



VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

**HEAD OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE SERVICES**

ANNUAL REPORT

2012-2013

The Children and Young People Services Division provides help and support to children and young people who are in need, who are looked after by the Council, who have left care, who have additional needs and/or disabilities or who need to be protected.

Context

1. In the Vale of Glamorgan Council Corporate Plan (2013-17), the intended outcome for children and young people is that they are engaged and supported and take full advantage of life opportunities available in their local community and beyond. The principal goal of Children and Young People Services is to ensure that effective services reach those vulnerable children, young people and families assessed as being 'in need'.
2. We achieve our goal by offering a range of services which, wherever possible, support a child or young person to remain living within their own family or in their local community. Where this is not possible or it is not safe to do so, we aim to place them in foster care within the Vale of Glamorgan and to maintain their links with family, friends and school.
3. *The National Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* provides a way of looking at, understanding and recording what is happening to children and families and ensuring the involvement of other agencies such as health, education and the voluntary sector. The Framework provides statutory timescales for work to be undertaken with families.
4. Partnership working in the Vale is strong and effective. At an operational level, there is evidence for this on a daily basis in the management of individual cases. Strategically, partnership working is demonstrated in the work of groups such as the Children and Young People's Partnership, the Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Community Safety Partnership and the Local Service Board.
5. Significant changes in the past year include:

- Establishment of the Families Achieving Change Together (FACT) Team providing early intervention and preventative family support services targeted at harder-to-reach children and their families.
 - Transfer of the Youth Offending Service from the Chief Executive's Department.
 - Full operation of the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) in partnership with Cardiff Council and the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board.
6. The Division has continued to achieve corporate savings over the last year. However, placements for children and young people looked after continue to be a source of budgetary pressure. Through the Directorate's Budget Programme, we are endeavouring to make the necessary changes to services that will bring about improvement but also ensure that we continue to meet the savings targets set and deliver a balanced budget.
7. The Vale is fully engaged in the national work to simplify assessment, planning and reviewing processes for individual cases, to reduce the levels of bureaucracy and the disproportionate time spent by staff entering information on to case management systems in line with proposals outlined in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill.
8. Demand for services continues to put services under pressure. However, the number of children and young people being included on the Child Protection Register has remained relatively stable this year – from 114 in April 2012 to 118 at the end of March 2013. Also, we have achieved a reduction in the overall numbers of Looked After Children – from 202 in April 2012 to 184 at the end of March 2013. We have managed this reduction safely by achieving permanence planning in appropriate cases e.g. by revoking Care Orders on children placed at home with parents and supporting Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders for children in long term settled placements. While

such placements continue to produce financial costs, the burdens on Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer time and resources will lessen and enable other priority areas to be targeted.

9. The new Children and Young People Services Commissioning Strategy 2013-18 was endorsed by Scrutiny Committee in March 2013 and contains four key strategic objectives:

- **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.
- **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.
- **To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements** that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
- **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.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

10. Social Services have a statutory responsibility to investigate situations where a child or young person may be suffering abuse or neglect or is at risk of suffering abuse or neglect. Whenever it is necessary, we must protect children and young people from harm. While we always

endeavour to do this in partnership with families, we sometimes have to take action against the wishes of the parents or wider family.

11. Referrals are received from a number of sources including the police, schools, health visitors, GPs, hospitals and members of the public (including families themselves). All referrals are screened to establish priority and need for assessment and the provision of support. The Service has succeeded in maintaining a very high level of performance for decisions made within one working day, achieving a 99% rate for the year. When there are concerns that a child or young person may be at risk of being harmed or neglected, the assessment commences immediately.

12. As stated above, the number of children and young people whose names are included on the Child Protection Register (CPR) has remained steady during 2012/13. From inspection, audit and quality assurance processes, we know that multi-agency assessments, decision making and planning are ensuring that the most vulnerable children and young people are identified and supported appropriately. It is reassuring to know, for example, that we hold all initial Child Protection Conferences and review all cases on the Child Protection Register on time.

These were our improvement priorities for 2012/13 and progress made:

- **We have delivered briefings and training to staff to support implementation of the Child Sexual Exploitation Protocol.**
- **We have launched the Neglect Protocol in the Vale of Glamorgan.**
- **We have made progress with the merger of the Vale of Glamorgan and the Cardiff Local Safeguarding Children Boards, as required by the Welsh Government.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2013/14:

- **We will conclude discussions with Cardiff and ensure the merger of our LSCBs.**
- **We will introduce a consultation process for children on the Child Protection Register to learn from their experiences.**

Children in Need

13. Our aim is to support children and young people so that they continue to live within their own family networks and within their community wherever this is possible. We intervene when it has been assessed that there are risks to children and young people, to prevent those risks escalating and to safeguard those children who have suffered or are likely to suffer significant harm. In order to achieve this aim, we work in close partnership with other agencies and service providers to offer a range of family supports to meet assessed needs. We ensure priority is given to those children, young people and families in greatest need to ensure the services are used most effectively and efficiently.
14. Through the Children and Young People's Partnership, the revised Families First grant funding criteria were used to review all commissioned services, to ensure they were targeted at those children and families who may be harder to reach and so more vulnerable. A fundamental part of this review was the recognition of the need to develop a Team Around the Family (TAF) service model. The new Families Achieving Change Together (FACT) Team was established in early 2012 and became fully operational in September 2012. This service development plays a critical role in supporting children and young people to remain living within their family networks and minimise the need for more intrusive and costly intervention.
15. The Welsh Government confirmed new funding to expand the Flying Start Programme across Wales. We have been planning the extension of services into the Castleland Ward of Barry Town and, through

partnership working with Families First, we are considering how to develop similar additional services in Llantwit Major and St Athan.

16. The focus on preventative services is a key part of the efforts of the Council and its partners to change the way in which children and family services meet need. The new model will be taken forward through the Commissioning Strategy which contains an analysis of the need for services and then defines how these will be made available. This Strategy received political endorsement in March 2013.
17. The timely completion of both Initial and Core Assessments is critical to ensuring appropriate support and services are provided to children and families 'in need'. Initial Assessments should be completed within seven working days and our performance has risen again to 89% for 2012/13. Completion of Core Assessments within the recommended 35 working days stands at 88% for 2012/13, compared with a Welsh average of 73%. The proportion of re-referrals fell considerably.
18. We continue to support young carers through a service commissioned by the Council from Action for Children. Performance has been maintained in 2012/13 with 100% of young carers known to the Council being assessed and 90% receiving a service.

These were our improvement priorities for 2012/13 and progress made:

- **We have reviewed and streamlined the Child in Need (CIN) planning and reviewing processes and associated documents.**
- **We have undertaken a thematic Quality Assurance audit of planning for individual children in need across each service area**
- **We have established a multi agency Resources Panel to co-ordinate our preventative and early intervention services.**
- **We worked collaboratively on the proposed development of a regional advocacy service across Councils and Local Health**

Boards with the final options appraisal confirming the need to maintain our existing service arrangements.

These are our improvement priorities for 2013/14:

- **We will implement the revised Children in Need planning and reviewing processes.**
- **We will support staff with the development of pre-court skills to enable confident risk management and decision making and improved analytical assessments in response to the revision of the Public Law Outline (PLO).**
- **We will implement a revised policy for supporting children and young people subject of Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.**
- **We will provide the full range of Flying Start services in the Castleland Ward area.**

Looked after Children

19. The most common reasons for children and young people becoming looked after continue to be abuse and neglect coupled with the growing number of homeless 16/17 year old young people.
20. All requests for placements are scrutinised by Divisional Managers at the weekly, multi-agency Placement Panel. In all cases, accommodation is being used appropriately to safeguard children and young people. However, it is clear that we need to provide responsive and effective services earlier in order to support children and young people to remain within their family networks. The implementation of the Children and Young People Services Commissioning Strategy will provide the framework to ensure targeted supports are provided to the right children and young people at the right time.

21. Whilst the number of children and young people being looked after by the Council can fluctuate on a daily basis, there has been a significant reduction during 2012/13 from 202 on 31st March 2012 to 184 on 31st March 2013. This has been achieved through a number of actions identified in the development of the Commissioning Strategy including:
- The revocation of Care Orders for children and young people who have been placed at home with their parents where it is assessed as being safe to do so,
 - Supporting long term foster carers and kinship carers to seek Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Orders for children and young people who have been in stable long term placements.
 - Planning how to establish a formal Permanency Panel where all care planning for Looked After Children can be considered before the second Statutory Review, i.e. within four months of becoming looked after.
22. These planned changes have meant that the percentage of children who have three or more placements in a year has risen substantially but this is in keeping with our paramount duty, which is to promote the welfare of the child.
23. There is considerable evidence that all looked after children and young people are receiving timely support and quality services. Every looked after child has an allocated Social Worker and every care placement starts with a Care Plan in place. 95% of statutory visits to children in their placements are achieved with reasons for the remaining 5% not meeting timescale being clearly recorded and agreed by a Manager. 96% of all Care Plans are reviewed within timescale with reasons for the remaining 4% also being agreed with Managers and clearly recorded. This performance maintains our position as one of the top performing Council's in Wales.
24. The percentage of looked after children having a Personal Education Plan in place within 20 days of becoming looked after has continued to

improve from 69% in 2011/12 to 76% for 2012/13, again placing the Vale above the Welsh average (63%). Children and young people benefit from the additional support offered by the Children First Team comprising a Specialist Teacher, part-time Educational Psychologist and LAC Clinical Nurse Specialists. Negotiations with Cardiff and the Vale UHB has ensured the percentage of LAC Health assessments undertaken has risen from 48% in 2011/12 to 60% for 2012/13. This is still below the Welsh average of 81% but shows a significant commitment to improvement. We have strengthened our processes for informing the NHS of all new admissions, moves and endings to ensure that they have the latest and most accurate data available.

25. The cross-party Corporate Parenting Panel, chaired by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, actively considers issues affecting Looked After Children. It emphasises the collective responsibility of the whole Council, in conjunction with all statutory and non-statutory bodies, to contribute to raising standards. The Panel gains significant benefit from the involvement of young people who represent Looked After Children in the Vale.
26. We continue to aim to place all children within their local communities, to ensure links are maintained with family, school and friends. We need to recruit more foster carers who are able to provide placements for older children and teenagers and children with health and disability needs and produced a Recruitment Strategy at the end of the financial year for implementation during 2013/14.
27. As part of the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) and the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (the 4Cs), we are engaged in developing regional commissioning of children's placements. As a result, we have already achieved cost savings by negotiating fees with independent sector providers through this unit. In addition, proposals are also being developed to consider a regional approach to recruiting foster carers.

28. The number of young people requiring mainstream residential care placements has remained the same during the year. However, we have experienced increased demand for specialist residential placements for disabled children and young people with complex and challenging behaviours. This is likely to be an area of growing demand over coming years. The contract for commissioned residential provision needs to be retendered and it is intended that the service specification will be expanded to include provision of smaller units of accommodation to meet the needs being identified for younger children who are experiencing numerous foster placement disruptions. Similarly, we recognise the need to provide additional support to foster carers dealing with increasingly challenging children and young people and we intend to scope the development of an 'intensive placement support team'.
29. In response to the Welsh Government's Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill, the Council has been preparing for the delivery of regional Adoption services and contributing to the debates regarding establishment of a National Adoption Agency. Our region includes the Local Authorities within the two Health Board areas of Cardiff & Vale of Glamorgan UHB and Cwm-Taff Local Health Board. It is expected that the regional arrangements will be operational by April 2014.
30. All young people leaving care have an allocated worker and access to a Young Persons Advisor, although a small number of young people choose not to use the support available. Pathway Plans continue to be in place in all cases. The needs of all homeless young people aged 16–18 years are assessed by Social Services in partnership with the Housing Department and Llamau, a third sector provider. Efforts continue to be made to improve access to work experience for our Looked After Children and care leavers via opportunities within the Council. The Council has a good record of supporting young people into Further and Higher Education.

These were our improvement priorities for 2012/13 and the progress made:

- **We have developed a Commissioning Strategy including the following key actions:**
 - **Development of a recruitment strategy for foster carers;**
 - **reducing the total number of young people in mainstream residential placements by one;**
 - **further developing the range of accommodation options available for young people leaving care and those who may be homeless;**
 - **continuing to review all looked after children cases with a view to changing legal status through use of Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.**
- **We have achieved an agreed funding formula for specialist placements with Education and have monthly formal meeting with the Health Board to secure support in individual cases.**
- **We continue to make full use of Families First and the Integrated Family Support Services to prevent the need for more intrusive statutory interventions.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2013/14:

- **Implementation of the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy.**
- **Establish a Permanency Panel to review the Care Plans for all LAC prior to their second Statutory Review.**
- **Award the contract for residential care provision.**
- **Continue to work to improve the completion of Personal Education Plans within timescale and the completion of LAC Health Assessments.**
- **Scope the development of an 'intensive placement support team' to deliver targeted interventions and supports to prevent placement breakdowns and the need for higher cost provisions.**

- **Continue to consider opportunities to expand the range of supported accommodation options for young people aged sixteen and above.**
- **Engage fully in developing the Regional Adoption Service and the National Adoption Agency.**

Child Health and Disabilities

31. The Child Health and Disability Team work to provide appropriate support to families, enabling disabled children and young people to achieve their potential. This includes supporting social inclusion and enabling them to gain skills that will enhance their independence.
32. Services include a range of short breaks, leisure provision and sessional support, overnight and holiday breaks with approved foster carers or at our purpose-built residential provision, Ty Robin Goch. These services are provided in partnership with Action for Children and Barnardo's. In addition, families may receive Direct Payments, where they are given the money to make the choice about how best to meet their children's needs. Holiday play schemes support disabled children and young people and, in addition, specialist support is provided by Social Services.
33. Short breaks provide invaluable support for disabled children and young people and their families. They offer opportunities for children to become more independent, widen their experiences and form real friendships outside their family. At the same time their families get a break from caring and a chance to recharge. Resource pressures mean that all care packages are regularly reviewed across all service areas to ensure equity of service provision to disabled children and their families.
34. There is evidence of increasing demand for support for older disabled children and young people. Families often manage to cope when children are younger but then find it increasingly tiring and stressful as

the children grow and may become more challenging or aggressive. A rising number of disabled young people are requiring 24 hour care and support and the demand for residential provision is increasing. This has been identified as a significant pressure on resources in coming years.

35. Through formal arrangements with Cardiff City Council and Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board, the Integrating Health and Social Care Programme Board has endorsed work undertaken on simplifying and agreeing standardised assessments and reviews across the three key agencies. The Vale of Glamorgan is the lead organisation for the Children with Complex Needs work stream however, operational issues within Cardiff Council have meant further progress has had to be halted for the time being.

These were our improvement priorities for 2012/13 and the progress made:

- **We recruited to the Transitions Social Worker post within the Child Health and Disability Team.**
- **We have fully utilised services provided through the disability strand of the Welsh Government Families First Grant.**
- **We continue to pursue all appropriate Continuing Health Care applications.**
- **We are engaged in the development of the Penarth Learning Campus.**
- **We led the Children with Complex Needs work stream of the Integrating Health and Social Care Programme Board.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2013/14:

- **We will continue to work with Health to establish a dedicated Children's Continuing Health Care Panel.**
- **We will liaise with Learning and Skills to ensure the Penarth Learning Campus includes both residential short breaks provision and 52 week placement availability in order to best meet demand.**

- **We will continue to work closely with statutory partner agencies to improve transition planning and support services.**

Youth Offending Service

36. As referred to earlier, the Youth Offending Service (YOS) successfully transferred to Children and Young People Services from the Chief Executives Department in April 2012.
37. The YOS works with children and young people from the age of 8 to 17 years identified as at risk of offending as part of its prevention service. These young people may not yet have offended and the aim of the service is to address the risks and needs identified to prevent them from entering the Youth Justice System. The YOS delivers early interventions alongside Cardiff Media Academy, Cardiff YOS and South Wales Police to children and young people who have offended for the first time and admit the offence to divert them from continued offending through triage and diversion interventions. Prevention and early intervention now make up approximately 50% of the YOS caseload.
38. The YOS statutory functions are to assess, supervise, plan and deliver interventions to children and young people both in the community, i.e. subject to Court Orders and in custody. The aim of the service is to prevent offending and reoffending, reducing the use of custody, promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people, manage risk and protect the public from harm.
39. In order to achieve these aims and to divert young people from criminality and anti-social behaviour, the YOS provides restorative justice for victims, reparation to individuals and the community, parenting groups and support, careers and education support, accommodation assistance, access to health interventions and

substance misuse treatment and education. By working closely with partner agencies representatives of the YOS aim to ensure children and young people with identified need access mainstream services provided by the Welsh Government.

These are our improvement priorities for 2013/14:

- **We will continue to work to reduce the number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System.**
- **We will continue to work with our partner agencies to reduce youth offending and re-offending.**
- **We will continue to offer support services aimed at reducing the need for Courts to use custody.**