



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2023/24

**COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

25TH SEPTEMBER 2023

**REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF
SOCIAL SERVICES**

Agenda Item No. 6

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
STRATEGY UPDATES**

Author: Annabel Lloyd Director and Catherine Tyler, Operational Change and Transformation Officer, Children's Services.

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Scrutiny Committee with information and current progress regarding Rhondda Cynon Taf's Children's Services Strategy

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Consider the information contained within the report.

2.2 Scrutinise and comment on the information provided.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf Children's Services Strategy is rooted in the service's values, purpose and vision. An infographic has been developed and adopted as an identifier given its cross-cutting significance across our work. The Infographic is included at Appendix 1

3.2 Children's Services Strategy aligns with population needs, and the Council's duties to vulnerable children having taken into account Government Policy and the resources that are available. We are developing a Service Strategy that is:

Evidence Based	Deploying secondary data analysis and working alongside strategic academic partners where relevant.
Systemic	Keeping child and family experience of the entire service in mind.
Involves Stakeholders	Including partners, providers and families.
Manages Risk	Measures and mitigates risk with links to the corporate risk register.
Outcome focused with Evaluative Governance	Each implementation plan has a group of staff focused on evaluating the progress and effectiveness of plans against a pre-determined set of measures.

3.3 The Service Strategy brings together 5 areas of transformation, each of which has its own strategy document and implementation plan that has been brought to Cabinet for approval and Scrutiny Committee for pre-scrutiny and information or to Corporate Parenting Board as is appropriate. The 5 transformation areas are:

1. Workforce
2. Children Looked After Prevention
3. Residential Transformation
4. Participation
5. Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) Review

4. **UPDATE / CURRENT POSITION**

Children’s Services Workforce Strategy 2022-2025

4.1 The vision for the Strategy is that Children’s Services’ workforce is motivated, engaged and valued; staff have the capacity, skills, competence and confidence to meet the needs of children and families. The strategy document sets out the Council’s response to the significant recruitment and retention challenges being faced by the Service, especially in relation to experienced social workers. The workforce plan was last brought to Scrutiny Committee in November 2022 and has focused on the following themes:

An engaged, motivated and healthy workforce	<p>The Children’s Services Communication Cycle is now embedded; including quarterly service updates, biannual Inform and Involve sessions for all staff, and an annual staff survey that leads to a ‘You Said; We Did’ response for staff. (Next staff survey to be held in October 2023).</p> <p>The practitioner wellbeing programme is established which exists in addition to the whole staff offer given the nature of the work and includes access to psychology led reflective for groups and individuals. Schwartz Rounds have also been developed in order to deliver peer to peer support.</p>
Attraction and recruitment	An exit and entry interviews now embedded in HR process and is evaluated regularly to inform our analysis of push and pull factors. A retention interview pilot will commence in Teams that experience the greatest challenges in this area.

	<p>In March 2023 we launched a social media campaign to mark World Social Work Day. As part of the recruitment drive, we used digital billboards across Rhondda Cynon Taf and had a sponsored article in Wales Online. Some attraction focussed video shorts can be found on the revised attraction website, and are used in social media posts. They can be found here: Social Care and Social Work at Rhondda Cynon Taf Council RCT - Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (rctcbc.gov.uk).</p> <p>Staff are currently updating our promotional materials including our webpages, and recruitment videos in readiness for a new recruitment campaign, focusing on the support practitioners can access in Rhondda Cynon Taf - specifically reflective sessions with psychologists.</p>
<p>Workforce Supply and Shape</p>	<p>Recruitment and retention continue to be a significant challenge for Children’s Services. The vacancy rate across Children’s Services remains high at 21.5% some teams are however experiencing acute vacancy levels for Social Work practitioners, operating with a vacancy rate that exceeds 50%. (iTrent Data August 2023). Additional capacity has been made available to support teams by the appointment of Assessor Care Manager and Support Worker roles. ITrent monthly workforce data management reports are now available to Children’s Services Managers, enabling timely scrutiny of workforce data.</p> <p>Given the evidence that ‘Growing our Own’ has greatest impact, we have continued our commitment to increase investment in the established scheme by expanding the number of Children’s Services staff able to be sponsored to access the Open University Social Work Degree programme with a guaranteed Social Work role on completion of registration. The data gathered by the ‘Grown our Own’ Sub-group demonstrates the strong link between providing final year social work student placements and recruitment. This has in part contributed to the appointment of 11 newly qualified social workers during quarter 1 and 2. The same Sub-group is exploring alternative approaches to a retainer payment with the universities due to barriers in taking forward the bursary scheme for student social workers. Additional support has been put in place to mentor newly qualified staff, and we are working to improve our offer to those seeking work experience in Social Care and Social Work.</p>
<p>Seamless Workforce Model</p>	<p>A Lead Manager for Social Work Practice commenced in post in June 2023. Training and development will be closely linked to the implementation of an agreed model of social work practice across Children’s Services.</p>

Children Looked After Prevention Strategy 2022-25

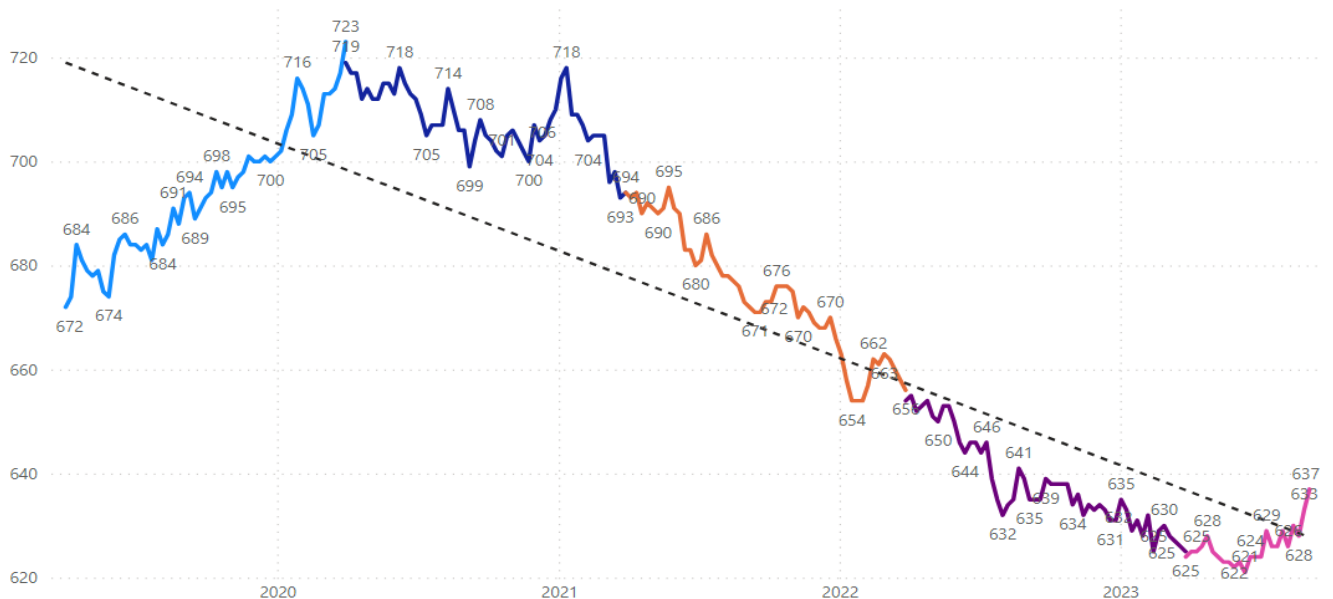
4.2 There are 4 elements to this Strategy, the purpose of which is to tortuously improve the evidence based services that safely prevent the need for children to become looked after. The Strategy and its investment was endorsed by Cabinet in January 2022 and later reported to Corporate Parenting Board:

1. Improving pre-birth services	Magu is now operational, and corporate parenting board has signed up to the charter for parents in care and leaving care.
2. Model of Practice	Evidence is being reviewed ahead of committing to the model.
3. Improve support for kinship carers	Kinship Cymru contract established and Special Guardianship Support enhanced, the published offer is in development. That offer will be no less than the support mainstream foster families can access.
4. Reunification project	This work aimed at improving how we reunify children and their parents following separation by becoming looked after will conclude in the Autumn leading to updated policy and practice.

4.3 The rate at which families stay together has increased, and the children looked after count has reduced:

Looked After Children by Week Commencing and Financial Year

● 2019-2020 ● 2020-2021 ● 2021-2022 ● 2022-2023 ● 2023-2024



Residential Transformation Strategy

- 4.4 This was brought to pre-scrutiny in November 2022 and was approved by Cabinet in February 2023. The vision for this is: By 1st April 2027, all Rhondda Cynon Taf young people who need residential care are looked after close to home in high quality settings where they can thrive, and that they are looked after by a stable, resilient, skill and well supported staff group. The work includes 2 co-dependent areas, (i) Foster Wales and (ii) 16+ strategy:
- 4.5 As part of the Strategy, four new children's homes are in development:

Willowford House	Registered setting, therapeutic approach for 3 young people
Ystrad Fechan	Emergency care for up to 3 young people. Setting is registered but refurbishment is required and timetabled - recent inspection identified areas for improvement including priority action notices which are being addressed.
Catref Melys	Therapeutics care for 4 young people. Purchase is complete, refurbishment and registration anticipated by 31.3.24.
Meadow View	Purchase has commenced

Participation Strategy

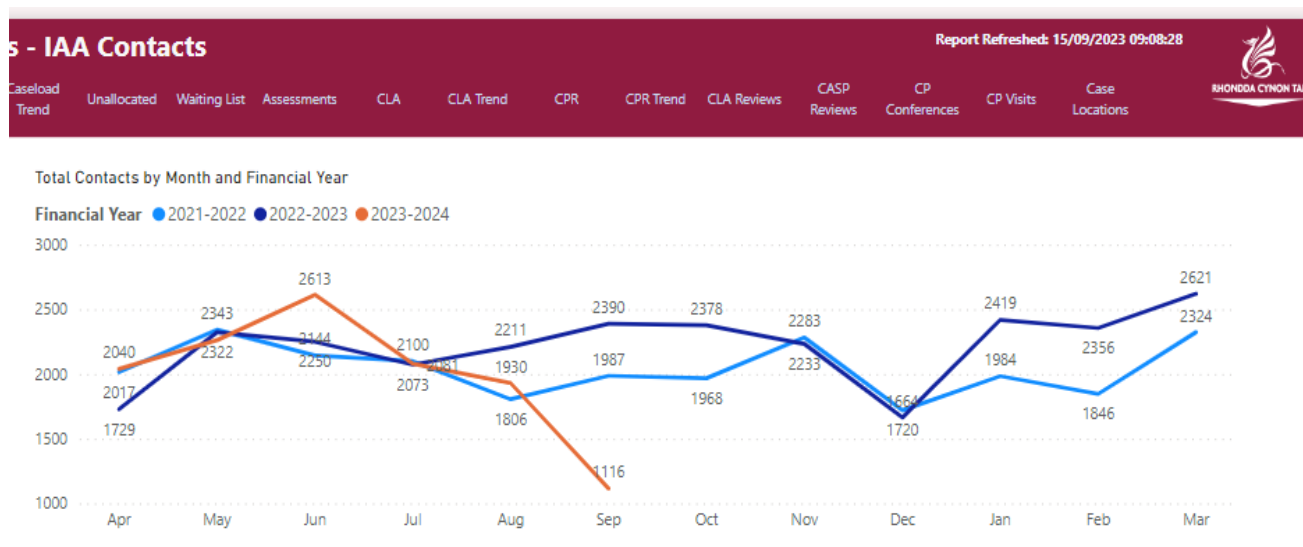
- 4.6 The Vision for the strategy is: Our children, young people and families feel valued, involved and their voices are heard through Participation and Co-Production. They receive feedback through individual feedback, consultation, participation, and co-production. Participation is reflective of the local population's diversity, Welsh language and cultural identity.
- 4.7 The Participation Strategy 2023-2026 outlines Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Children's Services approach to supporting the rights of children, young people, parents, carers, and families in receipt of care and support, to have their voices heard and to actively participate in decisions about their life and help to shape future service developments.

Aim 1. Consulting and engaging. Listening to Children and taking their views seriously (as guaranteed by Article 12-UNCRC)	A range a of consultation activities have been undertaken with children and young people, and included in Appendix 2
Aim 2 Children, Young People and Families information in an accessible language or format appropriate for age, ability or culture.	Task and finish groups are currently developing our public facing information.
Aim 3 Accountability: (Co-design + Co-production)	Facilitating a workshop on the 22/9/23 with care experienced young people to develop

Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) Review

- 4.8 The increase in the level of contacts to the IAA Team is being sustained, and in order to be a sustainable service, we need to re-design alongside stakeholders with an even stronger prevention intention at the forefront of the future. A review is underway and that will be concluded, and an action plan confirmed and commenced by 31.3.24.

The graph below illustrates the pattern of contacts:



5. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS/SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 5.1 There are no equality and diversity or socio-economic implications associated directly with this report.

6. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no Welsh language implications arising directly from this report.

7. CONSULTATION/INVOLVEMENT

- 7.1 Consultation activity is outlined within the report.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. However, each area of Strategy is costed with input from Finance colleagues and aligned with the Council's medium term financial plan. Where identified grant funding opportunities are explored to meet the cost of new developments, a business case and options appraisal is developed.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 Implementation of the Children's Services Strategy aims to

ensure that the Council is able to effectively support vulnerable children and families and meet the requirements of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN/OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

10.1 The implementation of the Children's Services Strategy will make a positive contribution towards the Council's corporate priorities, in particular:

- Ensuring people are independent, healthy and successful by enabling a sustainable social work practitioner workforce, and
- Enabling prosperity, creating the opportunity for people to fulfil their potential and prosper.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 Children's Services officers have developed a set of transformation plans that are rooted in values and people's rights, informed by evidence, and peoples' voices whilst being co-aligned with statutory duties and Government policy. Each area of transformation has an inter-relationship with the other. Plans are evaluated, and adjusted as effectiveness is measured. The transformation journey takes time, but having a clear set of plans, aligned with the Council's medium term financial plan helps keep us on track.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972
AS AMENDED BY
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985
RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
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Background papers:

None

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