



**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PREVENTION STRATEGY**

**27<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023**

**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 provides information to Corporate Parenting Board about Children's Services' progress with the Children Looked After Prevention Strategy.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:

- 2.1 Note the information;
- 2.2 Ask questions in line with the duties and role of Corporate Parenting Board Members.

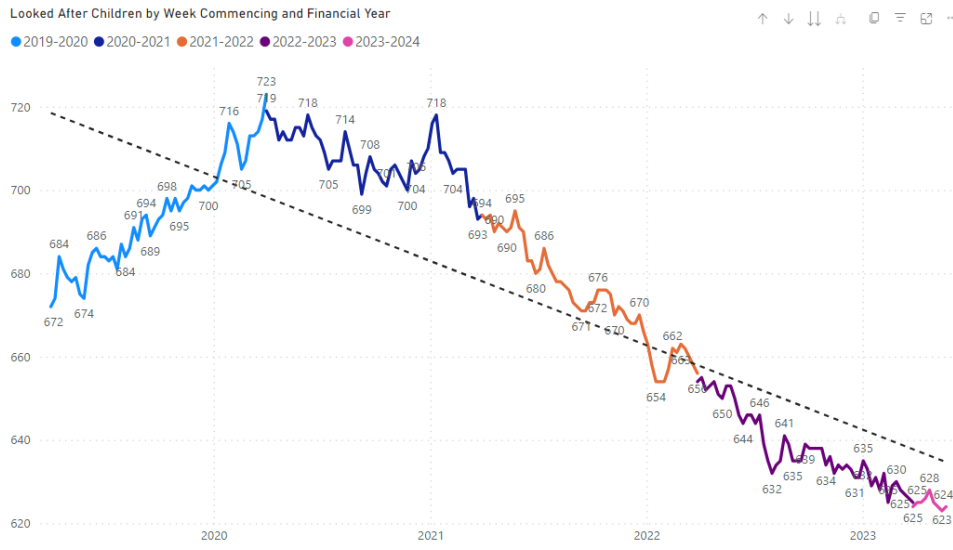
**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 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 December 2022, Cabinet endorsed the updated Children Looked After Prevention Strategy and the associated funding proposal. In February 2022 the report was received by Scrutiny Committee, and in July 2022, the report was received by Corporate Parenting Board. This report is an update on progress in relation to the implementation of the Strategy.

## **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 keep under review the services, policy, processes and practice that optimises our potential to safely avoid parent-child separation and enhance our family support meanwhile.
- 4.2 The strategy itself was co-produced with a strategic academic partner (Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brooks University) and was informed by a literature review, secondary data analysis of the prior 3 years, a deep dive of 75 cases and focus groups with staff, families, and partners.
- 4.3 We keep our performance in safeguarding and protecting children under constant review. We acknowledge that to keep some children safe, it is absolutely necessary that they become looked after. However, our ethos is first and foremost to enable and support children to be brought up within their families. With this in mind, we are pleased to note improving performance in the number of children who become looked after by the Council, demonstrated by a reduction in numbers. RCT has moved from previously being the Council with the second highest rate of looked after children in Wales to being in 4<sup>th</sup> position in July 2022 to 6<sup>th</sup> position in May 2023 from where we strive 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.
- 4.4 **RCT – Children Looked After Numbers**

The chart below demonstrates the reduction in number of children becoming looked after since 2020.



#### 4.5 Strategy progress update:

The strategy includes four improvement and development areas.

Improvement and Development Area	Progress / next steps
<p><b><u>1. Model of Practice</u></b></p> <p>Development of a clear RCT practice model for social workers and allied staff working with families referred to Children’s Services 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 significant development and will require a step-change throughout the service.</p>	<p>The recently appointed Officer has commenced in post and will commence the work that will build on some of the great practice that is already in existence. We particularly want this to be practitioner led, with emphasis upon the importance of involving an experienced practitioner in the steering group. The Officer is engaged in a thorough induction process which will acquaint her with the teams delivering services to children and families.</p> <p><b><u>Next Steps:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The steering group will meet to co-produce a clear RCT Children’s Services model of practice, which is underpinned by evidence of what works best.</li> <li>• A celebration of practice and outcomes is being planned for the September Inform and Involve sessions</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>2. Better Pre-birth Services</u></b></p> <p>Development of Magu which is our dedicated service for families referred to Children’s Services during a pregnancy to enable earlier intervention with parents considered to be very vulnerable before the child is born.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Magu team is operational and receiving cases</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Next Steps :</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report to Corporate Parenting Board is planned for October 2023</li> </ul>

<p>The service will include a specific pathway and set of supports for these parents.</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>	
<p><b><u>3.Developing reunification</u></b></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"> <li>• In hand, with final report anticipated early Autumn</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Next Steps:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement then evaluate the revised reunification and permanence process</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>4.Improve support for kinship carers and special guardians</u></b></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"> <li>• We have established a contract with Kinship Cymru in order to extend support</li> <li>• Therapeutic Service called MAPPS is now operational to support stability within the family placement</li> <li>• We have increased the staffing establishment that is available to support Special Guardians</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Next Steps</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are reviewing the financial support for Special Guardians</li> </ul>

## **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 Alongside improving the outcomes for children and young people, the proposals set out in the Children Looked After prevention strategy are intended to provide a cost benefit (or cost avoidance). Nonetheless, the gap in service provision cannot be closed within existing resources without standing down other essential services, therefore additional investment with a view to longer term saving, has been supported. Financial modelling in this regard however is difficult and it is important that in the evaluation, we allow time for the intended outcomes to be delivered.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED**

- 9.1 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 The Children Looked After prevention strategy is being implemented, and positive results have been noted in the increase of the number of families that remain together, and safe avoidance of the looked after system.

11.2 We will need to keep services under review and monitor continuing progress in the medium to long-term, and any changes in that.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**AS AMENDED BY**

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985**

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