

**HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
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**Supporting vulnerable children - A strategic approach from Early Intervention to Crisis Care**

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**Report Summary**

This report aims to highlight the direction of travel and progress made in developing and delivering a service that has a focus on prevention and early intervention; the overall objectives of which are to manage workload, improve service delivery and outcomes for children and families and reduce financial expenditure through a process of transformation.

The report will work through the broad system of children's services so as to evidence the impact that key parts of the service have upon the overall objective of reducing dependence on service and improving outcomes for children and families at risk and in need.

The report is provided to impart information upon scrutiny committee and develop a basis upon which to outline future progress made in providing a seamless service aimed at managing and stemming the flow of workload and expenditure.

**1. Introduction and Scrutiny Activity**

- 1.1 The overall focus of Children's services is to protect and safeguard children and young people and where appropriate and safe, this is done by enabling them to remain at home with their families. A precursor to this is the provision of prevention and early intervention services in order to enable families to develop their own strengths and in doing so prevent escalation to the need for statutory services
- 1.2 By the time families with complex problems come to the attention of statutory children's services, the intervention and need is usually crisis driven, complex and resource intensive. Responding to these issues by taking more children into care is a costly and unsustainable approach, although it should be acknowledged that this only occurs when necessary and where the need to safeguard is prevalent. The strategic approach taken reflects the children's services division's recognition that earlier and more intensive intervention before problems become entrenched, provides the best opportunity, value and benefit to individuals and families as well as long-term savings to the community.
- 1.3 The Children and Families division has implemented a process of transformation in order to continue to develop a whole system approach to service delivery with the objective of ensuring that families receive the right service at the right time regardless of where they interact with the service. This approach is aimed at

ensuring all parts of the service have a preventative focus at their core with the overall longer term aim of having greater control over the numbers of cases requiring statutory intervention.

- 1.4 This report aims to provide scrutiny committee with an overview of the basic plans and actions being taken in order to transform elements of children's services and positively impact upon an ability to manage and control the level of statutory services that are required. The report draws upon conclusions and recommendations made from previous reviews carried out by the Institute of Public Care (IPC), namely Evaluation of "Don't Walk By" Deeper Dive Report March 2017 – **Appendix one** and The Right Help at the Right Time: A Review of Preventative Social Work Interventions – **Appendix two**. The information contained in the report is to enable members to establish whether the whole programme approach developed to provide a pathway of care is effective in providing the right services at the right time earlier and tailored support for families avoiding statutory intervention.

## 1.5. **Scrutiny Activity**

Members are invited to consider the information contained in the report to

- Assess whether local arrangements and partnership working is effective and making a positive difference in supporting families earlier with the right services at the right time,
- Consider the findings and key recommendations of the evaluative reports completed by the Institute of Public Care,
- Develop a basis of understanding in order to challenge and scrutinise developments, achievements and challenges related to the transformation of service delivery.
- Determine what lessons have been learnt and how these lessons will be incorporated into service development going forward

## 2. **Information and Findings**

- 2.1 In March 2017, the Institute of Public care (IPC) completed an in depth evaluation of the "Don't Walk By" arrangements and initiatives designed within Torfaen to provide multi-disciplinary support to families with additional needs that could not be fully met via standard mainstream provision. (*Evaluation of "Don't Walk By" Deeper Dive Report March 2017 – Appendix one*). Following on from this, IPC also completed an in depth evaluation of preventative social work interventions within Torfaen and published its' report in February 2018. (*The Right Help at the Right Time: A Review of Preventative Social Work Interventions – Appendix two*). Both reports can be viewed as a continuum of practice from the identification of families with additional needs where early intervention could be provided as a preventative measure through to families in need of a higher level of support or statutory services.
- 2.2 A key finding of the "Don't Walk By" evaluation was "*The need to draw early help and children's social care services into a more streamlined continuum of family support – including in particular to benefit families at the high end of early help / on the edge of social care.*" The evaluation also found some deficiencies in terms of information sharing and a proportion of children and families requiring support,

which exceeded that which could be provided via a single agency with 24% of the cohort examined having very complex additional needs bordering the need for social worker involvement via a care and support plan or needs indicated a care and support plan. There were also indications that 12% of the families had some additional needs requiring targeted single agency support but not requiring multi-disciplinary support. Therefore, it could be argued that at that time, some 36% of the cohort examined were in receipt of the wrong tier of service with some requiring more intensive and possible statutory services and others not requiring a coordinated service. This led to the determination that the Families First funded projects could be more effectively managed within the children's services directorate, which could then be used to develop a continuum of service delivery aimed at ensuring consistency and the right level of service being provided to families and children. Families First projects moved to the Children's Services directorate in February 2018 and in doing so promoted a shift towards the transformation journey for Children's Services through the development of more targeted and effective support services straddling Children's Social Care and targeted 'high end' early help.

2.3 Some key findings of the "*Right Help at the Right Time: A Review of Preventative Social Work Interventions*" were:

- We are making the correct decisions for children and families once they are referred into the service.
- We have sufficient support services in place to support families to change or develop.
- We are accommodating children appropriately in terms of thresholds, assessments, and court-related decision making.
- We are effectively supporting children and young people to leave care.
- Based on our existing "front door" arrangements there was a determination that we are bringing too many children into the social services sphere when they could get better help at the right time from other agencies and our early help offer.

The division acknowledges the findings and subsequent recommendations of the "*Right Help at the Right Time Review*" particularly the recommendation that "*All the evidence from this review suggests that the primary focus for continuous improvement of this service should be the 'Front Door'*".

2.4 Following on from the "*Don't Walk By*" review, the report relating to the "*Right Help: at the Right Time: A Review of Preventative Social Work Interventions*" indicated that the service changes made via the divisions transformation agenda could have the impact of increasing statutory caseloads and the numbers of children coming into care. Experience of introducing these kind of changes in other innovation sites, such as Newport, suggest that in the first instance at least, increased numbers of children came into care – because the new forms of intensive support are more effective at identifying children who are being abused by parents. Evaluation of the Newport model suggest that, after this initial phase the number of children entering care should plateau and start to reduce with the embedding of these evidence based approaches.

2.5. **Discussion**

- 2.6 Prior to February 2018, the prevention and early intervention services were not directly managed within the Children's Services division and as highlighted above, the findings of the "Don't Walk By" review lead to the Families First delivered services coming under the umbrella of Children's Services. In adopting this shift the transition commenced for the broad sphere of services to be managed and delivered in a more seamless manner with prevention forming a golden thread throughout the directorate and the development of an overall medium to long term strategy of managing capacity and having a greater degree of control over workload, including the need to accommodate children and young people. **Appendix Three** illustrates the early intervention process employed within the Families First Framework and the service continuum into statutory provision
- 2.7 Prevention is intrinsic throughout every aspect of children's services intervention with families, and if children and families have proceeded into the statutory framework there continues to be a focus of de-escalation through intervention. To this end the Family Focus and Rapid Response teams formed within the Local Authority area aim to work within families requiring statutory services with the overall objectives of preventing the need for a child to be looked after and / or enabling them to return to their family. The Rapid Response Team is an 'additional resource' service that is committed to providing time limited (until the risk of placement breakdown is averted), intensive support to young people and their families or carers at times of crisis to prevent breakdown of placement by identifying what needs to be in place for the child/children to remain.
- 2.8 The Family Focus Team works with children and families who have become involved with Social Services or Families First, and have difficulties which need support and are willing to engage in intensive work due to recognising the need to make changes. Within the period 2017/18 the Family Focus Team worked with 194 children (92 families) and Rapid Response have worked with 56 children (31 families). A full annual review of the service has not yet been completed. However, within the first four months of operation 37 interventions were carried out where there was an assessed risk of a child being accommodated. Of these, two went on to become accommodated. (A more in depth report will be available post twelve months of Rapid Response operation).
- 2.9 Despite the services offered and taken up within Families first, Family Focus and Rapid Response teams there continues to be a trend of increase in the Looked After Population. As at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018 there were 378 children in the looked after system; an increase of 65 children against the figure of 313 for 30<sup>th</sup> June 2017. At the time of completing this report, comparable figures were unavailable although nationally, local authorities are experiencing an increase in the looked after population. The Looked After figures for the Welsh local authority areas will be available within September 2018. The number of care and support plans currently open is 504. The comparable figures for the preceding years are 509 for 2017 and 467 for 2016. There is a rising looked after population and a general increase in and demand across the entire spectrum of children's services.

### 3. **Actions and Progress**

- 3.1 In response to the "*Right Help at the Right Time Review*" The Children's Services division has employed a group manager with the specific purpose of leading the

transformation agenda and further embedding the early intervention and prevention strategies into the sphere of children services so as to have a seamless approach to service delivery, ensuring that the right service is provided at the right time. This requires a medium to long term outlook in terms of the objectives of managing demand and having greater control and as is highlighted within the “Right Help at the Right Time Review” there is the potential for the transformation to identify greater levels of need. Whilst in the short to medium term this may increase demand on services and may increase the need for children to become looked after, the positive by-product will be the potential to improve outcomes for children and families and have a more longer term objective, in line with impact upon future generations, of reducing and effectively managing and gate keeping the numbers of children requiring being looked after. The process also supports the councils T22 transformation programme in that it aims to better manage demand in the medium to longer term through prevention, early intervention and behaviour change and additionally aims to balance financial challenges against ongoing need.

#### **4. Implications**

- 4.1 There are some implications, deemed to be positive, in progressing with the transformation of early intervention / prevention and aligning its functions within those of statutory children’s services. These implications relate to more effective gate keeping and management of caseload flows.

#### **Policy**

- 4.2 There are no significant policy changes required as a result of the ongoing work. There may be some internal procedural changes required that relate to referral processes and the administration of front door services. The overall service review will address any procedural changes that become apparent.

#### **Well Being and Future Generations Act**

- 4.3 In considering the Well Being and Future Generations Act, the ongoing transformation of early intervention / prevention lends itself to a longer term approach that impacts on future generations, whilst aiming to prevent problems occurring or getting worse and requiring the input from statutory services.

#### **Financial**

- 4.4 The transformation of services linked to early intervention / prevention, anticipates longer term greater financial controls and the potential for longer term financial savings. There is no increase in financial investment currently required to impact on the alignment of early intervention and statutory provision and improvements to the front door services. However, the longer term benefits of having greater control and being able to stem the flow of service need at the front door and ensuring that the right level of service is delivered to those in need at the right time will result in greater financial control and improved outcomes for children and families.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Children and Family services are currently going through an ongoing process of transformation aimed at aligning early intervention and services with statutory provision in order to ensure that service users who are in need, receive the right support at the right time. This transformation also involves the ongoing development of preventative services in order to prevent children and families from, where appropriate, interacting with or escalating through to the need for statutory services.
- 5.2 Key to the transformation of the service and a consequent greater level of control on service need and demand is a review of the “front door” where children and families first interact with services, in order to ensure that the correct level of support is provided at possibly the most crucial time in order to prevent escalation.
- 5.3 The front end service transformation aims to have an impact throughout all levels of service delivery with the longer term goal of having greater control and stemming the flow of children and families requiring statutory services and ultimately the need to become looked after.

## 6. Scrutiny activity

- 6.1 Members are invited to consider the information contained in the report to
- Assess whether local arrangements and partnership working is effective and making a positive difference in supporting families earlier with the right services at the right time,
  - Consider the findings and key recommendations of the evaluative reports completed by the Institute of Public Care,
  - Question the means by which transformation is being achieved,
  - Develop a basis of understanding in order to challenge and scrutinise developments, achievements and challenges related to the transformation of service delivery.
  - Determine what lessons have been learnt and how these lessons will be incorporated into service development going forward

<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix 1 - Evaluation of “Don’t Walk By” Deeper Dive Report <i>March 2017</i>  Appendix 2 - The Right Help at the Right Time: A Review of Preventative Social Work Interventions  Appendix 3 – Families First Process Model.
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<b>Background Papers</b>	<p><b>Note: Members of the public are entitled, under the Local Government Act 1972, to inspect background papers to reports. The following is a list of the background papers used in the production of this report.</b></p> <p>Officers must list here any material on which the report is largely based (or from which quotes have been taken), unless that material is 'published work' and provided it is not exempt. Published work includes documents within the public domain (e.g. previous committee reports and minutes, acts of parliament, WAG or WLGA guidance etc).</p>
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**For a copy of the background papers or for further information about this report, please telephone:**  
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