

Annual Report on 'Social Services' 2014 / 2015

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Section 1: Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to my 'Annual Report on Social Services' in Merthyr Tydfil. 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.

Although the demand for services for adults and children remains high, overall our performance across social services during 2014 / 2015 has remained generally good. This is due to the hard work and commitment of our staff who take pride in serving their local community.

Social Services in Merthyr Tydfil together with our partner agencies continue to work hard to protect the most vulnerable people in our community and support those who need our help. Performance in this area has been maintained and is generally good. In order to improve information sharing across the Council and all partner agencies, a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) for both adults and children at risk has been set up. The MASH was officially launched in May 2015.

Like all other Councils in Wales we are facing the need to reduce the amount of money we spend. However, it is important to recognise that the Council remains committed to provide additional resources where absolutely necessary in order to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. As you will be aware, we have recently consulted with you on a number of proposals to make efficiencies across the Council. Some of these may well directly affect you. Please be assured that we have listened very carefully to your views and any decisions to reduce services have not been taken lightly. 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.

We are increasingly becoming a commissioning authority which means that we may not provide the services ourselves. Instead we may pay other organisations to provide them on our behalf. These organisations can be in the independent sector, third sector (not for profit) or the voluntary sector. All of these arrangements have contracts in place which we monitor on a regular basis.

Over the last year we have worked with our partners and used the Intermediate Care Fund (which is a grant from the Welsh Government to improve services for older people) to help all agencies work together better so that you receive the services you need in a joined up way. By using our Initial Response Services we have generally been successful in helping people to return home from hospital when they are ready to do so and supporting people to live for longer in their community.

There is a range of support available for carers both from Social Services and the wider Carers Network who are in contact with and supporting over 900 carers in our community. Although this may seem a high number we know there are more carers out there and we think there is more that needs to be done to support carers. From a social services point of view we need to improve our performance by increasing the number of assessments we do for carers.

The Enhanced Child in Need Service continues to be a success and many of the children, young people and their families have told us that their lives have improved as a result of our support. During 2015 the service will be moving to a new base which will offer more space and better facilities.

I am also happy to report that we have continued to build on our success in recruiting Foster Carers across the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough and through the 'When I am Ready' scheme we have been able to support 8 young people to remain with their foster carers past the age of 18.

This year we have seen some notable changes to the way we organise our services. In July 2014 the arrangements for our Youth Offending Service changed. The Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf Youth Offending Services have now joined up to provide one service across both areas (Cwm Taf area).

We will have a number of challenges over the next year, the biggest of which will be, along with other Local Authorities to maintain or improve our performance and make savings. So far we have managed to do this. In April 2016 the 'Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act' comes into force. This places a number of new responsibilities on Local Authorities and social services. The purpose of the Act is to:

- Make life better for people and their carers;
- Make social care law easier to use;
- Give people a stronger voice and more control;
- Make sure people get the help they need to lead a good life;
- Say what social services will be like all over Wales;
- Make sure communities have a chance to offer their knowledge and experience.

In 2013, Welsh Government introduced a Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in health and social services called "More than Just Words". The framework sets out the current position and what is needed to improve services for those who need or choose to receive their care in Welsh. Supporting action plans have been developed which detail the steps needed to strengthen Welsh Language services. Progress against the actions has been limited this year due to the need to prioritise staff time on achieving the necessary local authority efficiencies and preparation for the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. This remains under review and when resources become available will be addressed later this year.

Also this year I am pleased to say that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, together with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and the Cwm Taf University Health Board have jointly signed up to the 'Time to Change Wales' pledge. We are committed to this important cause and will play an active part in ending the stigma and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems in Wales – both in the work place and their community.

Priorities for this year.

Our priorities for the next year include:

- Continuing to safeguard the most vulnerable people in our community;
- Maintaining or improving our current performance across social services;
- Together with our partners we will prepare for the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act in 2016 and embed the ethos of partnership working and early intervention / prevention into our day to day work.
- 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 year.

Since our last annual report, we have seen a number of changes in the management of Social Services. The Council has managed this well and as a result our performance has remained generally good. This is a credit to all of the staff in the social services department and our partners. I would like to formally thank them all for their hard work and professionalism in helping to support the most vulnerable in our community.

Finally; I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you that have provided feedback on the Draft Annual Report as part of our consultation process during April 2015. Your support was greatly appreciated. All feedback received has now been carefully considered and used to help me write the final report. A number of the comments provided have also been shared with our services for consideration for planning future services, improvement and development.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Curtis-Jones".

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 usually 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 made good progress 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 if they are worried about anybody;
- 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 helped us to 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 Protection and Children's Services. Adult Protection was up and running in January 2015 and Children's Services from April 2015. This is where the key agencies responsible for safeguarding are based and where they consider the concerns we receive and decide what we need to do. 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.

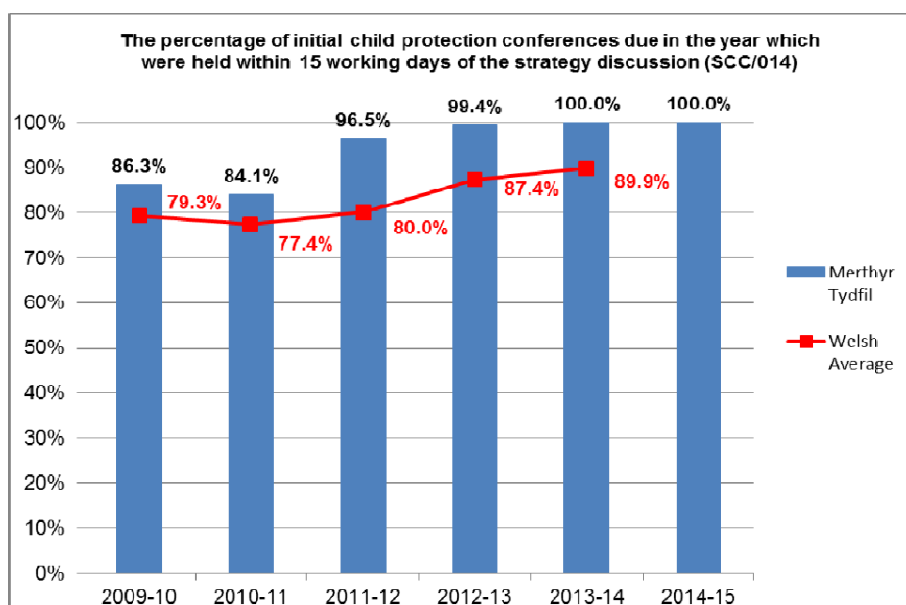
Did you know?

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 3 years, the number of children's names added to the Child Protection Register in Merthyr 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 2015, we had 105 children and young people on the 'Child Protection Register'. This figure is lower than it was at the same time last year which is positive, because there are high rates of children added to the Child Protection Register in Merthyr Tydfil compared to other Welsh authorities. Of all the children and young people on the register, it is pleasing to note that as of 31st March, none of them had been on there twice in the last 18 months. We have also tried to ensure that when Children's names are added to the Register, their names are not removed until there has been sufficient change to reduce the risk, with realistic prospect that the changes will stand the test of time.

Merthyr Tydfil Social Services staff have worked hard on the outcome focused planning process at an early stage which has led to increased family involvement in the plans and has assisted our success in working with families to reduce risk and support young people.

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 so that we can decide whether this is the case and to put a plan in place to protect the child. Since 2010, we have improved each year at meeting these timescales and are better than the latest available Welsh average (89.9%). Our performance last year was excellent. As you will see from the graph below, we have been able to maintain our performance again this year with 100% of our meetings taking place on time.



When a child or young person is in our care (looked after) or on the Child Protection Register; it is our job to review how well things are going at certain times during the year. We are good at doing the reviews on time, although; we have seen a slight dip in our performance this year with 98% of looked after children and child protection reviews done on time compared to 99% of reviews done on time last year. Where the reviews have not been done on time, this has mostly been due to matters outside of our control, such as health reasons or bereavement. Despite this, our performance is still very good and has stayed above the latest available Welsh average of 89.9%.

In order to make sure the children and young people we look after feel safe and secure, we continue to gather their views to make sure that they are happy in the family they have been placed with. In a recent review we received positive feedback which told us that many of the young people being looked after felt happy, settled, well cared for and supported in their placement. Where young people raised concerns, this was most often due to the arrangements for seeing family and friends, or changes to where they lived. We will work to improve this and make sure that all looked after young people have help and support to develop and understand their plan for the future. The Council provides children and young people who are looked after or whose names are on the Child Protection Register with an advocate where young people say this would help them take part in decisions and their plans.

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. This has helped us to manage the risk in most of the cases. 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 97% of cases.

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.

Listed below are a number of examples of what we are currently doing well and what we need to do better.

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 100% of meetings held within 15 working days and 98% of child protection reviews being carried out on time. At year end (March 2015) – 105 of children on the Child Protection Register have child protection plans in place that will improve their safety and well-being.
- Although we have seen an increase in the number of adults at risk from abuse; at 31st March 2015, in 97% 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 last year (99%), however; our performance this year is still very good and we remain above the latest available Welsh average (94.5%).

- 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 where things are not as good as they could be.

What could we do better?

- Encourage and help more children and young people to take part in their child protection meetings.
- 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 2015 / 2016?

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.
- In the autumn 2015, together with our partners, we will review how well the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub's for adults and children are doing.
- 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 and make children safe.

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.

Services for Adults



In Adult Social Services we work closely with 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 could include:

- Providing you with support at home if you have just come out of hospital;
- Arranging for someone to help with your personal care needs; or, 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;
- Giving you the confidence to manage day-to-day personal and practical tasks around your home by assisting you with advice, support or equipment.

This year we have continued to be successful in helping people to live in their community for longer. The information we have collected tells us that we are now helping more people who have a number of different care needs to continue living at home; where previously they would have gone into residential care.

If you need our support, we continue to ensure that wherever possible you are totally involved in how this is provided. Also that it is of the highest quality and that you are treated with dignity and respect. We also ensure that we do all that we can to protect the most vulnerable people in our community from abuse and neglect.

What you have told us!

- *“No complaints found, found all Support Workers to be polite helpful and friendly”*
- *“Very happy with the service, they were very good to me”*
- *“I found staff all great, a very good service”*
- *“Good all round support”*
- *“The benefits were excellent. I can now comfortably walk around the flat and get to the lifts to go out. I have achieved all my goals.”*
- *“A very good service, helped me get back on my feet and doing things around the house.”*
- *“The team worked well with me to get me back on my feet. I feel much better than I did leaving hospital.”*
- *“I am able to look forward to looking after myself, with thanks to all the team who supported me.”*
- *“The only thing I wanted to be able to do is play bingo, I can now do that.”*

In April 2016 the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act comes into force. This places 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 in future years we will 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 that "can and can only" be met by the Local Authority (Source: Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014). This includes vulnerable older people, people with a mental illness and people who are not able to do things for themselves without support. Over the coming years we will see the range and volume of community based services increase in response to the requirements of the Act and to assist those of us that may need information, advice and assistance at an early stage. Therefore, over time we expect to see the number of people that the Social Services Department support go down.

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 your 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. Each scheme has a warden (or shares a warden) but these do not often live in the scheme. Sheltered Accommodation is either 50+ or 55+ (depending on the Housing Association) and provides an opportunity for Older People to live in a community with other people their own age to live independently.
- **Extra Care** - Ty Cwm Extra Care is part of a range of services that the council provides to help meet the needs of older people. Ty Cwm offers 60 units with a mix of one and two bedroom apartments. It can offer a different type of service to the traditional residential care homes by encouraging and promoting independent living. 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.



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.

Our Mental Health Service is made up of two teams of staff from the Council and partner agencies. The team support people who have serious or long-term mental health problems. These teams work to something called the 'Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010'. This piece of legislation requires that 90% of the people we work with have the appropriate care and treatment plans in place. I am pleased to report that we have achieved this target and we will continue to work hard to ensure this continues.

Did you know?

World Mental Health Day is part of a worldwide campaign to raise awareness and reduce stigma and discrimination around mental health issues. The event is organised by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council in partnership with Health, the Third Sector, Service Users and Carers. World Mental Health Day takes place every year on or around 10th October and is a time when people and organisations come together to promote greater public awareness and understanding of mental health, emotional wellbeing and mental illness. The event provides support for carers, friends and family of those who have mental ill health; as well as information and tips for all of us on how to maintain our own mental health and well-being.

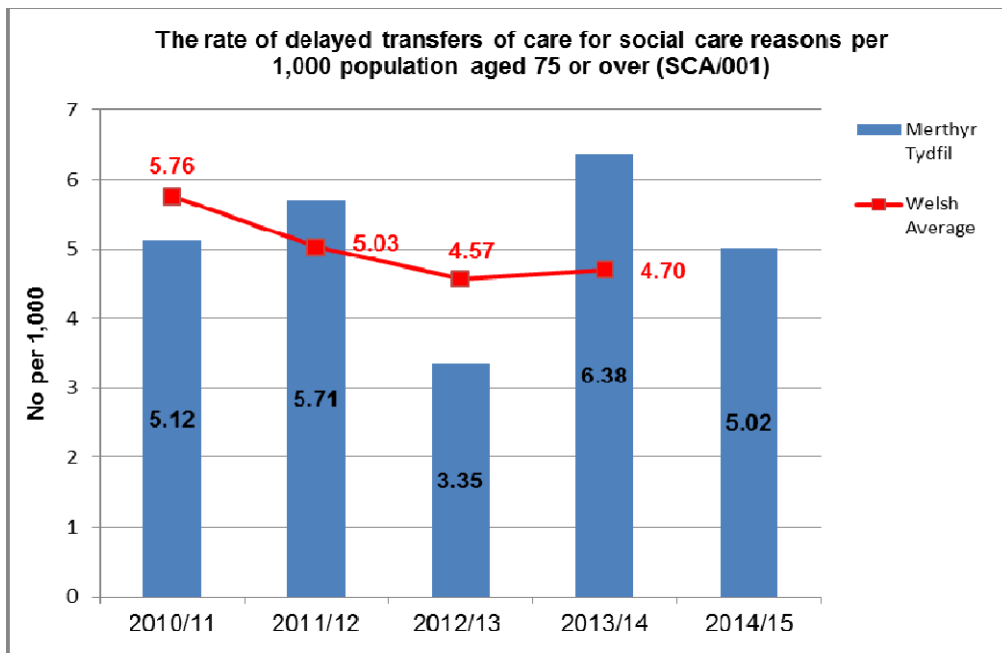
Last year, there were over 70 stall holders who took part in the World Mental Health Day event; providing advice, information and various activities – such as: complementary therapy taster sessions, workshops and a number of arts and crafts stalls with things to buy, see and do. The day was a success with around 300 people attending.

Overall, we believe our progress and performance this year has been reasonably good. We know this, not just because the information we collect tells us, but, also that organisations like the 'Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales' (CSSIW) have looked at what we do and are saying the same thing about our performance and there are still areas that we need to work harder on.

Some 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 worked hard this year with our Health colleagues to help people return home from hospital as quickly as possible. Our performance information tells us that we have improved as a result of this hard work but, we can still do better. What the graph on the next page shows is that the number of people who stay in hospital past the point at which they are well enough to go home has dropped compared to last year's performance and we are also doing better than most authorities in Wales – this is good. This is largely due to the services provided by our Initial Response and Reablement Teams who help people develop their confidence so that they can regain their independence. The number of people supported in this way has more than doubled over the last 5 years. Overall, half of the people who we support in this way do not need a long term service from us as a result.



Did you know?

96% of our adult population across the Merthyr Tydfil County Borough are living completely independently. 3.5% are receiving support to remain in their own homes and 0.5% are living in some kind of supported accommodation or residential care.

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 however; we are seeing a slight improvement. Last year, 74.8% of care plans were reviewed. This year 78.9% of care plans that should have been reviewed during the year were reviewed. Whilst we have seen an improvement, we know we need to do much better and will continue to work hard to achieve this.
- The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act will make it easier for people to have direct payments and to pay for a much wider range of services they may need. Although the numbers of people having direct payments has been steadily increasing, overall the take up of direct payments has slowed down. We are currently looking at ways in which we can help more people to use direct payments to pay for their support needs. As at 31st March 2015, there were 126 people receiving direct payments, of which, 72 are adults. This is something we need to improve on.

What else do we need to do during 2015 / 2016?

Whilst we continue to face many challenges, such as the ongoing financial pressures faced by the local authority and preparation for the implementation of the new 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:

- We aim to further improve our performance; especially in the areas that we are currently not doing so well;
- Along with all other Councils' we have been asked to make savings in the money we spend. In Adult Social Services we have so far managed to do this without affecting the quality of services we provide. Over the next year we will again be trying to do this, although; it may be difficult;
- We will be working with our colleagues in the Health Service, Voluntary Sector and Independent Sector to get ready for the new Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. This will come into force on 1st April 2016. This gives greater responsibility to the Local Authority to ensure that people have access to a wide range of services which could include social services we provide and services that are provided by the voluntary and independent sector;
- Over the next year we will be looking at new ways to meet the needs of people with dementia;
- We will be starting a number of new courses and groups specifically designed for people with a mental illness and / or personality disorder.

Services for Children



Children's Social Services is made up of a range of teams and work with a number of partners to make sure that all children and young people are kept safe, healthy and given every opportunity to grow and develop into independent adults.

Supporting children and young people is one of the greatest responsibilities that we have.

The work that we do in children's services focuses on improving outcomes for children, young people and their families. Over the last year we have changed the way in which we work to make sure that children, families and partner agencies are fully involved in developing plans that reflect the agreed outcomes for children, young people and their families.

We have developed an 'Enhanced Children in Need' Service which has been in place now for over a year. This service is based in the Merthyr Tydfil Family Centre (previously Gellideg) and provides a wide range of support to children / young people and their families. For example; we work with children and young people to get a better understanding of what life is like for them. We also work with the whole family to help them make any changes needed to keep children safe. 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. We would aim to provide advice and support at an early stage and where possible, prevent matters from getting worse.

This service is performing well. Overall, children / young people and their families have told us that they have found the support helpful in improving their knowledge, skills and ability to parent. Parents have also reported that they feel very much included in the process. Some have told us that their family relationships have improved; they have a better understanding about the needs of their children; they are able to keep their children safe; can communicate more effectively with each other and feel able to address challenges in a more effective way.

What you have told us!

- *"I enjoyed working with * it has helped me a lot with my problems" (young person)*
- *"He's helped me overcome my fear when I was in a wheelchair" (young person)*
- *"Thank you for everything you have made me happy" (young person)*
- *"I am now able to maintain my home and have good routines for my children. I am very happy and confident to undertake tasks myself. Excellent work" (parent)*
- *"I can deal with different types of issues a lot better by communicating with family" (parent)*
- *Thank you so much for everything you have done for me and my children I have changed my life around (parent)*

Although the Enhanced Children in Need Service (Merthyr Tydfil Family Centre) is performing well, we need to continue improving on the good work we have done so far. In April 2016 the 'Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014' will come into force. As part of the Act the Council will have a duty to become involved at an early stage to stop things from getting worse. The work being completed at the Merthyr Tydfil Family Centre will help us to do this.

Providing support to families at an early stage will continue to be one of our priorities moving forward. As a result, work has already begun to ensure that we work very closely with colleagues in the council to improve the way in which we provide services to those who require it when the need for support begins to emerge, with a view to preventing families in reaching crisis point.

Whilst there has been some success in supporting children, young people and their families at an early stage, there have been times when this was not possible. This was when a child or young person was at risk of neglect or abuse. When this happened, this resulted in the child / young person becoming looked after or part of the child protection process.

Demand for such services is high and is expected to continue to increase. We are working hard to reduce this and the ongoing work being carried out to help children, young people and their families when problems first arise will remain a priority for us so that, in time, we can reduce this number. On 31st March 2015 we had 105 children / young people on our Child Protection Register and 163 children / young people who are looked after.

Our Foster Carers play a very important role, by providing children and young people with a home and place in the community. As far as possible, we try to find a foster placement that will best meet the child or young person's needs to ensure that they settle well and fit in with their new family, remain in their community and continue to attend their own school. Over the last few years we have been successful in doing this. This year however we have seen an increase in the number of occasions when a child / young person have had to move to a different placement. During 2014 / 2015, 6.7% of looked after children had 3 or more placements, compared to a performance figure of 3.4% in 2013 / 2014. We are however performing better than the latest available Welsh average figure of 8.3%. Whilst our performance has dipped, it is important to note that the number of children / young people we are talking about is small and some of the moves have been for positive reasons such as moving to live with family, being adopted or moving to independence.

We have continued to build on our success in recruiting Foster Carers in 2014 / 2015. This year we have recruited an additional 8 foster carers and have assessed and approved 9 kinship (family and friends) foster carers. This has increased our number of foster carers to 53 and 17 kinship foster carers. This has meant that children and young people have been provided with more choice in where they live.

Did you know?

Young people can stay living with their foster carers after they reach 18 under a scheme called 'When I am Ready'. This means that they can plan their move to independent living in their own time with the support and security of their foster home.

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 5 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. 95% of our young care leavers have a plan of this kind in place.

Currently our Leaving Care service is provided by Barnardos. Once a young person has left our care, we take our duty to 'keep in touch' with our care leavers seriously, we will keep in touch with young care leavers as often as they wish until they are 21, and up until they are 25 if they are still in education and beyond this age in some circumstances. We will always make ourselves available to give advice to any care leaver at whatever age if they approach us. We have always been very good at this, however; this year we have seen a drop in the number of new care leavers who have wanted us to keep in touch. It is important to note that this relates to a very small cohort of young people (13 out of 15 young people have wanted us to keep in touch).

To help us provide the best possible service we can, the Permanence Service has worked hard to redevelop 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.

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. At the moment, we are currently supporting 84 children and young people with a disability.

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.

In July 2014 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. We provide 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. This year 12 young people have come into the service compared with the Welsh average of 77 people. We have also been successful 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 2 young people received a custodial sentence. Re-offending rates in Merthyr Tydfil however are still high compared to the Welsh average; although, it is important to note that this is due to a small number of young people.



Despite the challenges we are currently facing, overall, in Children's Services we are generally performing well in a number of areas. We recognise however that some of our performance is not as good as it could be. This is mainly due to the capacity of the teams and how well we record things in some areas. We are working hard to put this right and have put a number of arrangements in place, such as recruiting more staff to cover vacancies and improving the way we record information.

Listed below are a few examples of what we are currently doing well and what we need to do better.

Our Performance – What are we doing well?

- 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 / 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 (98.4%) were reviewed on time.
- We have been successful in increasing the number of our foster carers. This means that children and young people have more choice in where they go to live and where possible can remain within their own community.
- 93% of the children, young people and their families who we have worked with in the 'Enhanced Children in Need' service have told us that the support they have received has been good, very good or excellent.
- When we are approached for support for children / young people and their families, we try to provide services at an early stage to make sure the issues they are facing do not get worse. We have seen a reduction in the number of children / young people and their families who have had to come back to us for further support – this is good. This would suggest that we are making the right decisions and in a timely way.

What could we do better?

- Since 2009 / 2010, we have got better each year at finding more suitable and stable placements for our looked after children. As a result, we have seen less children and young people having to find alternative placements and moving around less. Last year we were the best in Wales with only 3.4% (6 out of 175) of our looked after children having three or more moves during the year. This year however our performance has not been quite so good (6.7%, which is 11 out of 163 looked after children). Whilst we are working hard to make sure looked after children do not have lots of placement moves, it is important to note that some of the moves were for positive reasons; such as the young person moving to independence, moving to live with family or being adopted.
- When a child / young person first come to us for support we are expected to do an assessment of their needs within 7 working days – this is called an initial assessment. Another, more detailed assessment (core assessment) will then be carried out after 35 working days. Performance is poor with only 57% of initial assessments and 81% of core assessments being done on time. We will review our practice and work hard to improve on this performance.

What else do we need to do during 2015 / 2016?

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

- Continue with our work to improve the way we provide services to young people and their families so that they are provided with the support they need at an early stage.
- We will work hard to improve our performance in the areas where we are not doing so well and make sure that the things we are good at stay that way.
- We will build on the good work we have done so far to ensure children, young people and their families continue to be provided with support they need at an early stage to help stop issues they face from getting worse.
- We will encourage and look to improve the number of children and families who are involved in developing and agreeing their plans and outcomes.
- We will continue to work with our partners to improve services.
- We will continue to look at ways to save money, without it affecting the quality of our services. The Looked After Children Service will remain a challenge for us as we have a duty to safeguarding and protect children and young people.
- We will continue 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 continue to work on developing a support strategy for families with disabled children.
- We will continue to improve our arrangements to ensure young people entering adulthood have their needs met appropriately.

Services for Carers



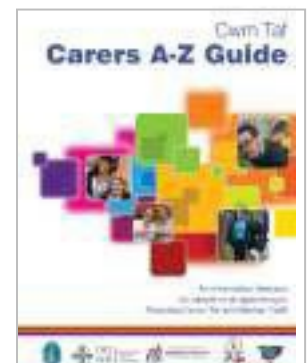
Being a carer can be a rewarding job, however; at times the role can also be quite demanding. Getting the right information, advice and support is therefore important.

To help you in your role as a carer, a wide range of support is available. This includes:

- The Council's Social Services Department, when the person you care for comes to us for support or if we are already providing them with a service.
- Talking to your local 'Carers Information and Development Officer'.
- Through the support of local groups who have set up the local 'Carers Network'. These include: Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil, Alzheimer's Society, Hafal, Crossroads, Merthyr and the Valleys Mind and Communities First groups.
- Information about the services available and how to access them can also be found in the 'Cwm Taf Carers A-Z Guide', which was produced by Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taf Councils and the Cwm Taf University Health Board. This booklet can be found on the 'Carers' section in our website (www.merthyr.gov.uk) or on our partner websites. Alternatively, you can speak with the 'Carers Information and Development Officer' on (01685) 353907 to find out how you can get a copy.

What you have told us!

"The Carers Booklet is excellent as everything needed, contacts, phone number and information is in one place" (Carer)



Having the opportunity to discuss your needs as a carer is important. If you come to Social Services for support; we will firstly speak with you to find out what is going well and what are the difficulties or pressures you are facing. This is known as an assessment. By doing an assessment, this will help us provide you with the right information, advice and support you need to carry out your role.

The Social Services Department aims to encourage as many carers as possible to have an assessment of their needs. Unfortunately, there are not as many carers taking up this offer or receiving services as we would like. This is a similar story for a number of councils across Wales. Our current information tells us that as at 31st March 2015, 210 out of 528 (39.8%) of carers known to Social Services agreed to have an assessment or a review of their needs. Of these, 69% (145 carers) went on to receive a service.

We will continue to work with our carers and partners to improve on this performance and find out the reason why carers are not taking up the offer of assessments or services.

If you have had a carers assessment and have been offered support, then you may be able to have a Direct Payment. Instead of social services providing you with support, a Direct Payment (which is a cash payment) will be made directly to you so that you have the control, flexibility and choice to arrange the support you feel would be of most benefit to you, when and how often you need it.

We have continued to encourage people to take up the offer of a direct payment and have seen an increase in the number of people receiving this payment. At 31st March 2015, a total of 126 people (adults and children) receiving a social care service through us had a Direct Payment. Although we have seen a steady increase, we want to see more people using Direct Payments as a way of getting the support they need.

In addition to the support we directly provide in Social Services; support is also available through your local Carers Network. The Network is made up of Local Authority, Health Board, voluntary organisations and most importantly, the carers themselves. Over the last year, support provided by the Carers Network has continued to make excellent progress in increasing the number of carers that they have identified and who are now receiving a service. The Network (including Social Services) is in contact with and supports over 900 carers in our community. Some of the organisations that are members of the Carers Network are funded by the Council to provide specific services to all types of carers. An example of this is the Barnardos Young Carers Service.

Barnardos are funded by us to provide a service to Young Carers in our area. The support provided to young carers is good. The Barnardos Young Carers Service is currently supporting 65 young carers aged from 5 – 18 years of age at any one time. The good work of the Carers Network has identified a further 55 Young Carers in schools who we have worked with to understand their needs.

Overall, the services provided to carers across the County Borough are good; and the voice of the carer is regularly heard and listened to when planning support services. We recognise however; that there is still some work to do to identify more carers (those we currently do not know about), get a better understanding of carers needs and what we need to do to continue improving the range and quality of services that are useful to them.

What you have told us!

“Support can be through education as well as health”. (Parent Carer)

“Parents don’t recognise, or put themselves forward as Carers”. (Parent Carer)

“Parents receive little or no offer of support at the time of diagnosis of their child”. (Parent Carer)

“You can talk to the people in the organisation, all the staff are helpful and the information and support they provide is excellent”. (Adult Carer)

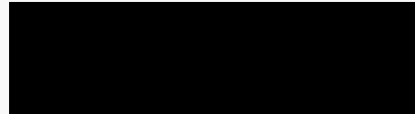
“The organisation saved my life and rescued me from the caring situation I found myself in”. (Adult Carer)

“If facilities were lost, the implication would be horrendous”. (Adult Carer)

Did you know?

If you are a parent or carer of a child / young adult; or you are a young carer – please visit the ‘Think Family – Think Parenting’ website at www.thinkfamilyparenting.org.uk to access a wide range of useful information and contacts.

Below is a copy of a letter we received from a Parent Carer about the support and services they received.



For the attention of Social Services Merthyr Tydfil

My late son [REDACTED] received service from your Department for 16 years and I would like to take this opportunity of providing feedback on the quality of care and support he received.

[REDACTED] had a progressive neurological condition which became evident during his teenage years. At that time he was independent in life however over the following 35 years his condition progressed to [REDACTED] losing all his skills, was unable to walk and required support in every aspect of his life. He required 24 hour support as he could not attend to any of his needs.

When it became necessary to have external support when [REDACTED] was 37 years of age, Social Services became involved and as his condition deteriorated the Department ensured his services changed to meet the new requirements. [REDACTED] needed support in all areas of personal care, mobility and community access and staff from Social Services assisted him with all these day to day tasks.

The staff who attended the house always met my high standards of care for Michael, they were professional, on time and displayed respect and dignity. They, without exception became an important part of both Michael's and my life; always wanting the best for both of us and they were so very supportive. Without them we would have faced extreme difficulties.

It was clear to me that staff were well supported by the Department as it was reflected in their skills. They were well trained and experienced in all aspects of service delivery to clients.

Receiving services from the Department was made easier for me with Management and staff at the office who approachable and good communicators especially keeping me up to date. On the rare occasion I needed to query Michael's hours they would work with me to achieve the best outcome.

When a person requires external support the services they receive cannot be looked at in isolation from family. I benefited from [REDACTED] receiving support from Social Services as I felt confident with the staff and the support from the Department. This gave me strength during [REDACTED] illness and his passing.

My testimony to Social Services is “ a well managed Department with a professional caring team who pull out all the stops to support the client and his / her family to increase their wellbeing”.

Regards

[REDACTED]

7th March 2015

Our Performance – What are we doing well?

- Our information shows that the Carers Network has made excellent progress in increasing the number of carers that they have identified and are now receiving a service.
- Excellent progress is being made in partnership with Social Regeneration, schools and Barnardos to identify and support a greater number of Young Carers.
- Partnership working across the Merthyr Tydfil Carers Network is excellent. The Network is good at supporting and encouraging carers to get involved in developing services and support that is important to them. The needs of local carers have been used to develop the 'Merthyr Tydfil Carers Strategy'.
- This year we have been successful in identifying more Carers Champions. There are currently 28 Carers Champions across the Council; which includes Councillors, library staff, and social workers. There are also champions in some of the local sheltered accommodation settings and 6 GP practices. The role of the Carers Champions is to promote awareness of the role of carers and to support and raise awareness of carers issues.

What could we do better?

- Although we have traditionally been good in social services at offering adult carers an assessment of their needs, this year we have seen a drop in our performance (from 100% last year to 85% at the end of March 2015). This could be due to a number of things; including the way we record our information. As a result, this has also affected the number of carers who have taken up the offer of an assessment and gone on to receive a service from us. Performance in this area is not as good as we would like and will continue to work hard to improve this.

What else do we need to do during 2015 / 2016?

- We will be carrying out some work to understand the reasons why there are not that many carers taking up the offer of an assessment or support. We will try to find out if their needs are being met in another way;
- We will review the current arrangements for recording the number of assessments undertaken. This will help us improve how we record carers information and ensure we know what the needs are for all individual carers known by social services;
- We will continue to promote and look to improve the number of people who access Direct Payments;
- We will work through the Carers Network partners to promote the benefits of participating in the assessment process, and encourage carers to accept recognition for their support in the Caring role.

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.

To make sure that you receive the best service possible, our staff have access to a wide range of training which helps them to do their job better. Some groups of staff; for example social workers, are required to do training regularly to keep up their professional registration. This year, we have run 370 courses and received 3933 nominations for training and 3820 places were offered. Most of the courses we run are open to voluntary and independent sector, carers and other social care organisations. Every year we are set targets by Welsh Government and this year we have exceeded all those set for us.

Approximately 60% of the services we provide are through contracts with independent sector providers. Our Contracts Team make sure that we are only buying services which are good and offer the best value for money for the people of Merthyr Tydfil. Currently we have 270 in place for the services we commission. The Contracts Team also regularly visit providers to make sure the quality of the service they provide is good. This year we did 885 monitoring visits.

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. The time we have taken to complete our financial assessments is not quite as good as it could be and is slightly lower than our performance last year. This is due to there being less staff now working in the team and the time it takes on occasions to receive the information we need to carry out an assessment. Despite this, we are continuing to work hard to improve our performance. This team also looks after our arrangements for Direct Payments and up until 23rd January 2015 also dealt with Student Loans (which is now dealt with by Welsh Government).

It is always important to hear when you are happy with what we have done or when things don't go the way you expect them to or when we haven't done what we said we would do. Our Compliments and Complaints Service is there to support you in this. We work hard to resolve complaints as quickly as possible but sometimes it takes longer than we would like. We always use independent people to investigate the more complicated complaints we receive. We have found that this works well. This year, we successfully resolved 86% of our complaints when you first came to us with your concerns (Stage One). The time taken to resolve stage one complaints however is not as good as we would have liked with only 51% of complaints resolved in 10 working days. Whilst we do our very best to resolve complaints within 10 working days, we sometimes need to take a little longer so that we can look into and resolve matters properly.

Our Performance – What are we doing well?

- A high percentage of our managers and staff across residential and support in the home services (Domiciliary Care and Initial Response Services) have a recognised qualification and have received appropriate training for their job.

Did you know?

- **100% of our Residential and Domiciliary Care Managers have achieved their target qualification.**
- **90% (74) of our residential staff are qualified, 5% are working towards achieving their qualification and 5% do not currently hold their target qualification.**
- **95% of our Support in the Home (Domiciliary Care and Initial Response Services) staff are qualified and the remaining 5% do not currently hold or are working towards their target qualification.**

- All of the services we commission have an appropriate contract in place which is reviewed in accordance with an agreed timetable.
- The amount of complaints (86%) that we have successfully sorted out at stage one of the complaints process is good.

What could we do better?

- 19% of our Foster Carers currently hold a relevant qualification compared with 51% last year and 5% are currently working towards this qualification. The reason for this is due to 4 Foster Carers leaving the service and the significant increase in the number of new Foster Carers that we have successfully recruited as part of our ongoing recruitment campaign during the year.
- Although we successfully resolved 86% of complaints at stage one, we need to improve on the number of complaints we resolve within 10 working days.
- We need to improve on the number of financial assessments for residential care that we carry out on time. This year, 78% of assessments were carried out within 20 working days.
- We also need to improve on the number of new financial assessments for support within the home that we carry out on time. This year, 82% were done one time.

What else do we need to do during 2015 / 2016?

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

- Next year we will be working with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Social Services Department to see whether staff training and development can be done more effectively across the two Authorities.
- We will also be strengthening our contract monitoring arrangements in order to ensure that the people of Merthyr Tydfil continue to receive high quality services.

- To ensure our staff are provided with the necessary skills to do their job well, we will continue to provide them with a wide range of training opportunities as part of our annual training programme.
- We will carry out a review of the systems and processes in our Finance and Assessment Team so that we can improve on the time it takes for us to assess people's ability to pay for their care.
- Whilst we take all complaints seriously and do all we can to resolve matters; we need to do more work to understand why things have gone wrong so that we can improve the services we provide or arrange on your behalf.

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:

Telephone: (01685) 724693

Email: ACRF@merthyr.gov.uk

Write to: **Annual Council Reporting Framework**
Social Services Department
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Civic Centre
Castle Street
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AN