to workforce development.

12.6 Partnership working will be key to achieving the service priorities, and work with schools, community partners and other local authority services will underpin their successful implementation.

APPENDIX 1

Integrated wellbeing support – return to school

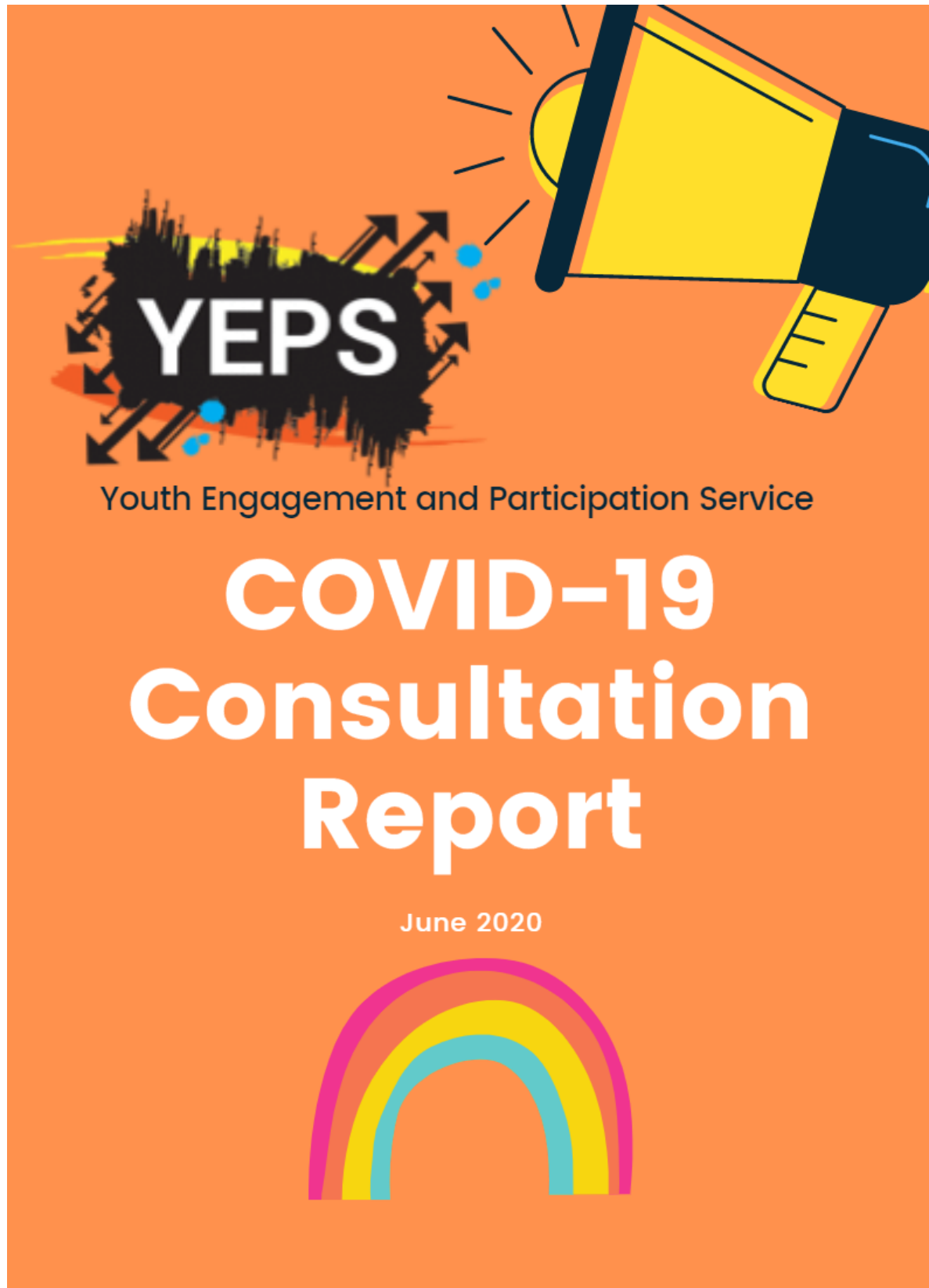


APPENDIX 2

YEPS Activities 2020 / 21				
Month	Activities	Sessions	Participants	Contacts
Apr-20	24	91	190	301
May-20	22	81	133	319
Jun-20	21	82	114	261
Jul-20	22	72	113	338
Aug-20	15	41	67	213
Sep-20	8	14	47	67
Oct-20	22	37	143	234
Nov-20	11	43	110	234
Dec-20	18	30	135	158
Jan-21	31	78	165	509
Feb-21	36	119	174	552
Mar-21	20	20	130	106
TOTAL	250	708	1521	3292

Street Based Youth Work		
Month	No. of Sessions	No. of Contacts
Oct-20	34	590
Nov-20	60	1751
Dec-20	30	444
TOTAL	124	2785

Referred Open Cases (1:1 Support)		
Month	Open Referral 2020/21	New Referral 2020/21
Apr-20	375	25
May-20	295	19
Jun-20	299	52
Jul-20	309	37
Aug-20	295	22
Sep-20	334	65
Oct-20	440	159
Nov-20	504	142
Dec-20	469	59
Jan-21	463	57
Feb-21	462	76
Mar-21	416	75



INTRODUCTION

Throughout June 2020, Rhondda Cynon Taf's Youth Engagement and Participation Service (YEPS) launched its Covid-19 Response Consultation to capture the views of young people aged 11-25 on the support offered by YEPS throughout the Covid-19 Lockdown.

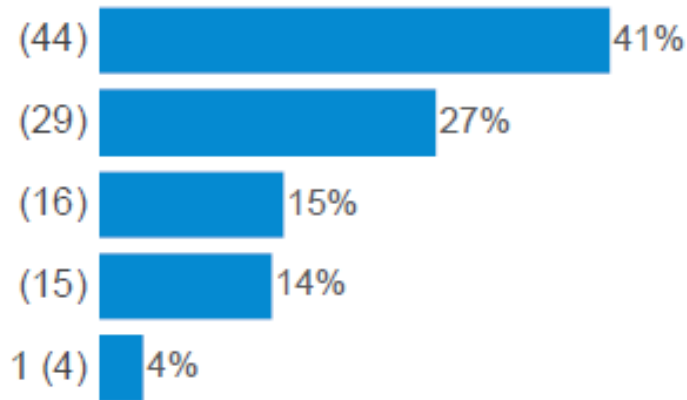
The aim of this report is to outline the results of the consultation, which will be used to inform the future planning for YEPS of its online presence and support in the months ahead following the Covid-19 Lockdown.

Further information, and an opportunity to discuss this further with a youth worker within YEPS can be found at our young person's website Wicid.tv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

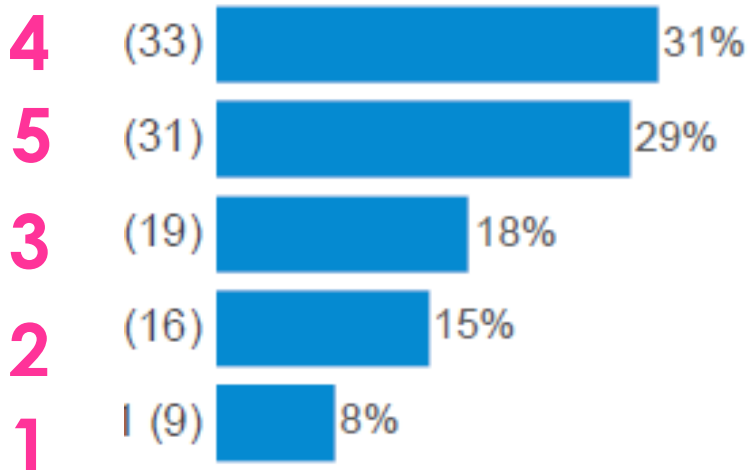
The Youth Engagement and Participation Service would like to thank the 125 young people who took the opportunity to complete the survey and all those who supported with the delivery of the consultation.

1. How are you feeling today?

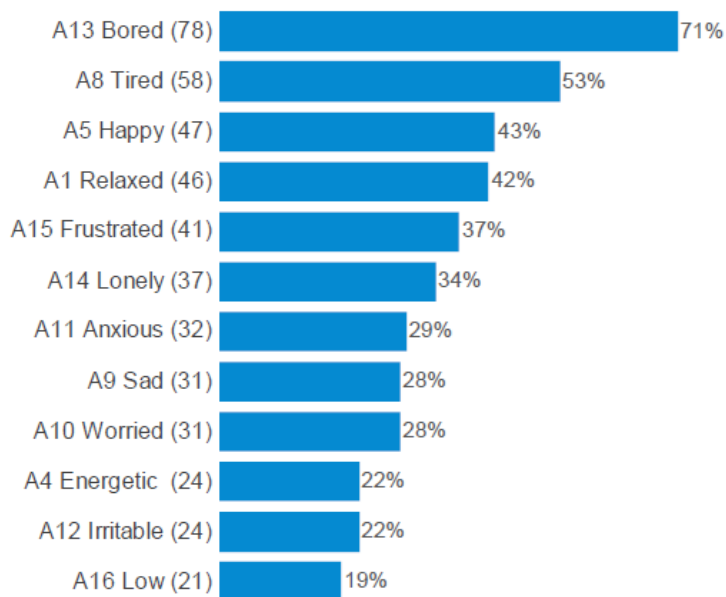


4
5
3
2
1

2. How much have you enjoyed being at home during lockdown? (5 really enjoyed – 1 not enjoyed at all)



3. Which words best describe how you have felt at home during lockdown?



Other (please specify)

Depressed	Scared
Eager to get back to a normal routine	Depressed
Calm	Not motivated

4. What have you enjoyed about being at home during lockdown?

A2 being able to spend more time relaxing / doing the things I like (75)	62.0%	A3 trying out new hobbies/activities (44)	36.4%
A1 spending time with family (74)	61.2%	A5 being able to stay in touch with YEPS staff and take part in YEPS activities / provision (26)	21.5%
A4 being able to learn / do school work in my own time (51)	42.1%	A6 other (please specify) (7)	5.8%

Other (please specify)

Sit ups challenges

FaceTime friends and family members

FaceTime friends

Nothing

seeing friends going on walks

SEEING MY FRIENDS

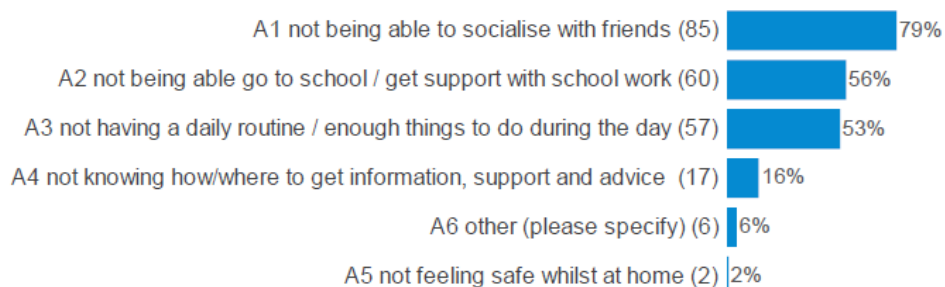
I have been inspired by a tv show called 911 and 911 lone star. I'm inspired to be a firefighter.

Alone time.

Nothing really

playing with friends in hub

5. What have you have found difficult about being at home during lockdown?



Other (please specify)

Not being able so see family

Bored

being with my family all of the time

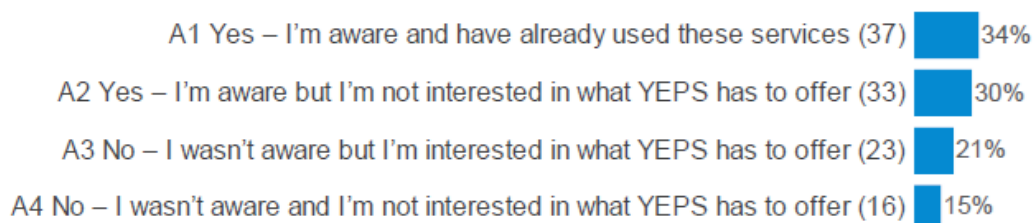
Worrying about family and friends.

School was a place where I could socialise without the pressure to.

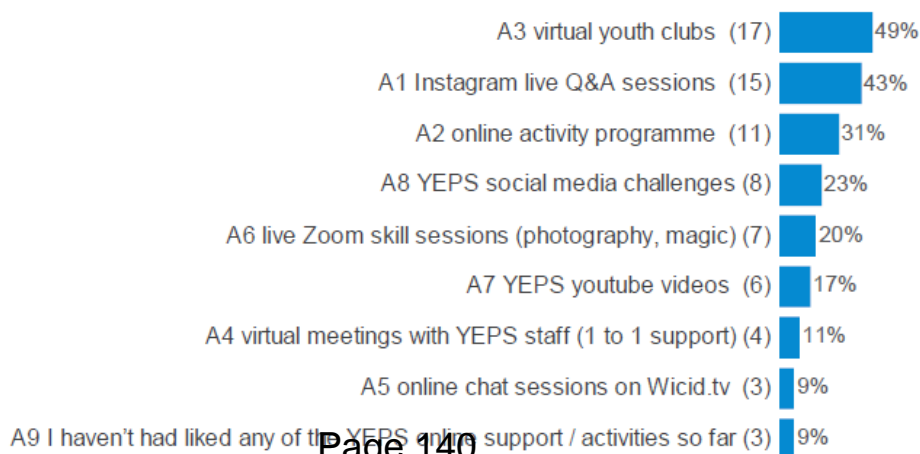
How my caring duties have increased more than I am use to

I can't get focused at home

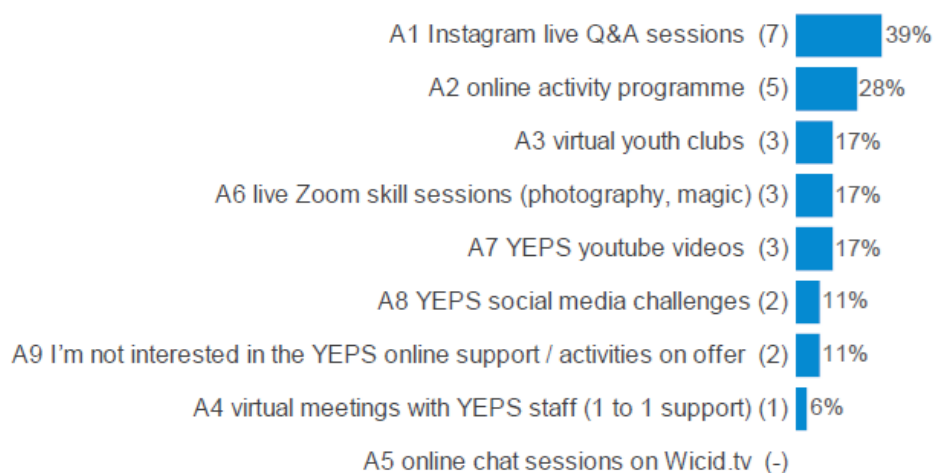
6. Are you aware that YEPS are offering online support and activities for young people during lockdown on the Wicid.tv website and social media channels?



7. Which YEPS Online support/activities have you liked so far?



8. Which online support/activities would you like if changes or improvements were made to how they are delivered?



Comments:

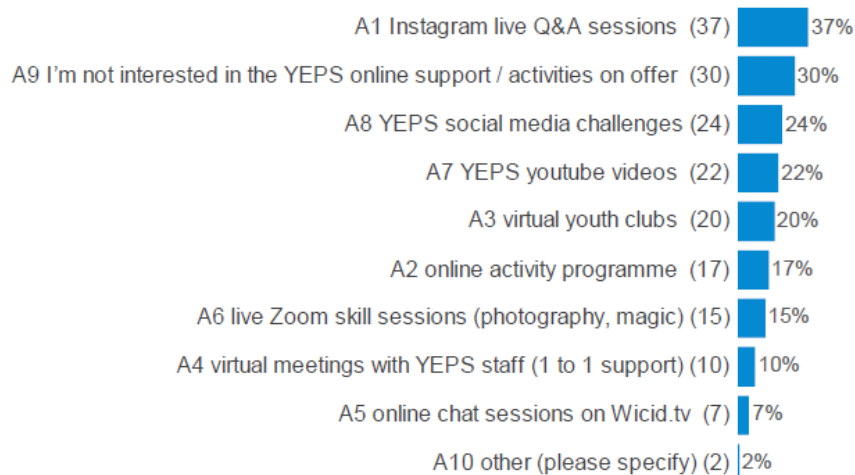
N/A

Also sit ups was good

To make sure we know when the online classes are so we know when to join as on the Instagram stories it just says what we are doing not when it is

To let us know when it is and what's the code on virtual youth club or on Instagram story

9. Which online support/activities would you like YEPS to continue to run after lockdown has lifted?



Other (please specify)

Stuff like the challenges

Fitness

this would help if you kept online meeting with pupils as they could be struggling in the holidays

Online prevision

it isn't that im not interested, i just don't feel the need to use them

Dal ati gyda popeth rydych yn gwneud!

Perhaps YouTube live-streams where something like Kahoot is this played.

Drama and singing lessons

Challenges /goals of the week

I would like to see virtual youth club continue

I would like yeps to offer online classes on YouTube because they are something fun for us to do if we are bored and if someone can't make it to the youth club or after school clubs they can still take part but in their own time

I would like yeps to offer online meetings one to one as they could feel alone or stressed and they can get in touch with you in the holidays

We would like to be creative and continue to develop the support we provide online, however it is important that we hear from you as young people about what you would like to see. Please share below your ideas of what additional support/activities YEPS can provide throughout lockdown and into the future.

Art competition

Email links

Some activities I would enjoy would be trips to adventure places e.g Llangranog or Rock UK

I dont know really

I think there is loads provided already

I am unsure because I haven't seen everything that YEPS is providing for people my age

zoom drawing, show pets/videos with pets

no.

crafts and workouts

Making sure you check up on people whether they look like their okay

Session on cycling such as bike maintenance.

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 20/21

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21ST JULY 2021

**SUMMER TERM UPDATE IN RELATION TO EDUCATION'S LATEST POSITION IN
RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND INCLUSION SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members of the Children and Young People's Committee with some contextual information on the most recent changes in Education during the summer term in response to the changing COVID-19 position.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Consider the verbal update from the Director of Education and Inclusion Services on the Council's most recent responses to Ministerial announcements in relation to the COVID-19 situation.
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish the Director of Education and Inclusion Services to report on further information in any future meetings.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide Members with an update on the actions taken by the Council as a result of announcements made by the First Minister and the Education Minister and the associated gradual easing of lockdown measures.
- 3.2 To update Members of the current COVID-19 processes and practices in Rhondda Cynon Taf schools and to ensure that they are kept abreast of all developments.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The First Minister confirmed (on the 1st of April) that all learners would return to school settings on Monday the 12th of April, immediately following the Easter break.
- 4.2 Preventative measures have continued to be implemented in school settings since they returned at full occupancy.
- 4.3 Updated operational guidance was circulated to all schools in readiness for the post-Easter return of all learners, with all schools required to update their risk assessments and business continuity plans accordingly.

5. EDUCATIONAL PROVISION

The local authority continues to work very closely with all of our schools and provides advice and guidance to school staff as well as regular updates to parents/carers (see section 6 below).

Operational guidance continues to be provided in relation to the safe re-opening of schools and this is regularly updated to reflect the latest advice and announcements from Welsh Government.

Guidance is also updated and shared in relation to the offer of lateral flow testing for all school staff and all learners in Year 10 and above.

5.1 Remote learning

Remote learning allows pupils to continue accessing the curriculum beyond the classroom. It allows them to learn through a guided study programme set by their teachers.

Schools across Rhondda Cynon Taf implemented a variety of remote learning options with support from the Council's school improvement officers and colleagues at the Central South Consortium throughout the various lockdown periods and are very adept at ensuring continuum of education via remote means when required to do so. Welsh Government's Hwb digital platform for learning and teaching also provides a wealth of educational resources for schools, parents/carers and learners.

Although all learners returned to school settings from the 12th of April, remote learning is still made available to learners who need to self-isolate due to COVID-19.

5.2 Digitally Excluded Learners (DELs)

From the start of the pandemic, digitally excluded learners who did not have access to an appropriate internet-connected device and/or internet connection have been supported to engage in online learning activities from home. The local authority frequently communicates with schools to identify families facing such difficulties

and have sourced ICT equipment and Mifi devices to enable learners to access education.

The audit of digitally excluded learners was refreshed this academic year to identify any new families that had moved into the area or were experiencing challenges in accessing education remotely.

A total of 2,868 devices were provided to DELs in the 2019/2020 academic year and a further 2,570 were provided to newly identified DELs in NCY 1 to 13 between January 2021 and March 2021.

Schools have been informed that DELs who are returning to their school in September 2021 can keep their devices for use at home for on-line learning. Any DELs that are leaving their school at the end of term have been asked to return their device to the school.

In July 2021, a total of 4,456 Chromebooks provided by Welsh Government were allocated to schools in accordance with their number of learners eligible for free school meals.

5.3 Examinations

Following Welsh Government's announcement on the 8th January of 2021, that schools were to remain closed to the majority of learners until at least the 29th of January 2021, a decision was made to cancel the spring term assessments (for GCSE, AS and A level learners) that were planned to take place between the 22nd of February and the 23rd of April.

The Design and Delivery Advisory Group Design and Delivery Advisory Group (DDAG) (comprised of headteachers and college principals) set up to support 'wellbeing, fairness and progression' for learners in 2021, developed revised proposals which were accepted by the Education Minister. In summary, these were: -

- Learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales would have their qualifications awarded through a Centre-Determined Grade (CDG) model – this means that grades have been determined by their school or college based on an assessment of the learner's work. This has been a holistic approach underpinned by evidence of attainment in areas a learner has covered.

Schools and colleges have been able to use a range of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded to their learners, which has included Non-Examination Assessment elements, mock-exams, and classwork. In addition, the WJEC has offered a set of adapted past papers for each qualification which enabled schools to continue to assess learning within their teaching plans, providing extra support for teachers and learners. All evidence used to identify grades has been the learner's own work, but there have been no formal external assessments.

Qualifications Wales worked with the WJEC, supported by the DDAG, to provide an assessment framework to support schools and colleges in developing their own assessment plans, which demonstrated sufficient coverage of key concepts to allow learners to progress, and detail for how the centre has determined a learner's grade. These assessment plans were quality assured by the WJEC and all RCT schools' plans were accepted as appropriate.

- The deadlines and controls around Non-Examination Assessment were removed, and no moderation was undertaken by the WJEC. However, where possible schools and colleges have supported learners to undertake some of their Non-Examination Assessment to continue to build learning and skills.

Qualifications Wales published a timeline for learners. A learner's school or college was directed to discuss the provisional Centre Determined Grades that had been decided for the learner in each of their subjects before the end of June. All schools have undertaken this activity.

Vocational Qualifications

The Minister's policy decision did not relate to vocational qualifications. The awarding of vocational and technical qualifications in 2021 differed depending on the type of qualification.

A summary document can be accessed at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/964614/Infographic_-_how_vocational_and_technical_qualifications_will_be_awarded_in_2021.pdf

Qualifications Wales agreed to a three-stage appeals process following the dissemination of provisional grades to learners:

Stage 1 – By June schools and colleges will share provisional centre determined grades with their learners. A learner can ask their school or college to review provisional grades and/or check for any errors before they are submitted to WJEC.

Stage 2 – After results day in August, a learner can appeal to WJEC that the grade judgement that their school or college has made is unreasonable and/or a procedural error has been made.

Stage 3 - Following completion of the Stage 2 appeal, learners can request an Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) review from Qualifications Wales to check whether WJEC has followed their procedures correctly.

Final qualification grades will not be issued to learners until the results days, which are the 10th of August for AS and A levels and the 12th of August for GCSEs.

5.4 **Business Continuity Plans**

All schools have Business Continuity Plans in place that detail the school-based actions that will be taken to mitigate risks and to ensure that it is possible to ensure continuity in delivering education safely. These have been shared with the local authority and are reviewed by officers. Schools are requested to revisit, update and submit their Business Continuity Plans to the local authority on a regular basis.

Business continuity planning is critical to ensuring that schools are able to quickly respond to any challenges and are able to maintain effective delivery of education to all learners throughout various stages of the impact of the pandemic at school, local and national level. Education and Inclusion Services provided schools with detailed guidance and template documentation to assist with this planning. This guidance is updated to reflect the changing national position.

5.5 **Health and Safety**

All schools have undertaken a COVID-19 specific Health and Safety Risk Assessment in consultation with their governing bodies and staff. Education and Inclusion Services have provided schools with comprehensive and regularly updated guidance documentation (*'Guidance for the Safe Re-Opening of Schools' version 11 – updated July 2021*) which contains template documentation to assist schools in writing their risk assessments which schools must revisit, update and submit to the local authority on a regular basis for review by Health and Safety Officers who also offer assistance and guidance, as requested.

5.6 **Managing Confirmed Cases**

Schools continue to work very closely with the Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) Service and are key in identifying close contacts of confirmed cases, thereby enabling those contacts to isolate for a 10-day period and prevent the spread of the virus. The local authority has provided schools with template letters to issue to parents as part of this process. Schools have also been provided with flow charts and process maps to summarise the actions needing to be taken in various scenarios.

Any learner required to self-isolate as a result of being a confirmed case themselves, or a close contact of a confirmed case is provided with remote learning to ensure continuation of their education.

The number of cases of COVID-19 in our schools has started to rise. Between the 26th of June 2021 and the 2nd of July 2021 there were 28 confirmed cases in 18 school settings. According to the information recorded by schools on SIMS during that week, there were 523 isolations of close contacts of confirmed cases.

5.7 **Lateral Flow Testing**

Welsh Government continue to provide all schools and childcare/play settings with Lateral Flow Tests. This twice weekly self-administered testing is undertaken at home and can help to regularly and quickly identify positive asymptomatic cases

and ask them to self-isolate before coming into schools and childcare/play settings. Test kits are made available to all school staff and pupils in Year 10 and above (subject to written consent having been provided). Staff in all CIW (Care Inspectorate Wales) childcare/play settings have been provided with test kits directly from Welsh Government. Test kits for childminders and unregistered childcare/play settings have been distributed by the RCT childcare team.

Anyone testing positive using a lateral flow test should undertake a PCR test within a 24-hour period of their positive lateral flow test.

Schools and childcare/play settings are aware that testing is to supplement other preventative measures and that maintaining contact groups, wearing face masks, ensuring adequate ventilation, hand washing, cleaning and social distancing etc. must all still be implemented. Along with all of these current preventative measures put in place by schools and settings, testing will help reduce the likelihood of adults unwittingly spreading the virus to others in the setting.

Local Health Boards are also making COVID-19 PCR testing available to people with a wider range of symptoms such as fatigue, muscle ache or pain, a sore throat, a headache, a runny nose, nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea. Individuals with these wider symptoms are also asked to consider taking a PCR test and self-isolate while they await the result.

5.8 Attendance

Following consultation, the Welsh Government has revoked the School Performance and Absence Targets (Wales) Regulations 2011 (in force from the 7th of August 2020). As a result, schools are not required to set targets for future years or report on those previously set for 2019/20 onwards. The annual attendance data collection for attendance has also been suspended for the 2020/21 academic year for primary and secondary phase.

Due to Welsh Government deciding not to reinstate Fixed Penalty Notices/Prosecutions, the Attendance and Wellbeing Service continue to operate Wellbeing Response Visits into the summer term. The Attendance and Wellbeing Service liaise with schools on a three day rota and schools advise of pupils who have unauthorised absences from school and request a Wellbeing Response visit from the Attendance and Wellbeing team which aims to discover the reason for the absence and provide any support/assurances as required to reintegrate pupils back into school. From the start of the academic year to the Summer half term break, this resulted in 9,395 wellbeing visits to homes.

If a learner is unable to attend the physical setting of the school due to self-isolation, the school will continue to engage regularly with the learner remotely.

Attendance rates for the autumn term (from the 14th of September 2020 following the staggered start) were 89.8% in primary and 85.6% in secondary.

For the first half of the spring term, only key worker and vulnerable children provision was available on school sites. Attendance figures increased from 2.48% of the whole school population (964 pupils) at the start of term to a high of 6.84% (2,654 pupils) during the final week before half-term.

For the second half of the spring term, attendance increased significantly with the return of the foundation phase and later the whole of primary settings as well as isolated days for some secondary year groups. This increase was from 17.86% of the whole school population (6,929 pupils) on the 22nd of February to 72.04% (27,954 pupils) on the 23rd of March.

Attendance for statutory year groups for the spring term was 94.0% in primary and 89.6% in secondary. In the first half of the Summer Term, this had declined slightly. At primary level attendance was 93.6% and at secondary level it was 88.0%.

5.9 Partnership Working

Education and Inclusion Services work closely and meet regularly with Welsh Government, Central South Consortium and many departments within the local authority (in particular, Public Health and Protection; Children's Services) as well as many other partners, to share up to date information and facilitate opportunities for discussion, questions and problem solving. The Senior Management Team of Education and Inclusion Services meet regularly with headteachers and trade union representatives.

5.10 Free School Meal Provision

The Council has seen a significant growth in the number of learners eligible for free school meals (eFSM). The data is summarised as follows:

Month	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20
eFSM	8367	8619	8698	8764	8960	9051	9089	9089
Total	38561	39004	38997	38991	38989	38985	38832	38832
%	21.70%	22.10%	22.30%	22.48%	22.98%	23.22%	23.41%	23.41%

Month	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21
eFSM	9284	9328	9439	9546	9513	9689	9816
Total	36771	38755	38757	38806	38750	39231	39211
%	23.71%	24.07%	24.35%	24.60%	24.55%	24.70%	25.03%

Month	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21
eFSM	9953	10028	10121
Total	39325	39293	39331
%	25.31%	25.52%	25.73%

Free school meals are provided at school on days that an eligible learner attends the school setting. Where an eligible free school meals learner is unable to attend school due to them needing to self-isolate due to COVID-19, BACS payments of £3.90 per day are made to their parent/carer.

The Welsh Government has also provided funding (at a rate of £19.50 per learner per week) to make free school meal provision available during school holidays throughout the 2021 to 2022 financial year.

BACS payments were also made to the parents/carers of eligible learners in years 11 and 13 for the period that they are not required to attend school premises during the second half of the summer term 2021. These payments will continue until the end of the 2021 school summer holiday period.

5.11 Breakfast Club Provision

Breakfast club provision continues with a reduced capacity following a health and safety review undertaken prior to the schools returning in September 2020. This review took into account the size of school halls, staffing provision and the need to maintain contact groups. Demand for places has been high but prioritisation cannot be given to any specific groups (e.g., previously unsuccessful applicants, vulnerable groups or key workers) as this provision is intended to provide a healthy breakfast to all learners and is not an emergency childcare provision. The regulatory framework does not allow certain groups to be prioritised above others. Places are allocated on a 'first come - first served' basis in relation to online applications. In the event of regular non-attendance by a pupil (excluding self-isolation and sickness absences), places are re-allocated to pupils on the waiting list.

As places are restricted, parents/carers were encouraged to only apply if their child required access to a free, healthy breakfast before the start of the school day. Despite the robust approaches adopted to keep everyone safe, Rhondda Cynon Taf still allocated 3,137 breakfast club places for the summer term.

A further application process was recently undertaken for the autumn term (period from the 2nd of September to the 17th of December 2021). The Council has continued to allocate all available places based on the previously agreed application processes and capacity calculations, to ensure that social distancing and effective hygiene and preventative measures can be maintained. All applicants have remained within year groups and this has ensured that risks can be mitigated.

5.12 Childcare Settings

Following months of very few positive notifications, and none since the end of May, there has been an increase in positive notifications recently. In the two-week period the 23rd of June to the 6th of July 2021, there have been five positive lateral flow (LFD) notifications and seven positive PCR notifications. (Three of these were confirmation of the LFD results.)

Nearly all childcare settings are now open. Some out of school settings are still unable to return to their usual venues, due to venue restrictions but are operating from alternative premises.

The childcare sector continues to adapt well to continuing protective measures and are implementing all Welsh Government guidance to ensure the safety of their staff and childcare. Demand for childcare does not seem to be back to pre-COVID levels. Feedback suggests that several childcare settings are struggling financially with a drop in the number of children attending. Partial or full closures due to positive cases is also still impacting on the sustainability of settings.

6. SUPPORTING PAPERS AND INFORMATION

6.1 As general information for the committee, the following table reflects the key guidance documents sent to stakeholders since Easter 2021 with attached links to the Council website where appropriate:

Document		Date of issue/ circulation
1.	Schools – correspondence/information	
	Outdoor activities – WG guidance - AND RCT FAQs v12.	12/04/21
	Circulation of Welsh Government letter regarding lateral flow testing offer extended to pupils in Year 7 and above.	13/04/21
	Headteacher in Wales, Education Support – wellbeing support for headteachers – links.	13/04/21
	Outdoor activities – follow up e-mail regarding cleaning between groups.	14/04/21
	Additional (wider) symptoms – PCR test recommended but no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting results – clarification for schools regarding original message for parents.	29/04/21
	Circulation of Welsh Government guidance update regarding educational visits.	04/05/21
	LFT delivery guidance and re-ordering information.	06/05/21
	LFT – updates regarding Welsh Government assets; online ordering system established; peripatetic staff test collection point changing.	08/06/21
	Welsh Government letter regarding end of term events and wider symptom testing.	11/06/21

	Guidance updates – transition; end of term events; ventilation.	18/06/21
	Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB summary paper – testing and isolation requirements.	08/07/21
	Welsh Government letter outlining plans for September 2021 and updated operational guidance for September 2021.	09/07/21
	Reminder of links for uploading confirmed Covid cases.	09/07/21
	Letter from the Chief Medical Officer regarding flu vaccinations being extended to more children.	13/07/21
2.	Frequently Asked Questions – for parents/carers: Covering a number of issues including – school safety measures; cleaning; transport; catering and free school meals; confirmed cases of COVID-19. These FAQs are published on the Council’s website and updated regularly – www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schoolreturnfaqs	
	FAQs for parents/carers – versions 12a, 13, 13a, 14	29/03/21 – 14/07/21
3.	Parents/carers – correspondence	
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Learners – v1	19/04/21
	Additional (wider) symptoms – PCR test recommended but no requirement to self-isolate whilst awaiting results	26/04/21
4.	Parents/carers – social media – summer term The below videos/captions were published several times via the Council’s social media channels (Facebook and Twitter)	
	Updated social media graphics – reflecting the return of ALL year groups to school settings post Easter	From 12/04/21
5.	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) guidance	
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Schools in RCT – v3	19/04/21
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Learners – v1	19/04/21

	Template letter for schools for parents/carers whose children are a potential close contact of someone testing positive on an LFT	18/06/21
	Lateral Flow Testing (LFT) Guidance for Schools in RCT – v4	08/07/21
10.	Reopening Schools - Guidance document issued to headteachers: Regularly updated to reflect changes in the local and national position and to reflect updated guidance from the Welsh Government	
	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for the safe re-opening of schools VERSION 9 – updated May 2021	18/05/21
	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for the safe re-opening of schools VERSION 10 – updated July 2021	08/07/21
	Coronavirus (COVID-19): Guidance for the safe re-opening of schools VERSION 11 – updated July 2021 (in readiness for September 2021)	14/07/21

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not currently required - the contents of the report are for information purposes only.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1 There is no requirement to undertake any consultation. The Director of Education and Inclusion Services provides regular and detailed COVID-19 updates to Scrutiny Committee meetings.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

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

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 10.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

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

- 11.1 This is an information report presenting the Cabinet report which outlines how the Council is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

12. CONCLUSION

- 12.1 Whilst it is proposed that Scrutiny is presented with regular updates on the Education Directorate's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation relating to schools and education is often very fluid and fast-moving. In view of this, a termly update will be provided to encapsulate all of the key changes and the wide-ranging documentation sent to schools to ensure that they are kept abreast of national and local changes.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

21st JULY 2021

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
AND INCLUSION SERVICES**

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