



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2021/22

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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THE RESILIENT FAMILIES SERVICE – PERFORMANCE

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDRENS SERVICES

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To brief Members on the performance of the Resilient Families Service during the financial years 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 to date.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

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

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To provide Members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update on the work of the Resilient Families Service and an analysis of the service's performance data for 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 to date.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 In 2018 Rhondda Cynon Taf established the RCT Resilient Families Programme to support a wide range of partners to work together to co-ordinate the delivery of timely and effective services to families to maximise outcomes for families as well as demonstrate the Council's commitment to the wider early intervention and prevention agenda embedded in the

principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

- 4.2 To deliver this programme of early intervention and prevention work the Resilient Families Service (RFS) was established to provide direct support to families requiring early intervention and prevention services and deliver an enhanced Team Around the Family (TAF) model.
- 4.3 Support from the Resilient Families Service is not subject to any specific threshold criteria and therefore is universally available to families residing in RCT who are:
- referred to the Information Advice and Assistance Team (IAA) but do not meet the threshold for statutory service intervention. Referrals can be made as a self-referral by family members or by other agencies, where it has been identified that the family would benefit from the early intervention to support and prevent their needs escalating further.
 - 'stepped down' from statutory Children's Services as no longer requiring child protection intervention but would benefit from continued family support.
- 4.4 The Resilient Families Service takes a collaborative and integrated approach to co-ordinating the contribution of a wide range of partners in delivering the right support at the right time to families and ensuring that the family remain central to the delivery of any services. The approach:
- Provides timely intervention to prevent the multiple and/or complex needs of families escalating to crisis levels;
 - Recognises the needs of the whole family and supports a holistic approach to address issues collaboratively
 - Ensures the commissioning of services for children, young people and families is undertaken in response to the known needs of families in RCT
 - Ensures that access to services is available RCT wide and is not limited to geographical areas
- 4.5 The service delivery model employs a proactive, strengths based, relational approach to working with families that offers practical support to remove barriers to positive change. Focusing on assessing and improving the level of resilience families have, to deal with the challenges they face, the service provides timely, appropriate and effective early intervention support to prevent them from requiring statutory intervention. The Service sits within the Children's Services structure and is Social Worker led, comprising of seven core teams:

The **Assessment Brokerage and Review Teams (East and West)** undertake assessments with all families referred to the Service, create an individual plan for every family plan and review the plan to ensure the work has been done. Roles in these teams include Engagement and Assessment Officers who are responsible for engaging families and undertaking assessments on behalf of the whole service and Brokerage and Review Officers who are responsible for building and reviewing family plans and managing professionals and services delivering elements of these plans.

The **Families Plus Team** works with families that are close to the Children's Service threshold for intervention and require intensive support to reduce the level of risk within

the family. Intervention Workers provide intensive support to families to focus on relationships within the family and build networks within their community.

The ***Children with Additional Needs Service (CANS)*** works with any family where the learning, physical or neuro-developmental needs of a child within the family is impacting on family life. Intervention Workers provide intensive support to families to focus on relationships within the family and build networks within their community.

The ***Parenting Support Team*** focuses on working with parents and children to develop early language and communication skills through play as well as supporting families to develop their parenting skills to manage their children's needs in a productive and positive way. Previously both parenting support and early language and communication services were only available for a small percentage of children and families living in particular geographical areas in RCT, via the Flying Start Programme. Now these services are universally available to any children and families in RCT who require it, via the Resilient Families Service.

The ***Families Teams (East and West)*** work with families that require support to improve the quality of family life. Intervention Workers employed by Barnardos provide intensive support to families to focus on relationships within the family and build networks within their community.

4.6 In addition to the core teams, work with families is also supported by a multi-disciplinary specialist team within RFS. This specialist appraisal, assessment and therapeutic and targeted intervention support is provided by the following roles:

- RFS Specialist Health Visitors
- RFS Community Nursery Nurses
- Educational Psychologist
- Assistant Educational Psychologist
- Speech and Language Therapist
- Occupational Therapist
- PSCO

4.7 Alongside the RFS teams, support for families is also delivered by a range of commissioned services who operate as fully integrated part of the delivery model and undertake direct work with families to address actions within RFS Family Plans. The RFS Providers Forum currently engages over 40 partner organisations who assist in the delivery of integrated family support.

4.8 As part of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Early Years Transformation Programme, Rhondda Cynon Taf is piloting the delivery of a new early years system for 0-7 year olds and the extension of Flying Start services to be available universally. This new approach being piloted in RCT utilises the pre-existing operational infrastructure of the Resilient Families Service to deliver enhanced early years services to any child and family across the County Borough who require it including enhanced Health Visiting, universal parenting support, early language support and the provision of funded childcare places for 2-3 year olds.

- 4.9 The Resilience and Wellbeing Health Programme which forms part of the RCT pilot model formalises the delivery of fully integrated health and social care services in the early years and is the first of its kind in Wales. Launched in October 2020, this is a single programme of support delivered jointly by RFS and Health visiting utilising a single front door approach to providing bespoke early intervention and prevention services for children and families.

5. IMPACT OF COVID-19

- 5.1 Covid-19 has changed the family support landscape immeasurably both in terms of the increased demand for services and the innovative delivery of these services. The vast majority of parents, if not all, have struggled at some point during the pandemic to support their children through it whilst managing their own needs at the same time. The additional pressures put upon families as a result of lockdown compounded issues to a point of crisis for many.
- 5.2 As a key front line service RFS continued to undertake face to face contact with families on safeguarding grounds throughout the pandemic, however the vast majority of service delivery had to be amended significantly and quickly to provide families with support that did not rely on face-to-face contact due to the national restrictions.
- 5.3 The impact of Covid-19 is still being felt by families and is likely to continue and evolve for some time as restrictions ease and everyday life returns to normal. This is evident in the increased demand for and engagement in support services from a much wider cohort than was previously seen.
- 5.4 The innovation of staff to meet the needs of children, parents and families remotely during lockdown deserves commendation and it is from this innovation an evidence base has emerged to support the continuation of virtual and remote methods of service delivery to engage with parents who have traditionally been hard to reach. In the first 6 months of lockdown the RFS received 83,000 views of the parenting support videos they had produced and posted on social media platforms.
- 5.5 Resilient Families Service staff worked closely with the Community Resilience Hubs to ensure children and families who were required to shield had food and medication and with community groups to provide families with ipads and resources to ensure that low-income families could access and engage virtually with the support services they required.
- 5.6 Across the wider Community Wellbeing and Resilience Service staff team over 3,000 activity packs were created and distributed to vulnerable children and families across the County Borough to support their wellbeing and encourage children's positive social and emotional development in the most difficult of circumstances.
- 5.7 Resilient Families Service Provider Forum meetings were held remotely and focused on contingency and recovery plans to support continuity of services and were instrumental in securing a collaborative and co-ordinated response to new and emerging needs as a result of covid.
- 5.8 Service development also continued during the pandemic in swift response to new and emerging needs. Recommissioning parenting support services provided the Council with

the opportunity to respond to the new landscape and meet the demand for parenting support that is timely, responsive and delivered in a number of formats to improve accessibility for a wider range of parents.

- 5.9 The demand across RFS during the pandemic has been significant, resulting in capacity issues across the internal and external teams. Additional financial support was agreed by the Council's Senior Leadership Team to increase the number of RFS staff to meet this ongoing demand. Since the start of the pandemic an additional 12 staff have been recruited on a temporary basis to meet service demands. These additional posts within the core RFS teams are delivering support services directly to families and ensuring that despite the significant increase in demand there are no waiting lists for families to access RFS support. WG additional grant funding has been utilised to support the sustainability of third sector partners who remain a vital element of the RFS offer.

6. PERFORMANCE

- 6.1 Over the last four years since the creation of the service, RFS has had contact with over 7,000 families in RCT. The table below provides a breakdown of referral rates by calendar year and provides a comparison of these rates against both of the preceding year and of the baseline year in 2018 (RFS was operational from 1st January 2018).

Calendar Year	RFS Referrals	Step downs	DSR*	Total	Difference from preceding year	Difference from baseline year
2018	1145	360	27	1532	-	-
2019	1301	368	21	1690	+ 158	+ 158
2020	1017	241	8	1266	- 424	- 266
2021	1784	367	7	2158	+ 892	+ 626
2022						
January	182	23	3	208	+ 81	-
February	162	34	4	200	+ 62	-
2022 (so far)	344	57	7	408	+143	-
Total	5591	1393	70	7054		

*Direct Service Referrals (DSR) are from Children's Services Teams requesting specific pieces of work to be undertaken by RFS with families open to them (e.g. Disabled Children's Team requesting parenting programme)

- 6.2 As the table above shows, during 2020 the referral rate dropped significantly as a result of the number of families requesting to suspend engagement with the service until restrictions were lifted and more practical face to face support could be provided. As a result of the removal of restrictions the service has experienced a surge in the level of demand for family support evidenced in a 70% increase in referrals in 2021. This situation has made comparative analysis of performance data challenging, therefore for the purpose of this report, an analysis of the full financial years 2019-20, 2020-21 and the 2020-21 data @ 28th February 2022 is offered in this section. Further detail in relation to the full financial year 2020-21 and 2021-22 to date performance data can be found in Appendix 1.

- 6.3 Of the almost 3000 combined referrals received in 2019-20 and 2020-21 just over a third were re-referrals into the service. Whilst traditionally re-referral has negative connotations, RFS was set up to provide the right support at the right time and as such this is a particularly positive indicator that families have positive experiences and relationships with RFS and are happy to return for further help and support as required. In terms of preventing escalation of need, re-referral into early intervention services is an important protective factor for families and something to be recognised as an indicator of positive culture change in public perception of social care services. This rate of re-referral increased to 46% of the combined 3,375 referrals received in 2020-21 and 2021-22, most likely as a result of families choosing to suspend engagement with the service whilst restrictions were in place and re-engaging following easement.
- 6.4 Between April 2019 and March 2021, the Service saw five times more cases stepped down from Children's Services teams than cases requiring step up for statutory intervention with the total number of cases during this period requiring step up being 126, only 4% of the total number of referrals to RFS. Between April 2020 and February 2022 the step up rate has decreased further to 110 cases; almost six times more step down than step ups and only 3% of the total number of referrals to RFS requiring statutory intervention. This evidences that RFS is successfully managing and reducing risk for families, preventing the need for statutory intervention and is successfully and safely holding cases that would have traditionally sat within the statutory arena.
- 6.5 Whilst referrals decreased by a quarter in 2020-21 as a result of families preferring to wait until the usual hands on RFS approach could resume, by July 2021 the average monthly referral rate sat at 126% more than the previous year. Comparison of the average monthly referral rate between 2020-21 and 2021-22 shows a more settled picture yet demand remains extremely high with an 80% increase on 2020-21 levels.
- 6.6 As expected, the data shows a decrease in referrals from universal services such as schools during the pandemic and an increase in referrals to RFS from community groups and commissioned providers who were in closer contact with families. This year has seen an increase in referrals from Health Visitors, schools and also self referrals which have risen by over 5%.
- 6.7 In 2020-21 there was also a measurable increase in the families presenting with support needs linked directly to the challenges of covid and lockdown such as increased stress across the family unit as well as a marked rise in the complexity of cases. 2021-22 data evidences a continued increase in stress levels of a further 13.6% (69.9% of families) and the need for intense support to address challenges (52.6% of families), alongside a steep increase in the mental health related needs (45.1% of families). Of concern is the increase in reported disengagement in leisure, sport and community activities (40.9% of families), which are recognised protective factors to building and maintaining resilience.
- 6.8 Appraisals form part of the assessment process where specialist recommendations are made to address barriers to engagement and resilience building faced by a family. Appraisals are sought from key services (both internal and external to the Council) that are commissioned to provide this specialist function on behalf of RFS. One of the third sector partners commissioned to undertake Appraisals and provide specialist interventions as a fully integrated part of the RFS delivery model is Citizen's Advice RCT who provide financial inclusion appraisals for families. In 2020-21, 237 families received

an RFS Financial Appraisal which totalled a combined secured financial gain of £323,746; an significant average gain of £1,366 per family.

- 6.9 The rate of disengagement halved between 2019-20 and 2020-21 and the number reporting increased resilience also increased illustrating that even though smaller numbers were coming through they were staying with the service with improved outcomes which is testament to the flexibility of staff to find new ways of working with families remotely. The number of families disengaging has slightly increased this year with this cohort representing 13% of all referrals in 2020/21 and 14.4% in 2021/22. Further analysis of the referral source for families who disengaged from RFS at the pre action plan stage during 2021/22, shows that 21% were step down cases from Children's Services (64 families). This is a proportional improvement from the 34% (58 families) in 2020-21. This is attributable to the voluntary nature of engagement with RFS.
- 6.10 Analysis of data also demonstrates the impact of RFS in disrupting the negative cycle of impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences on individuals and families, with families scoring the same or better in RFS exit assessments in those domains directly linked to protective factors e.g. the home is safe. The areas where the greatest impact of RFS involvement is realised are:
- **Home is safe and suitable** - 98.8% improved or maintained (increase of 0.3% from 2020-21)
 - **Able to demonstrate self control** - 98.6% improved or maintained) (increase of 0.1% from 2020-21)
 - **Drug and alcohol use** - 98.6% improved or maintained) (increase of 0.6% from 2020-21)
 - **Abuse or Violence** - 98.3% improved or maintained (increase of 1.5% from 2020-21)

7. SERVICE DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES FOR 2022-23

- 7.1 As part of the Early Years Transformation Programme, the delivery new Early Years system for 0-7 year olds being piloted in RCT is subject to rigorous external evaluation. This includes evaluation of the Resilient Families Service model as a means to provide universally accessible early intervention and prevention services. This comprises a three stage external evaluation, the second stage of which is currently underway and is focused on rigorous evaluation of the systems and processes of RFS that underpin the pilot delivery model. The Stage 1 evaluation undertaken by Miller Research in April 2021 noted that *'as the approach is built on the integration work that has already happened in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, notably the establishment of the Resilient Families Service, delivery has begun successfully. Services are available to all in RCT with access determined by assessment of need'*. A third stage of evaluation is planned for 2023-24 which will be a summative evaluation concerned with measuring the outcomes for service users and the impact on services and policy of the new delivery model. The findings of this Stage 3 evaluation will inform local discussion about the adoption of this model on a regional footprint as well as formal discussions with Welsh Government about implications for national policy.
- 7.2 When Section 1 of the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 (Children Wales Act) comes into force on 21 March 2022 it will remove the defence of reasonable punishment. From this time all physical punishment of

children will be illegal in Wales, to help protect children's rights, including punishment by parents and anyone acting in loco parentis in any setting in Wales, including visitors to Wales. Parents who physically punish their children following the commencement of Section 1 of the Act will commit an offence and may, therefore, be charged with the criminal offence of assault and battery. If the police (having considered the evidential and public interest tests) decide to take further action against a parent who has physically punished their child, they might offer an out of court disposal (OOCd) to avoid the potential of prosecution through the courts for low level offences. A condition of the OOCd would be engagement in parenting support which is intended to develop positive non-violent parenting practices. This parenting support intervention will be delivered by the RFS Parenting Team and will seek to improve parents' understanding, attitude, behaviour and skills to parent their children without the use of physical punishment. Joint delivery pathways and mechanisms are currently being finalised to establish the necessary working arrangements between the Council and the Police to implement the new legislative framework.

- 7.3 The MAGU Project builds on the work started in RFS to integrate health and social care services for pregnant women and families and offers a single pathway through early intervention and prevention and edge of care services to provide consistent support and intervention from 12 weeks of pregnancy through to the age of 1 to prevent children entering care. The term 'Magu' translates from Welsh as *'to bring up, rear, nurture, raise, gain'* and promotes the ongoing long term nature of the support required to deliver better outcomes for children and families. The MAGU project has recently been approved by Cabinet and construction of the service is underway. This includes the creation of a new integrated delivery pathway between Community Midwifery, RFS and Children's Services to embed an early intervention approach and facilitate smooth and effective transitions between services for the benefit of children and families.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 An equality impact assessment is not currently required as the contents of this report are for information purposes only.

9. CONSULTATION

- 9.1 A 'Parenting through Covid-19' Survey was created and public consultation undertaken in September 2020. Analysis of this survey feedback was used to inform the revision of parenting support services as part of the RFS offer.
- 9.2 Informal consultation takes place on a regular basis with families receiving Resilient Families Service interventions who are given opportunities to provide feedback on their experience of accessing the service, outcomes as a result and areas for improvement.
- 9.3 Consultation with partners including; health, education, housing providers, childcare and play providers, and third sector organisations takes place on a termly basis via the Resilient Families Service Provider Forum meetings, and also on a one to one basis during contract monitoring visits. All commissioned partners are signed up to providing universal access to family support services as set out by the Council's Resilient Families Programme.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 The cost of the Resilient Families Service is mainly met from existing grant funding as part of the Children and Communities Grant the Council receives from Welsh Government. In addition to this, contributions are also made from Council core budget and other external grant funding streams.
- 10.2 As with all grant funding there is a level of risk to the Council should this funding be withdrawn at a future time, however the Welsh Government remains committed to the delivery of integrated early help services for families within the wider anti-poverty and early intervention and prevention agendas.
- 10.3 The Children and Communities Grant offers far more flexibility than the Council has previously had to move funding where it is required to meet identified need, therefore should a reduction in the grant occur the Council remains in a good position to re-allocate funds to priority areas. As a result of Covid-19 the delivery of early intervention and prevention support for families is a clear identified priority for both the Council and Welsh Government with additional resources to increase staffing capacity having been made available in 2021-22 and recent confirmation that this will extend to 2022-23.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 11.1 There are no legal implications arising from this work.
- 11.2 The following legislation was considered in relation to the development of the Resilient Families Programme:

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014:

- Putting an individual and their needs, at the centre of their care, and giving them a voice in, and control over reaching the outcomes that help them achieve well-being
- Supporting people to achieve their own well-being and measuring the success of this care and support
- Increasing preventative services within the community to minimise the escalation of critical need
- Strong partnership working between all agencies and organisations.

The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015:

- A more equal Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales

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

- 12.1 The Resilient Families Service contributes to the Council's corporate priority that People are independent, healthy and successful, by improving services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do by:
- working in partnership with Welsh Government, strive to reduce child poverty, providing services that encourage and build resilience of children and their families.

12.2 The Resilient Families Service has been developed in full consideration of the sustainable development principles. The work also supports the Council to contribute to all of the seven well-being goals:-

- A prosperous Wales
- A resilient Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A more equal Wales
- A Wales of cohesive Communities
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
- A globally responsible Wales

13. CONCLUSION

13.1 Supporting a wide range of partners to work together to co-ordinate the delivery of timely and effective services to families, the RCT Resilient Families Programme enables the Council to maximise outcomes for families as well as demonstrate its commitment to the wider early intervention and prevention agenda embedded in the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

13.2 The work of the Resilient Families Service in providing early intervention family support remains a vital part of the Council's approach to providing the right support at the right time and reducing the need for statutory intervention. This work is needed now more than ever in light of the challenges facing families across RCT as a result of covid-19.