



MERTHYR TYDFIL  
County Borough Council  
Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol  
MERTHYR TUDFUL

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

**Community Services Directorate**

# **Annual Report on 'Social Services'**

**2013 / 2014**

**This Report is available in other  
languages and formats upon request.**

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# Index



	<b>Page</b>
1. Welcome from Director of Community Services	2 - 3
2. Safeguarding Children and Adults	4 - 9
3. Services for Adults	10 - 18
4. Services for Children and their Families	19 – 29
5. How do I access further information	30

# Welcome to my annual report on social services in Merthyr Tydfil.

As the Council's 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.

Social Services in Merthyr Tydfil aim to provide a range of services which are responsive and well co-ordinated in protecting and supporting the population as a whole and vulnerable people in particular.

As a directorate we aim to support the delivery of the Council's priorities by helping people in Merthyr Tydfil to maximise their potential, be free from poverty, be independent and healthy, and to live in supportive and resilient communities. This is consistent with the priorities set out in the Single Integrated Plan for Merthyr Tydfil 2013 / 2017 (details of which can be found further on in this report); and is particularly important in the current financial climate.

I am pleased to report that in 2013 / 2014 inspectors continue to feel that our management of your services are good, and that we have continued to focus on improving the delivery of our front line services. Inspectors also made positive comments about the way we commission services on your behalf, following their review in January 2014.

Overall, our performance in 2013/2014 has remained generally good. Some of our achievements include:

- Maintaining very high performance in the national safeguarding performance indicators, and consistently being above the Welsh average.
- We have continued to ensure that safeguarding children and vulnerable adults remains a high priority for Merthyr Tydfil CBC (as set out in the Single Integrated Plan and the work of the Local Service Board).
- The opening of our two new care homes.
- The continued success of our Initial Response and Reablement Services.
- The launch of the new enhanced Child In Need service operating out of Gellideg Family Centre.
- The continued success in recruiting new Foster Carers.

Welsh Government has 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. In my role as Director of Social Services, I have a key part to play in this important initiative by ensuring that we are effectively contributing to the objectives outlined in the framework.

As with all public services, we continue to face significant financial challenges. Whilst it is impossible, within the current climate to support and maintain current spending levels, every effort has been made to seek to minimize the impact of the current financial situation on the most critical services that we provide and to recognise the need to address demographic pressures where possible. In order to continue to meet the needs of our community we will need to continue to transform services and to respond to the challenges set out in the new Social

Services and Wellbeing Bill. This will require us not just to do things differently but to do different things and as a result stop doing some things. In moving forward we will continue to drive on this Council's priorities by helping people in Merthyr Tydfil to maximise their potential, be free from poverty, be independent and healthy, and to live in supportive and resilient communities. It is important to note that, despite the scale of financial pressures The Council has again sought to allocate additional resources, where absolutely necessary, to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. As you will be aware, we have recently consulted 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 front-line services can continue to operate effectively and meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our community.

Our service priorities for 2014/15 include:

- Continue to work together to make sure that all our staff are properly trained and understand their responsibilities for safeguarding vulnerable people;
- To continue to improve how all agencies work to ensure that adults and children at risk from significant harm are protected and kept safe.
- Improve integrated support to older adults together with our key partners across Local Government, Health and Third sector.
- The continued development of integrated health and social care services so that you receive the services you need in a joined up way;
- Commissioning a range of services that help you remain as independent as possible;
- Continue to deliver sustainable services that improve the well being of children and families with complex needs.

I have kept the structure of the report the same as last year because you have told us that it was helpful and easy to read. Therefore, the headings are: '**Safeguarding**', '**Services for Adults**' and '**Services for Children and their Families**'. Each section will give you a picture of how things have gone over the past year; provide a summary of what each service intends to do this year, and how it will make a difference to people's lives.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the continued dedication and professionalism of our staff and partners that help support the most vulnerable in our community.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Isingrini'.

**Giovanni Isingrini**  
Director of Community Services

# Safeguarding

## How effective are we at safeguarding vulnerable children and adults from significant harm?



**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:

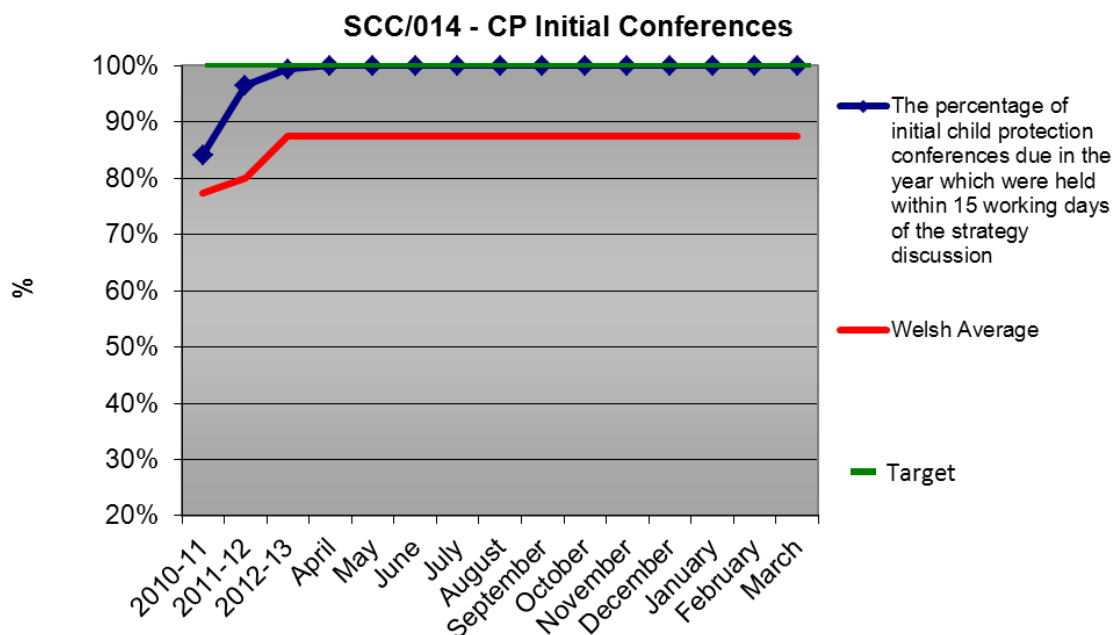
- Children under the age of 18;
- People with physical, visual, hearing or learning disability;
- People with mental health issues;
- The elderly, frail or ill;
- Those suffering from any form of domestic abuse.

### ***Did You Know?***

Over the last year, the Safeguarding Team has worked closely with a range of staff and partners to ensure that:

- When we appoint new staff, we are satisfied that they are safe to work with vulnerable adults, children and young people.
- Employees, elected members, schools, and partner organisations have continued to receive access to information, training and support to recognise the signs of abuse and understand their safeguarding responsibilities.
- We continue to effectively monitor the quality of our practice, to ensure it continues to improve and is of the highest possible standard.
- We consult with and listen to the views of adults, children and their families in order to help us improve the way we work and quality of support we provide.

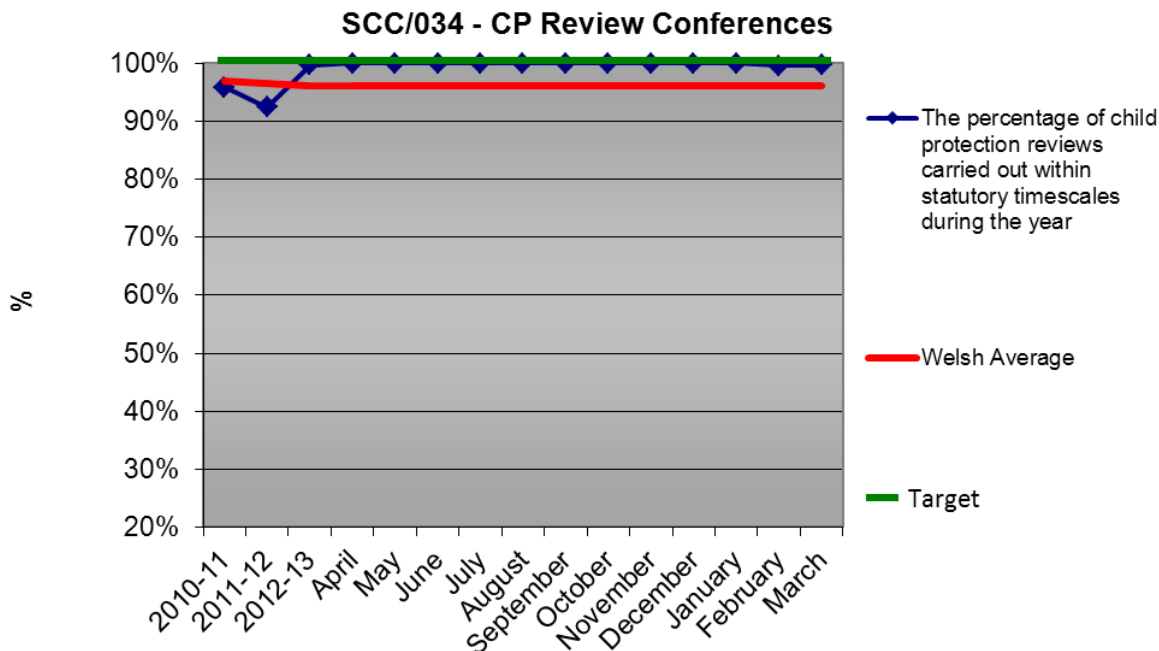
Over the last year we have again continued to maintain or improve our performance, and remain above or comparable with the Welsh average.



Our performance in relation to the percentage of initial child protection conferences that were held on time is good. During 2013 / 2014 our performance was 100%. In actual numbers 70 conferences have been held, relating to 130 children and young people.

Since 2010 / 2011, our performance has improved year on year, and continues to be above the latest Welsh average figure (2012 / 2013) of 87.4%.

All children on the Child Protection Register have a Child Protection Plan in place. It is a requirement that plans are reviewed at regular intervals to find out how well the plan is working, and to ensure that the child / children continue to be safeguarded from harm. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, 99.7% of children on the Child Protection Register at that time had their plans reviewed on time. In comparison with last year, we have maintained our performance and remain above the Welsh average.



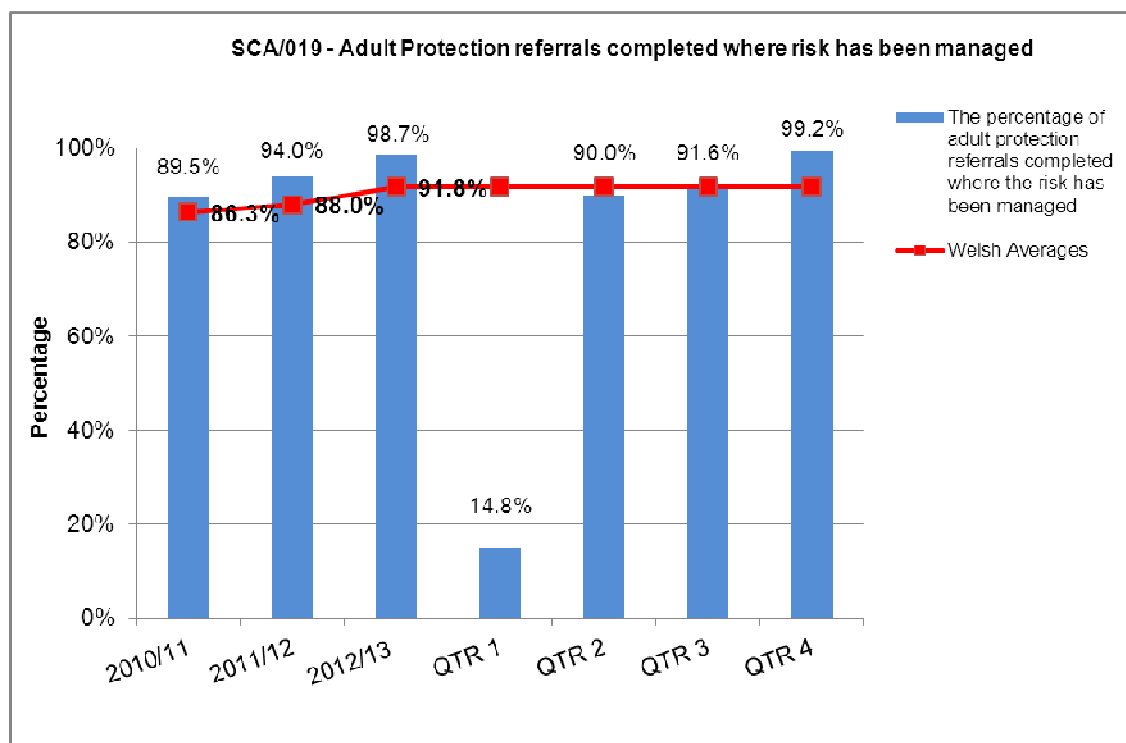
## Did You Know?

Did you know that we **all** have a responsibility for safeguarding? Safeguarding is **everyone's** business!

If you see or hear something that makes you feel uneasy, you probably need to mention it. Safeguarding is not rocket-science; its common sense. If you have concerns about a child / young person or vulnerable adult, please contact Social Services for advice.

In relation to vulnerable adults, the percentage of referrals completed where the risk has been managed, our end of year performance was 99.2%. This is an improvement on our performance during 2012 / 2013 (98.7%), and well above the latest available Welsh average (2012 / 2013) figure of 91.8%. 141 vulnerable adult referrals were closed during the year. In 8 cases there were outcomes of "no action" or "not applicable" - these referrals have not been counted for the performance indicator. Out of the remaining 133 referrals, 132 have outcomes that indicate the risk has been reduced / removed or an adult protection plan was put in place.





Across the Cwm Taf area, there are two high level, strategic, multi-agency management boards: **Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board (CTSCB)** and **Cwm Taf Safeguarding Adult Board (CTSAB)**. The CTSCB and CTSAB are responsible for co-ordinating and overseeing the work of its partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults.

Over the past year the Boards have ensured the continued improvement of multi-agency practice, by providing staff with up-to-date procedures and guidance, access to a range of training opportunities, and developed improved processes for quality assuring practice through Quality Assurance and Standards Groups.

### ***Did You Know?***

The Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board and Cwm Taf Safeguarding Adult Board are currently in the process of developing a website in consultation with relevant community groups. The website is aimed at informing the community of the role they can play in safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The website will go live Autumn 2014.



## Priorities for Improvement and Change

The areas for improvement during 2014 / 2015 detailed below support the following priorities set out in the Single Integrated Plan for Merthyr Tydfil 2013 – 2017. :

Merthyr Tydfil Single Integrated Plan Priority Outcome	Merthyr Tydfil Single Integrated Plan Priority Area
People, who live and work in Merthyr Tydfil, are supported to enjoy a healthier and better quality of life.	<b>Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Children-</b> Children and Young People in need of support receive services to meet their needs.
People enjoy a vibrant, attractive safe and sustainable place in which to live, work, play and visit.	<b>Safeguarding Vulnerable People –</b> Greater public awareness of the need to protect vulnerable adults and children from harm.

Areas For Improvement During 2014 / 2015	
<b>Priority: All employees, elected members (Councillors) and service providers continue to be supported to understand their safeguarding responsibilities and are accountable for their safeguarding responsibilities.</b>	
<b>The outcomes for people will be:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That all employees and elected members of the council have been recruited in a safe way, received appropriate training, and are aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.</li> </ul>	
<b>Priority: Vulnerable adults and children at risk of significant harm and other relevant people are consulted and listened to and their views influence future service developments and inform how they are supported.</b>	
<b>The outcomes for people will be:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That vulnerable adults, children at risk of significant harm and their parents / carers are included in any decisions and plans that involve them.</li> <li>• Together with the Children and Adult Safeguarding Boards, we will ask vulnerable adults, children at risk and their families about their experience of our safeguarding services, and will ensure that any necessary improvements to practice are made.</li> </ul>	

**Priority: Vulnerable adults and children at risk from significant harm are protected and kept safe from significant harm and repeat significant harm.**

**The outcomes for people will be:**

- We will ensure there is improved information sharing in place; better decision making arrangements, and a more consistent, timely and unified multi-agency response to concerns about a child or vulnerable adult by the continued work to create a Cwm Taf Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.
- Continue to improve multi-agency practice by ensuring that staff has up to date protocols and guidance.
- Continue to improve multi-agency practice by ensuring that we deliver a training and awareness raising programme.
- Continue to improve multi-agency practice by undertaking quality assurance work and ensuring that there is effective continuous learning from this.

**Priority: Members of the community are supported to be aware of the role and responsibilities that they have and how they can contribute to safeguard vulnerable adults and children at risk of significant harm.**

**The outcomes for people will be:**

- Access to information to inform the community of the role they can play in safeguarding children / young people and vulnerable adults together with the Safeguarding Children and Adult Boards.

# Services for Adults

## How well are we delivering services for Adults?



**Our aim in Adult Services is: Supporting people to live independent, healthy and fulfilled lives'. We achieve this by providing support to people to stay in their own homes, wherever possible; instead of going into residential care.**

In order to do this we are:

- Providing services which help to prevent loss of independence and isolation, and support people to maintain their quality of life.
- Making sure that support for rehabilitation and reablement is readily available.
- Encouraging the use of direct payments.
- Tailoring support to individual needs and outcomes.
- Supporting people to be actively involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of their service.

The Home for Life strategy provided the direction of travel for adult social services and it has enabled us to develop services which will compliment the new Social Services and Well Being Bill when it is finalised. The structure of Adult Social Care was revised during 2012 / 2013 to support the outcome of promoting independence and realigning all enabling services into one "front door" for customers.

Despite providing services to prevent the loss of independence, we have seen a continued rise in the number of people supported in care homes to 221 people. This is well above our end of year figure of 206 for 2012 / 2013. Whilst there has been an increase in overall placements, it is important to note that the needs of these people have significantly increased so that the greatest demand is to meet the need for those people with nursing needs. This is because many more people are being supported in their own homes for longer, and when they need accommodation their needs are far greater.

## Responding to Need

The reconfiguration of adult services in 2012/13 created a single team of Social Workers to provide a specialist support service to those adults with complex, long term needs. The team works alongside the Initial Support Service to ensure a seamless transfer of care for those adults who need ongoing support. A large percentage of the teams work is supporting the discharge of patients from hospital and to minimise any delays. The creation of the initial and specialist support services has resulted in Social Workers no longer undertaking non-complex work, allowing them to spend more time with people who have the most complex needs and safeguarding the most vulnerable clients.

### ***Did You Know?***

We have a contract in place with every service provider with whom we commission services. These contracts include requirements for safeguarding vulnerable people and ensuring value for money.

We have developed a new Provider Performance Protocol which sets out how we will monitor the services we commission.

### **Health Park**

One of our priorities for 2012/13 was to reconfigure day services and relocate some of our services to the new Kier Hardie Health Park. This was completed in October 2012 and the move has resulted in learning disability day services being co-located with the health service clinical team. Benefits include access to clinical staff during attendance at the centre for assessment, treatment and routine medical tests, removing the need for home visits and significantly increasing response times.

We have successfully restructured our services to enable us to respond more effectively to the future increasing demand for services within the community. The structure was also designed to allow us to develop future integrated services with health based on the locality of Merthyr Tydfil. This is aimed at improving the way we work together to provide our services and can be demonstrated by the range of services that we now have at the new Kier Hardie Health Park facility.

In January 2013, Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) chose Merthyr Tydfil CBC as one of five council's they wished to visit as part of a national review of adult commissioning for social care in Wales. The focus of the review was to examine how effective we have been in commissioning care and support for people with dementia and their carers. The outcome of the review was positive, and highlighted a number of areas of good practice; including the Keir Hardie Health Park.

The Initial Support Service, which includes the Home Care Service, Reablement, and Community Occupational Therapy effectively supports people to regain independence through the provision of enabling services. A number of the Initial Support Services are also located at Keir Hardie Health Park along with the Community District Nurses. This means that we have been able to improve our communication both between the social services teams and our health colleagues which helps us with the way that we work together to provide you with a better service.

We have also transferred the Telecare house and the aids and equipment demonstration facilities from MIDEAC to the Health Park. You can visit and try out the wide range of equipment that is available. This includes other specialist hearing and visual equipment.

A review of the Reablement and Initial Response Service was undertaken in February 2013 by Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) as part of the review of co-located services at the Health Park. The review reported back that when they asked service users about how effective they thought the service was, they reported a positive impact on their quality of life.

### ***Did You Know?***

The Mental Health (Wales) Measure was introduced in 2010.

The aim of the Measure is to improve the support available to people in Wales in assessment, care and treatment of all people with mental health problems, whether they are in hospital or in the community. It applies to all age groups – children, adults of working age and older people.

In partnership with the University Health Board and Voluntary Sector; examples of what we have achieved so far include:

- The setting up of a Local Primary Care Mental Health Support Service, based at Keir Hardie Health Park; that provides a range of early support options, as well as referral on to Secondary Care (more specialist) Services if required;
- 61% of Service Users now have a Care and Treatment Plan. We are aiming to improve on this during 2014 / 2015, and have set ourselves a target of 90%
- Advocacy services are in place for individuals who are in hospital, if required.

The Psychiatry of Old Age team has moved to their new team base at the Health Park along with the Community Mental Health Team. This means that they now share office space with the Assertive Outreach Team and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. The Dementia Day Service is also located with the day hospital which again will improve communication between these services and enable the way these teams work together to provide you with a better service. We continue to work very closely with Cwm Taf Health Board who has been successful in obtaining extra resources to strengthen community based services to support people to remain at home. These have been used to increase therapy resources within the Reablement team in Merthyr Tydfil.

### ***Did You Know?***

Every year we review the training needs of our staff, and design training programmes to ensure that when a social worker visits you they will have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to help you remain as independent as you can.

During 2013 / 2014 we organised 355 training courses, offering 3402 places to our staff and partner agencies.

### **Accommodation**

The two new care homes in Gurnos Estate and Treharris were opened in December 2013. Each of these new homes are able to accommodate 32 residents with a range of different needs. The two new homes have been built to the latest standards (which can be found on the Care and Social Services Inspectorate (CSSIW) website). All rooms are spacious, light and have en-suite facilities, ensuring that residents live in high quality, homely accommodation.

### *New Residential Home, Treharris.*



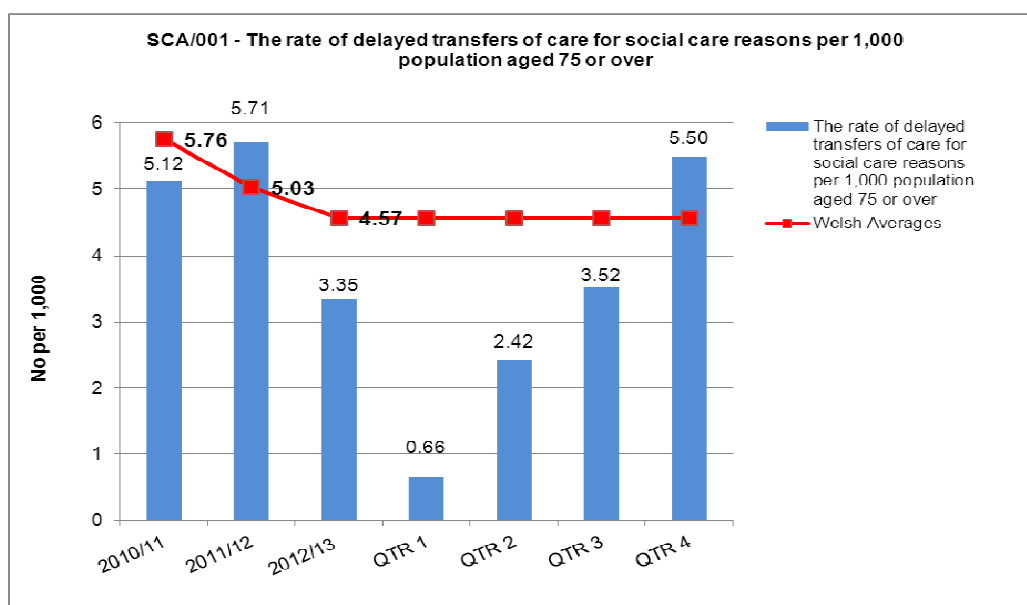
The development of the extra care facility has improved provision for Older People in the County Borough. The scheme has prevented individuals from entering long term institutionalised settings and has allowed individuals to 'step down' from these settings to live more independently. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 the Ty Cwm Extra Care was fully occupied, housing 66 residents.

The "Shared Lives Scheme" is an Adult Placement Scheme which places vulnerable adults with Carers in local communities giving them the opportunity to be part of a family. During 2013 / 2014 10 people were placed in this way. The adult may have a learning or physical disability, they may have mental health problems or be an older person who wants to live in a homely environment, but cannot manage on their own. There are a further 16 people who are waiting to be matched with families.

## Promoting Independence

### Delayed Transfer of Care

A delayed transfer of care – also known as "bed blocking" – arises when a person who no longer needs hospital treatment is unable to leave and return to their own home or to a social care setting such as a residential home.





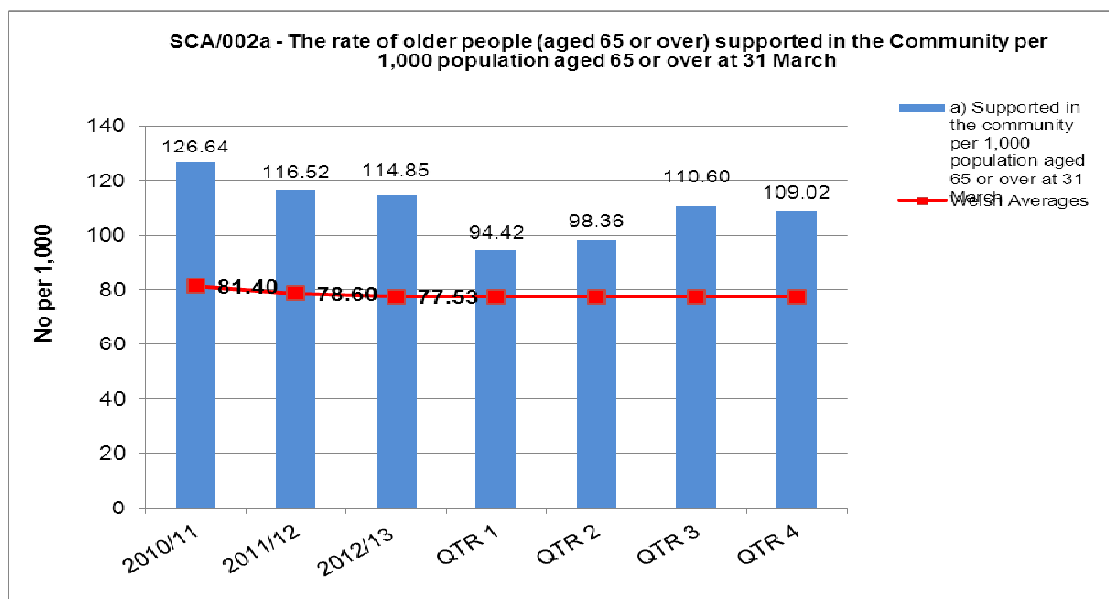
Due to a number of factors, including a temporary increase in the number of people requiring nursing and residential care, the closure of a privately run nursing home (reducing the number of bed spaces available locally) - our performance for the year (2013 / 2014) has increased to 5.5 delays per 1,000 population (aged 75+) compared with our end of year performance figure (3.35) for 2012 / 2013; and are above the latest available Welsh average figure of 4.57 (2012 / 2013). Social Work staff will continue to work closely with the Health Board Discharge Liaison Team to ensure discharges take place as timely as possible.

Where possible, our Reablement Service helps patients who are in hospital to return home as soon as they can. Demand for these services can fluctuate considerably however, there is an overall upward trend for support to remain at home.

### Did You Know?

During 2013 / 2014, our Initial Response service supported 420 people, of which, 213 regained their independence and a further 40 regained a level of independence.

When compared with other Authorities, Merthyr Tydfil is one of the highest performing in terms of the rate of older people (aged 65 or over) supported in the community, our performance for 2013 / 2014 (113.74) has decreased slightly in comparison with our performance in 2012 / 2013 (114.85); despite this, we remain well above the latest Welsh average figure of 77.53.



During the year 2013/14 of all the people who we know and provide support to, 88.99% are supported in their own home. This is a good thing and well above the Welsh average.

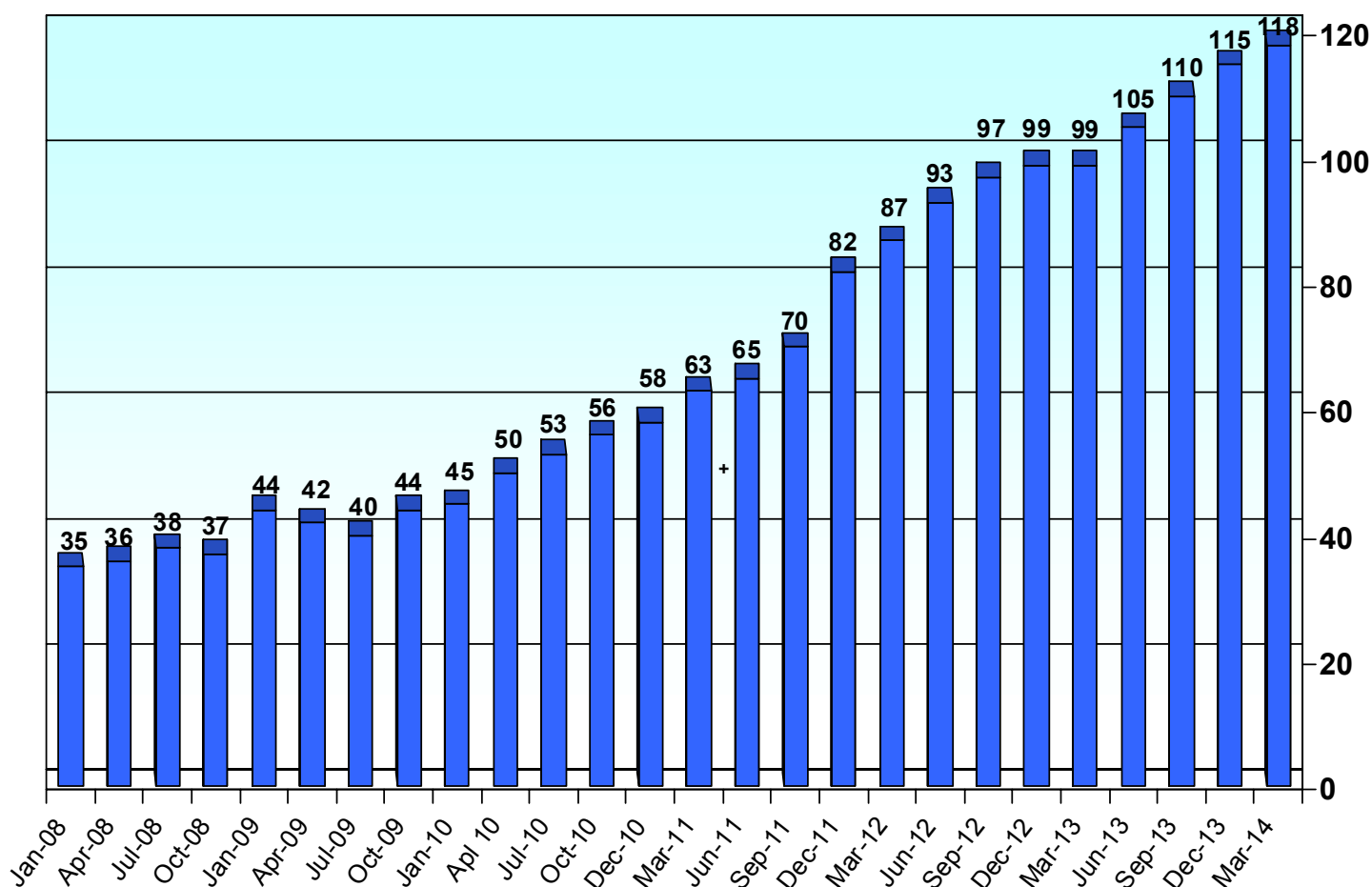


## Direct Payments Scheme

Direct Payments provides the means for individuals to purchase and personally manage support services by employing the people or organisations that they choose. It means they can design the support to best suit them.

Service Users who have requested a Direct Payment in lieu of services continues to grow across both Adult and Children's Services. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2013 there were 98 people in total receiving a direct payment. By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, this figure had increased to 118 with another 17 referrals currently being processed. The table below shows the continued growth in the scheme since January 2008.

### Growth in the users of the Direct Payments Support Scheme since January 2008



## Carers

A carer is somebody who is caring for someone who needs their help. You do not need to be a relative to be called a carer. There is a Carers Network in Merthyr Tydfil which is made up of Local Authority, Voluntary Organisations and Carers themselves. The Carers Network delivers a range of services that address the individual needs of Carers and those being cared for in order that they may live as independently as possible.

### ***Did You Know?***

During 2013 / 2014, 100% of carers (481) of adults were offered an assessment or review of their needs in their own right. We have maintained our performance in this area over the last 4 years, and are above the 2012 / 2013 Welsh Average of 86.8%.

Since 2010 / 2011 there has been a steady increase year on year in the number of assessments undertaken over the last 3 years (since 2010 / 2011), however; during 2013 / 2014 when asked, only 36.4% of carers said they wanted an assessment. Of these, 77.7% went on to receive a service. This is slightly above the previous years (12/13) annual performance figure of 75.2% and the latest available Welsh average figure of 62.8%.

We are currently working with our partners and carers to improve both the numbers of assessments undertaken and the numbers of carers who receive a service as a result.

We have increased the number of training opportunities for carers via the Social Care Workforce Development Partnership. There is a bespoke training calendar in place for carers which is based on carers needs (which have been identified by the carers themselves as part of a training needs consultation process).

### ***Did You Know?***

From April 2014, Carers will be able to access discounted leisure services at local authority leisure centres.

## **Adult Community Learning**

We also ensure that individuals are supported to be as independent as possible, and to develop life skills, including access to universal and community based services, training and employment opportunities.

Estyn (who are inspectors of Education and Training in Wales), in their inspection of Adult Community Learning provision judged the service to be excellent overall. Their findings identified that Adult learner achievement in Merthyr Tydfil is outstanding. Many learners have developed a passion for learning and are gaining valuable personal, social and employability skills leading to greater social inclusion and independent living.

### ***Did You Know?***

During 2013 / 2014, 869 learners participated on courses to develop their basic skills, with 622 enrolling on an accredited course; of which 87% (541) gained qualifications. From the total of individuals engaged 765 (88%) have progressed onto further education, training or volunteering opportunities.

Family and Community Learning run a volunteering project based at Cyfarthfa Park. There has been a positive response to the volunteering programme, with 91 volunteers enrolled to date. It engages a diverse range of learners / volunteers to include carers, students with additional needs, older learner's, schools and service users with mental health conditions.

## Priorities for Improvement and Change

The areas for improvement during 2014 / 2015 detailed below support the following priorities set out in the Single Integrated Plan for Merthyr Tydfil 2013 – 2017:

Merthyr Tydfil Single Integrated Plan Priority Outcome	Merthyr Tydfil Single Integrated Plan Priority Area
People, who live and work in Merthyr Tydfil, are supported to enjoy a healthier and better quality of life.	<p><b>Promoting Independence</b> – People in Merthyr Tydfil are able to lead independent and fulfilled lives.</p> <p>Accommodation, direct payments, carers and housing are also clearly identified within this part of the Single Integrated Plan.</p> <p><b>Mental Health and Emotional Well Being</b> - Children, young people and adults in Merthyr Tydfil enjoy good mental health and well being.</p> <p>“Together for Mental Health” and Family Support Pathway are also clearly identified within this part of the Single Integrated Plan.</p>
People enjoy a vibrant, attractive safe and sustainable place in which to live, work, play and visit.	<b>Housing</b> – A community where residents live in good quality, suitable and affordable housing.
Areas For Improvement During 2014 / 2015	
Priority: Deliver local services in partnership with Health.	
<p><b>The outcomes for people will be:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The services you need will be: locally delivered, in the right place, at the right time, and provided by the right person.</li> <li>• That Social Care Services and Health work together to make sure that the service that you receive is joined up.</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Priority: Ensure that services provide value for money, are of good quality and are able to meet your changing needs.</b></p>
<p><b>The outcomes for people will be:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That there will be a range of services available to you that are flexible enough to meet your needs as they change.</li> <li>• That when we commission services, they will be monitored by us to ensure that they meet your needs, are of high quality and are value for money.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority: Continue re-designing services to improve well-being and support individuals and families to lead independent lives within their community.</b></p>
<p><b>The outcomes for people will be:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A range of day time services will be commissioned to assist people to live more fulfilled and meaningful lives.</li> <li>• The health and well-being of residents will improve by engaging in learning activities.</li> <li>• There will be a range of services for carers that is based on their views of what they need.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority: Complete the implementation of the Home for Life Strategy 2005 - 2015</b></p>
<p><b>The outcomes for people will be:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will have a choice of different sorts of service so that, if you need support you will not automatically need to leave your own home. You can choose to take control of your own care and support by using direct payments.</li> <li>• You can choose to live permanently or for periods of time with another family using the 'Shared Lives' scheme.</li> <li>• If you choose to live in a residential home, as well as looking and feeling more like an ordinary home, the staff who work there will have the necessary skills and experience to meet your needs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Priority: Develop and consult on a strategy which identifies how integrated support to older adults can be delivered with key partners across Local Government, Health and Third sector.</b></p>
<p><b>The outcomes for people include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where possible, people will not be admitted to care homes direct from hospital.</li> <li>• People will not stay in hospital longer than they need to.</li> <li>• The most vulnerable people will have their liberty safeguarded when living in any form of supported accommodation or in their own homes.</li> <li>• The range of support to people in the community will be increased.</li> <li>• People will be supported to live independent, healthy and fulfilled lives.</li> </ul>

# Services for Children and their Families

## How well are we delivering Services for Children and Young People in Need?



**Our job in Children's Services is to Support children and young people to live healthy, safe and fulfilled lives.**

We do this by providing support and services so their needs are met by living permanently within their own or alternative family arrangements. Supporting children and young people we look after is one of the greatest responsibilities we have.

The demand for children's social services remains high. Despite this, overall children's services continues to perform well. Performance against key indicators has at least been maintained and in many cases improved.

Public information has been reviewed. The priority development for 2013 / 2014 was the revision of the website for fostering, to support our recruitment initiatives, which will be launched during the Summer of 2014.

Listening to what our service users tell us has continued to be a priority and is an integral part of the services provided by Gellideg family Centre. We have undertaken some work this year to develop similar feedback processes for other services e.g. the new CIN service and also to ensure that we better utilise the feedback we receive through our routine work with children, young people and their families. For example we have reviewed how we use the information gathered through the consultation process for the reviews of childrens plans and our fostering and adoption services and will in future be able to use this information more effectively to inform what we do and how we do it.

### Responding to need

Children's services work with on average 750 children in need at any one time. Each child / young person receives an individualised assessment and, where there is ongoing service provision an individualised plan that is reviewed at least 6 monthly.

The new 'Enhanced Child In Need Service' (as reported on last year) is now up and running. The social work staff (Senior Social Worker and 2 Social Workers) are in post and working with children and their families. This service provides assessment and support for children and young people who have previously been the subject of multiple referrals, where there is a risk of the child / young person becoming looked after by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. This is therefore a very intense programme of work that demands a lot from the families involved. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, 53 children were benefitting from this service.

When we work with families, we agree with them a plan which is designed to achieve clear outcomes. We have developed a new format for this, which families have told us that they prefer, and it helps them understand what is expected of them and what help they are getting. We now intend to introduce this type of plan across the whole service although this may take some time to achieve.

When a social worker visits a child / young person, they can be assured that they will have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to help. To do this we have a comprehensive Workforce Development Programme that is focused on the needs of the staff and kept under regular review. We consult with our staff about what training they think they need as well as taking into account feedback we receive from services users and our quality assurance mechanisms.

Merthyr Tydfil already has a very successful and award winning Family Centre at Gellideg, and there has been an increase of approximately 10% in the referrals to Gellideg for Direct Work this year. Gellideg provides services and support to children and families who have complex and high levels of need. This works alongside the Intensive Family Support Team which works across Merthyr Tydfil and RCT. This is a very specialist service that works with parents who have serious substance misuse issues.

Gellideg Family Centre has provided services to 121 families during the year, both children and parents in these families received individual services. These families and their children are the most vulnerable in our community. The family centre asks families how they feel about the services they have received and evaluates how the services have helped them. Overall, feedback we have received shows a high level of satisfaction.

## **Gellideg - What our families say about our services!**

### **Direct work**

*"I enjoyed working with X because she helped me improve my behaviour and we had good fun"*

*"X helped me by giving me support when I was in a wheelchair. He got me out of my wheelchair by boosting my confidence by getting me to public places"*

*"I liked playing games as a family. I liked being in charge of a round of compliments. I liked it when X helped with my worries"*

*"I really enjoyed my sessions and I felt that she helped me cope with my issues but also give me coping methods"*

### **Family sessions**

*"I found working with my mam very helpful because it shows me what she expects me to do"*

*"the work that was done with my lad was brilliant can't have asked for a better worker"*

*"I think that thanks to X our family has become more close and we have been able to understand and relate to each other thanks to the family sessions we have found more and easier ways to handle situations and I think our family sessions have been a brilliant success and I feel we are able to go ahead as a better family. Thank you X for all the work and time you have put into our family!"*

*"My relationship with X improved since the last input"*

### **Family Intervention Support Worker**

*"She was very nice to work with she gave myself and partner information if required and also was very helpful in other ways. I am sad to see her go but also happy that I am at a stage to do things for my family myself"*

*"I found the help really helpful. If I ever need help again I know where to go"*

The Council has services available to help people who do not need a social worker, which are provided by us and our partners. A number of these services are supported by the Families First Programme and these services are designed to help families who are in need of support and advice as problems begin to emerge. This includes the Multiple Intervention Assistance Programme (MIA) which provides early intervention to work alongside families to address their problems and help them identify potential solutions. As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, MIA were working with 211 families. During 2013 / 2014, 141 were deemed appropriate to be closed to MIA. 102 families (72%) recorded a successful outcome. 25 (18%) families were identified and supported to step up to statutory services and a further 14 (10%) were closed due to disengagement.

During 2013 / 2014 we have received feedback from a total of 99 families on the service they have received from MIA. Of those who completed an evaluation, 100% stated that they were satisfied with the service.



The Families First programme also now delivers a service to young carers in Merthyr Tydfil. During 2013 / 2014, a total of 71 young carers were supported. 21 young carers were also receiving the MIA 'Team Around the Family' service. Increased awareness raising through the 'School Intervention Project' during 2013 / 2014 has resulted in a further 51 young carers being identified.

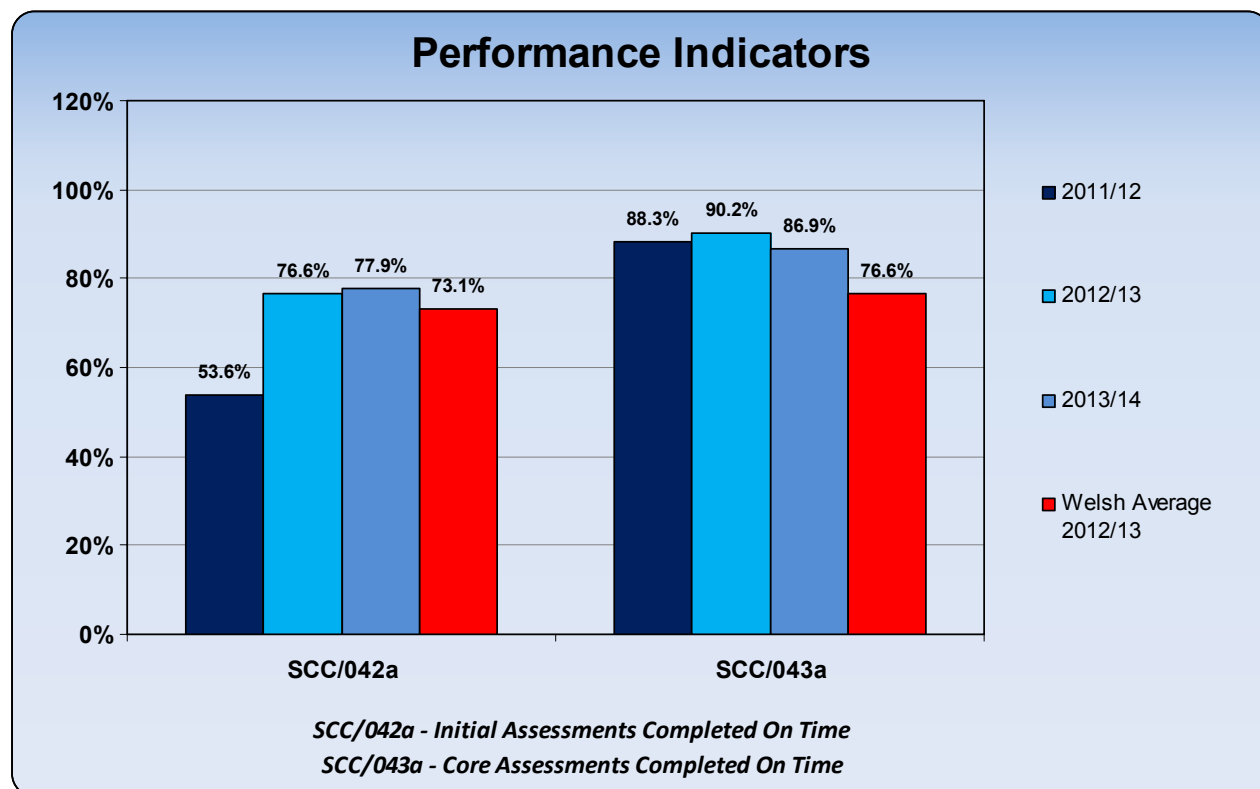
As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, 54 young carers are receiving services and a further 13 have been supported during the year. There are a further 45 young carers who have been identified that are being assessed to establish their current and future needs.

There are also some services to disabled children provided from the Families First Programme.

### ***Did You Know?***

Children's services received more than 4548 contacts for information, advice or requests for service during 2013 / 2014.

We told you last year that we changed the way we worked in order to improve how well and how quickly we do assessments. The graph below shows that we have continued to maintain our performance of the assessments we do alongside families.



We have been developing an outcomes approach to the Intake, Assessment and Family Support Services that we provide, which has resulted in better levels of family engagement in the plans and services provided. This has included ongoing feedback from our service users and will be extended to other parts of the service in the forthcoming year.

## Looking After Children

There are some situations when children cannot safely remain at home. When this happens we have the responsibility to make sure that these children are looked after properly. During the year, we have successfully implemented changes to how we work with cases where legal proceedings are necessary.

The numbers of children that we are looking after had been rising steadily (which is the case across Wales); however, within Merthyr Tydfil there are some early signs that this may be levelling off. We look after children and young people of all ages, who have many needs. Our Fostering and Adoption services work closely with social workers to provide placements that meet children's needs and to explore options within the family.

### Looked After Children Feedback

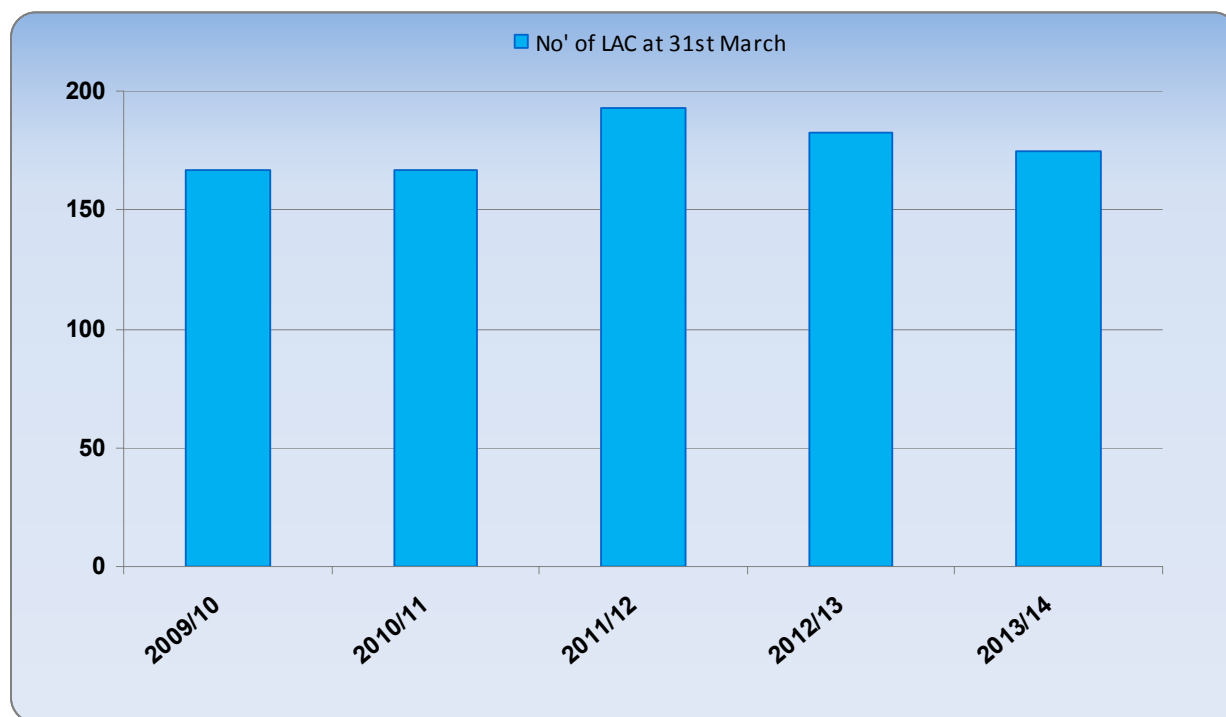
We collected feedback from all looked after children as part of the process of reviewing their plans. The majority of looked after children indicate a high level of satisfaction with the arrangements in place for their care. Some specific matters were that:

- *94% were satisfied with their placement and the people lived with*
- *100% were satisfied with school / college arrangements*
- *97% feel they see enough of their friends or are helped to do so / make new ones*
- *100% of younger children have their own belongings with them*
- *90% felt they had sufficient contact with their social worker*

Some other matters indicated areas to consider, which have been followed up:

- *78% felt they had someone to talk to or could talk to their social worker but 22% felt they couldn't talk to their social worker*
- *71% of older children were happy with the arrangements for contact with their birth family or siblings and while there are likely to be many reasons for this almost 30% were not - mainly older children*
- *38% of older looked after children had had issues with bullying*
- *18% of younger children said that they didn't / couldn't have their friends round to play.*

## Merthyr Tydfil looked after children figures 2009/10 to 2013 / 2014

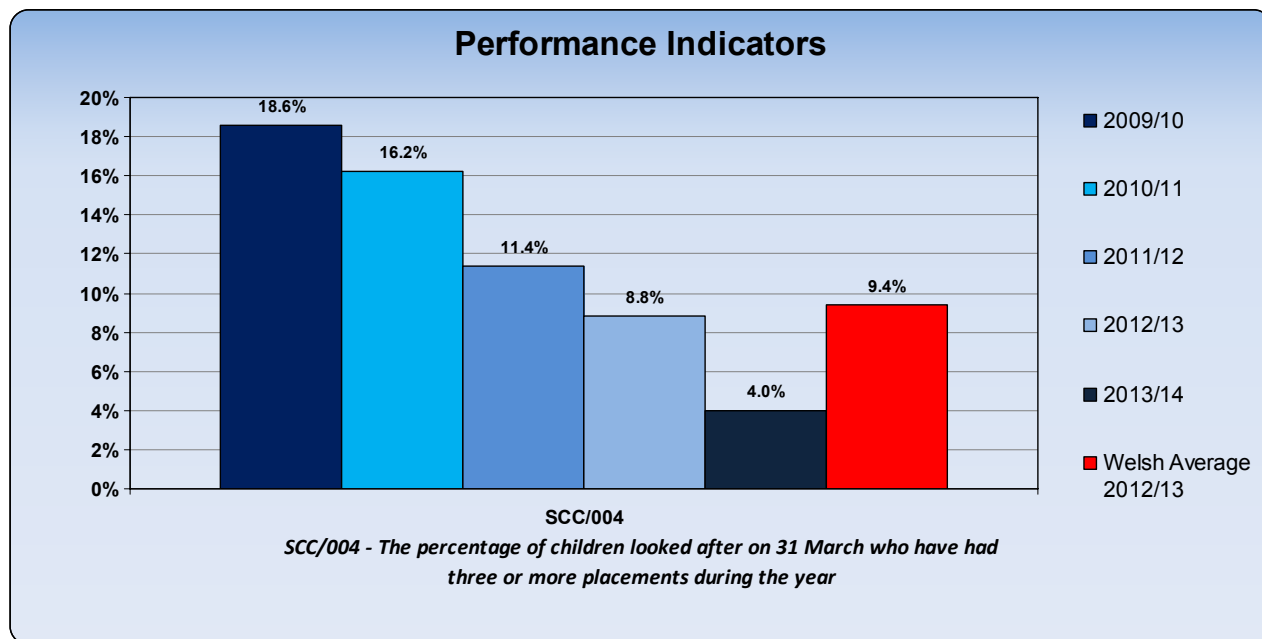


We have been working hard this year to recruit more foster carers. As a result there has been an increase in expressions of interest in becoming a foster carers for Merthyr Tydfil. At the end of March 2014 there were 29 assessments ongoing, and during the year 31 new Foster Carers were approved, providing 43 placements; a number of these being Kinship placements. Just over half (55%) of fostered looked after children are placed with Merthyr Tydfil foster carers.

The South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) and the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4C's) help us make arrangements for good quality and cost effective placements for looked after children. We have been working with SEWIC to explore how best to meet the needs of looked after children in Merthyr Tydfil.

We have been keeping a close eye on the stability of our looked after children's placements by ensuring that placements and schools etc are only changed where there is no alternative – our performance in relation to both has improved. We are being proactive with better communication and holding meetings to put early support in place when we know that problems may be starting. We are also working towards more robust multi-agency contribution to this through the multi-agency Prevention and Permanence Panel which is in place.

## Percentage of looked after children who have had 3 or more placements during the year: 2009/10 to 2013 / 2014



### What is it like being in Foster Care?

*I am 13 years old and have been in the care system from the age of 5. I lived with my Mother, Sister and Brother. I can remember the first night I spent away from my family. I had a lot of emotions, some of being frightened and confused. It's like taking the wrong bus and ending up in the wrong place. When I went to my first foster home, which was one of three, I can remember my social worker taking me to meet these two strangers. All I could think about was my Brother and Sister and where they were going to go. My time spent with my first carers was brief; however I soon made myself at home and part of the family. As this was a short term foster placement social services found me a long term foster placement soon after.*

*Once I had moved into my second placement I was nervous even though I had moved before, it was just the thought of moving again. I didn't have a very good relationship with my carers at the time so, I moved to my third and last placement which I have been with for four years. I have settled down really well and made myself at home with an amazing foster family that I know will look after me and gives me the care that my biological family couldn't.*

*Some people and families say that being in care is all bad, but it's not. They give to you what every child deserves, which is a family and the care that comes with it. When I get to the age of eighteen I know that I can look back at the brilliant memories that I had in foster care and to thank all the carers that looked after me and who gave me not only a roof over my head but, a home to come to.*

**Written by a 13 year old Merthyr Tydfil Looked after Child.**

The Adoption Service was assessing 8 prospective adopters at the end of the year, and there were 20 children at various stages of being adopted. 9 adoption orders have been granted for Merthyr Tydfil children so far this year.

We are also taking a lead role in the development of the regional adoption service which will be operational by September 2014. This will be hosted by the Vale of Glamorgan.

### ***Did You Know?***

MTCBC Adoption Team chose 'Home and Family' as their theme at the adoption exchange day in Tottenham on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January. The day was highly successful with 7 potential adopters expressing interest for MTCBC children.

We ensure that our care leavers and older young people have plans in place for their future that they have contributed to and that they agree with. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, 75 out of 77 young people who should have a plan in place had one i.e. 97.4% and the other 2 were in the process of being completed. This is an improvement on our performance in 2012 / 2013.

All our care leavers between the age of 16-18 are asked if they would like to choose their personal advisor, once they reach 18 they are allocated a personal advisor from Barnardo's. This is a more relaxed and informal role designed to support care leavers with the things that are important to them most young people choose their foster carer to be their personal advisor before they reach 18, some young people say this is because they know them well. At the end of March 2014, 100% of young people aged 16+ had a Personal Advisor. This is slightly above our performance for last year which was 98.8%.

We are currently maintaining an up to date assessment of the accommodation needs of care leavers, young offenders and other children in need. This is being used to inform service planning by housing and other providers. Some additional supported accommodation for young people in Merthyr Tydfil has been developed this year, the project is called 'Chaplins' managed by ADREF housing and will be available during May 2014, places will be allocated to 16-25 year olds in the Borough via a referral process.

Merthyr is one of the pioneer sites for the Welsh Government 'When I am Ready' scheme which will allow care leavers to remain in their foster care placements under a type of 'supported lodgings' arrangement, if agreed by the Foster Carer and young person. During the pilot phase, as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, 1 young person has benefited and it is possible that up to a further 10 may over the next two years.

## **Supporting Children with Disabilities and their Families**

Over the last 2 years we have been working with families to develop and implement the Family Support Pathway. This is an alternative, multi-agency model of meeting the needs of disabled children and children with additional needs.

A draft revised eligibility criteria document has been devised to clarify the referral pathway and case transfer process into the Children with Disabilities Team and this has been consulted upon. This is now being finalised for implementation from April 1<sup>st</sup> 2014. We are reviewing the support services that are provided to children with disabilities to ensure that they are appropriately targeted and within the resources that are available.

### ***Did You Know?***

One of the Social Workers in the Children with Disability Team has been trained in the 'Early Bird Programme' which supports the parents of younger children with Autism. Feedback from families indicates that this is a positive model and supports their parenting.

We are continuing to encourage the use of Direct Payments as a method of meeting children's needs flexibly.

At the end of March 2014, the disabled children's team was working with 140 children and young people and 76% of reviews had been held on time. The ongoing assessment and review process ensures that plans are kept up to date and there is ongoing communication with children, young people and their families.

We will be considering the learning from last year's key worker pilot, so that we can decide whether to develop a key worker service.

The transition from children's to adult services can be a difficult time. We have an established transition process in place and at the end of March 2014, 64 disabled children and young people had a transition plan in place ready for this move. We do this to ensure that there is continuity of support to the most vulnerable young people as they grow older.

## **Youth Offending Service**

Our Youth Offending Service exists to ensure that wherever a child / young person lives in Cwm Taf (Merthyr / RCT), they will have access to good quality and effective Youth Offending and prevention services. Our work to merge the youth offending services of both local authorities has continued and the target date for the new service to become operational is July 2014.

To date this year good performance in relation to First Time Entrants into the judicial system has been maintained and custody rates have reduced. Re-offending rates has been maintained, although this remains comparatively high. We have investigated this and this is largely due to increasingly small numbers of prolific and repeat offenders committing high risk offences compared to the rest of South Wales.

We have successfully engaged with young people to obtain their views on current services and to inform the future provision of services for care leavers and older young people. Feedback was particularly positive in relation to services offered from the Youth Offending Service. One 16 year old said he was ***'pleased with the support from YOS in gaining his Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) qualification'***. Another young person said ***'YOS were good. They listened to me'***.

## Priorities for Improvement and Change

The areas for improvement during 2014 / 2015 detailed below support the following priorities set out in the Single Integrated Plan for Merthyr Tydfil 2013 – 2017:

Merthyr Tydfil Single Integrated Plan Priority Outcome	Merthyr Tydfil Single Integrated Plan Priority Area
People, who live and work in Merthyr Tydfil, are supported to enjoy a healthier and better quality of life.	<p><b>Meeting the Needs of Vulnerable Children-</b> Children and Young People in need of support receive services to meet their needs.</p> <p><b>Mental Health and Emotional Well Being</b> - Children, young people and adults in Merthyr Tydfil enjoy good mental health and well being.</p> <p>“Together for Mental Health” and Family Support Pathway are also clearly identified within this part of the Single Integrated Plan.</p>
People enjoy a vibrant, attractive safe and sustainable place in which to live, work, play and visit.	<p><b>Offender Management</b> – People in Merthyr Tydfil are protected from the actions of repeat offenders</p> <p>The role of the Youth Offending Service is clearly identified within this part of the Single Integrated Plan</p>

Areas For Improvement During 2014 / 2015
<p><b>Continue to deliver sustainable services that improve the well being of children and families with complex needs</b></p> <p><b>To do this we will:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree and implement an approach to Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) which includes the current Intensive Family Support Team (IFST), Gellideg Family Centre and Enhanced Children in Need Service.</li> <li>• Improve the focus of permanence planning for children in need.</li> <li>• Begin preparation for the forthcoming Social Services and Well-Being Bill.</li> <li>• Ensure there is a clear and current Commissioning Strategy for children's social services.</li> <li>• Implement an efficiency plan for the service and re-shape services as required.</li> <li>• Continue to promote good outcomes and permanence for looked after children.</li> <li>• Ensure that care leavers receive services to meet their needs.</li> <li>• Ensure that children with disabilities receive services to meet their needs.</li> <li>• Keep under review the training and development needs of the workforce.</li> </ul>



**The outcomes for children / young people and their families will be:**

- An improved range of quality services that better meet your needs, are of good quality and value for money.
- Improved public and professional understanding of the services available to help children / young people and their families.

**Improve the participation of children and families in agreeing the plans and outcomes for our work with them**

**To do this we will:**

- Continue the Outcomes Framework project and implement the approach across the whole service.
- Develop ways to ensure the Framework supports performance reporting in line with revised Welsh Government expectations and quality assurance.

**The outcomes for children / young people and their families will be:**

- Plans that have been developed with you clearly show the outcomes we are trying to achieve.
- Plans that are user friendly and help you understand what is expected of you and what help you are getting.
- More opportunities for you to tell us what you think about services and how we can continue to improve our services.

**Opportunities created through partnership working, will help us improve the range, quality and timeliness of services.**

**To do this we will:**

- Implement the Cwm Taf Youth Offending Service.
- Implement the Regional Adoption Service as part of the new National Adoption Service for Wales.
- Continue the development work to create the Cwm Taf Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)
- Continue to work with the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) on regional initiatives to support the Fostering Service.

**The outcomes for children / young people and their families will be:**

- Opportunities created through partnership working, will help us improve the range, quality and timeliness of services available to you.

# How do I access further information?



If you require more detailed information in relation to the contents of this report; please contact us as follows:

**Telephone:** (01685) 724693

**Email:** [ACRF@merthyr.gov.uk](mailto:ACRF@merthyr.gov.uk)

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