



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

30th SEPTEMBER 2024

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PREVENTION STRATEGY

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN DISCUSSION
WITH THE RELEVANT PORTFOLIO HOLDER, CABINET MEMBER FOR
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

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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 2021 – 2024.

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, and June 2023 reports were received by Corporate Parenting Board. This report is an update on progress in relation to the implementation of the Strategy since 2023.

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 under review; the Safeguarding and Prevention Quality Assurance Panel meets at least quarterly to review performance and receive quality assurance reports. An annual report is produced that informs our training needs analysis. The Safeguarding Board also has a developing multi-agency performance and quality assurance review process. In 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales inspected Children's Services Public Law Outline process, providing a result that gave assurance about practice.
- 4.4 The overall count of children looked after in RCT has reduced since 2020 when we recorded a count of 722 but it remains high in the national comparison. This is a difficult and sometimes unpredictable area of business for the Council, and in addition to poverty, domestic abuse, substance misuse and poor parental mental health¹, other factors that currently influence the rate at which children become looked after include the transfer of Unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and in the impact for children and families of exploitation.
- 4.5 RCT – Children Looked After Numbers

Chart i below demonstrates the overall numerical count of looked after children, and chart ii provides the national comparison.

Chart i - Numbers of Children Looked After 2022-2024 in RCT

¹ [Children's social services and care rates in Wales: A survey of the sector | WCPP](#)

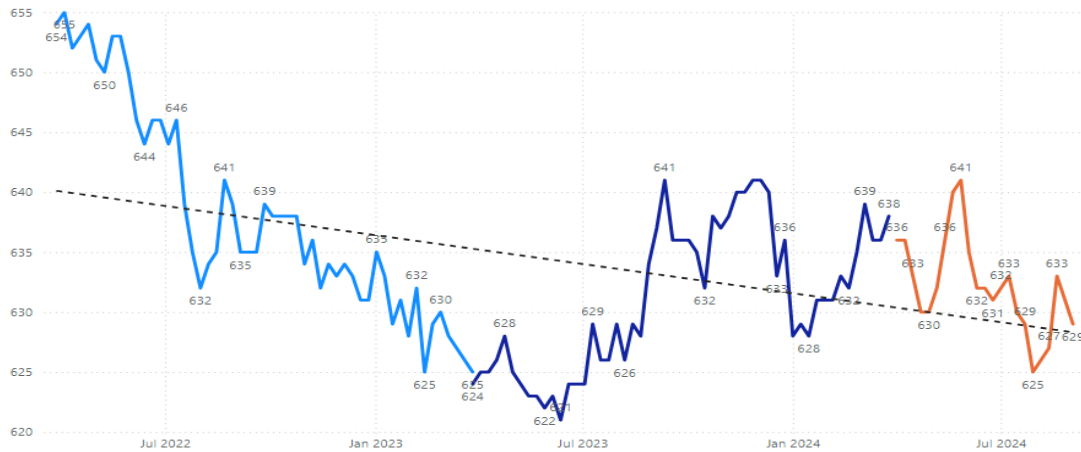
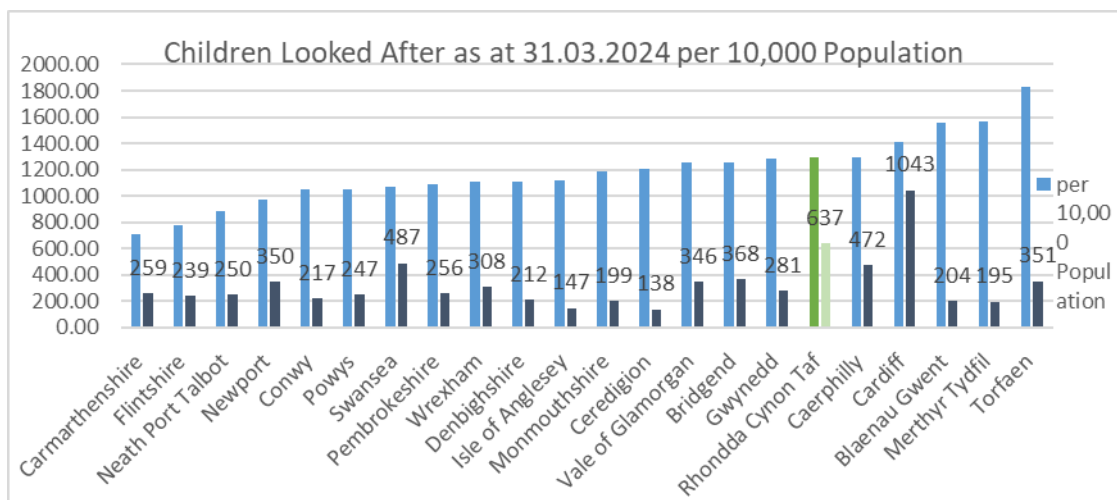


Chart ii - National Comparison of Looked After Numbers



4.6 Strategy progress update:

The strategy includes four improvement and development areas.

Improvement and Development Area	Progress / next steps
<p>1. Model of Practice</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>This is a mid and long term, commitment to better outcomes for young people, and ensuring that RCTCBC is known to promote and support great social work practice in a way that has a positive relationship with our workforce strategy. The lead officer for this area has completed the research and consultation with staff and families. The steps we are taking with the collaborative communication training requires some level of change for us all and training commences this Autumn. At Appendix 1</p>

	<p>an information summary is included.</p> <p><u>Next Steps:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out of Collaborative Communication Training. • Steering Group to continue to guide the work and oversee implementation plan.
<p><u>2. Better Pre-birth Services</u></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> <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>Corporate Parenting Board has received a report about Magu and the evaluation of Year 1 notes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There has been a 22% reduction in children under the age of 1 year becoming Looked After in RCT. • Reliance on parent and child placements has reduced by 10% • Decrease in parent and child placements ending with separation of parent and child. Only 1 of the 9 placements being supported by Magu ended in separation. Previous rates have been at approximately 30-40% separation. • Of the 46 babies born where Magu support is in place 41 have remained in the care of a parent or have returned to the care of a parent following a period of separation. • There is good uptake of the service by fathers. Of the 78 families, 53 of those involved a father as part of a couple or as the sole involved parent. • Improved wellbeing and resilience recorded in 100% of those exiting the service <p><u>Next Steps :</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magu is now embedded and developing its offer to parents who are separated from their children called Cefnogi Rhieni

<p><u>3.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"> • The planned work has been achieved • Further progress is expected alongside the proposed reconfiguration of Teams into Children Looked After and 14+ Teams progress as planned <p><u>Next Steps:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The remaining step is to design and deliver training alongside Independent Reviewing Officers.
<p><u>4.Improve support for kinship carers and special guardians (SG)</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"> • Work in this area has been achieved, and the recent SG newsletter outlines the offer and has been shared with Corporate Parenting Board Members for their info <p><u>Next Steps:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the year ahead (25-6) we will evaluate the SGs Pilot that seeks to enhance the financial support that is available moving to a position where the support available to Special Guardians matches what is available to kinship foster carers.

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. The challenging financial environment facing all councils does mean that we need to ensure that we are maximising the benefits of the resources we invest across all services.

- 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). Any additional investment with a view to longer term saving / cost avoidance, does need to continue to be scrutinised and closely monitored, notwithstanding it is recognised that financial modelling in this regard 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 some positive results have been noted, but we have ambition to see further progress in the number of families with care and support needs remaining a family unit.

11.2 The strategy itself was due to expire in 2024, and in 2025 independent review will be invited to evaluate the past 3 years and set the next phase of work in this area.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Appendix 1

RCT Children's Services Model of Practice Relationships, Collaboration, Trauma Informed

Context to the Development of Model of Practice

In September 2023 RCT Children's Services began the journey to determine a model of practice. A Model of Practice is an approach to service delivery. It is normally value based and should provide a clear framework for practice. It can be transformational, improving outcomes for children and families, helping to retain staff and develop their skills.

The conversation about the value of an effective model of practice began UK wide in 2010. A review of child protection services in England by Prof Munro concluded; social work had become overly bureaucratic, too focused on compliance, and the focus on social justice and improving children's and families lives diminished. Around the same time, social workers in Hackney decided to do things differently and designed a new model of service delivery and practice (Trowler and Goodman, 2013). Services and social work teams were reconfigured, increasing time with families, building in mechanisms to support reflection, enhancing relationship building that enabled change. The outcomes were overwhelmingly positive. They included a reduction in the numbers of children going into care, those on child protection plans and re-referrals (Munro, 2011). Several other local authorities in England tentatively followed suit and later some in Wales. Additionally funding from the Department of Education in England was made available to "innovate in children's social care". 94 projects were set up, delivered, and evaluated between 2014 and 2020. Most were based within Local Authority children's services. The standard of evaluation varied as did the outcomes, but it has provided a useful evidence base of "What Works" as RCT ventured into developing its model of practice.

The Journey

The journey to identify and develop an RCT Children's Services model of practice began in September 2023, when our steering group met for the first time. The steering group is driven by the Head of Service, Service Managers and key others. The group was clear from the outset, that the model of practice needed to support and build on RCT

specific strengths and values, to reduce the challenges and work towards the Departments priority outcomes. These were defined as:

- Improving Outcomes for Children and Families
- Providing a clear evidence based approach
- Increasing staff confidence
- Supporting strong relationships with families
- Increasing collaboration with multi agency partners

Once these aims were established, practitioners were asked about the departments value base, to ensure there was consensus about what was important. Practitioners were able to give examples of their work matching the established values, and also highlighted another which was compassion. This has now been added to the organisational values. Staff also highlighted the transformational power of relationships and it's centrality to social work. This was held in mind when searching for and designing the right model. Alongside reviewing the values, the departments vision was adjusted to align with the Corporate Vision for RCT, which is to:

“Ensure that all children and young people have the best start in life and grown and learn safely”.

The steering group reviewed 11 models that had been successfully evaluated and another less successfully evaluated but popular. All were strength-based models. A number were ruled out at the initial stages for varying reasons. Three models were shortlisted by November 2023 and steering group members were asked about various options for taking forward. By February the consensus was that there were elements of all three to build on, creating a bespoke RCT Model of Practice.

The Model

The model utilises the acronym of RCT to highlight the three key pillars of our practice. Relationships, Collaboration and being Trauma Informed.

Relationships

Building strong relationships that support families identify and build on strengths is central to the approach. We know that to effectively help children and families this is essential.

Collaboration

Working with children families and the their networks as early as possible to co-produce plans will be integral to the approach. Identifying key areas for support and retaining an outcome focus. This collaborative approach should span work with partner agencies.

Trauma Informed

Recognising the possibility of trauma in children, families and others, and responding effectively is key to the approach, as a way of supporting people overcome some of the experiences they may have had and to avoid unintentionally retraumatizing. Integrating the unique therapeutic support on offer in RCT Childrens Services via internal and external support is key to this, as well as building on the successful implementation of a trauma informed support in some teams.

Delivery and Embedding

To deliver this approach we need to build on the skills already in the service and achieve a confident and stable workforce who are able to manage the complexity inherent to the work. We know this is going to require organisational support:

- Time – ensuring people have manageable workloads and time to reflect will be essential
- Training- ensuring there is a robust training offer to support with implementation
- Supervision – reflective high quality supervision will be essential and group supervision may be a part of this
- Culture – ensuring the whole organisation is working in a relationship focused, collaborative, trauma informed way from Senior Management down will be crucial to the model.
- Paperwork and processes – everything will need to be aligned to support this way of working
- Support for worker wellbeing – building on that trauma informed approach supporting workers manage their own wellbeing will be essential

Training Offer

To support the model our training offer has three distinct strands

Collaborative Communication

This was developed by Dame Rhoda Emlyn Jones. She has advised us this is not just training but a chance to review the practice of the organisation. The training also supports practitioners build on skills to work alongside children and families, ensuring an approach of doing

with rather than to. It will support inter team and organisational discussions about the most effective ways to deliver services and focus on outcomes rather than process. Alongside the training a mentor support scheme is in place, so as mentors are identified they will be supported nationally via Social Care Wales.

Systemic Practice

This will not be a universal offer, but we will build towards experienced practitioners getting the opportunity to undertake systemic practice training, building on their knowledge of relationship focused work. Utilising tools to understand a whole families world better and drawing on the strengths of the whole network.

Trauma Enhanced and Trauma Skilled Training

With so many of the children and adults we work with having been subjected to traumatic events (big T trauma) and living in highly stressful environments, where little t trauma is endemic, training should support practitioners understanding and approach to working with trauma. There is already a robust therapeutic support model in place in RCT Children's Services, so this approach will build on that by ensuring all our workforce feel confident to support people recover and ensuring that the system does not unintentionally retraumatise. There is also recognition that vicarious trauma can impact workers. There are a number of interventions already in place that worker can access to maintain their wellbeing, and we will build on this.

What changes might Partners see

This is not a quick fix solution and this scale of change cant happen overnight but we will move to a more consistent approach across the authority.

- Conversations will be strength based and outcome focused.
- Workers will be very focused on how to reduce risk and the process will support this rather than being the priority.
- There will be a shift in culture from a "keeping children safe" to a "keeping families together unless its unsafe for a child".
- Wider family will be involved (when agreed) from an earlier stage
- Workers will be feeling confident to explore and hypothesise about a problem that a family are having and helping families think creatively about solutions.

- The paperwork will be family friendly and the language will be accessible.

Next Steps

The consultation period has been completed with children and families and there was a positive response from families about this approach. Their feedback and the ongoing process with staff is providing us the detail of how families want us to work. These messages will be integral to training and development.

The steering group were clear that they needed to be modelling this approach from the start and the Senior Management Team and Managers will be undertaking training in November and December. This is a really exciting time and will build on some of the amazing work already happening.