



HEAD OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES



ANNUAL REPORT 2013 – 2014

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.

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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 help and support reach those vulnerable children, young people and families assessed as being 'in need'.
2. We achieve our goal by offering a range of services. Many of them are designed to 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 find placements for them that meet their needs. Most often, this means that they live in foster care within the Vale of Glamorgan so that they can 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. The Vale is fully engaged in national work being done 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.
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 across the whole range of need. Strategically, partnership working is demonstrated in the work of groups such as the Children and Young People's Partnership, the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Local Safeguarding Children Board, the Community Safety Partnership, the Local Service Board, the South-East Wales Improvement Collaborative (with nine other local authorities) and the Integrating Health and Social Care Programme (with Cardiff Council, the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board and third sector umbrella organisations).
5. There is a high and growing level of demand for children and family services. To ensure that this demand can be met and to go on improving year by year the quality of the services available, the Children and Young People Services Commissioning Strategy 2013-18 was introduced. It 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.
6. As a consequence of actions to implement this strategy, the number of children and young people whose names are included on the Child Protection Register has decreased from 118 in April 2013 to 86 at the end of March 2014. Numbers of looked after children have been subject to monthly fluctuation but have remained stable over the year; from 184 at the end of March 2013 to 184 at the end of March 2014. We have continued with our strategy to achieve permanence planning in appropriate cases 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 lessen as a result and enable other priority areas to be targeted.

During 2013/14, we made seven successful applications to Court in respect of 13 children to revoke Care Orders in favour of Special Guardianship Orders. These 13 children are no longer Looked After and no longer have Social Services intervention in their lives at an inappropriate level.

7. The Division has achieved budget savings over the last year. However, placements for children and young people looked after continue to be a source of 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. This has included the development of an invest-to-save project to provide funding for the recruitment of additional in-house foster carers. The project has enabled the employment of a qualified social worker on a fixed term contract to act as a recruitment officer. There is also provision built in for marketing costs and the funding of assessments by independent social workers.

By increasing our ability to place with in-house foster carers, we will reduce our reliance on independent foster placements.

8. We have been able to maintain staffing levels at the front-line and a good level of stability amongst the workforce. We have made positive strides in recruiting to posts within areas that have previously proved challenging, e.g. the Intake and Family Support Team.
9. Significant changes in the past year include:
 - Further expansion of Flying Start with four new projects, including our first partnership in childcare within a school.
 - Re-location of Children and Young People Services to the Dock Office, providing service users and staff with better reception facilities and working conditions.
 - Implementing the Children and Young People Services Commissioning Strategy 2013-18.
 - Returning children to Wales from out of area placements.
 - Meeting the annual target set for increasing the number of in-house foster carers.

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 maintained a high level of performance for decisions made within one working day, achieving a rate of 99% for the year. When there are concerns that a child or young person may be at risk of being harmed or neglected, the assessment starts immediately.
12. As stated earlier, the number of children and young people whose names are included on the Child Protection Register has decreased during 2013/14. From inspection, audit and quality assurance processes, we know that multi-agency assessments, decision-making and planning are helping to ensure that the most vulnerable children and young people are identified and supported appropriately. The Council continues to demonstrate strong performance in areas such as the timeliness of child protection conferences and initial core group meetings.

These were our improvement priorities for 2013/14 and progress made:

- **We have concluded the merger of the two Local Safeguarding Children Boards and the regional Board now operates across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.**
- **To learn from their experiences, we have introduced a consultation process for children on the Child Protection Register.**
- **We have supported 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). The process is delivering improvements for children by reducing the time cases take to progress through the Court.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2014/15:

- **To maintain effective partnership working with all agencies through the new joint Safeguarding Children Board across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan to ensure individuals are protected from harm.**
- **To review our responses to forms of abuse where there is national or regional evidence of increasing prevalence such as child sexual exploitation, trafficking and internet grooming.**

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 our aims, 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. The focus on prevention and earlier intervention is a key part of the efforts of the Council and its partners to change the way in which services meet need. This model is being 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.
15. 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 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. A case study example is detailed below.

Families Achieving Change Together (FACT) Case Study

A single, unemployed parent with two children under ten. Multiple issues including tenancy and financial difficulties, parent's mental health, challenging behaviour presented by both children, lack of home routines and poor school attendance. Through the development of a multi-agency plan coordinated by FACT, the family were supported to achieve the following outcomes; benefit entitlements confirmed and implemented, threat of eviction removed, improvement in parent's mental health, improved behaviour at home and at school and a marked improvement in school attendance.

16. Demand for the FACT service has increased, together with a rise in the complexity of referrals being made. This is a common experience across other TAF service models in Wales. Welsh Government is aware of these challenges and is currently reviewing the guidance; the outcome of this review is expected in the latter part of 2014/15. Locally, the Vale of Glamorgan is undertaking work with partners to understand and find solutions for the increase. This will include a review of the Vale of Glamorgan's Resource Panel, which receives referrals at Tier 2 of the Integrated Service Model and cases which are on the edge of more intensive interventions from statutory services, and the development of a referral protocol between the Intake and Family Support Team and FACT.
17. Under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, local authorities and the NHS had a joint statutory responsibility for ensuring delivery of an Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) in their area. In July 2011, a consortium involving the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Councils and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board made a successful bid to the Welsh Government to become one of two areas in Wales chosen to implement an IFSS under Phase II of the national programme. The IFSS had been operational since the end of February 2012 and has five principal functions:
 - Undertaking intensive direct work with families through the application of time-limited, family focused interventions.
 - Providing advice and consultancy to practitioners and agencies on engaging complex families with parental substance misuse.
 - Working jointly with the case managers and others to ensure that the family can gain access to the services they need.
 - Spot-purchasing services not otherwise available.

- Providing training on evidence-based interventions for the wider workforce.
18. The IFSS Annual Report 2013/14 demonstrates that the IFSS are meeting expectations in terms of numbers of families receiving help and the outcomes achieved. It outlines the robust system of data collection and analysis in place to demonstrate how families are referred and prioritised for support, and the impact upon key areas of wellbeing such as education, parenting, relationships, alcohol or drug cessation. This data is complemented by qualitative evaluation through service user and referrer feedback. The results demonstrate that IFSS are taking a lead role in strengthening services to support some of the most disadvantaged children who are in need or at risk because of parental alcohol or drug dependence.
 19. The main priorities for IFSS for the year ahead are to increase the number of referrals towards a target of 100 families and to train the wider workforce in the IFSS model of intervention using motivational interviewing, solution focused and other cognitive behaviour techniques. At a local level, there are plans to strengthen the maintenance phase following the IFSS intensive intervention. In addition, the IFSS Board will continue to plan the structure and pattern of future service delivery, and identify funding for the medium to long term.
 20. The Flying Start programme, funded by Welsh Government, expanded into the Castleland area of Barry from 1st April 2013 and will double in size over the next two years to offer a service to 1,200 children. Flying Start is a Welsh Government initiative provided locally by the Vale of Glamorgan Council which offers free childcare, support and advice for parents. Research shows that focus on early years is the most effective means of achieving long term success in transforming the life chances of children. The programme also provides basic skills and life coaching to parents to encourage and support them to get back into employment.
 21. We continue to support young carers through a service commissioned from Action for Children. Performance has been maintained in 2013/14 with 100% of young carers known to the Council being assessed and 92% receiving a service. The service provides for an average of two activities per week, with all young carers provided with respite on a three weekly rota. One to one support of up to four sessions is available in addition to this. More young carers are offered residential opportunities than actually attend as some do not feel comfortable leaving the home.

Direct feedback from young carers who attended a residential trip in September 2013 highlighted the following benefits of the service:

- *'I get to go out on trips with other young carers'*
- *'It's a chance to 'get away''*
- *'I get to make friends'*
- *'I had the opportunity to get a social life'*

22. 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 been maintained at 87% for 2013/14. Completion of Core Assessments within the recommended 35 working days has risen to 91% for 2013/14, compared with a Welsh average of 76%. The proportion of re-referrals has decreased.

These were our improvement priorities for 2013/14 and progress made:

- **We have implemented the revised Children in Need planning and reviewing processes as a means of more clearly defining the work required to effect change and to monitor progress.**
- **In line with our Commissioning Strategy and our commitment to support children to remain with their friends and family, if this is assessed to be in their best interests, we have implemented a revised policy for supporting children and young people subject of Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders.**
- **We have contacted all eligible families within the Castleland area who will be able to access the full range of Flying Start services in their area.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2014/15:

- **To complete the 2015 expansion phase for Flying Start.**
- **To review current service models to ensure individuals are able to access appropriate services in a timely manner. This will include examining the capacity of current services and ensuring appropriate allocation of resources.**

Looked after Children

23. The most common reasons for children and young people becoming looked after continue to be abuse and neglect but, as a result of case law decisions, there are also a growing number of homeless 16/17 year old young people who are being accommodated by the Council.
24. 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 and from the regular contribution made by staff from the NYAS advocacy service. Examples of topics explored by the Panel during 2013/14 include the responsibility of the local authority to respond to allegations of abuse against professionals, developing the financial capability of looked after children, and improvements to the process of personal educational plans in monitoring the educational progress of looked after children.

25. All requests for placements are scrutinised by Divisional Managers at the weekly, multi-agency Placement Panel. This ensures that, in all cases, accommodation is being used appropriately to safeguard children and young people. It also helps staff to identify the kind of responsive and effective services that might be introduced earlier in order to support children and young people to remain within their family networks. The Children and Young People Services Commissioning Strategy provides the framework to ensure targeted support is provided to the right children and young people at the right time.
26. Whilst the number of children and young people being looked after by the Council can fluctuate on a daily basis, the number over the year has remained stable from 184 at the end of March 2013 to 184 at the end of March 2014. This has been achieved through a number of actions set out in 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 placements.
 - Establishing 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.
27. Although these planned changes of placement can have an impact on the percentage of children experiencing three or more placements in a year (an important performance indicator for the service), the substantial rise in this figure experienced in 2012/13 stabilised in 2013/14 to less than 11%.
28. There is considerable evidence that 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 on time and reasons for the remaining 5% are agreed by a Manager and recorded. 97% of all Care Plans are

reviewed within timescale and again reasons for the remaining 3% are agreed with Managers and recorded.

29. Considerable work has been undertaken during 2013/14 to further enhance the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process which captures the attainment of a looked after child and identifies the need for any additional support. The new guidance and the PEP format were drafted in collaboration with schools, Social Services and children. The process is more robust and carefully tracks the attainment of the child. It is now a cumulative document, incorporating the education history of the pupil as well as other information which is useful to schools and other educational settings.
30. 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. Working closely with the Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board has helped us to ensure that the percentage of looked after children receiving a health assessment increased from 60% in 2012/13 to 66% for 2013/14. This is still below the Welsh average of 80% but we will maintain a commitment to improvement in this area. 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.
31. There are concerns about the extent to which the Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS) across Wales is able to meet the need for help. Problems in delivering an effective CAMHS service model are long-standing and there are serious adverse consequences for children and families in the Vale, including those for whom the Council has a direct responsibility. The Cwm Taff University Health Board has experienced significant problems in maintaining agreed staffing levels in the CAMHS service it provides for other health boards.
32. For this reason, the Social Services Directorate has been closely engaged in helping the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to plan and implement remedial action. Action plans are in place for a number of workstreams and we are beginning to see some evidence of progress. For example, in January 2014, an interim pathway for urgent referral to specialist services from general practice was put in place. The Council will be using our lead role in multi-agency planning for children's services to exercise oversight of this University Health Board programme and to monitor the effects of implementation on areas such as assessment rates and children's safety.
33. We aim to place all children within their local communities so that 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. To increase the availability of local placements, the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

was introduced during the year. The target to recruit eight foster carers during 2013/14 has been met.

34. As part of the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) and its Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (the 4Cs), we are engaged in regional commissioning of externally managed children's placements. By negotiating fees collectively with independent sector providers through this unit, all the local authorities have been able to achieve cost savings and improve service quality. In addition, a regional approach to recruiting in-house foster carers has been developed.
35. The number of young people requiring mainstream residential care placements has remained the same during the year. However, we continue to experience increasing demand for specialist residential placements/packages of care for young people with complex and challenging behaviours and disabled children. . The Council has carried out an exercise to re-tender residential care provision from the independent sector and the service specification includes provision of smaller units of accommodation to offer a wider range of placement options. It is anticipated the first of the three residential units will be operational during the summer of 2014. Similarly, we recognise the need to provide additional support to foster carers dealing with increasingly challenging children and young people and we have begun to scope development of an 'intensive placement support team'.
36. In response to the Welsh Government's Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, the Council has been leading the work to prepare for delivery of regional adoption services as part of the local government commitment to establishing a National Adoption Agency. Our region includes the Local Authorities within the two Health Board areas of Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan and Cwm Taff. We anticipate that the regional collaborative will be operational by September 2014.
37. All young people leaving care have an allocated case worker and access to a Young Person's 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 Council has a good record of supporting young people into Further and Higher Education.

Educational achievement of some of our young people leaving care

One young person will be qualifying as a solicitor during 2014, another young person has finished her degree and has qualified as a Social Worker, four others are at University undertaking degree courses, and a number are undertaking their A Levels.

38. 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 and we work actively to provide appropriate help.

39. As a Council, we are aware of the increasing demand for accommodation by young people presenting as homeless and also how this affects adversely the options available for young people leaving care and preparing for independence. During 2013/14, we have cooperated with a private landlord to put in place a scheme which provides accommodation for four young people who possess sufficient independent living skills to care for their own room and prepare food but who are not yet able to manage adequately the demands of their own tenancy. This will enable us to release higher-level supported accommodation for our more vulnerable 16-18 year olds.

These were our improvement priorities for 2013/14 and the progress made:

- **We have implemented to good effect our Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy.**
- **We have established a Permanency Panel to review the Care Plans for all Looked After Children in advance of their second statutory review.**
- **We have awarded the contract for new residential care provision.**
- **We have worked with colleagues in Education and Health to improve the completion of process of Personal Education Plans and the completion of LAC Health Assessments.**
- **We have begun to 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 provision.**
- **We have expanded the range of supported accommodation options for young people aged sixteen and above.**
- **We have engaged fully in developing the National Adoption Agency and the Regional Collaborative for the Vale, Valleys and Cardiff.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2014/15:

- **To reduce the number of care leavers who are not in employment education or training (NEET).**
- **To increase sustainability and stability of looked after children and young people's placements.**
- **To achieve the target set within our Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy and to explore the possibility of creating a regional marketing centre for foster care.**
- **To reduce the number of placements with Independent Fostering Agencies.**
- **To make best use of our commissioned residential provision once it is operational.**

- To continue improving the percentage of looked after children receiving a LAC health assessment from 66% to 70%.
- To support Cardiff and Vale University Health Board in planning and implementing remedial action to address deficits in the provision of CAMHS, and to monitor the effects of implementation.

Child Health and Disabilities

40. The Child Health and Disability Team work to provide appropriate support to families, helping 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.
41. 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 Barnardos. In addition, families may receive Direct Payments, where they are given financial support which they use to fund choices about how best to meet their children's needs. Holiday play schemes support disabled children and young people and, in addition, Social Services provide specialist support.
42. Children and families are regularly given information and advice on how to access the range of benefits and services available to them. The quarterly Disability Index newsletter is distributed to all families and is backed by a publicly accessible web-site which contains news on all the latest developments in services and support. 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 the caring role. Resource pressures mean that all care packages are regularly reviewed across all service areas to ensure equity of provision to disabled children and their families.
43. 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 some of them find it increasingly tiring and stressful as the children grow and may become more challenging or aggressive. A small number of disabled young people require 24 hour care and support which can be met in a residential school setting, usually until they reach the age of 19. This represents a significant long-term pressure on resources in coming years as the cost of such provision is extremely high. At the end of 2013/14 there are four children in such settings, plus three currently under the age of 10 who are likely to require this provision in the future due to the complexity of their needs.

44. Strategic social care and health partners in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan are agreed on the need to undertake a fundamental review of services provided to disabled children and young people and their families. This is in the context of shared expectations that partners will seek opportunities to integrate health, social care and special educational needs provision where there are potential benefits for children. We also need to improve families' experiences and expectations when young people make the transition from child to adult services, maximise the potential to improve cost effectiveness over the longer term, and meet the overall step changes required by the Social Services and Well-Being Act. The three statutory partners have commissioned a service review which will report early in 2014/15.

These were our improvement priorities for 2013/14 and the progress made:

- **We have continued to work with the NHS to establish a joint Children's Continuing Health Care Panel but this is not in place as yet.**
- **We are involved in discussions with Learning and Skills to consider how best the Penarth Learning Campus can be used to meet the demand for short break provision.**
- **We have continued to work closely with statutory partner agencies to improve transition planning and support services.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2014/15:

- **To continue working with Cardiff Children's Services and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board on the Joint Equipment Service, a Joint Strategy for Children with Disability, and assessment and decision-making around Continuing Health Care criteria for children.**
- **To consider and act on recommendations arising from the project on Remodelling Services for Children with Disabilities across the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff, to achieve improved outcomes for children.**
- **To work with Learning and Skills to influence the model of provision of residential and respite care at the Penarth Learning Campus in line with the assessed needs of children and families for such support.**
- **To continue working closely with partner agencies on transition planning and support, including updates to the Transition Protocol and underlying policy guidance.**

Youth Offending Service

42. The Youth Offending Service (YOS) works with children and young people from the age of 8 to 17 years at risk of involvement in offending as part of its prevention service. These young people may not have committed offences and the aim of the service is to address risks and identified needs 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.
43. 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, reduce the use of custody, promote and safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people, manage risk and protect the public from harm.
44. 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, the YOS aims to ensure that children and young people with identified needs get access to mainstream services.
45. A report published in January by the HM Inspectorate of Probation praised the Youth Offending Service for providing effective help and effective management oversight which ensures good practice. The inspectors concluded that children and young people are being well served by the quality of assessments, reports and plans being produced by the Vale of Glamorgan YOS. Staff are committed to delivering high quality services and are well supported in their work by management and a range of partners. There is effective management oversight in place regarding improvement activity, which underpins good practice. Inspectors judged staff supervision and quality assurance arrangements had made a positive impact in almost all of the cases inspected.
46. The key strengths identified during the inspection were:
 - the quality of Pre Sentence Reports (PSRs) prepared for the Court;
 - the engagement of children and young people and parents/carers in assessments;
 - risk of harm and vulnerability issues were being managed effectively in most cases; and

- clear attention was being given to addressing sentence compliance and non-engagement issues.

These were our improvement priorities for 2013/14 and the progress made:

- **We have continued to work to address the number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System. Maintaining a reduction in numbers has been difficult to achieve and the Vale has experienced a levelling off in the numbers of young people entering the system. Our aim is to maintain this level to under 50 young people in a year.**
- **We have continued to work with our partner agencies to reduce youth offending and re-offending. The cohort of young people subject to statutory orders has become more complex. This is reflected in the difficulties that the YOS has experienced in engaging these young people with services provided by partner agencies. Overall during the year, there has been an increase in re-offending rates across England and Wales. The Youth Justice Board is developing in partnership with YOTs, tools and alternative methods to try and address this rising trend.**
- **We have continued to offer support services aimed at reducing the need for Courts to use custody. During 2013/14, custodial rates for young people within the Vale of Glamorgan have remained relatively static, with young people being sent to custody based either on the seriousness of the offence or non-compliance with Court Orders. In order to reduce numbers sentenced for non-compliance the YOS has introduced Compliance Panels where the young person meets with a manager to discuss the reasons for their non-compliance, review their intervention plan and agree a way forward without the need to return to Court where possible.**
- **During 2013/14, the YOS introduced Neighbourhood Resolution Panels in partnership with South Wales Police, Cardiff YOS, Cardiff Media Academy and Safer Vale to engage victims and young people in face to face restorative meetings aimed at creating greater awareness amongst young people of the harm their behaviour has caused, offering victims an opportunity to participate in restorative meetings where their voice can be heard, and young people can offer to repair the harm caused. During the meeting an agreement is reached which is designed to prevent/reduce further offending. The involvement of community members as facilitators of the meetings seeks to promote community confidence that anti-social behaviour and low level crimes are being addressed.**

These are our improvement priorities for 2014/15:

- **To undertake an analysis of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System following an increase in the numbers of children in this category within the Vale of Glamorgan and across Wales.**
- **To refresh our Youth Offending Prevention Strategy with the aim of ensuring appropriate identification and delivery of services to children and young people most at risk of offending and anti-social behaviour.**
- **To focus attention on re-offending in line with the priority of the Youth Justice Board, Welsh Government and the Police and Crime Commissioner. Although no specific numeric targets have been set in relation to reducing re-offending, it is the YOS' aim to reduce re-offending year and year. In 2011/12 the binary rate for re-offending across South Wales was 42.6%. The Vale YOS would aspire to be below this level in 2014/15.**
- **To review use of custody levels in partnership with Cardiff YOS and Cardiff and Vale Magistrates Court. Over the last six months the Vale YOS has seen an increase in the number of young people sentenced to custody. We will work with the Court, Youth Bench, Cardiff YOS and YJB Wales to identify the reasons for the increase and attempt to move to a position where custody is used as 'the last resort'.**