



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

22ND SEPTEMBER 2022

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PREVENTION STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES IN DISCUSSION WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, COUNCILLOR G CAPLE

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report supplies information to Corporate Parenting Board about Children's Services' progress with the looked After Prevention Strategy

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:

- 2.1 Note the information
- 2.2 Ask questions in pursuit of continuous improvement of outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Under the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014, the Council has a duty to provide preventative family support services that promote family resilience and prevent family breakdown. In January 2022, Cabinet endorsed the updated Looked After Prevention Strategy, and the funding proposal that accompanies that and in February Scrutiny Committee received the report for scrutiny. The relevant links for those reports are added in here:

Cabinet Report 27.01.2022, Link:

<https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s33221/LAC%20Prevention%20Strategy%202021-24.pdf?LLL=0>

Scrutiny Report 16.02.2022, Link :

<https://rctcbc.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s33751/CLA%20Prevention%20Strategy.pdf?LLL=0>

4. BACKGROUND

4.1 In line with our statutory duties, Children’s Services identify the right to a family life as chief amongst our principles and values. Notwithstanding our important safeguarding duty, Children’s services are seeking to keep under review the services, processes, policy and practice that optimises our potential to safely avoid parent-child separation and enhance our family support meanwhile.

4.2 In the prior Cabinet and Scrutiny reports, we have set out the detail of the mixed – method review that took place during 2021-2 leading to the development of our existing 3 year strategy. An update in relation to the 4 change areas can be found at xx

4.2 Performance is being monitored, and RCT has moved from previously being the Council with the second highest rate of looked after children in Wales to being in 4th position from where we hope to see further progress. This is a difficult and sometimes unpredictable area of business for the Council, and we face the uncertainty of the post pandemic and cost of living impact for vulnerable families, however, it has been promising to see steady decline in the rate at which children become looked after in RCT. Staff have worked hard to embrace, implement and embed the public law reforms that see us working differently with families in the pre-public law phase of our work.

4.3 RCT – Children Looked After Numbers
Insert graph here

4.4 Strategy progress update:

Four Improvement and Development Areas	Progress / next steps
<p>1. <u>Model of Practice</u></p> <p>Development of a clear RCT practice model for social workers and allied staff working with families referred to Children’s Social Care for support, including to generate better engagement of families who are in ‘pre-contemplation’ (who have not yet come to the view that they need or want to change). This is a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The post that will lead this work is out to advert <p><u>Next Steps:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the post holder is inducted, we will work with the staff participation group that has already been identified in order to review our library of evidence and build on the good practice

<p>significant development and will require a step-change throughout the service.</p>	<p>that exists to document the RCT model of practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a skill development partner
<p>2. <u>Better Pre-birth Services</u></p> <p>Development of a Magu – including specific pathway and set of supports for families referred to Children’s Social Care during a pregnancy to enable earlier intervention with parents considered to be very vulnerable before the child is born.</p> <p>Linked with this, improvements to the support available to parents who have had a child removed from their care are also important.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A manager has been appointed who is finalising the team structure and operational processes ahead of recruitment <p><u>Next Steps :</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commence operational delivery of pilot in Autumn A Regional Integrated Fund proposal has been submitted in relation to parental support
<p>3. <u>Developing reunification</u></p> <p>Development of a more coherent and consistent approach to reunifying children home who have spent some time being looked after by the local authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff vacancies and increasing demand has meant that we need to pace the work whilst prioritising those areas where we can viable make progress <p><u>Next Steps:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By 30.12.22 we will have revised our arrangements
<p>4. <u>Improve support for kinship carers and special guardians</u></p> <p>Strengthening of the support to be offered to children living with extended family - in kinship care and / or with a Special Guardian, including to their carers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have established a contract with Kinship Cymru in order to extend support • Therapeutic Service called MAPPS is now operational • We have increased the staffing establishment that is available to support Special Guardians <p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are reviewing the financial support for Special Guardians

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and the initial screening test has not identified any negative impacts. A fuller assessment will be carried out. All of the services identified here are available to all families on a basis of risk and need irrespective of any protected characteristics.
- 5.2 The service and staff skill set will be attuned to reach families who most need the service and will do so in a way that over comes any socio - economic barrier. Supporting families to overcome barriers to improving well-being, accessing services and, where appropriate the workplace will be central to this work. Specifically, the service will seek to address and reverse any discrimination and stigmatisation experienced by parents who are in care and leaving care.

6 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 A Welsh Language Impact Assessment has been carried out and submitted for review. Recruitment will be carried out in compliance with the Welsh Language Standards, including seeking to appoint bi-lingual staff.

7 CONSULTATION / INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 Staff and parents with experience of the services took part in a focus group to inform the overall evaluation of the former looked after strategy.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 Financial modelling of the costs has been carried out, and the relationship between better outcomes for vulnerable children, safely reducing looked after populations and improved cost control is well established.
- 8.2 The proposals set out should provide a cost benefit (or cost avoidance) alongside improving the outcomes for young people. Financial modelling in this regard however is difficult and it is important that we evaluate the impact as the proposals are implemented given time to deliver intended outcomes. Nonetheless, the gap in service provision cannot be closed within existing resources without standing down other essential services, therefore additional investment has been supported.
- 8.3 Whilst the overall cost of the Magu proposal would amount to £418k, it is proposed that the team be incrementally stepped up, alongside ongoing prioritisation and evaluation to ensure that the identified

outcomes are being realised and to provide some flexibility of approach. In this way, we can fund from existing one-off resources and pending evaluation of outcomes, can then transition and mainstream into the Councils base budget on a fully informed basis. Some parts of the new service would need to be implemented in full immediately, such as the new model of practice and kinship carer/SGO support arrangements. The MAGU team can be introduced incrementally, and this approach may also be driven by constraints on available resources, particularly availability of qualified social workers.

- 8.4 Resources and flexibility provided by the Social Care Recovery Fund are available to supplement existing one-off resources to fund this in line with the aforementioned principles.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

The proposed development will see the Council enhance its potential to deliver against its prevention duty to families. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

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

10.1 The implementation of the proposed changes to foster carer allowance allowances 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*'.

- 10.2 It will also help the Council to meet three of the seven wellbeing goals that The Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015' puts in place as follows:

- A more equal Wales
- A healthier Wales
- A Wales of cohesive communities

- 10.3 The proposed changes are also consistent with the sustainable approach promoted by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the five ways of working:

- Long-term – the proposals seek to make a long-term difference to people's lives, the way we work with families and the Council's resources.

- Prevention – the proposal is fundamentally focused upon strengthening our prevention offer
- Integration – Partner organisations have been invited to join the steering group and will continue to be involved. Particularly important in terms of integrating a seamless offer to vulnerable families with the Resilient Families Service, and Midwifery
- Collaboration – Families, and staff have been involved in the evaluation and proposal
- Involvement – Families, and staff have been involved in the evaluation and proposal

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 An evaluation of the previous looked after children strategy has taken place leading to a new one with 4 improvement areas.
- 11.2 By implementing the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy, the Council is providing families with the strongest possible service model for reducing the risk of family breakdown and preventing avoidable entries to the looked after system.
- 11.3 Due to a combination of financial and capacity reasons we are phasing implementation.
- 11.4 Performance is promising and we will need to keep this under review.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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