

VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL
SOCIAL SERVICES DIRECTORATE
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES

COMMISSIONING STRATEGY

2013 – 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Children and young people looked after by the Local Authority and not by their parents or within their families are among the most vulnerable groups in society. As their Corporate Parents, it is our responsibility to keep them safe, to make sure their experiences in care are positive and to improve their life chances. We must approach this 'parenting' role with as much passion and commitment as any family and ensure that our Looked After Children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

While this strategy describes the level of care and placements we want to provide and commission for our Looked After Children, it has to focus too on all stages of the 'care journey'. We must support families to stay together wherever it is safe to do so and, as a result, minimise the need for children to become looked after.

The commissioning strategy identifies how the social care needs of children, young people and their families will be met within the resources available to the Council during the period 2013 to 2018. It should be read in conjunction with the Social Services Commissioning Plan 2011.

All services involved with children, young people and their families have a role to play within the model of service provision set out in this strategy. The intention is to provide a coherent picture of the range of activity across Children and Young People Services at all tiers and stages of the care journey which contributes to the Vale of Glamorgan's model of Integrated Children and Young People Services. Consequently, this is a Council-wide strategy which will require coordinated effort and purpose from all Divisions and other service providers to deliver. .

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Why is resource management in social services so important?

1. Effective management of resources is not just about efficiency or cutting costs. Our service users and carers are adversely affected by poor resource management. It leads to money being spent inappropriately and not targeted on local and national priorities. It may also lead to personal distress and the loss of essential support and care to some of the most vulnerable people in the community. Effective long-term financial planning and good budget management will help ensure that the support given to users and carers is effective in meeting their needs, by avoiding poor short-term decision making.
2. Good resource management will ensure the delivery of efficient and effective services by:
 - providing information to councillors and managers about how well service policies and priorities are being delivered;
 - allowing changes to the direction of services to reflect requirements that are being driven either by central government or by the local authority;
 - assisting complex service change programmes to be conducted in a stable financial environment which minimises risk;
 - helping the council to respond to changes in demand for services and ensuring that resources are targeted to areas of greatest need; and
 - setting clear parameters for distributing resources equitably and transparently across different categories of service users.

Why is resource management in social services problematic?

3. These are some of the consistent features which make resource management especially challenging.
 - It is the largest pot of money directly controlled by the council. On average, social services expenditure accounts for nearly a quarter of the council's total budget.
 - Potential demand for most social care services will always exceed supply and so we are always involved in establishing eligibility and in prioritising.
 - Like all local authorities in Wales, this Council is heavily dependent on funding from the Welsh Government. The formula used to allocate this funding is problematic for the Vale of Glamorgan. It means that social services here receive substantially less money than some local authorities which are similar in size. The outcome is that our average spend per head of population is relatively low. Therefore, we have to be exceptionally efficient and, like any other 'lean' organisation, there is limited resilience or scope for ineffective use of resources.
 - Decisions which affect the type and cost of services to be provided are often outside of the council's control and may be unpredictable – for example, decisions taken by the court in childcare cases.

- Some individual services are very expensive. Placements for children with complex needs can easily exceed £100,000 a year and some will cost substantially more.
 - Financial decisions have to follow the changing needs of individual users.
 - Expenditure incurred in one year may lock the council into financial commitments for many years to come.
 - Market pressures sometimes mean that councils can face escalating costs when purchasing services from independent providers, which may exceed the original budget assumptions.
 - Charging for services is either not permitted or hedged in by considerable constraints.
4. There are a number of new factors which are making the task even more difficult:
 - increasing demand for services;
 - new requirements from the UK and Welsh Governments for which adequate funding has not been received;
 - the need to achieve considerable budget savings.
 5. The Council faces formidable challenges in continuing to deliver high quality social services - most obviously in finding ways to bridge the gap between the reducing resources available and the year-on-year growth in our costs and in demand for social care (resulting from demographic trends, increased citizen expectations, changing family structures and increasing numbers of children with long standing and complex disabilities). Net cost pressures of at least £700,000 have been estimated for children and young people services for 2013/14, most of which are connected with the cost of Looked After Children services.
 6. To balance the competing priorities of managing service demand, improving quality, meeting higher expectations and reducing expenditure is especially problematic in situations where safeguarding children from harm has to be the key factor in decision-making.
 7. The overall financial context for the public sector as a whole has changed significantly. In the past, pressures such as inflation costs and rising demand were dealt with by use of savings from better times within the economic cycle or by economic growth. The financial crash of 2008 has changed all that. Additional resources on a vast scale have gone to stabilising the financial system and as yet there is little prospect of any real growth. The Council's overall resource base is shrinking. Therefore, we cannot buy our way out of the current dilemmas and a depressed economy is having a clear impact upon our communities, increasing still further demand for social care services. The impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms will compound these problems.
 8. Our first three-year Change Plan allowed us to recover from a very long period of significant budget overspends and deliver a budget reduction programme of £6 million. The more easily managed savings have already been made.

So what must we do?

9. The only way in the long-term to deal effectively with a context where the need for social care is growing rapidly and resources are not keeping pace is a combination of:
 - even better resource management;
 - some retrenchment;
 - reducing costs;
 - reshaping services to divert demand;
 - integrating services; and
 - regionalising services.

10. Because of the difficult financial context and increasing demands for services, the only sustainable answer for social services in the longer-term is for the Council and its partners to change the pattern of services. This work must be based upon an understanding that we need to reduce dependence wherever possible and focus services on prevention, using the strengths within families and communities as key resources.

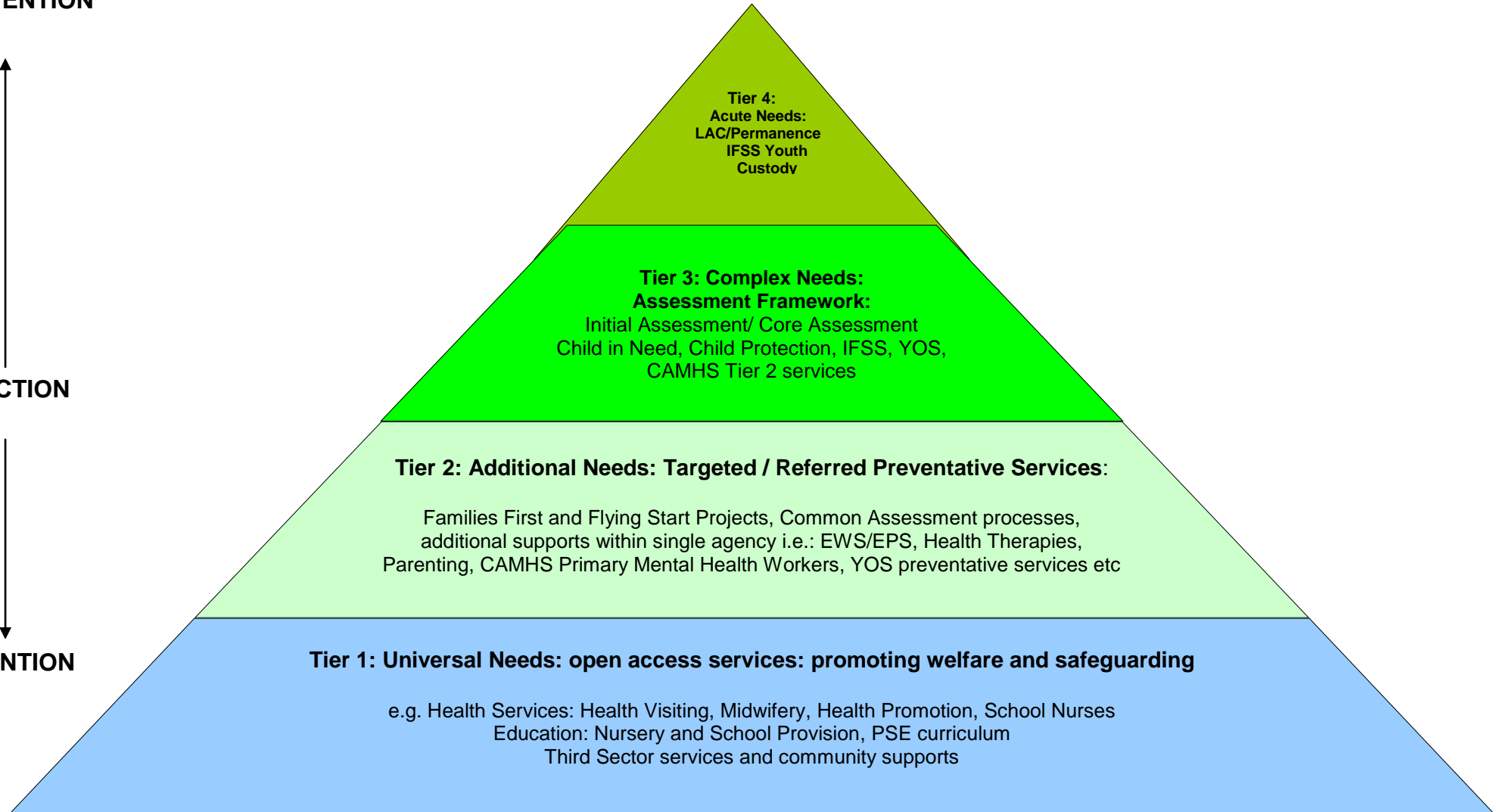
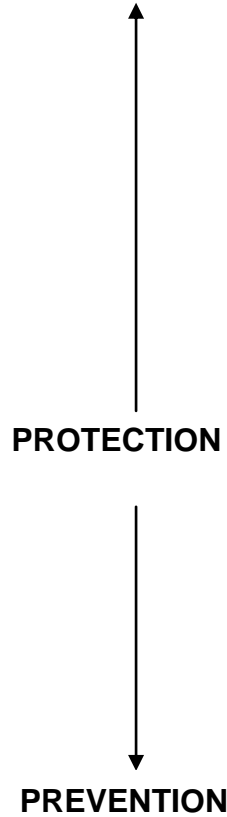
11. The overall agenda and the actions needed are set out in the Change Plan 2011-2014. The Council anticipates that implementation of the Plan will help to achieve the following overall aims:
 - making best use of the fact that Social Services is an integral part of local government (able to call upon all the resources available within the local authority to meet statutory obligations);
 - providing sustainable, flexible and innovative services (which can adjust to new circumstances and needs);
 - developing further a competent and confident workforce (which is skilled, responsive and professional, able to operate with a reduced volume of prescriptive government guidance about processes);
 - facilitating more collaborative working (to deliver better service integration); and
 - securing better value in the use of scarce resources (through efficient and effective delivery of services, promoting independence and reducing demand for intensive support services by a focus on prevention).

12. Implementing the Change Plan is helping us to develop still further the tools needed for reshaping services which involves improving arrangements in three interconnected key areas: resource management; commissioning and contracting; and planning and partnerships. Historically, these were three areas where the council had struggled. Delivery of the first three-year Change Plan brought about significant improvements and we now have in place many of the arrangements needed for further progress. This includes collaborative arrangements needed for integration and regionalisation such as the Children and Young People's partnership, the Integrating Health and Social Care Partnership Board (with Cardiff Council and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board), and the South-East Wales Improvement Collaborative (with nine other social services departments).

13. Effective service commissioning requires that partners across social care (including users and carers, other directorates within the Council, the NHS, the third sector and the independent sector) cooperate in developing a shared model of service provision and in ensuring that the local market in social care delivers the range of services required. The Directorate's work on new service models is beginning to produce dividends. We are pioneers in establishing a coherent approach to the preventive, protective and remedial initiatives contained in the Child Poverty Strategy (Flying Start, Families First and the Integrated Family Support Service). This is:
- providing opportunities for creative thinking about how services are delivered, encouraging dialogue and getting consensus about overall direction;
 - helping to embed concepts which children, young people and families service users and others believe are necessary to underpin wellbeing – choice and control, a rights-based approach, social inclusion and opportunities;
 - providing a way of establishing priorities and clarity for staff, partners and service users/carers;
 - acting as a precursor for decisions about investment of resources and commissioning;
 - encouraging investment in preventative services to divert families from inappropriate and higher cost provision or managing demand at lower levels of intensity/intrusiveness; and
 - generating debate about tiers of services, thresholds and access.
14. This strategy sets out below the model of social care provision for children, young people and their families on which the Council has been working and for which there appears to be a broad degree of consensus across key stakeholders. The next steps must involve turning service models into effective commissioning strategies and plans.

Vale of Glamorgan Model of Integrated Children and Young People Services

INTERVENTION



LEVEL OF NEED AND TYPE OF SUPPORT OR INTERVENTION	SERVICE RESPONSE AND PRIORITY	SERVICE CONTEXT	ASSESSMENT, PLANNING AND RESOURCES
TIER 1 UNIVERSAL NEEDS	Universal provision and /or access to health services, child care, education, information, advice, guidance and other opportunities.	All children and young people, including all vulnerable groups and those with any type of special needs. Family Information Service. Flying Start – 3 Communities	Universal – across a broad range of services.
TIER 2 ADDITIONAL NEEDS	Either a single agency response or a multi-agency response where this is required.	Community based support for children and families suffering early stresses and temporary crises. Joint/Common Assessment processes and thresholds in place. Flying Start Plus and Families First Projects	Above plus Joint/Common Assessment processes to ensure a multi-agency response. Team around the Family as and when required. Multi-agency Preventative/Resource Panels; YISP, School Action and School Action Plus; Targeted Youth Support etc.
TIER 3 COMPLEX NEEDS Health or development likely to be impaired without services but no immediate risk of significant harm. ↓ This tier includes CHILDREN IN NEED (Children Act, 1989). ↓ Some risk of significant harm/family breakdown ↓	Threshold for specialist assessment by services including Health, Social Care, Youth Offending. For Social Care: response within 24 hours and children seen within 7 working days as part of an “initial assessment”.	No immediate risk of significant harm. Community based support for children, young people and families facing a range of stresses, from moderate to severe Children and young people supported to remain living at home or within family network.	Above plus specialist assessment. For example: Children & Young People Services Initial Assessment and Core Assessment Child in Need planning Child Protection planning Short breaks services for disabled children and young people. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Tier 2/3 Services YOS assessments/preventative services Multi agency Placement Panel
TIER 4 ACUTE NEEDS High risk or actual Family/social breakdown including children with significant health care needs. ↓ Statutory intervention. ↓	Immediate service response required and subsequent service guaranteed.	Community based support for children and families facing severe stresses and at risk of family breakdown AND services to children and young people not living at home. - Children accommodated in foster care or in some form of specialist provision.	Above plus IFSS Foster care/ residential care Multi-agency Complex Case Panel Specialist Health Services Specialist CAMHS YOS statutory interventions
PERMANENCE	All children allocated to appropriate professional	Placed for adoption or in other long term and permanent care placements	Above plus Permanence Panel

SOCIAL CARE COMMISSIONING

What is Social Care Commissioning?

15. Commissioning involves making decisions about the type, range and quality of services that will be made available, where and in what settings, on what scale and with what capacity, at what cost and by which provider.

'Social care commissioning is a set of activities by which local authorities and partners ensure that services are planned and organised to best meet the social care outcomes required by their citizens. It involves understanding the population need, best practice and local resources to plan, implement and review changes in services. It requires a whole system perspective and applies to services provided by local authorities, as well as public, private and third sector services.'

Source: Welsh Assembly Government *Fulfilled Lives Supportive Communities Commissioning Framework Guidance and Good Practice*

'Commissioning is the means of securing the best value for local citizens. It is the process of translating aspirations and need, by specifying and procuring services for the local population, into services for users which:

- deliver the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes, including promoting equality;
- provide the best possible health and social care provision;
- achieve this with the best use of available resources.'

Source: Department of Health, 2007 *Commissioning Framework for Health & Well-Being*

What are the benefits of effective commissioning?

16. Effective commissioning helps to ensure that:

- there is a consistent focus on the needs of families and achieving the best possible levels of support;
- the independent and voluntary sectors also have a clear understanding of the intentions of the local authority and so range, quality and cost effectiveness of services can be adjusted to meet the needs specified;
- constructive dialogue with all stakeholders is encouraged;
- a framework for utilising resources is developed to achieve objectives through making best use of all sectors;
- providers have more certainty, which gives them the opportunity to plan ahead;
- bridges are built between service and financial planning.

What is the purpose of this strategy?

a) Strategic Intent

17. The strategy outlines how the Council will commission services designed to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families within the Vale of Glamorgan in need of social care support over the next five years. It describes our strategic intentions as well as the changes we hope to make in the pattern of services.
18. A key aim of the strategy is to explain how we intend to help children and families:
- have real control over the services they receive;
 - experience better outcomes when they require advice, information or support;
 - make meaningful choices about the type of help available and when they can get access to these services;
 - look after themselves and remain safe; and
 - be able to participate fully as active members of their community.

b) Model of Service Provision

19. Effective service commissioning requires that partners across social care (including users and carers, other directorates within the Council, the NHS, the third sector and the independent sector) cooperate in developing a shared model of service provision and in ensuring that the local market in social care delivers the range of services required. This strategy has set out on pages 7 and 8, the model of social care provision for children, young people and their families on which the Council has been working and for which there appears to be a broad degree of consensus across key stakeholders.

c) Shaping services through engagement with the social care market

20. A key aim for the strategy is to help shape the market in social care services within the Vale of Glamorgan - that is the way in which financial and other systems work to determine what services are made available by independent providers, third sector providers and the Council. This will be achieved by:
- making best use of the resources available;
 - better matching of needs and services;
 - better engagement with the independent sector and the third sector;
 - better links between planning and partnerships, commissioning and contracting and resources management;
 - ensuring that services run directly by the Council operate efficiently and in a business-like way; and
 - effective use of early intervention and/or prevention services.

The Context for Commissioning

21. The priorities within this strategy are derived from a number of imperatives, only some of which are external.

Local imperatives

- a) The Vale of Glamorgan Community Strategy 2011 – 2021
- b) The Community Strategy incorporates the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy and the Older People's Strategy. Among the ten priority outcomes in the strategy are:
 - Children and Young People have a healthy life, free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation (Core Aim 3).
 - All children and young people should have a safe home and community which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing (Core Aim 6).
- c) The Vale of Glamorgan consultation draft Corporate Plan 2013 – 2017.
- d) The Social Services Change Plan 2011 – 2014
http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/living/social_care/change_plan.aspx

22. Through the Social Services Change Plan 2011-14, a corporate approach is being taken across all Council directorates to the task of modernising social services in the Vale of Glamorgan. The document sets out the key strategic work streams where action is required if social services are to meet the challenges of increasing demand, reducing public sector finances and the need to support people to remain as independent as possible.

23. The Change Plan objectives include the following:

- The Council converts plans into commissioning intentions so that services are provided by the most appropriate provider and deliver best value.
- Information is available to enable appropriate linking of need/demand and service options (analysis of markets, resources, risks).
- Commissioning strategies match needs and facilitate re-shaping of services where required needed to deliver improved outcomes or sustain appropriate levels of service delivery.
- The Council manages the social care market well, having developed effective relationships with service providers across the different sectors.

National Imperatives

24. Key national documents that set the direction for Social Services in Wales and for commissioning practice include:

- 'Sustainable Social Services for Wales - A Framework for Action' – Welsh Government
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/guidance1/services/?lang=en>
- 'Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities – Commissioning Guidance & Good Practice – Welsh Government
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/circular/commissioningguidance/?lang=en>

25. These documents have many similar themes.

- Individuals should have a greater say in the services they receive.
- An integrated approach to services across health and social care is required.
- There is a need to promote independence.
- There is a need to develop preventative, community-based services.
- We must ensure that services are of a high quality.
- There must be a greater focus on prevention, on promoting well-being and on delivering services in settings that are more convenient to the people that use them.

Efficiency Savings

26. In the current financial context, all public services in Wales are required to reduce costs. It is likely that the Social Services Directorate will be required to make annual efficiency savings of at least £2 million a year for the foreseeable future.

27. As a local authority service, we act within a statutory framework and we are accountable for the implementation of national policy and performance targets. Social services and social care are facing real and unsustainable increases in demand. There are a rising number of people with complex needs who can benefit from support and whose support needs is extensive. The financial outlook is difficult and so it is not possible to buy a way forward. The new national strategic plan for social services, "Sustainable Social Services for Wales - A Framework for Action" concludes that the choice is either retrenchment or renewal. Retrenchment would see fewer people receiving services, greater expectations that people find their own solutions, increased burdens on informal carers and a growing number of disputes between services about who is responsible for providing support. Renewal means focusing more clearly on delivery (including preventative services), continuing to innovate and creating sustainable services.

28. It is essential that the commissioning strategy for children and young people services establishes a financially affordable model of assistance and support.

Joint Commissioning

29. There has been a renewed emphasis on the need to make greater progress with joint commissioning where expertise and capacity are shared across organisations. The Vale has been in the forefront of pioneering initiatives for joint commissioning - with the NHS in commissioning substance misuse services and with nine other local authorities in commissioning independent sector placements for looked after children. The Council has helped to establish important mechanisms for taking forward this work more systematically through the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative and the Cardiff and Vale Integrating Health and Social Care Services Programme Board.

OBJECTIVES

30. The scope of this strategy covers four key objectives. These are:

- A. To support families to stay together** and reduce the need for children to be looked after, by ensuring a focus on early intervention and preventative action across all service provision for children.
- B. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the ‘edge of care’** by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by making private arrangements within their wider family networks.
- C. To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements** that meet the diverse range of children’s needs.
- D. To give children clearly planned journeys through care** which remain focused on achieving care plans, prevent drift, enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.

PRINCIPLES

31. These objectives are underpinned by the following key principles.

- i) The responsibility for meeting the needs of children and young people looked after or at risk of becoming looked after rests across all services for children, including statutory and independent providers.
- ii) The majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families.
- iii) Preventative services and early intervention to support children in need and their families should be provided to give them every chance to stay together.
- iv) Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, families will be supported to make private arrangements within their wider family and friendship networks and, where necessary, to make these arrangements permanent through the use of Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders
- v) Formal kinship fostering arrangements will be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protecting children

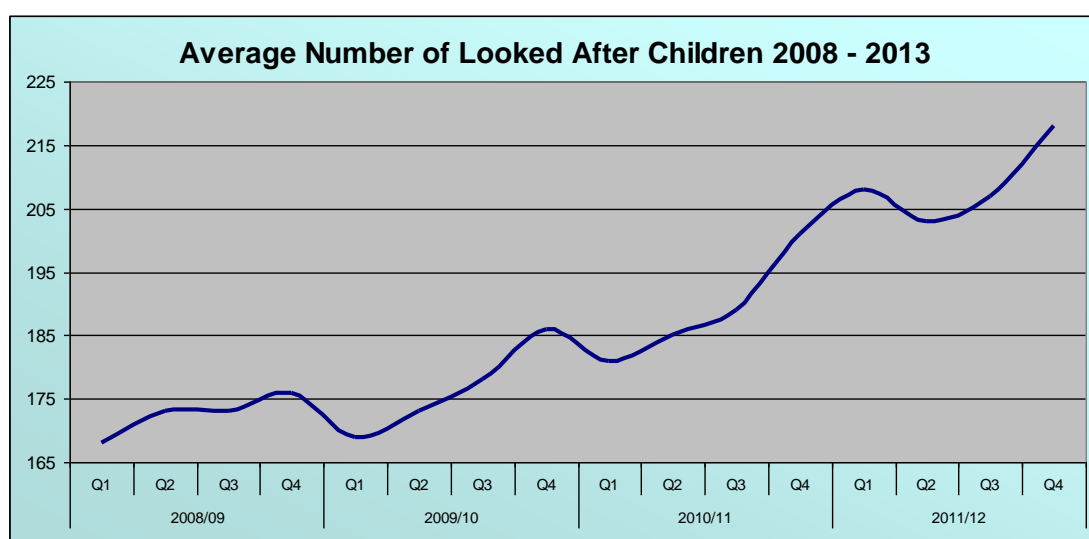
- vi) Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through the arrangements described in principles 4 and 5, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family, preferably with in-house foster carers and, if not, with Independent Fostering Agency carers wherever possible living within the Vale of Glamorgan.
- vii) Residential care placements will be made only where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person's needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject to a Court Ordered Secure Remand.
- viii) Placements should be local to enable children and young people to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives.
- ix) Placement requests should be defined in terms of the child/young person's needs. It is the role of the Placement Panel to agree that a child should become looked after and consider the most appropriate type of placement to meet these needs, with due consideration given to the available resources.
- x) All Looked After Children of statutory school age should receive appropriate education provision regardless of their placement and ability to access school. Providing appropriate support to enable engagement in education is just as important as finding suitable care placements for Looked After Children.
- xi) Placements should support a positive transition to independence, adulthood, education, employment, training and, where applicable, resettlement back into the community from custodial settings.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

32. Based on the 2011 Census, the population of the Vale is 126,336. This number is expected to rise by 0.76% each year to 2023. The age profile of the Vale's population is also expected to change; the number of children (age 0 - 14) is forecast to rise from 22,650 in 2008 to 24,885 by 2023

Numbers of Looked After Children

33. Since 2008, the number of Looked After Children in the Vale of Glamorgan has increased by 20% (i.e. by 36 children and young people) to 218 as at March 2012. This level of increase places the Vale of Glamorgan above the Welsh average but below many other Councils which have reported increases of between 35 and 50%.



34. As at July 2012, the profile of our looked after children was as follows.

Age and gender

Age	Female	Male	Total
0-4	23	25	48
5-10	23	20	43
11-15	29	41	70
16-17	23	21	44
Totals	98	107	205

35. 48% of our looked after children are female and 52% are male. At 34%, the largest cohort of our looked after children is between 11 and 15 years of age. A priority area will be to develop the future accommodation needs of these young people as they progress towards independence.

Ethnic origin

No.	Ethnic origin
190	White British
2	White background
3	Mixed white and black Caribbean
2	Mixed white and black African
2	Mixed background
1	Asian/Asian British – Pakistani
1	Disclosure declined
1	Chinese
3	Any other ethnic group
Total 205	

Reasons for children being looked after

No.	Looked after reason
127	Abuse or neglect
3	Disability
6	Parental illness or disability
23	Family in acute stress
34	Family dysfunction
8	Socially unacceptable behaviour
4	Absent parenting
Total 205	

36. Although the reasons recorded above reflect the primary issue at the point of initial accommodation, a number of these children have complex needs that incorporate a number of these different factors.

Legal status

No.	Legal status
95	Care Order
29	Interim Care Order
71	Section 20
9	Placement Order
1	Emergency Protection Order
Total 205	

Placement profile:

No.	Accommodation type
6	Placed for adoption
38	Foster placement with relative or friend
76	Local authority in house foster carers
34	Independent foster carers
10	Supported accommodation
23	Placed with parents or other person with parental responsibility
1	Independent living
11	Residential care home
5	Residential school
1	Other placement
Total 205	

37. 11% of our looked after children are subject of Care Orders and placed at home with parents.
38. Over half of our looked after children (59%) are either placed for adoption (3%), placed with in-house foster carers (37%) or placed with relatives and friends (19%).
39. Of the 205 looked after children, 51 (25%) are placed outside the Vale of Glamorgan. This equates to 10 children placed with relatives or friends, 9 placed with Vale carers who happen to live outside the county boundary, 21 placed with independent fostering providers, 8 young people placed in residential care homes and 1 in a residential school. Only one young person resides in the category of 'other' placement. This is a young person seeking asylum we have agreed should remain in his present accommodation while his age is assessed.

Placement costs:

40. Independent foster care provision can cost between £740 and £1480 per child per week compared to a maximum of £486 per child per week if placed with an in-house carer.
41. Mainstream residential placements range between annual costs of £146,000 and £234,000, dependent upon the young person's support needs. Specialist residential provision can cost between £140,000 for a 38 week placement to £283,000 for a 52 week placement. Where agreement is reached, these costs are shared proportionately with Education and Health.
42. Supported accommodation for young people costs from £160 per week to £660 per week. The support element, included in this highest cost, is funded via the Supporting People Grant.

Vale of Glamorgan Performance compared with Welsh Averages.

43. Compared to the Welsh average, the Vale of Glamorgan Council performs well in a number of key areas:

- Maintaining placement stability is a key priority area for us and only 7.83% of Vale children had 3 or more placements during 2011/12 compared with the Welsh average of 9.15%.
- The Vale has demonstrated year on year improvement in relation to statutory visits to looked after children. In 2011/12 the Vale achieved the highest performance in Wales at 99.73% of statutory visits achieved in timescale, against the Welsh average of 81.3%.
- The Vale is a top performing authority in relation to completing Initial Assessments within 7 working days, achieving 88% in 2011/12 against a Welsh average of 66%.
- Similarly the Vale is a top performing authority in relation to the completion of Core Assessments within 35 working days, achieving 91.38% against a Welsh average of 65%.

Summary

44. This is a challenging context. Despite the significant financial pressures faced by the local authority, we need to focus on preventing children and young people becoming looked after, on enabling those who do come into care to be rehabilitated to their family network where it is safe to do so and, for those who remain accommodated, on having the best possible outcomes.

OBJECTIVE 1: TO SUPPORT FAMILIES TO STAY TOGETHER

Principles

1. The responsibility for meeting the needs of children and young people looked after or at risk of becoming looked after rests across all service provision for children including statutory and independent providers.
2. The majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families.
3. Preventative services and early intervention to support children in need and their families should be provided to give them every chance to stay together.

45. Children and young people's needs are best met in their own families wherever this can be safely supported. Therefore, helping families stay together must be a key focus for all agencies working with children, young people and families – beginning with early assessment, identification of need and effective intervention.

46. Preventative and early support services can reduce the number of children and young people reaching the threshold for statutory interventions and needing to become looked after. The following key areas have been identified to assist us to achieve this objective:

Supporting parents and carers

47. We need to work together in building the resilience of parents and families and giving them the skills and confidence to provide a positive and safe family environment in which children and young people can thrive. This includes direct support when families are struggling as well as developing and building capacity in families to sustain effective strategies for managing change and difficulty without the need for ongoing professional support. This will include responsive assessments and provision of Direct Payments for children with complex needs, to provide additional supports at the lowest level of intervention.

Flying Start

48. Flying Start is a Welsh Government Grant Programme for children aged less than four years and their families. It is targeted at the most deprived areas in the Vale of Glamorgan. It includes four core elements of service provision:

- intensive health visiting support,
- free quality childcare placements,

- parenting support and
 - early literacy.
49. Flying Start works with parents and children to improve family aspirations and the life chances of children within the Ward areas in which it operates. The Welsh Government has confirmed additional investment in Flying Start which will see a doubling of services currently being provided within the next three years. It is critical that the success achieved to date is maintained in order to support families at lower tier levels and so avoid the need for statutory services.

Families First

50. Families First is a new Welsh Government funded initiative, established to target early intervention and prevention services to children, young people and families, minimising the need for higher level support and intervention from statutory services.
51. The initiative recognises that some of the difficulties children and young people present are as a result of factors affecting other members of the family. The project aims to provide families with holistic, multi-agency support, tailored to the needs of individuals and the family as a whole.
52. The initiative is being developed in line with the 'Team Around the Family' (TAF) model and is known as the FACT Team (Families Achieving Change Together). The work of the team is underpinned through the commissioning of a range of family support services funded by the Families First Grant programme.

Youth Offending Service – Prevention Service

53. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) provides parenting support to those families of children and young people assessed as 'at risk of offending' through their prevention service and to those 'at risk of re-offending' whilst under supervision of a statutory court order where the parenting ability is assessed as a significant risk factor to the young person's offending.
54. The YOS offers eligible parents access to 1:1 or group work programmes to improve their skills in managing and changing inappropriate behaviours.
55. The YOS will also supervise parents of children and young people on Parenting Contracts and Parenting Orders as defined by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 when a parent has refused to engage voluntarily in the interventions offered and the young person's risk of offending or re-offending determines such action is required.

Development of a Volunteer and Mentoring service

56. A volunteer/ mentoring service will be developed to recruit, select and train volunteers to work with both parents and young people. Parenting volunteers could be utilised to mentor and support parents and carers undertaking parenting programmes, to assist in removing barriers to engagement, working with parents and carers to implement changes required within their own homes and providing support and advice.
57. Volunteers could also be recruited to work with young people who cannot be returned to their family or those young people leaving care to assist in engagement in school, in training or seeking employment, in developing independent living skills including budgeting, cooking skills, social activities and personal hygiene.
58. A volunteer protocol will be developed to support staff who will work with and supervise volunteers. This protocol will cover the following areas:
- recruitment and interviewing
 - role descriptions
 - relevant training
 - volunteer files
 - appropriate supervision
 - appraisal system
 - staff responsibilities
 - awards/recognition.

Supporting children and young people to stay in school

59. Disaffection and disengagement in school are causes of escalating poor behaviour which can lead to children and young people being absent or excluded from school. Keeping children and young people in school is an influential factor in enabling parents to care for children within their own family
60. Coupled with other social factors, exclusion from school can trigger a breakdown of home life and result in a request for accommodation. It is vital, therefore, that education providers fully understand a child's circumstances and experiences so that they can share information with other agencies, work to prevent absences and behaviours that could lead to exclusion and raise concerns about children with their parents. Other agencies must share relevant information with schools, support plans to prevent absences and exclusion and where necessary and appropriate, challenge decisions to exclude children from school
61. Under the Families First Grant, the **Putting Families First Project** provides a forum of coordinated support for parents within a nursery and primary school settings. The service is largely offered on a self-referral basis. However, schools can identify families where children may be at risk of exclusion and work can be targeted at encouraging those families to engage in the programme.

- 62. Families engaging in the programme benefit from improved access to information regarding community based services and family support (i.e. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Family Information Service, Genesis 2, Citizens Advice Bureau) and have opportunities to learn new skills (including personal confidence, parenting, first aid, play and skills to help re-engage with training and employment).
- 63. Parenting is addressed through the Nurture programme (a ten-week parenting programme) offered on the school premises. This work is also supported by individual bespoke sessions delivered in the weekly group, linked to the programme and aimed at building confidence and self-esteem across a wide range of parents in preparation for their engagement in the full programme.

Apply the ‘Think Family’ approach to sharing information and working together

- 64. Supporting families to stay together is easier if we think about the needs of the child or young person within the context of their family, their school and their community. Children’s needs always come first for Children and Young People Services but often these cannot be seen in isolation from the needs of the parents and wider family.
- 65. Where this is the case, we need to establish a ‘think family’ approach whereby all professionals working with any member of the family operate as a single coherent team rather than individual services.
- 66. Development of this ‘think family’ approach will be through the implementation of the Families First Project for children in need (Tier 2) and will be complemented by the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) for families experiencing breakdown/child protection (Tier 4). Both services require the development of appropriate protocols between agencies and service areas to avoid duplication and provide more seamless responses to children, young people and families in need.

Objective 1: Summary of Actions:

- 1.1 Ensure the successful implementation and effective use of Families First, the Flying Start expansion programme, the Integrated Family Support Service and YOS preventative services subject to availability of grant funding.
- 1.2 Through relevant planning and review meetings, work in partnership with families, the Learning and Skills Directorate and schools to promote attendance, reduce exclusions and keep children and young people in school
- 1.3 Ensure the ‘Think Family’ approach underpins every aspect of practice and intervention with children, young people and their families by

providing training and development opportunities to staff, with a focus on the importance of sharing relevant information between professionals involved with a child and family in line with agreed protocols.

OBJECTIVE 2: TO MANAGE RISK CONFIDENTLY AND SUPPORT FAMILIES AT THE EDGE OF CARE

Principles

2. The majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families.
4. Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, families will be supported to make private arrangements within their wider family and friendship networks and, where necessary, to make these permanent via Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders

67. We need to ensure the right children become accommodated at the right time.

68. To do this, we need to be able to manage risk successfully with families who are approaching the threshold for care by providing effective assessments and interventions which support families to make changes whilst always ensuring that children and young people are kept safe.

69. Building on the service developments outlined in Objective 1, we need to support staff to make evidence-based risk assessments and implement strategies to manage identified risks. This will require managerial oversight and agreement of risk management plans. It will also need require other family members, agencies and out of hours services to be clear about their role in implementing risk management plans.

70. We will establish a multi-agency 'Resources Panel' which will contribute to the development of plans and strategies to manage risks by identifying and committing appropriate resources from the range of service providers in order to reduce the need for accommodation.

71. In addition, the following key areas will contribute to supporting children, young people and families 'at the edge of care':

Engagement of wider family and friendship networks

72. Families experience a range of situations that can at times make parenting difficult to sustain. This could include caring for a child with a severe disability, young people testing boundaries and challenging the authority of the parent or becoming involved in the Criminal Justice System as well as health, environmental and social factors that impinge on parents' ability to provide care and protection to their children.

73. Where a family is struggling to cope or has reached the point of crisis, we will support the family to explore whether there is capacity within the wider

family and friendship network to provide appropriate care for the child or young person either temporarily or when necessary on a permanent basis through private family arrangements. This will be achieved through adoption of Family Group Meeting/ Mediation approaches to all our work.

74. For children who cannot remain living with parents and for whom the family are making arrangements for permanency via a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order, ratification of the plan and future support needs based on assessment will take place at the Permanency Panel.

Provide shared care and short breaks to enable families time limited opportunities to have respite or to resolve issues impacting on their parenting capacity

75. Sometimes families need respite from caring duties or time and space to resolve stressful, chaotic situations and achieve change. Traditionally, short breaks care and respite care has usually only been provided for disabled children and young people. Offering short breaks and shared care arrangements for children and young people on the edge of care can be a positive action that reduces the need for them to come into longer term or permanent care. Use of Direct Payments and child-minding can assist families to access the most appropriate level of support when they need it.

Ensure placements made in an emergency or at short notice have robust time limited care plans

76. We need to continue to ensure that the right children are accommodated at the right time and in the right placement. It is difficult to provide well matched and value for money placements in emergency situations or where requests are made at very short notice. We must acknowledge that a small number of children and young people may require immediate accommodation as a result of a Court Order or because of their involvement in the Criminal Justice System.
77. We need to ensure that children accommodated in emergency situations have robust and time limited plans in place that focus on rehabilitation to family and friends.
78. Decisions to accommodate a child or young person are made by the multi-agency Placement Panel. The involvement of other agencies in the Placement Panel is critical to ensuring that, following an emergency placement, a holistic approach to meeting the child's needs is taken (for example, minimising disruption to school attendance because of the placement location).

Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless

79. A key group of young people on the edge of care are 16 and 17 year olds who present to Social Services or Housing as homeless. In the majority of cases, with mediation and social work input, young people can be supported to return home. It should be only those young people who genuinely do not have a suitable place to live that become looked after by the Local Authority.
80. If we are to succeed in supporting this group of vulnerable young people, it is important to have access to appropriate short term accommodation that allows the assessment to be completed and any family mediation to be undertaken. Such accommodation would allow us to avoid making more expensive short term arrangements which can often create false expectations and hamper efforts to return young people home.

Objective 2: Summary of Actions:

- 2.1** Support Social Workers to manage risk successfully at the edge of care
- 2.2** Adopt mediation and Family Group Meeting methodology to ensure we always explore capacity within the extended family and kinship network before children and young people come into care.
- 2.3** Develop the provision of respite and short breaks to families who may benefit from time-limited support to prevent children and young people having to come into care.
- 2.4** Provide appropriate challenge and multi-agency support at the entry to care (e.g. through the Placement Panel).
- 2.5** Develop a range of accommodation options to support 16 and 17 year olds who are care leavers or facing homelessness including short term housing provision for the duration of assessment.

OBJECTIVE 3: TO PROVIDE AND COMMISSION A FLEXIBLE AND AFFORDABLE RANGE OF HIGH QUALITY PLACEMENTS

Principles

5. Formal kinship fostering arrangements will be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protect children
6. Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through the arrangements described in principles 4. and 5, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family provided preferably by in-house foster carers and if not with Independent Fostering Agency carers, wherever possible within the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 7 Residential placements will only be made where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person's needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject of a Court Ordered Secure Remand.
8. Placements should be local to enable children and young people to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives.
9. Placement requests should be defined in terms of the child/young person's needs. It is the role of the Placement Panel to agree that child should become looked after and consider the most appropriate type of placement to meet these needs with due consideration given to the available resources

81. For children and young people who are accommodated we will continue to ensure we have the right range of placements which promote positive experiences and meet diverse need
82. At present, we do not have sufficient placements available in the Vale of Glamorgan to meet both demand and the range of individual need. This means we have some children and young people placed a long way from their homes and communities.
83. In order to ensure our range of placements are good value for money and affordable within the budget available, we need to focus on achieving the following areas.

Increasing the number and capacity of in-house fostering placements

84. One priority is to focus our effort and resource on recruiting and retaining new foster carers, to ensure we have enough families with the right combination of skills who are supported to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in the Vale of Glamorgan
85. We are particularly in need of foster carers who can manage very challenging behaviours, provide placements for young people involved in the Criminal Justice System (including on Youth Remand), provide parent and baby placements, placements for disabled children and short term or emergency placements.
86. As outlined above, we also need to recruit foster carers able to offer short breaks and respite care placements to support children and young people to remain living at home or within their family network.
87. In order to achieve this, the Fostering Service is developing a recruitment campaign and it is committed to increase the capacity of the service by at least 30 placements over the next four years. This strategy will complement the regional recruitment work being undertaken by the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC).
88. We will continue to support regional and sub-regional collaboration options through SEWIC as a way of increasing capacity and not increasing costs.

Reduce our dependence on Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and clearly specify their role.

89. In the longer term, a successful recruitment strategy for our in-house service will mean a reduced reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies. These Agencies can continue to play a role in complementing our in-house provision through targeted commissioning of more specialist type provisions rather than simply being a fall back when an in-house placement is not available.

Managing demand for mainstream and specialist residential placements

90. It is important to differentiate between the provision of mainstream residential care and specialist residential care.
91. Mainstream residential care placements are for those children and young people who may present challenging behaviours because of their life experiences to date. More often than not, they will have experienced numerous care placement breakdowns, may be running away and may be misusing substances. Consequently, they require additional levels of supervision and support that can be provided in appropriate residential care.

92. Specialist residential is a term usually applied to placements for disabled children and young people with extremely complex and challenging needs.

Make fewer mainstream residential placements and make them closer to home

93. For a very small number of children who are Looked After, a residential home will be the best environment to meet their needs and help them succeed. Where this is the case, there should be a positive choice for this type of provision clearly supported by their care plan.
94. Staffing levels can allow 24 hour support to be provided for the highest levels of need and most challenging types of behaviours.
95. The longer term vision is to reduce reliance on mainstream residential placements and move to a smaller cohort of high quality consistent providers. To support this, we will develop our contractual relationships with a small number of competitive providers to meet the needs of our most troubled and challenging young people.

Specialist placements

96. We are seeing increased demand for placements which support older disabled children and young people. Families often manage to cope when children are younger but then find it increasingly tiring and stressful as children grow and mature physically, often displaying challenging and aggressive behaviours. As a result, a growing number of disabled young people are requiring 24 hour care and support and the demand for residential provision is rising. This has been identified as a significant pressure on resources for future years and particularly for Adult Services at the point of transition.
97. The SEWIC Residential Placement Framework will continue to assist us in commissioning flexible and robust placements that improve outcomes for those children and young people in placement.
98. A reduction in numbers of children and young people in mainstream residential placements will be supported by steps to increase the skills and ability of foster carers to care for our most challenging young people and to recruit carers specifically for young people with challenging behaviours and those in the Criminal Justice System. The planned increase in the capacity of our in-house fostering service will help to address this issue. Additionally, increased provision of the preventative and 'edge of care' services can contribute to a reduction in the total number of children accommodated.
99. Alongside these measures, we need to consider developing the multi-disciplinary supports available to both foster carers and residential units to assist them in meeting the higher needs and more challenging behaviours being presented. We need professionals to engage in developing a care

management approach designed to coordinate consistent support that enables young people to engage in education and access appropriate health and support services.

Jointly commission accommodation for young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years

100. We need to transform our placements for young people in care between the ages of 16 and 18 years to create a flexible range of different types of accommodation which supports different levels of independence and transition into adulthood.
101. At present, we do not have enough independent or semi-independent living options such as supported housing, 'training flats' and supported lodgings. Subject to available resources, we propose to enter into a joint arrangement with Housing and Llamau to commission a new extended and more flexible portfolio of placements from all housing providers.
102. We hope that a range of accommodation will be commissioned to meet the needs of young people who have come through the care system and are moving towards independence as well as those young people who come into care as 16 and 17 year olds as a result of being homeless.

Objective 3: Summary of Actions:

- 3.1 Develop an effective recruitment strategy for in-house foster carers to increase the number of fostering households supported by the Service by at least 32 placements over 4 years and thereby reduce the reliance on independent fostering agencies and residential placements.
- 3.2 Ensure the recruitment strategy addresses need regarding short breaks opportunities, emergency placement capacity, parent and child placements.
- 3.3 Building on the work of SEWIC, continue to explore regional collaborative opportunities as a way of increasing the capacity of the Fostering Service. This could include regional recruitment and assessment activity.
- 3.4 Commission an appropriate range of residential provision for children and young people within the Vale of Glamorgan
- 3.5 Consider the development of a virtual multi-disciplinary 'team around the child' approach to support foster carers and residential providers with the skills and supports needed to allow them to support higher level needs. This team would need to include professionals from health, CAMHS, Education and others

- 3.6** Contribute to the review of residential and shared care short breaks provision for disabled children and young people across Cardiff and the Vale with a view to integration of the services currently provided.
- 3.7** Jointly commission with Housing Services and the Third Sector suitable accommodation options for young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years to provide a pathway between care and independence.

OBJECTIVE 4: TO GIVE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CLEARLY PLANNED JOURNEYS THROUGH CARE

Principles

6. Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through the arrangements described in 4 and 5 above, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family provided preferably by in-house foster carers and if not with Independent Fostering Agency carers, wherever possible within the Vale of Glamorgan.
7. Residential placements will only be made where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person's needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject of a Court Ordered Secure Remand.
8. Placements should be local to enable children and young people to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives.
9. Placement requests should be defined in terms of the child/young person's needs. It is the role of the Placement Panel to agree that child should become looked after and consider the most appropriate type of placement to meet these needs with due consideration given to the available resources.
10. All Looked After Children of statutory school age should receive appropriate education provision regardless of their placement and ability to access school. Providing appropriate support to enable engagement in education is just as important as finding suitable care placements for Looked After Children.
11. Placements should support positive transitions to independence, adulthood, education, employment and training enabling young people to succeed.

103. For children and young people in care, having a clear plan is essential. A good plan ensures that children come into and exit care at the right time. We need to ensure that children and young people do not 'drift' through care but have clearly planned journeys which allow them to be re-united with family and friends wherever possible, have stable placements with carers and exit the care system positively at whatever age this happens. This process will be assisted by focusing on a number of key areas.

Find the right placements

104. We need to ensure rigorously compliance with the processes for referral for a placement, including the provision of detailed information to support placement finding. We need a wide range of high quality placements supported by integrated assessment and planning.

Give children stability and permanence as quickly as possible

105. Giving children and young people a sense of security, continuity and commitment is crucial to ensuring that they have a positive experience of being Looked After. This sense of 'permanence' includes emotional, physical and legal stability and, as corporate parents, we must commit to providing a plan to achieve permanence for all Looked After Children. This can be achieved through:

- reunification with their birth family
- living with other family and friends
- Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders
- long-term fostering
- adoption

106. A new multi-agency 'Permanency Panel' will be established to consider the planning for **all** Looked After Children prior to their second Statutory Review (i.e. within 4 months of becoming Looked After). This panel will monitor and ratify all plans for permanence, ensuring they remain focused on achieving reunification with families and friends where it is in the child's best interests and, where this is not possible, permanency via adoption or long term fostering. The Permanency Panel will also ratify all final care plans prior to presentation to Court and will oversee the implementation of the plan following agreement in Court.

Monitor drift in care planning

107. Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO's) are tasked with reviewing a child's care plan at each statutory review. Once it is identified that a child can be reunified with family or friends (under the auspices of rehabilitation, placement with parents, Residence or Special Guardianship Orders), the IRO will provide the name of the child to the Permanency Panel. The social worker will then be expected to present the revised care plan at Panel for ratification and oversight of the process until it is concluded.

Ensure all Looked After Children and young people receive a good education

108. Providing the right education setting is just as important as providing a suitable home environment. Becoming Looked After means a dramatic change in the life of a child or young person and this can be even more significant if it results in a change of school at the same time.

109. Once a child becomes Looked After, we will endeavour to keep them in the school they were attending before being accommodated. To make this work, schools, social workers and carers need to work together to share information and plan effectively.
110. The Personal Education Plan (PEP) is an integral part of the care planning process. Roles and responsibilities must be clear across the agencies to ensure they feed into the statutory reviewing processes.

Help young people prepare for adulthood and independence

111. A vital part of our role as Corporate Parents is to prepare young people we look after for their adult lives. Young people will be supported to develop the necessary life skills, experience and confidence with the purpose of achieving as much independence as possible in preparation for adult life.
112. The future 'life chances' of care leavers are significantly improved if they can be supported to move into education, employment or training. We are committed, therefore, to encouraging ambition and achievement from as early an age as possible and to developing work and training opportunities within the Council.

Objective 4: Summary of Actions:

- 4.1** Implement a new Permanency Panel to ensure all children and young people in care have a plan for permanence by the time of their second Statutory Review and this is ratified and monitored until achieved.
- 4.2** Ensure the Permanency Panel, in conjunction with IROs, remains focused on supporting young people to return home where this is in their best interests.
- 4.3** Work with Legal colleagues and CAFCASS to review the legal status of all long term placements to consider the revocation of Care Orders, the granting of Residence and Special Guardianship Orders wherever appropriate.
- 4.4** Improve joint working arrangements between Social Services and Education so that children and young people are supported to remain in school and achieve their full potential.
- 4.5** Ensure all Pathway Plans for young people leaving care address transitions issues in a timely manner to ensure appropriate links can be made across services and partner agencies.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

113. This strategy sets out how we will deliver our commitment to Looked After Children and support families to stay together or be reunified wherever it is safe to do so.
114. The development of this strategy simply marks the start of a journey. It is delivering the objectives included in the document that will make the difference, work that will require a continuing and coordinated effort which is Council wide and includes all Divisions and other service providers.
115. The Children and Young People Services Divisional Management Team (DMT) will be tasked with overseeing the delivery of the strategy, monitoring the impact on children and their families and driving forward the focus on reducing admissions to care and increasing reunification to family and friends as a key priority for the Division.
116. An Action Plan follows and each work stream has an identified lead. Progress against each action will be reported quarterly through DMT.
117. We will continue to refine the plans and build our evidence base over coming months; as our thinking evolves, so will this strategy. As a result, this strategy and the associated action plan will continue to be live documents, regularly updated as progress is made. However, our commitment to Looked After Children, to the principles embedded in this strategy and to working together to provide the best possible services will remain constant.

