



Neath Port Talbot
Castell-nedd Port Talbot
County Borough Council Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol

Children's Services: Pandemic and Beyond

Over the course of the Pandemic Children's Services has remained open for business. Practitioners across the Local Authority (LA) have adapted to home working and have developed innovative and creative ways to engage children, young people and families across the LA. The pandemic has provided an opportunity to take stock and rethink how we go about our day-to-day business and this brief has been written with that in mind: to provide Scrutiny with an update from CS but to assist all members to fully understand CS, which one hopes will assist Scrutiny with their future task to hold the Service to account. Below is a brief overview of CS, its component parts; response to the pandemic and beyond:

- **SPOC** (aka the Front-Door) – SPOC receives all referrals for the LA (Child and Adult Services). It has continued to receive and respond to referrals during the pandemic. There was a slight drop in referrals in April 2020, however this drop was comparable to the drop in referrals seen during a summer holiday period and the number of referrals received has since risen. The front-door anticipates a surge in referrals as lockdown eases and some normality returns to the day-to-day life of residents and partner agencies across NPT. The goal for SPOC is to make it a truly integrative front-door and the team, with the wider service and partner agencies, is working in earnest to make this happen.
- **Early Intervention and Prevention Panel (EiPP)** – The EiPP is made up of partner agencies, specifically third sector agencies from across the Borough. The panel continues to meet weekly to coordinate support to those families identified as requiring support.
- **Team Around the Family (TAF)** – TAF workers continue to work with children, families and their carers open to the service.
- **Community Teams** – All open cases (Care and Support, Child Protection, Court Work, Adoption) sit across these four area teams: Cwrt Sart, Dyffryn, Llangatwg, Sandfields. The Care and Support and Child Protection cohorts are currently stable and monitored on a weekly basis for patterns and trends. Caseloads are below the national average and the work force is also stable with low vacancy rates and few (n1) agency workers. At the break of the pandemic all children and young people open across CS were RAG rated and prioritised according to risk and need. A vulnerable list was set up with colleagues in education and is reviewed and updated weekly by practitioners. At the same time a multi-agency (MA) group was set up to ensure a consistent and joined-up response to the vulnerable list. The MA group meet weekly and is attended by partner agencies, including those from the third sector. The vulnerable list has since expanded to have oversight of those children and young people open to partner agencies but not open to CS. A summer support plan is currently being developed by CS and Education to ensure children, young people and their families are supported over the summer period.
- **Youth Justice and Early Intervention Service (YJEIS)** – This service continues to provide support for those subject to statutory court orders and those identified through preventative channels.
- **Support Services** (Family Action Support Team – FAST; Integrated Family Support Service – IFSS; Working Together Service - WTS) – These services continue to support families in line with existing care plans albeit virtually and via creative and innovative means – walk and talks, garden/door step visits etc.
- ***Looked After Children (LAC)** – The LAC team continues to support all Looked After Children and their caregivers. The team is currently working on how to reinstate contact between children and their families safely. The LAC population across NPT continues to reduce and reduce safely. This cohort of children is carefully monitored, as are all vulnerable children and young people, and whilst we seek to safely reduce the number of LAC children if children are

judged to be at risk and need to be accommodated then they will be accommodated by the Local Authority. Also, those children looked after, will only move on if it is safe to do so i.e. court orders revoked and rehabilitation back to parents care etc.

- ***Route 16** – Route 16 supports LAC children to achieve independence, when the time is right.
- ***Fostering Service** – The Fostering Team has continued to work closely with the LAC and area teams to support foster carers over the course of the pandemic. They too are involved in the work around reinstating contact.

**A review of the LAC team, Route 16 and Fostering Services is currently being undertaken by the PO with responsibility for this area of practice. The LA has commissioned an expert in the field to support this review the findings of which, coupled with the future proposals for this part of the service, will be shared with the committee once the review is completed.*

- **Conference and Reviewing Service (CARS)** – The CARS team is responsible for chairing child protection conferences and LAC reviews. It has a unique view across CS, which allows it to identify and share good practice as well as pick up and respond to poor practice. This CARS team were the first team to fully embrace the virtual world upon lockdown and have supported the wider service to make a smooth transition to this new world through the sharing of learning along the way.
- **Hillside Children’s Secure Home** – Hillside continues to go from strength to strength. Disruption to service delivery has been minimal over the course of the pandemic. The home has needed to make some adaptations for receiving new admissions in light of the virus i.e. a period of isolation for new arrivals. However the latter is well managed and isolation should not be read as children and young people being locked up on their own for periods of time. Rather they are merely kept apart from the other residents with their daily routine tailored to their needs during the isolation period.
- **Western Bay Adoption Service (WBAS)** – WBAS continues to support prospective adopters and children ready to be moved into adoptive placements. The key issue for WBAS, the Local Authority and indeed Adoption Services across Wales, is the potential for delay in moving children on as medicals for prospective adopters have been put on hold as GP’s have responded to the Pandemic.
- **Strategic Safeguarding Group (SSG)** – Membership for this group consists of Senior Managers from across all Directorates. The group has met during the pandemic to take assurances that safeguarding remains a priority for the council during these times. The group is currently updating the Local Authority’s Corporate Safeguarding Policy and working on those actions set by the Welsh Audit Office Inspection Report. The aforementioned report will be shared with this committee and the Audit Committee.
- **Regional Safeguarding Board (RSB)** – The RSB has met over the course of lockdown to seek assurance from partner agencies during these challenging and uncertain times. The RSB has recently published its annual plan for 2020/2021, which can be found at <http://www.wgsb.wales/21538>. An Annual report will be made available to committee at the end of 2020.

Panels: All panels across CS continue to be held albeit virtually: Admissions panel, Resource Panel, Legal Surgery, Contextual Risk Panel.

Other Partnership Boards: Senior managers continue to represent CS on partnership boards: Public Services Board, Area Planning Board, Community Safety Partnership, VAWDASV Leadership Group,

CONTEST Board, Regional Adoption Board and the Regional Transformation Board, Silver Group: Covid-19 response (including various sub-groups off this main group).

The Director, HoS and Cabinet Member have visited all teams across CS over the course of the pandemic.

CS is currently planning for an adaptive phase, which includes the potential for further waves of the virus. As is noted above a number of strands of work are being undertaken to plan for this phase these being: what a safe return to the office would look like; how to create safe spaces for assessments to be undertaken with children and families away from the family home; how to safely reintroduce contact between children and their families; how to continue to support those identified as the most vulnerable over the summer holiday period and beyond i.e. Summer Support Plan.

Pages could have been filled to reflect the positive changes, the challenges and the opportunities that have arisen over the course of the past four months across CS. As was noted at the beginning of this brief, it is brief and will undoubtedly generate many welcome questions for discussion during the next committee.