

Meeting of:	Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 07 June 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Family Information Service Annual Report 2022
Purpose of Report:	To update Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Vale Family Information Service (FIS)
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cabinet Member, Social Care & Health. Operational Manager, Accountancy. Operational Manager, Legal.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Report provides information on the performance of the Vale Family Information Service (FIS) during 2021-2022. • This report provides an update of how the Family Information Service has emerged from the Covid -19 Pandemic during 2021-22. • The Family Information Service plays a vital role in contributing to the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) requirement of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. 	

Recommendations

1. That Scrutiny Committee considers the Annual Report of the Vale Family Information Service (FIS) and the work undertaken to support parents/carers and providers in the Vale of Glamorgan.
2. Scrutiny receives annual updates on the Family Information Service.
3. Members consider the impact of the Pandemic upon the Family Information Service.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure effective oversight of this important area of social services activity.
2. To ensure Scrutiny Committee continues to be updated with regard to the Family Information Service.
3. To allow members the opportunity to consider how the pandemic has impacted on the services we provide.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Family Information Service (FIS) provides families in the Vale of Glamorgan with information and guidance on child care and support services for families. These include additional needs support, activities and groups for children and young people. FIS has received 1,566 enquiries over the past year. Please see link for Annual Report [Family Information Service Annual Report 2022](#)
- 1.2 The FIS maintains a database of these services, to ensure families, professionals and providers have access to information that is accurate and up to date. FIS uses the [Dewis Cymru online directory](#), which feeds through to the national [Childcare Information Wales](#) website. The Dewis Cymru online directory provides information to the general public about a wide variety of services across Wales and includes a lot of information about locally available services.
- 1.3 The FIS receives funding to promote the Childcare Offer for Wales in the Vale, which provides working parents with funding for childcare for 3 & 4 year olds. In the last year, almost 1000 children have accessed the Childcare Offer. Although outreach opportunities in schools have been limited this last year, FIS officers have been able to attend pre-school groups and sessions in the libraries, to help promote the Childcare Offer to new parents, as well as work closely with key health professionals. FIS has attended numerous meetings with Welsh Government to help shape the new national digital system for the Childcare Offer. This will be rolled out from the summer 2022.
- 1.4 The FIS also receives funding through Families First to administer The Index for Children with Disabilities or Additional Needs. This is a voluntary register and once signed up, families receive newsletters and ebulletins connecting them to services, schemes, groups and much more. Over the last year, registrations to

the Index have almost doubled from the previous year and there are now 892 children on The Index. The Index Officer has worked closely with the Families First Advice Line to monitor referrals and attend outreach at Llandough Children's Centre on a weekly basis, as well as improving links with the ALNCOs in schools.

- 1.5** Improving digital information and marketing has been key over the last year, as opportunities for outreach have been limited. FIS has produced three videos explaining different elements of the service, which have been promoted widely. Engagement with social media and the website has increased significantly and have been invaluable.
- 1.6** The enquiries to the service have reduced significantly since the previous year and resemble the nature and volume of enquiries FIS would normally receive pre-pandemic.
- 1.7** FIS have been integral to the compilation of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2022, which is carried out every five years. This assesses the sufficiency of childcare for parents in work or training in the Vale. A large consultation exercise has taken place with parents, partners and childcare providers.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** As mentioned, the Childcare Offer for Wales is expanding to include parents who are in training and education, as well as adoptive parents. This will be rolled out on a phased basis from September 2022 and FIS will be integral to promoting this to eligible parents and professionals.
- 2.2** The roll out of the new national digital system for the Childcare Offer has been delayed and is now due to start at the end of the summer, when childcare providers will enrol on the new system, and new parents will then apply in the autumn. Again, FIS will ensure the smooth transition to the new system and work closely with childcare providers, parents and colleagues. A temporary Childcare Offer Support Assistant is currently being recruited to support this.
- 2.3** FIS has been closely monitoring the availability of childcare, with a few breakfast and after school clubs remaining closed following the pandemic, and an increased number of childminders deregistering. FIS is working closely with childcare colleagues to address this and also inform them of the enquiries being received from parents requiring childcare. This information and the findings from the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment will inform an action plan for the next five years and FIS will be instrumental in taking this forward.
- 2.4** FIS will be key in promoting the expansion of the Flying Start scheme where all 2 year olds will receive an element of free childcare. Information will need to be accurate and consistent, to manage parents' expectations.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** FIS is a preventative service, reaching families in the community and providing relevant information that can prevent families reaching crisis point. Enquiries to FIS vary greatly from childcare, help with childcare costs, support for a family who has a child with additional needs and doesn't know where to turn, to groups for parents and children who feel isolated. FIS works closely with colleagues, especially the services that form the single point of access for information for families - the Families First Advice Line and Child & Young People Services Intake and Assessment Team.
- 3.2** FIS contact all those who have enquired to the service to ask for feedback, to help develop the service. For example 94% of parents who contacted the service said that they had the right information when they needed it and would recommend FIS to others. FIS carried out a survey with all the families signed up to The Index, to find out their views about the services they have accessed, whether they feel there are any gaps in services and the delivery of The Index in general. Responses were fed back to the Families First lead and providers.
- 3.3** FIS have worked closely with colleagues in Learning and Skills and ALNCOs in schools to help inform parents about the new ALN Code and how the implementation will affect parents. The Index Officer arranged a Q&A session with key professionals which was recorded and shared widely via The Index and schools.
- 3.4** FIS has worked with employability partners to ensure information about financial support is given to parents, which has included the Tax Free Childcare Scheme, Childcare Offer for 3 & 4 year olds, childcare element of Universal Credit, Child Development Fund and more. Plans going forward include information sessions for new parents, bringing together key partners to inform parents of what is available to them

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1** The Family Information Service is funded from RSG as a legacy from Welsh Government Cymorth Grant which transferred to RSG in 2008.
- 4.2** Additional funding to support The Index is provided under a Service Level Agreement funded from Families First.
- 4.3** Welsh Government funding for the Childcare Offer has facilitated a temporary Engagement Officer who sits within the Family Information Service.

Employment

- 4.4** Two new members of staff are being recruited to the Family Information Service Team: Childcare Offer Support Assistant and Index and FIS Support Assistant. Both posts are funded for a year and are part time.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.5** The Family Information service enables the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Child Care Act 2006, Section 27, regarding the provision of prescribed information to parents and prospective parents, on childcare and other services or facilities.
- 4.6** It also provides an integral part of the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service, as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014).

5. Background Papers

Reports to Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee: 6th July 2021; 15th July 2019; 12th June 2018.