

Annual Report on 'Social Services' 2015 / 2016

This Report is available in other languages and
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Section 1: Welcome and Introduction

As the Council's Chief Officer (Statutory Director) of Social Services, it is part of my job to report to you every year on how well I think the Council's Social Services are working. In my report I will outline the following:

- The performance of some of our key services;
- Developments and challenges throughout the year;
- Our priorities - what we will be doing over the next 12 months.

We continue to face significant financial pressures and have been working hard to achieve the savings the Council needs whilst doing our best to ensure that the services we provide to you are not adversely affected. On the whole we have managed to achieve this.

April 2016 saw the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. This is a significant piece of legislation designed to change the relationship between the Local Authority, its partner organisations and you. We have been undertaking a great deal of work to get ready for this and I have made reference to this throughout the report.

The Act has the following 5 main themes:

- You will have a voice, be in control and make decisions about your life;
- We will work with you to keep you well and to see when you need support;
- We will work with you to help you to get what matters to you and is important;
- You will be involved in how your care and support is decided and provided;
- Everyone will work together to help you to live the life you choose for longer.

This will mean that whichever type of care and support you need, we start by asking what is it about your relationship, community and life that matters to you and we will focus on your well-being and quality of life.

As part of the new Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, from April 2016, the information we collect and the way in which we collect it will change. We will now be required to gather additional information and report on the difference we are making on peoples' lives.

Although the demand for services for adults and children remains high, overall our performance across social services during 2015 / 2016 has remained generally good. This is due to the hard work and commitment of our staff who take pride in serving their local community.

Our work across the region to improve services using the Intermediate Care Fund has continued this year. We now have the Community Coordinators in place to support people to access services in the Voluntary Sector and improved Early Stroke Discharge Service. The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) has now been operating for 12 months and has received Awards for its performance. We continue to work regionally when commissioning broad ranging services. We have jointly produced a regional Commissioning Statement and we are currently tendering for a regional Home Care Service.

Our social workers and family support workers face increasingly complex and challenging situations as they go about their demanding work safeguarding young people and seeking opportunities to promote excellent outcomes. With the implementation of our Looked After Child Prevention Strategy, although it is early days, we are seeing a reduction in the number of children we look after. The Enhanced Child in Need Service continues to be a success and in 2015 moved to a new base which offers more space and better facilities for families.

Like all other Councils in Wales we continue to face the need to reduce the amount of money we spend. However, it is important to recognise that the Council has an ongoing commitment to provide additional resources where absolutely necessary in order to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Every effort has been made to ensure that our services can continue to work effectively, meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community, balanced alongside the commitment to supporting services that help people at an early stage and stop things becoming worse.

Priorities for this year.

Our priorities for the next year include:

- Implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act;
- Continuing to safeguard the most vulnerable people in our community;
- Maintaining our commitment to early intervention and prevention in all of our work;
- Implementation of the new Performance Measures Framework;
- Wherever possible, make the savings that we have been asked to without affecting the quality of services we provide.

Please see the other sections of my report for further examples of what we intend doing over the next 12 months.

Finally, I would like to offer my personal thanks to all the dedicated staff who work very hard to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.



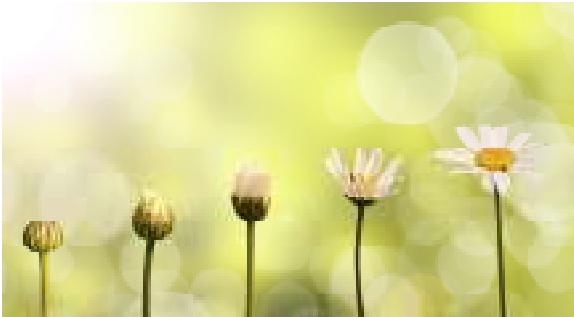
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mrs Lisa Curtis-Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mrs. Lisa Curtis-Jones

Chief Officer (Social Services) - Statutory Director of Social Services

Section 2: How well are our services performing and what can we do better?

Safeguarding Vulnerable People



All children, young people and vulnerable adults have the right to be safe, happy, and healthy; and deserve protection from abuse.

Safeguarding refers to those who may be vulnerable. This can include:

- Children under the age of 18;
- People with physical, visual, hearing or learning disability;
- People who experience poor mental health;
- The elderly, frail or ill;
- Those who are living in a household affected by domestic abuse.

During the last year we have been successful in safeguarding vulnerable people. We have continued to work closely with our colleagues across the Council and partner agencies to make sure that:

- When we take on new staff in the Council, they are safe to work with vulnerable people;
- Employees, Councillors, schools and our partners have continued to receive the training they need to spot signs of abuse and know what action they should take;
- We regularly review how well we are performing to make sure that the quality of our practice continues to be of a good standard;
- We listen to the views of vulnerable people and their families. This has continued to help us improve the way we work and the quality of the support we provide.

Together with our partners, we have set up a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for both Adult and Child Protection. Before the MASH, this work was done by each agency individually and shared where necessary. Now all of these people are based in the same place and can share information straight away. This means that we are able to improve our ability to co-ordinate, protect and support vulnerable people who are at risk of abuse. The MASH has been fully operational since May 2015 and has won two awards from South Wales Police for innovation and partnership working. As the MASH is a year old, partner agencies have agreed to undertake a review to ensure that we continue to improve performance and safeguard children and adults.

Did you know?

Cwm Taf have a Safeguarding Children and Adults Board which is a multi-agency partnership that has responsibility for safeguarding children and adults in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf. The Board monitors how well agencies safeguard adults and children from abuse and neglect. The Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board has launched a website www.cwmtafsafeguarding.org The website contains information on the range of safeguarding issues affecting children and adults and importantly, how to spot the warning signs and seek further support.

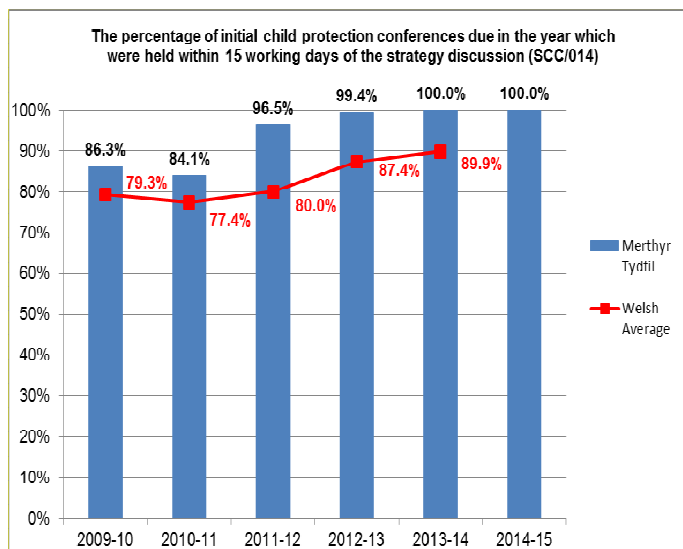
Did you know?

The 'Child Protection Register' is a confidential list of names of children and young people across the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough who are at risk from abuse or neglect. The register is kept by the Safeguarding Unit in social services and there is a multi-agency plan of protection for each child whose name is added to the Child Protection Register.

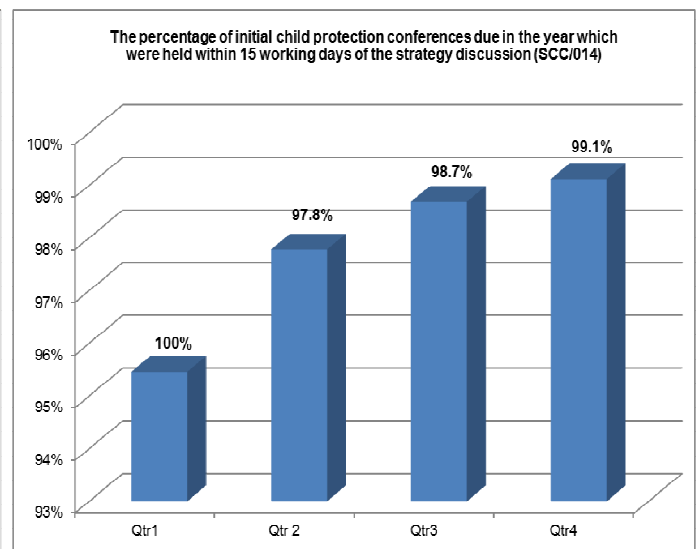
During the past 4 years, the number of children's names added to the Child Protection Register in Merthyr Tydfil has been high compared with other Welsh Authorities. This is thought to be due to a number of reasons, including: high rates of domestic abuse, the number of parents who are affected by issues like substance misuse, alcohol misuse and poor mental health. As at 31st March 2016, we had 103 children and young people on the 'Child Protection Register'. This is slightly lower than the same period the previous year (104 children). Our aim is to work with families at an early stage to prevent things getting worse and reduce risk and support young people. We ensure when Children's names are added to the Register, their names are not removed until there has been sufficient change to reduce the risk and that the changes will stand the test of time.

When there is a concern that a child or young person may be at risk of abuse or neglect, we are required to hold a meeting with all concerned within 15 working days. This is so that we can decide what help is required and to put a plan in place to protect the child. Every year since 2010 our performance has improved. We have however seen a slight dip in performance this year with 99.1% of conferences held within timescales. It is important to note that this only relates to one conference which did not take place on time and performance is still good.

Our performance over the last 5 years



2015 / 2016



In order to make sure the children and young people we look after feel safe and secure, we ask them how they feel about where they live and the people they live with. They have told us that on the whole they felt happy, settled, well cared for and supported in their placement. Where young told us they were not happy, this was most often due to the arrangements for seeing family and friends, or where there had been changes to where they lived. We are working to improve this and make sure that all looked after children and young people have help and support to develop and understand their plan for the future. Where young people say they would like an independent person to help them make decisions and plans, the Council provides an independent advocate.

Did you know?

Child Sexual Exploitation is abuse. It can take the form of children and young people being drawn into sexual relationships with adults who use a variety of methods such as giving gifts, cigarettes, affection, drugs, money etc.,. Whichever way this starts and however the child / young person feels about it – it always ends badly. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of the internet or on mobile phones. In all cases, those exploiting the child or young person have power over them for example because of their age, gender, physical strength etc. For those who are abused, the pain of their ordeal and fear that they will not be believed means they are often too scared to come forward.

If you are a child or young person who needs help please call **Childline on 0800 11 11.**

If you are an adult who suspects that this is going on you must call the Police.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in conjunction with the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board has undertaken extensive work to address the issues associated with Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and the findings of the Casey report into Rotherham. A multi-agency CSE strategy and action plan is in place to ensure that the Council takes steps to safeguard children at risk from exploitation within our area.

The Council has also implemented a Corporate Safeguarding Policy to ensure that all Council employees are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. A corporate safeguarding reference group has been developed; they are responsible for ensuring that any corporate safeguarding plans are implemented.

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act came into force on April 6th 2016. This Act strengthens the duties placed on the Local Authority for safeguarding; particularly vulnerable adults. These changes to legislation are welcomed by the Council and we will monitor the impact of this in relation to our safeguarding practice. Due to an increased workload, the Council has increased the number of staff who work in the Adults at Risk section of the Safeguarding Unit.

Despite having a higher number of cases to deal with, we have been able to put a plan in place to help reduce the risk of further abuse in 95% (76 out of 80) cases. This means that we have been able to protect and support adults at risk effectively and is evidence of good practice, however; we strive to reach 100%.

Did you know?

The Council meets with Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), relevant partners and managers / owners of homes where there are concerns about the quality of care. The purpose of the meetings is to share information and put together an action plan to ensure that the quality of care improves for the residents. This is known as provider performance and aims to prevent home closures due to poor practice.

In response to Operation Jasmine 'In Search of Accountability' which was a national review into the neglect of older people living in some care homes; the Adult Safeguarding Board held a multi-agency workshop with participants including practitioners and managers involved in the care of older people, as well as adult and carer representatives. We focused on four areas considering: 'What does good Care look like', 'How do we respond to Concerns', 'How do we provide assurance on the Quality of Care' and 'How can we support Care Home Residents who have no visitors'. The workshop was well received and the learning that we have taken from this has been implemented in our safeguarding practice.

Our Performance – What are we doing well?

- When a child / young person is at risk of abuse; meetings, reviews and decisions have been carried out in a timely way; with 99.1% of meetings held within 15 working days and 100% of child protection reviews being carried out on time;
- Although we have seen an increase in the number of adults at risk from abuse; at 31st March 2016, in 95% of cases we have been able to manage the risk. By this we mean having a plan of action in place to reduce the risk of further abuse. Our performance is slightly lower than the same period last year (97.1%), however; our performance this year is still good;
- The quality of practice by all those involved in protecting vulnerable children and adults is regularly reviewed and reported on to the Council. This ensures that examples of good practice are shared and practice is improved.

What could we do better?

- Improved access to quality and timely information in respect of the safeguarding process;
- Continue to encourage and help more children and young people to take part in their child protection meetings;
- Continue to encourage more adults who are at risk of abuse to take part in the meetings that talk about how they may be protected.

What else do we need to do during 2016 / 2017?

Listed below are a few examples of what we intend to do over the next 12 months in this area:

- We will continue to regularly monitor the quality of practice and work hard to improve our performance in the areas where we are not doing so well and make sure that where our performance is good it stays that way;

- We will continue to provide relevant training and support to colleagues in other areas of the Council to ensure that they fully understand their role in safeguarding vulnerable people in our community and share any concerns they have with the Safeguarding Unit for further consideration and action;
- We will ensure that all staff are trained in regards to their safeguarding responsibilities under the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act;
- We will implement the recommendations of the review of the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub for both children and adults;
- We will ensure that the recommendations from 'In Search of Accountability' are implemented and reviewed;
- We will ensure that children and young people who are affected by child sexual exploitation are listened to and that we work effectively with partners and families to challenge those that commit this offence;
- We will continue to work with families at an early stage to support and prevent their circumstances from deteriorating further.

Services for Adults



In Merthyr Tydfil we have continued to work closely with all of our partners to develop and improve the services we provide to you so that, where possible, you can continue to live independently and safely within your community.

For example, this includes:

- Providing you with the information, advice and assistance you need to help you live as independently as possible;
- Providing you with a direct payment so that you are free to arrange your own care in a way and at a time to suit you or, arranging for someone to help with your personal care needs;
- Making sure that if you have been in hospital that you get the support you need, when you need it to return home;
- Promoting your independence by giving you the confidence to manage day-to-day personal and practical tasks around your home;
- If you can no longer live in your own home, to help you and your family find a suitable alternative;
- Support you as a Carer to ensure that you can continue your caring role;
- Ensuring that our most vulnerable people are protected from exploitation and harm.

In preparation for the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 we have been looking at ways to improve how we provide you with information, advice and assistance. This means that you will have access to better information about what is happening in your local community, clear advice about the support available to you and timely access to the support you need. Later in 2016, we will be asking those people who have received a service their opinion on how this has worked and we will publish the results.

The new Act has placed a duty on the Council and its partners to develop a range of services that will prevent or delay the need for care and support. This will mean that we will continue to see more people receiving support at home and within their local community. The Social Services Department's job will be to continue to provide support to those people who have the highest levels of need. This includes vulnerable older people, people with disabilities, a mental illness and people who are not able to do things for themselves without support.

This year we have continued to be successful in helping people to live in their community for longer. We have done this by making sure that the services we commission are flexible and rigorously monitored to make sure that they are of good quality. We have continued to work with people at an early stage in order that they can regain their confidence and ability to undertake the tasks of daily living. This has meant around 58% fewer people needing services in the longer term. Please see below some of the comments we have received about this.

What you have told us!

We asked you if you have benefitted from the Reablement programme. These are some of the things you told us:

- *"I can now get out of bed with more ease and walk with more ease."*
- *"I have achieved what I wanted to."*
- *"I would have liked to have a little bit longer."*
- *"Yes, I have improved enormously from the Reablement programme"*
- *"It gave me confidence to do daily tasks safely"*
- *"I don't believe I would be walking as well without their input"*
- *"The person who came here was very helpful and provided us with suggestions of equipment we could use to help me in my role as a carer and my husband to manage getting in and out of the bath, up the stairs, getting in and out of the house. This has made a difference to us".*

When we asked if you feel you have achieved your goals - this is what you told us:

- *"I Achieved a lot more"*
- *"Made me feel more confident in transferring."*
- *"I know feel confident to make a cup of tea."*
- *"No, not quite, it was cut short because I had a flare up of gout"*
- *"Yes, although it is still necessary to carry on with the exercise programme"*
- *"Yes, I am more confident in normal activities"*

The new Act will make it easier for people to use direct payments to pay for a much wider range of services they may need. The number of people using direct payments has been steadily increasing and we expect to see this continue in future years. As at 31st March 2016, there were 122 people receiving direct payments, of which, 68 were adults. Not everybody wants to use direct payments as a way of receiving services. If you would prefer not to do this, you will still be able to receive services that we commission and organise on your behalf. As of 31st March 2016, we were supporting 1731 people in this way.

We have continued to work hard this year with our Health colleagues to help people return home from hospital as quickly as possible. For those people returning to their own homes with a package of support, we are performing well. This is due to the hard work of our Initial Response and Reablement Teams who help people develop their confidence so that they can regain their independence. Where there have been delayed discharges, these have been due to people who have very special needs, requiring specialist accommodation and support – which is not always available quickly enough. We have also seen a reduction in the availability of nursing homes across the region which has impacted on this.

We have worked with colleagues in health, the voluntary sector and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council to improve services across the region through the use of the Intermediate Care Fund. This includes the use of Community Coordinators to support people to access services run by the voluntary sector, and worked together to increase voluntary services in the area. We have also worked together to develop services that support people to return home from hospital sooner such as the Early Stroke Discharge service and increased the services that help people to be more independent. We have also adapted several properties across Cwm Taf to provide a short term home for people who are waiting for adaptations to their own home.

Did you know?

There is a Commissioner for Older People who undertook a review of residential and nursing homes called 'A Place Called Home'. Each local authority and Health Board have produced an action plan to improve the quality of life and care to older people living in care homes in Wales.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales

We are working with our partners across the Cwm Taf Region to deliver on the Older People Commissioner's requirements for action for care homes. In support of this we have developed a quality assurance toolkit which includes routine consultation with service users and their families. In addition to this we are responsible for undertaking our own inspections of care homes in our area which includes speaking to residents, their families and staff. Comments received are used to help us continue to improve the local services and make sure that they are delivered to the highest standards.

What you have told us!

This is some of the feedback we have received about our residential homes:

- *"I would like to remain here for the rest of my life, because I feel this is now my home and I like all the people in here."*
- *"All the staff are really friendly, kind and helpful. Nothing is too much trouble for them; they will do anything for you".*
- *"I feel they have increased my confidence when dealing with the world."*
- *"I am very pleased with my relatives care, thank you very very much".*

There are times however when we can no longer support you to live safely in your own home. If this happens, we will work closely with you and you family / carer to find the best possible alternative. This doesn't automatically mean that you would live in a residential home. There are a range of alternative options that you could consider. These include:

- **Sheltered Accommodation** - There are 415 units of sheltered accommodation across the County Borough. All the sheltered accommodation in Merthyr Tydfil is provided by a Housing Association.
- **Extra Care** - If you live in Extra Care, you have your own apartment with your own front door. You can decide who comes into your home and who doesn't. There is 24/7 care and support available on site if needed to help you stay in the community for longer. Extra Care is a real choice for people who cannot stay in their homes because their needs have changed.
- **Shared Lives Scheme** - The shared lives scheme supports vulnerable adults to live with carers for either a short term break or on a permanent basis. Placements are tailored to the individual and enable them to receive support to live more independent lives.



As part of our work to continually improve services, we changed the arrangements for two of our learning disability residential group homes. This meant that the people living within the two homes are now able to enjoy a much more independent lifestyle where the care and support is tailored to flexibly meet their needs.

The Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) is a joint team with Health based in Kier Hardie Health Park and is co-located with the Psychiatry of Old Age Team, the Outreach and Recovery Community Drug and Alcohol Team and Primary Mental Health Service. As part of the work of the CMHT, we have to make sure that there are individual plans in place for at least 90% of the people we work with. We are pleased to report that we are at 99% for this measure.

The Psychiatry of Old Age Team work with people who have dementia. The aim of the team is to maintain people's independence for as long as possible. The team's philosophy is to promote people's strengths to enable them to remain living at home within their own communities. The Psychiatry of Old Age Team has close links with the Alzheimer's Society and day care providers. They also utilise equipment such as telecare and lifeline to ensure people's health and well-being is maintained. We also support carers who play a vital role in providing care and support.

Did you know?

Over the last year Social Workers and Community Psychiatric Nurses have begun a number of new courses and group work sessions for people with a mental illness. Courses included: Hearing Voices, Mindfulness, Try This First, a Sexual Abuse Survivors group, Creative Writing and a Swimming group.

Having the opportunity to discuss your needs as a carer is important. If you come to Social Services for information, advice and assistance; we will firstly speak with you about what is going well and where you may need support to do the things you want. By having this conversation this will help us provide you with the right information, advice and support you need to carry out your role. Last year we reported a drop in performance in offering adult carers an assessment. This trend has continued into 2015 / 2016 with 66.2% of carers offered an assessment as at 31st March 2016. This reduction in performance was due to significant staffing difficulties during the year, however; despite this we have seen an increase in the uptake of services by carers. At 31st March 2016, 85.1% of carers who were assessed were provided with a service. This performance is good and an improvement on last year (69%).

Overall, we believe our progress and performance this year has again been reasonably good with some areas for further improvement. Examples of what we are doing well and what we need to do better are listed below.

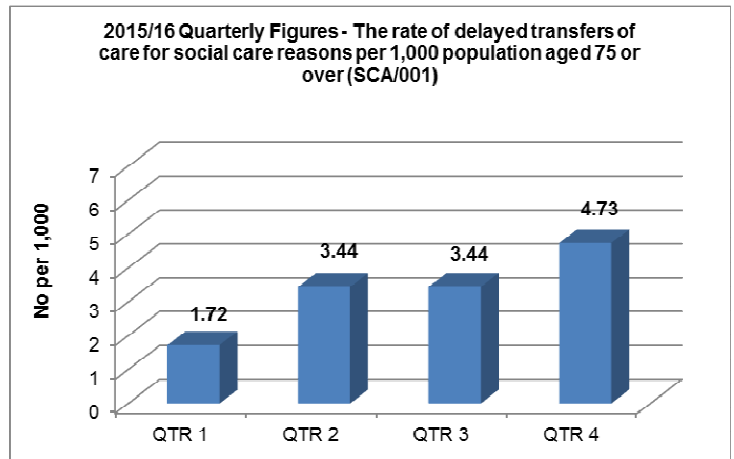
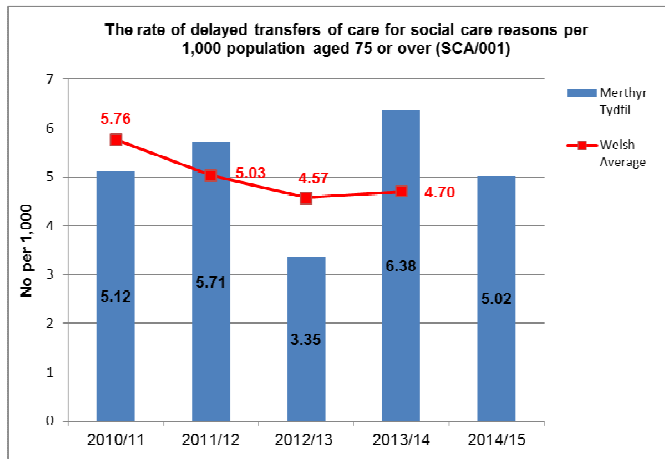
Our Performance – What are we doing well?

- We have continued to work hard this year with our Health colleagues to help people return home from hospital as quickly as possible. In those situations where we are able to influence the outcome, for example; those people returning to their own homes with a package of support, we are performing well. This is due to the hard work of our Initial Response and Reablement Teams.

Where there have been delayed discharges, these have been due to people who have very special needs, requiring specialist accommodation and support – which is not always available quickly enough and we have also seen a reduction in the availability of nursing homes across the region which has impacted on this. This has meant our performance as at 31st March 2016 of 4.73 is an improvement on our performance of 5.02 for the same period last year.

Our performance over the last 5 years

2015 / 2016



What could we do better?

- When somebody is supported by us they have an individual plan (called a care plan) which we agree with them. This plan should be reviewed at least once a year. Although everyone has a care plan, our performance in reviewing them has been in decline over the last few years. This year we have seen an improvement in our performance. As of 31st March 2016, 81.3% of our care plans had been reviewed compared with 77.4% the previous year. Whilst we have seen an improvement in our performance, we would still like to do better;
- As mentioned above, we have seen a further decline in the number of adult carers offered an assessment.

Arrangements have now been put in place to address the two areas above where our performance needs to improve.

What else do we need to do during 2016 / 2017?

We will continue to face many challenges, such as the ongoing financial pressures faced by the local authority and the ongoing implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; this also brings about the opportunity for us to further develop and improve our services. Together with our partners, we will continue to work hard to make sure that you get the best possible service we can provide.

Over the next 12 months:

- Wherever possible we will continue to work across the region with our partners in Cwm Taf University Health Board and Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and the Third Sector to support you achieve the outcomes you want;
- Along with all local authorities in Wales, we will be required to report on new performance measures, some of which will require us to ask you directly what your views are in relation to what is important to you. This means our performance and your views can be compared with all other local authorities in Wales in a much simpler way;
- Along with all other Councils' we will have to continue to make savings and this will mean as times goes on you are likely to see this impact on the services we provide and the way we provide them;
- We are going to be working much closer with Health colleagues to further improve our reablement and hospital discharge processes to ensure that if you need to go to hospital you are able to return home with the support you need as quickly as possible;
- We will be reviewing our arrangements for providing day services to ensure that wherever possible these services are community based.

Services for Children



Children's Social Services is made up of a wide range of teams. We work with a number of partners, some of which include Cwm Taf University Health Board, Police and Education. We work together to make sure that all children and young people are kept safe, healthy and given every opportunity to grow and develop into independent adults. Increasingly we are working with the voluntary sector as we develop our prevention work.

Supporting families to safeguard children and young people is one of the greatest responsibilities that we have and where it is necessary we will continue to look after young people to make them safe. Our social workers and family support workers face increasingly complex and challenging situations as they go about their demanding work safeguarding young people and seeking opportunities to promote excellent outcomes. We are rightfully proud of our workforce and the results they achieve.

The work that we do in children's services also focuses on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Over the last year we have worked hard to prepare for the requirements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. We have done this by:

- Focusing on providing support to families at an early stage (prevention);
- Working with partners at the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Board Hub (MASH) to make sure we safeguard those who are at risk of harm;
- Making sure that we listen to family members and work in an outcome focused way so we reduce the amount of time we are involved with families;
- Making changes to the way we work so that we continue to help you identify your well-being outcomes and assist you to achieve them;
- Improving the way we organise and plan our services by being clear about what we want to achieve and involving our staff in this. We have also looked for opportunities to listen to the public and people who use our services about our plans. We will continue this work during the year ahead.

Our first year of operating the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub has gone well and as stated in the 'Safeguarding' section of this report we will be reviewing how well this has gone.

Providing support to families at an early stage (prevention) continues to be a priority and we have begun to see some success in this. As at the 31st March 2016 we now have 22 fewer children who are looked after (in care) than we did at the same point last year. We have achieved this through working differently with families to ensure that children can remain at home where that is safe.

We have also worked harder with extended families so that they may provide a safe alternative placement when it is not possible for a child to remain at home; and in some cases children have returned home. This work will continue and has been written up into a Looked After Child Prevention Strategy to help keep us on target.

Another preventative service is the 'Enhanced Children in Need' Service which has been in place now for over two years. The service continues to help families make lasting change and prevent children from becoming looked after. The service is based in the Merthyr Tydfil Family Centre and provides a wide range of support to children, young people and their families. The service works with a specific number of children at any given time which allows the social worker to work closely with families and support them within their community. The service works with families in a way that helps make changes to their lives that will keep children safe for their entire childhood. The service has achieved particular success in cases where the concerns are serious and we have seen evidence that we have been able to avoid a child becoming looked after as a result.

The Family Centre also provides other services that work with either individuals or the whole family to help them keep children safe from neglect and abuse; including child sexual exploitation.

During the year the Family Centre has expanded its work to include Family Group Conferences. This way of working helps families find their own solutions. Family Centre staff has also carried out work which enables young people who are at risk of sexual exploitation or alcohol and drug misuse to increase their safety and reduce risks. This service is performing well.

Overall children, young people and their families have told us that they have found the support of the Family Centre helpful in improving their knowledge, skills and ability to be a good parent. Parents have also reported that they feel very much included in the process. This was confirmed by the work of the Care and social services inspectorate who visited the service during the year. Some family comments and feedback is included below:

What you have told us!

- *"It helped me to identify the difference of a healthy relationship and not so healthy relationships"*
- *"Feel a more confident person"*
- *Before working with the staff at the family centre: "I didn't think there would be any benefit to attending. Why do I need to go? Not happy everyone knowing what's going on". After working with the family centre staff: "Found it more helpful to understand their actions and can say they have turned their life around. Thank you for not judging me. Course is brilliant – should be more early before things hit rock bottom"*
- *"I realized I am not alone. No-one judges each other. Needed this to move on from my past"*
- *"It has helped me understand more about my baby "Did not have much trust in SSD – have now. I am in a better place now"*
- *"My kids are more confident now. Didn't want the work, but glad allowed it now"*

When the Care and Social Services Inspectorate came to visit the Enhanced Child in Need Services, they reported that: *A service usergreatly valued the belief in her shown by her social worker. She saw this as the difference the service had made in helping her to make progress in her parenting abilities.*

The work being completed at the Merthyr Tydfil Family Centre is helping us to make sure that our work is in line with the expectations of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

The Intensive Family Support Service is also preventative service that provides specialist support to families affected by parental drug and or alcohol misuse. Recent research tells us that the families who work with this service are often able to make changes that mean children are no longer at risk, and that those changes are lasting. Over the next year, the Intensive Family Support Service will increase the services they provide to include working with families where there are concerns of domestic abuse. We will ask the service to work with as many Merthyr Tydfil families as possible.

At the moment, we are currently supporting 84 children and young people with a disability. We work together with our partners, children and their families to ensure that children with disabilities have access to the right advice, support and services so that they have the same opportunities as all other children and young people across Merthyr Tydfil. We have been told by the families we work with that arrangements we have to support young disabled people who are becoming more independent and moving into adulthood are good.

Barnardos are funded by us to provide a service to Young Carers in our area. The support provided to young carers is good. During the year, 96% (27 out of 28) of young carers known to social services were assessed and of these 92.9% (26 young carers) were provided with a service. This is a significant improvement in our performance on the previous year.

The Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf Youth Offending Services joined up to provide one service across both areas (Cwm Taf area). The Youth Offending Service is made up of a number of organisations who work together to help young people that may have been in trouble with the law. The service provides the young person (and their family) with the support they need to change their lives for the better and help them to stay away from crime or anti-social behaviour. Overall, performance in this area is generally good. The



number of young people coming into the service for the first time is low. We have also continued our success in reducing the number of young people who go on to have a custodial sentence – for example; in 2009 / 2010 the number of young people having a custodial sentence in Merthyr Tydfil was 32, by the end of last year this had reduced to 6 young people and this year only 1 young person received a custodial sentence.

This result shows us that prevention is having a real impact on young people's lives. When we looked at the re-offending rates we found that a small number of young people are involved in a high number of crimes. This tells us we need to work with those young people who present the greatest challenges.

The Permanence Service has continued to support the Looked After Children and Care Leavers participation group known as 'The Rainbows'. We will make sure that through this group the voice of looked after children and care leavers are heard and they have the power to influence changes to the things that affect their lives.

This includes making sure that the Council's Corporate Parenting Board takes a lead from looked after young people.

Merthyr Tydfil Foster Carers play a very important role by providing children and young people with a home, stability and a place in the community. As far as possible we try to identify a foster placement that will best meet the child or young person's needs to ensure that they settle well. Wherever possible we avoid changes of school for young people.

During 2015 / 2016, the number of children or young people who have experienced three or more moves has remained low with only 13 children or young people being affected. Some of the moves were planned and for positive reasons, such as the child or young person going to live with family members, being adopted, or moving to long term carers following their permanence plan being finalised. The young people who have moved more than three times in one year are a very small percentage of our looked after population (9.2%); which is in line with the latest available Welsh average figure of 9%.

Did you know?

Merthyr Tydfil currently has 46 approved main stream Foster Carers offering 89 beds plus 2 'When I am Ready' placements and 2 carers approved for respite provision only. We currently also have 10 approved kinship placements for 13 children's or young persons.

During 2015 / 2016 we have assessed and approved 7 new Foster Carers, including new Emergency Carers following the retirement of our previous emergency provision and 4 Relative Carers. There have also been 13 examples of relative Foster Carers being given a Court Order to provide a safe home for young people, which means that those young people are no longer looked after by the Local Authority. We have 6 ongoing mainstream carers assessments and 4 kinship carer assessments.

The Council has a duty to provide advice and support to young people leaving care until they reach 21 years of age; unless they are in higher education and then it is 25. At the moment we have 2 young people attending universities across the UK. We work together with young people and our partners to provide information, advice and support on things such as education and training, independent living skills, getting a job, where to live or budgeting.

We also help young care leavers to work out their plan for the future and at present 98.6% of our young care leavers have a plan of this kind.

We also measure the number of care leavers who we are in contact with. As of 31st March 2016, we were in contact with 19 out of 21 (90.5%) care leavers; which is an improvement on the same period last year (86.7%). When we have looked closer at why we are not keeping in touch with all care leavers, we have found that a small number choose to have no further contact with us. We will always make ourselves available to give advice to any care leaver at whatever age if they approach us.

During this year a manager received a letter from a care leaver who said that:

"... I have never properly thanked you for all that you have done for me. I realise now that if it wasn't for you going out of your way I wouldn't be where I am now.....so this is me saying thank you for the kindness and belief you have shown in me – even the tough love! It can't be easy doing your job but if you do half as much for others as you've done for me then I reckon you're doing a good job. Thanks for everything!"

Our Performance – What are we doing well?

Despite the challenges we are currently facing, overall, in Children's Services performance is good.

For example; when a child or young person becomes 'Looked After', we make sure they go to live in a family where they will be happy and settled and need to put a plan in place at the start of their placement. These plans must be reviewed with the child or young person at certain times – what they tell us about their experiences is very important. As a result of hard work, better planning and improved arrangements; all of our looked after children and young people had a plan before starting their placement and most of the plans (99.5%) were reviewed on time and has improved in a number of areas.

We have also made some improvements to our performance during the year. This includes:

- An increase in the number of children and young people who have met with the social worker during their assessment;
- Increased the frequency of social work visits to children and young people who are looked after
- Reduced the time taken to complete assessments;
- Increased the number of young carers who receive a service.

Listed below are a few examples of what we need to do better.

What could we do better?

- Improve our frequency of visits to looked after children and young people;
- Improve the numbers of care leavers we are in touch with; making sure that there is a plan in place for them, whilst increasing the number who are in employment, education and training and who have a personal adviser.

What else do we need to do during 2016 / 2017?

Some of the things that we need to do over the next 12 months includes:

- During 2016 / 2017, we will provide information, advice and assistance service that will help young people and families know how to go about getting help early on before problems become worse. In providing this our aim is to improve families' ability to choose the early help that they get;

- We will continue working with our partners to further develop the effectiveness of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub;
- We will look to reduce the number of repeat involvements with the same families;
- We will increase the number of families who work with the Enhanced Child in Need Service to make sure that we use every opportunity to help families make lasting change sooner;
- We will continue the work under the Looked After Child Prevention Strategy, making sure that we always consider family first and placements close to home'
- We will recruit more Foster Carers to make sure that there is a sufficient number of placements for the types of situations and children and young people who need foster placements close to home'
- We will continue to improve the time taken to complete the adoption process'
- We will listen to families to improve our understanding of 'what good looks like' for children, young people and their families. This will help us develop clear outcomes for the children, young people and families we work with'
- We will work with partners on our Corporate Parenting Board to make sure that we are challenging ourselves to constantly improve the lives of looked after young people.

Managing our Business



This section looks at some of the other important areas of our work that may not immediately spring to mind when you think of a social services department. These include: staff development and training; finance and charging; contracting; compliments and complaints.

In response to the requirements of Welsh Government, we have been working with our partners across Cwm Taf to develop a regional training unit for the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and our staff training requirements in general. The new regional training service began its work on 1st April 2016. This will mean that our staff will have access to a wide range of training which will help them do their jobs better and make sure you receive the best service possible.

Most of the courses we run are open to voluntary and independent sector, carers and other social care organisations. Between April 2015 and March 2016 we have trained 2983 people.

As of March 2016:

- 20% Foster Carers hold a recognised qualification, 3% are currently working towards this qualification and 77% do not currently hold their target qualification. It is important to note that the lower number of qualification holders is a result of a successful recruitment drive and Foster Carer turnover;
- 94% of our residential care staff holds a recognised qualification, 2% are currently working towards this qualification and 4% do not currently hold their target qualification.

The structure of the Contract Team has changed during the year with the Contracting and Procurement function moving to the Corporate Team, while the monitoring function has been strengthened by the addition of a Senior Monitoring Officer post. This has enabled us to extend the monitoring remit to include other services not previously monitored.

Our Contracts/Procurement Team make sure that we are only buying services which are the best quality possible and offer the best value for money for the people of Merthyr Tydfil. Currently we have 335 contracts in place for a wide range of commissioned services. The Contracts Monitoring Team regularly visits providers to make sure the quality of the service they provide is at the highest standard possible. During 2015 / 2016 we have completed 954 monitoring visits to a range of services. This is an increase on last year and an improvement in our performance.

This year we have developed a Joint Commissioning Statement with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Cwm Taf University Health Board and the Third Sector. This sets out how we work more closely together in the future when we develop services to meet local need.

This year we have also worked with Rhondda Cynon Taf Council to jointly commission home care services. This new contract across Cwm Taf will begin in October 2016 and will ensure that we can obtain the best quality and value for money for supporting people in their own home.

The Council charges for some of the services that we provide and the Finance and Charging Team ensure that people pay the right amount at the right time. 78% of new service users receiving support in the home services and 86% of people in residential care had a financial assessment on time. This is below our target of 95% and we are continuing to work to improve this figure.

Social Services provide support to the most vulnerable people in our community; often in very difficult situations. Whilst we aim to deliver effective services that make a real difference in people's lives, there are times when you may not be happy with what we have done, when things don't go the way you expect or when we haven't done something we said we would. Our Complaints Service is there to help you when this happens. It is important to us that should you need to make a complaint about our service, you are listened to properly. We will work with you and aim to resolve your complaint as quickly and effectively as possible.

During 2015 / 2016 we have received 44 new complaints. We successfully resolved 77% of these complaints when you first came to us with your concerns (stage one). The time taken to resolve stage one complaints has improved compared with the previous year. As at 31st March 2016, 90% of our complaints had been resolved within 15 working days – which is an improvement on the previous years' performance (51%). Whilst we do our very best to resolve complaints within 15 working days, we sometimes need to take a little longer so that we can look into and resolve matters properly.

Social Services adopt a positive attitude towards complaints. We continue to learn from complaints, as we believe they provide us with valuable feedback on how well we are doing and what we need to do to develop and improve the quality of our services we provide.

It is also helpful to know when we get things right. We would like to hear from you when you have had a positive experience of our services and where we have made a difference in your life. So far this year we have received 8 compliments about our service.

The Local Authority is required to report annually to Welsh Government on performance across its Social Services. We regularly and routinely monitor our performance and have effective processes in place to ensure this information remains as accurate and up-to-date as possible. It is important to us to understand how well we are doing and how we compare with other authorities in Wales. This information is essential in helping us identify the areas where we need to improve our practice, make changes to our services, address the things that are preventing us from achieving good performance and generally used to help managers in their decision making and planning.

As part of the new Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, from April 2016, the information we collect and the way in which we collect it will change. We will now be required to gather additional information and report on the difference we are making on peoples' lives.

As part of the new arrangements, if you are receiving care and support from us, you may be asked to complete a short questionnaire (which will be anonymous). This will help us to understand how the care and support you have received has helped your well-being so that you are happy, healthy, safe and contented with your life and what you do.

Did you know?

Further information about the new Performance Measurement Framework and other information relating to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 can be found on the Welsh Government website at:

www.gov.wales.uk

Home > Topics > Health and social care > Social services > Measuring well-being > Performance measurement framework for local authorities

Performance – What are we doing well?

- Every year we are set national minimum qualification targets by Welsh Government for specific groups of staff; such as foster carers and care staff working in our residential homes. Social care services within the Local Authority have performed well and exceeded these targets for some years;
- This year we have been working with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Social Services Department to develop a joint training service. This started on 1st April 2016;
- All of the services we commission have an appropriate contract in place which is reviewed in accordance with an agreed timetable;
- We have reduced the time it takes to resolve your complaints successfully and when the more complex complaints have been independently reviewed, the original decisions have been upheld – which means we are making the right decision in the first instance.

What could we do better?

- Although we have reduced the time it takes to resolve your complaints, we would like to improve the number of complaints we successfully resolve at the earliest stage;
- We need to improve on the number of financial assessments that we carry out within 15 working days. Although our performance has improved, it is still below our target figure of 95%.

What else do we need to do during 2016 / 2017?

Some of the things that we need to do over the next 12 months include:

- Implement the new charging arrangements under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act;
- Implementation of the new Performance Measurement Framework as part of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act;
- Implementation of the new training arrangements across Cwm Taf.

Section 3: Valuing your Views

If you would like to find out more about any of the information contained in this report, or share your views and experiences; then please get in touch.

Getting in Touch

You can contact us in the following ways:

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Email: ACRF@merthyr.gov.uk

Write to: **Annual Council Reporting Framework**
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