

## **Children's Services**

# **Strategy To Safely Reduce The Numbers Of Looked After Children**

**2017 – 2020**

**SOCIAL  
SERVICES  
DIRECTORATE**

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Part 6 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 sets out the Local Authority's duty to assess and meet a child's needs for accommodation if that child cannot reside within their family of origin and there is no viable alternative to placement.

However, it is accepted that outcomes for children in care are not always good and that, wherever possible, children should be supported to remain within their birth family.

It is also accepted that provision of appropriate placements for children looked after is an expensive option and the safe prevention of children becoming looked after is a preferable option from a moral, legislative and financial perspective

The needs of our Looked After Children (LAC) and young people are being met in a variety of ways: through provision of in-house foster placements; through provision of independently provided foster placements; through placement at home with their parents; through kinship fostering arrangements; through provision of residential placements; through Secure arrangements; through independent living arrangements.

For some children, their time being Looked After will be relatively short-lived as we implement plans which secure their safe discharge from the Looked After system. However the impact of the trauma and upheaval of being removed from their families cannot be easily assessed over the course of their lives. Suffice to say that their removal will have an impact regardless of their permanent care plan.

It is generally acknowledged that outcomes are poorer for Looked After Children than their peers. The NSPCC website (accessed on 10.04.17) helpfully summarises some of the key findings in relation to outcomes for Looked After Children. The findings relate, primarily to English studies but have relevance in Wales:

- they are more than four times likely to experience poor mental health; they are likely to do less well than their peers in school;
- 34% of care leavers are not engaged in education, employment and training at aged 19, compared to 15.5% of the general population;
- the rates of children who run away are higher for children in care than the general population and
- children in care are more likely to experience sexual exploitation.

There is a multiplicity of reasons for this but, in general terms, long-term care, by whichever method, should only be considered in the absence of any other alternative to family life.

As a Social Services Department we strive to:

- Promote independence
- Minimise dependency
- Only intervene when necessary

This strategy will embed these principles in practice which in turn will drive change in the way we deliver services to ensure the best possible outcomes for those children and families we work with

## **2. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

The Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014, The Children Act 1989, Adoption and Children Act 2002, Children Act 2004 provides the legislative and regulatory framework which underpins this strategy.

## **3. PURPOSE**

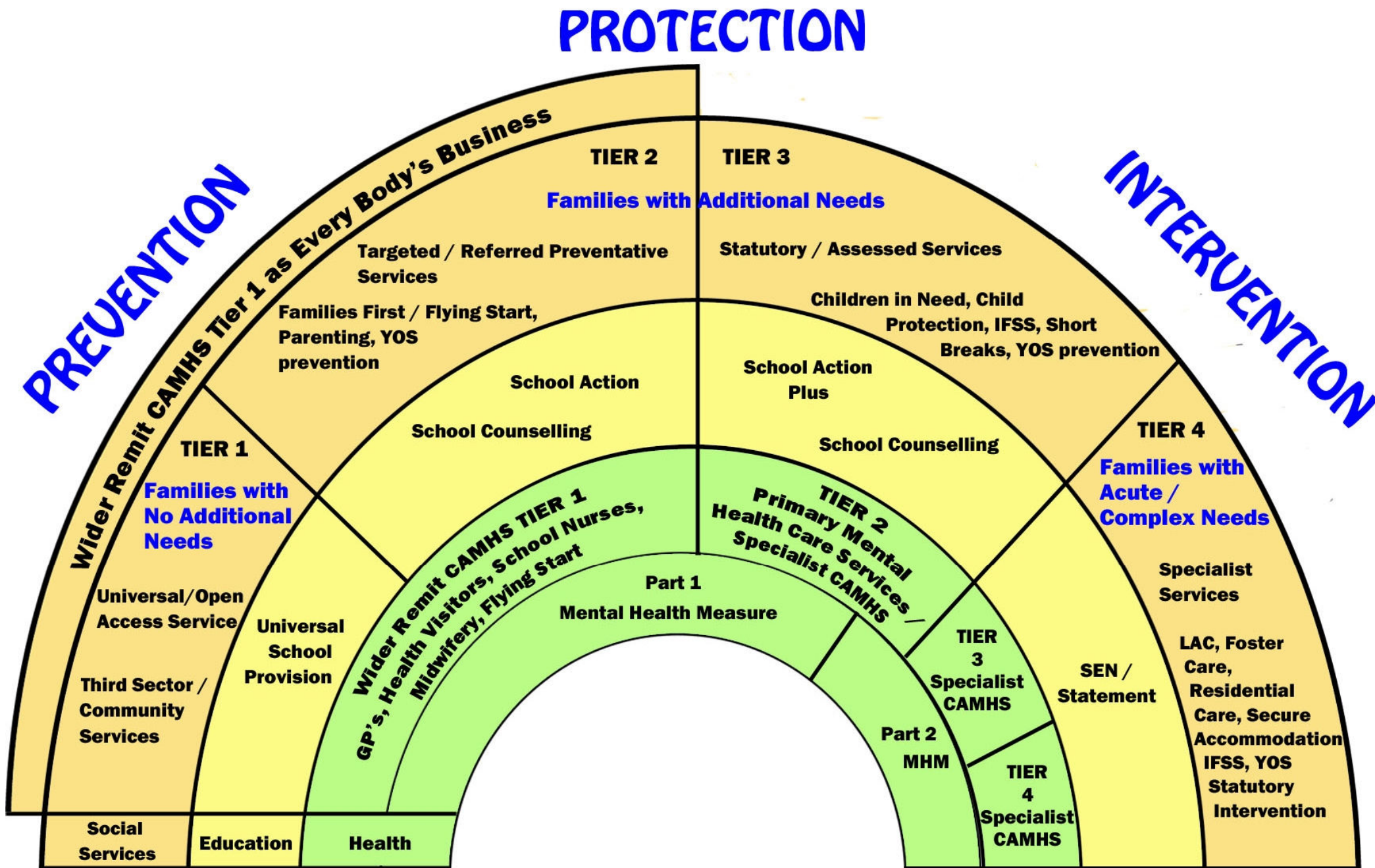
The Purpose of this strategy is to achieve three key objectives. These are:-

1. To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to be Looked After by ensuring a focus on early intervention and prevention across all service provision for children, young people and their families.
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the 'edge of care' by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by making private arrangements within their wider family networks.
3. To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements that meets the diverse range of children's needs.

Figure 1 and 2 sets out the range of social care provision for children, young people and their families provided by the Council and key partners

Figure 1: Tiered Model of Children, Young People and Family Services

# Multi Agency Tiers of Intervention



**Figure 2**

Level of Need and Type of Support or Intervention	Service Response and Priority	Service Context	Assessment, Planning and Resources
<p><b>Tier 1 Universal Needs</b></p>	<p>Universal provision and /or access to health services, childcare, education, information, advice, guidance and other opportunities.</p>	<p>All children and young people, including all vulnerable groups and those with any type of special needs, for example Family Information Service</p>	<p>Universal – across a broad range of services.</p>
<p><b>Tier 2 Additional Needs</b></p>	<p>Either a single agency response or a multi-agency response where this is required.</p>	<p>Community based support for children and families suffering early stresses and temporary crises. Team Around the Family/Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) processes in place. Flying Start Programme and Families First Programme</p>	<p>Above plus Team around the Family model (Supporting Family Change) which implements JAFF as and when required. YISP, School Action and School Action Plus; Targeted Youth Support etc.</p>
<p><b>Tier 3 Complex Needs</b> Health or development likely to be impaired without services but no immediate risk of significant harm. This tier includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children in need (Children Act, 1989).</li> <li>• Some risk of significant harm/family breakdown</li> </ul>	<p>Threshold for specialist assessment by services including Health, Social Care, Youth Offending.</p> <p>For Social Care: response within 24 hours and children seen within 7 working days as part of an “initial assessment”.</p>	<p>No immediate risk of significant harm.</p> <p>Community based support for children, young people and families facing a range of stresses, from moderate to severe</p> <p>Children and young people supported to remain living at home or within family network.</p>	<p>Above plus specialist assessment. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children’s Services Initial Assessment and Core Assessment</li> <li>• Child in Need planning</li> <li>• Child Protection planning</li> <li>• Immediate Response Team</li> <li>• Children’s Services Commissioned Services</li> <li>• Short breaks services for disabled children and young people.</li> <li>• Child and Adolescent Mental Health Tier 2/3 Services</li> <li>• YOS assessments/preventative services</li> <li>• Multi Agency Resources Panel (consideration of placement options)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tier 4 Acute Needs</b> High risk or actual family/social breakdown including children with significant health care needs.</p> <p>Statutory intervention.</p>	<p>Immediate service response required and subsequent service guaranteed.</p>	<p>Community based support for children and families facing severe stresses and at risk of family breakdown AND services to children and young people not living at home. Children accommodated in foster care or in some form of specialist provision.</p>	<p>Above plus Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) Foster care/ residential care Multi-agency Complex Needs Panel Specialist Health Services Specialist CAMHS YOS statutory interventions</p>
<p><b>Permanence</b></p>	<p>All children allocated to appropriate professional</p>	<p>Placed for adoption or in other long term and permanent care placements</p>	<p>Above plus Permanence Panel</p>

## 4. TRENDS IN DEMAND FOR BLAENAU GWENT AND COMPARATOR AUTHORITIES

The Welsh Government data unit gathers information from all local authorities across Wales. This enables authorities to compare their performance with authorities with similar characteristics. The authorities identified as being the standard comparator authorities with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council currently are:

- Rhondda Cynon Taff
- Merthyr
- Caerphilly
- Torfaen

**NB** Newport have also been included as a neighbouring authority who has a developed Edge of Care Team which has been independently evaluated

This section of the report provides information on the following

- The numbers of **referrals** made into Childrens services
- The numbers and % of **re referrals** made into Childrens services
- The numbers of **children in need** and rate per 10,000 population
- The numbers of **children on the child protection register** and the rate per 10,000 population
- The numbers of **children looked after** and the rate per 10,000 population

### Figure 1

#### Referrals to Children's Social Care Services:

Local Authority	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Rhondda Cynon Taff	2,767	3,017	3,441	3,102	3,765
Merthyr	741	928	825	698	802
Caerphilly	3,058	2,836	2,237	1,907	2,006
Blaenau Gwent	1,049	1,127	1,194	1,071	1,103
Torfaen	1,945	2,331	2,284	1,985	1,447
% per head of population					
Wales	45,905	39,817	35,285	35,423	33,536
Newport	4,304	3,524	1,935	1,871	2,018

Figure 1 shows a consistent picture in relation to the numbers of **referrals** being made into Blaenau Gwent Childrens services. What it does not show is the change in the nature of those referrals. The Blaenau Gwent safeguarding report which is produced 3 times a year and presented to Joint Scrutiny Committee has during 2016/17 seen a sustained increase in the number of child protection referrals. This inevitably means a higher level of intervention and work load.

**Figure 2**

**Re-referrals into Children's Social Care Services:**

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>
Rhondda Cynon Taff	532 19%	644 21%	775 22.5%	622 20%	908 24%
Merthyr	157 21%	239 26%	218 26%	112 16%	132 16%
Caerphilly	755 25%	760 27%	544 24%	400 21%	417 21%
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	<b>172 16%</b>	<b>170 15%</b>	<b>154 13%</b>	<b>141 13%</b>	<b>148 13%</b>
Torfaen	554 28%	593 25%	597 26%	530 27%	323 22%
<b>Wales</b>	<b>13,635 30%</b>	<b>10,749 27%</b>	<b>7,839 22%</b>	<b>7,459 21%</b>	<b>6,727 20%</b>
Newport	1,883 44%	1,374 39%	604 31%	438 23%	502 25%

**Figure 2** shows that Blaenau Gwent has consistently had a lower number of re-referrals back into childrens services compared to our comparator authorities and the Wales average. This would suggest the needs of the children and families have been successfully met first time preventing further re referrals back into the service



**Figure 3**Number of **Children in Need**:

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rhondda Cynon Taff	1,880	1,865	2,115	2,095
Merthyr	555	575	615	530
Caerphilly	1,355	1,400	1,245	1,245
Blaenau Gwent	520	525	620	670
Torfaen	995	995	915	865
Wales	20,240	19,920	20,145	19,385
Newport	1,090	1,045	1,085	1,110

**Figure 4**Rate of **Children In Need** per 10,000 population by authority:

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rhondda Cynon Taff	375	370	425	420
Merthyr	440	460	490	425
Caerphilly	340	355	320	320
Blaenau Gwent	365	370	440	480
Torfaen	500	510	470	445
Wales	320	315	320	310
Newport	330	315	325	335

Figure 3 and 4 shows a continual rise year on year in the number and % per 10,000 population of child in need cases being open in Blaenau Gwent. It also shows in 2015 Blaenau Gwent had the highest number of children in need in relation to our comparator authorities and the Wales average.

**Figure 5**Number of Children on the **Child Protection Register** as at 31<sup>st</sup> March by authority

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rhondda Cynon Taf	420	365	470	450	460
Merthyr Tydfil	105	115	135	105	105
Caerphilly	245	165	215	205	195
Blaenau Gwent	70	60	70	65	70
Torfaen	150	95	135	100	150
Wales	2,885	2,955	3,135	2,935	3,060
Newport	110	135	190	185	140

**Figure 6**

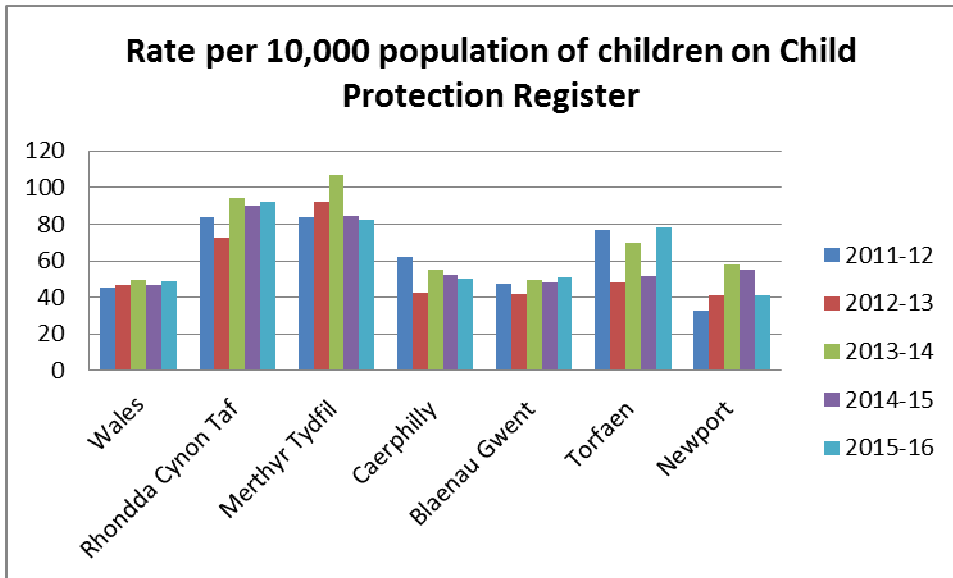


Figure 5 and 6 show the numbers and % per 10,000 of children on the Child Protection Register in Blaenau Gwent is lower than our comparator authorities RCT, Merthyr and Torfaen but within similar numbers and % per 10,000 population as Newport and Caerphilly. The children's services senior management team regularly scrutinise those children who are on the child protection register to ensure risks are being appropriately managed and scrutinises those cases where children have remained on the register for over 12 months. This has had the impact of very few numbers of children remaining on the register for over 12 months without a clear multi agency decision being about the ongoing risk to those children.

### Figure 7

Number of **Looked After Children** by authority at 31<sup>st</sup> March:

Local Authority	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rhondda Cynon Taf	595	620	650	620	625
Merthyr Tydfil	190	180	175	165	140
Caerphilly	310	305	275	270	275
Blaenau Gwent	135	135	145	135	195
Torfaen	300	300	295	290	270
Wales	5,720	5,765	5,745	5,615	5,660
Newport	275	280	285	285	292

**Figure 8**

Rate of **Looked After Children** per 10,000 by authority:

<b>Local Authority</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Rhondda Cynon Taf	119	124	130	124	125
Merthyr Tydfil	153	145	140	131	113
Caerphilly	78	77	71	70	72
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>139</b>
Torfaen	152	153	152	150	142
<b>Wales</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>90</b>
Newport	83	84	86	86	88

Figure 7 and 8 demonstrates a significant rise in the numbers and % per 10,000 in Looked After Children numbers in Blaenau Gwent during 2015/16. For many years Blaenau Gwent had been comparable to the Wales average however the 2015/16 figures now places the authority out of kilter with this position. It is interesting to note that Newport and Caerphilly who have Edge of Care Teams in place have maintained a low rate of looked after children per 10,000 population. It is also interesting to note Torfaen up until 2016 had a reducing number per 10,000 population. Part of this strategy involves learning from research currently being undertaken by the Children and Young People's Partnership Board to learn from best practice within the Gwent area

## **5. ANALYSIS OF BLAENAU GWENT'S LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN POPULATION AND PROVISION OF LOCAL FOSTER CARE**

**Figure 9**

**Breakdown of looked after children by age as @ Feb 2017**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Under 5	50	26%
5 – 11 years	70	36%
12 – 15 years	49	25%
16+	25	13%
<b>Total LAC</b>	<b>194</b>	

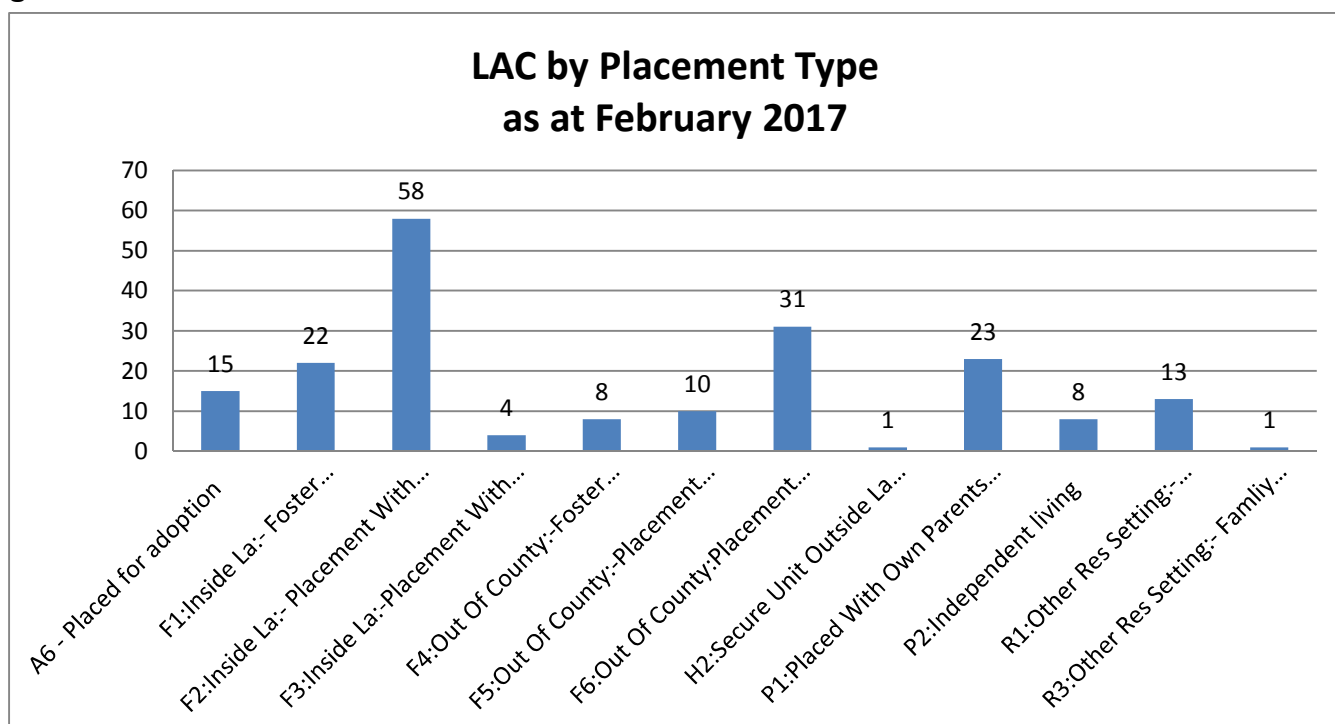
Figure 9 shows us the age profile of out looked after children. This information is not easily available to enable us to compare ourselves to our comparator authorities. It is important we understand this demographic. This cohort of children most likely to exit the looked after system is the 0- 5 year olds. It is this cohort who is most often involved in care proceedings and will either return to the care of their parents or extended family members or be adopted. The older the child the more likely they will remain in the looked after system.

**Figure 10**

**Breakdown of Placement type as @ Feb 2017**

Placement Type	Number	Percentage
A6 - Placed for adoption	15	8%
F1:Inside La:- Foster Placement With A Relative Or Friend	22	11%
F2:Inside La:- Placement With Other Foster Carer Provided By La	58	30%
F3:Inside La:-Placement With Foster Carer, Through Agency	4	2%
F4:Out Of County:-Foster Placement With A Relative Or Friend	8	4%
F5:Out Of County:-Placement With Other Foster Carer Through La	10	5%
F6:Out Of County: Placement With Foster Carer, through Agency	31	16%
H2:Secure Unit Outside La Boundary	1	1%
P1:Placed With Own Parents Or Person With Parental Responsibility	23	12%
P2:Independent living	8	4%
R1:Other Res Setting:- Residential Care Home	13	7%
R3:Other Res Setting:- Family Centre Or Mother And Baby Unit	1	1%
Total LAC	194	

**Figure 11**



Figures 10 and 11 show where our looked after children are living. The highest proportions are living with our own local authority foster carers inside the local authority borough. Overall approximately two thirds are with our own foster carers and one third are with independent foster carers and yet the budget for each cohort is the same. This is not to say those living with

independent foster carers receive a high quality of care (this is simply not the case) it just costs more. It is imperative we try to redress this balance not least from the point of view that most independent foster placement are outside of Blaenau Gwent making it difficult for children to stay in the same school and maintain friendship groups and contact with family.

**Figure 12**

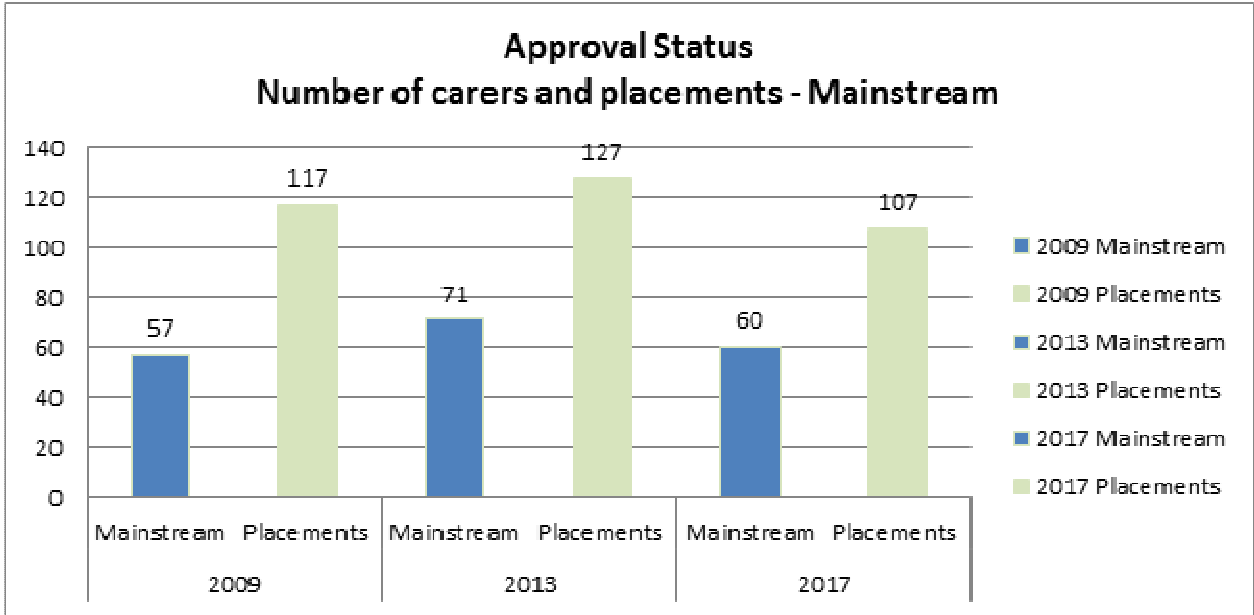


Figure 12 shows how the numbers of Mainstream (local authority ) foster carers have decreased since 2013. This is not a picture that is unique to Blaenau Gwent which is why Welsh Government through the Ministerial Advisory Group for Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children are in the process of developing a National Foster Framework. There is a recognition Wales is in the middle of managing a declining number and aging population of foster carers when the demand for foster placements is increasing.

**Figure 13**

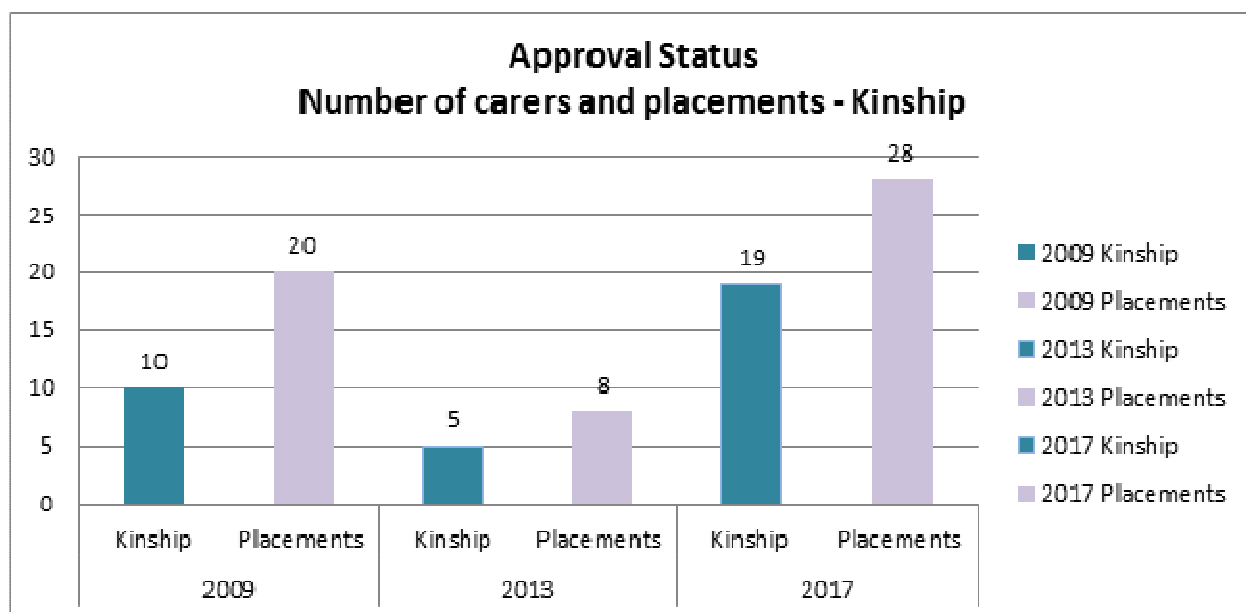


Figure 13 show the increase of Kinship placements since 2013. Kinship placements are family members who have been assessed as foster carers who care for their children. This cohort of carers includes grandparents, aunts and uncles. Historically these placements have been made informally by the local authority but case law has made these informal arrangements very difficult to achieve. The Social Service and Wellbeing Act 2014 puts a great deal of emphasis on prevention and early intervention. Part of this strategy is using this aspect of the Act to return to the use of these informal arrangements when it is appropriate and safe to do so.

## **6. PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE OBJECTIVES**

The following are the principles which underpin this strategy

1. The responsibility for meeting the needs of children and young people Looked After or at risk of becoming Looked After rests across all services for children, including statutory and independent providers.
2. The majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families and communities.
3. Preventative services and early intervention to support children in need and their families should be provided to give them every chance to stay together.
4. Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, families will be supported to make private arrangements within their wider family and friendship networks and, where necessary, to make these arrangements permanent through the use of Child Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders

5. Family and friends fostering arrangements will be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protecting children
6. Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through the arrangements described in principles 4 and 5, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family, preferably with in-house foster carers and, if not, with Independent Fostering Agency carers wherever possible living within Blaenau Gwent County Borough.
7. Residential care placements will be made only where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person's needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject to a Court Ordered Secure Remand.
8. Placements should be local (unless safeguarding concerns dictate otherwise) to enable children and young people to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives.
9. All Looked after Children of statutory school age should receive appropriate education provision regardless of their placement and ability to access school. Providing appropriate support to enable engagement in education is just as important as finding suitable care placements for Looked after Children.
10. Placements should support a positive transition to independence, adulthood, education, employment, and training and where applicable, resettlement back into the community from custodial settings.

## **7. OBJECTIVE 1: TO SUPPORT FAMILIES TO STAY TOGETHER**

### **Resources available to help achieve this objective**

**Information, Advice and Assistance** – Blaenau Gwent is well placed to deliver the provision of a service that provides people with information and advice relating to care and support, and assistance in accessing care and support. The service provides the critical entry point to Children's and Adults Services and has a key role in assessing the needs of children, young people and their parents and carers and signposting them to the most appropriate solution to meet their needs. The service enables early intervention and access to preventative support to reduce the need for statutory care and support.

**Prevention and Early intervention** - We need to work together in building the resilience of parents and families and giving them the skills and confidence to provide a positive and safe family environment in which children and young people can thrive. This includes direct support when families are struggling as well as developing and building capacity in families to sustain effective strategies for managing change and difficulty without the need for ongoing professional support. This will include responsive assessments and provision of Direct Payments for children with complex needs, to provide additional supports at the lowest level of intervention.

There is a range of provision available within the Borough which includes:-

- **Flying Start** - a Welsh Government grant funded programme available in targeted areas of Blaenau Gwent and supports families where there are children between the ages of 0 and 3 years to give them a Flying Start in life. The scheme has 4 core elements which include, enhanced health visiting support, free part time child care, parenting, speech and language support. Flying start also has an outreach element to the programme which works with children under the age of 3 whose names are on the child protection register.
- **Families First** - a Welsh Government grant funded programme, established to target early intervention and prevention services to children, young people and families, minimizing the need for higher level support and intervention from statutory services. The initiative recognizes that some of the difficulties children and young people present are as a result of factors affecting other members of the family. The programme aims to provide families with holistic, multi-agency support, tailored to the needs of individuals and the family as a whole.
- The Families First programme in Blaenau Gwent has been restructured and the new delivery model will start from April 2017. The programme will comprise of a Team around the Family model plus a small number of commissioned services. The majority of interventions will be delivered by 2 hubs covering the North and South of the Borough. This multiagency Team will undertake an assessment of need and deliver a plan of intervention according to that need.
- **Reflect Service** - Reflect provides support to women, and where appropriate their partners, following the compulsory, permanent removal of one or more children due to child protection concerns. The service will provide holistic support to enable women to make positive changes for the future, which can include avoiding pregnancy through the use of long acting reversible contraception systems (LARCS)
- **Gwent Missing Children Hub** – This project aims is to improve the lives and outcomes for children who go missing by reducing the number of missing episodes for children by using the independent debriefing service which seeks to meet with every child following a missing episode to establish the reasons why and provide support to prevent this from reoccurring.
- **Youth Offending Service (YOS)**– Prevention Service - provides voluntary family support to those families of children and young people assessed as ‘at risk of offending’ through their prevention service and to those ‘at risk of re-offending’ whilst under supervision of a statutory court order where the family agree to engage with family support services to reduce the risk of offending.

The YOS offers eligible parents access to 1:1 or group work programmes to improve their skills in managing and changing inappropriate behaviours. The YOS will also supervise parents of children and young people on Statutory Parenting Orders imposed by the Court, as defined by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 when a young person’s risk of offending or re-offending determines such action is required.



## **Actions Required**

### **Management responsibilities**

- Embed the new family's first structure from April 2017 to deliver targeted interventions to prevent needs from escalating.
- Continue robust delivery of the 4 core elements of Flying Start and maximize the use of the outreach element to identify need at an early stage and deliver interventions to prevent needs from escalating
- Commission legal advice on a regional level to establish how children can be placed with extended family without the need to become looked after under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014.

### **Developing Practice**

- Ensure regular review of children placed at home with parents under a care order, and ensure revocation of the order is done at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure the option of rehabilitation back to family members is discussed at every looked after Childrens review
- Embed a family meeting culture across the service to enable family to establish their own support and solutions when a child is at risk of becoming looked after
- Peer reviews of cases will be undertaken to ensure thresholds are consistent.

### **How will we know the objective has been achieved?**

- We will be confident we are looking after the right number of children
- There will be a stabilisation or possible reduction in the numbers of looked after children
- There will be a possible reduction in the numbers of children receiving statutory social services
- Also possible lower numbers of children on the child protection register

## **8. OBJECTIVE 2: TO MANAGE RISK CONFIDENTLY AND SUPPORT FAMILIES AT THE EDGE OF CARE**

### **What is available to help achieve this objective?**

We need to ensure the right children become accommodated at the right time. Where early intervention and preventative services do not meet the needs of a child or young person, eligibility for further services is established if their needs can, and can only, be met by the preparation of care and support plan.

To do this, we need to be able to manage risk successfully with families who are approaching the threshold for care by providing effective assessments and interventions which support families to make changes whilst always ensuring that children and young people are kept safe.

Building on the service developments outlined in Objective 1, we need to support staff to make evidence-based risk assessments and implement strategies to manage identified risks. This will require managerial oversight and agreement of risk management plans. It will also require other family members, agencies and out of hours services to be clear about their role in implementing risk management plans.

In addition, the following key areas contribute to supporting children, young people and families 'at the edge of care':

- **Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS)** – funded by Welsh Government, IFSS is a regional multi-agency team working intensively with children and families where parental substance misuse co-exists with concerns about the welfare of the child.
- **Engagement of wider family and friendship networks-** Where a family is struggling to cope or has reached the point of crisis, we will support the family to explore whether there is capacity within the wider family and friendship network to provide appropriate care for the child or young person either temporarily or when necessary on a permanent basis through private family arrangements. This will be achieved through adoption of Family Group Meeting/ Mediation approaches to all our work.
- **Risk management tools-** These tools were adopted by the local authority and all staff received mandatory training during January/February 2016. The tools support social workers and managers to clearly identify risks to then agree appropriate interventions
- **Provide shared care and short breaks to enable families time limited opportunities to have respite or to resolve issues impacting on their parenting capacity-** Sometimes families need respite from caring duties or time and space to resolve stressful, chaotic situations and achieve change. Traditionally, short breaks care and respite care has only been provided for disabled children and young people. Offering short breaks and shared care arrangements for children and young people on the edge of care can be a positive action that reduces the need for them to come into longer term or permanent care. Use of childminding can assist families to access the most appropriate level of support when they need it.
- **Ensure placements made in an emergency or at short notice have robust time limited care plans-**We need to continue to ensure that the right children are accommodated at the right time and in the right placement. It is difficult to provide well matched and value for money placements in emergency situations or where requests are made at very short notice. However, we must acknowledge that a small number of children and young people may require immediate accommodation as a result of a Court Order or because of their involvement in the Criminal Justice System.
- **Provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds presenting as homeless-** A key group of young people on the edge of care are 16 and 17 year olds who present to Social Services or Housing as homeless. In the majority of cases, mediation will be attempted and will determine whether a Social Work Assessment and/or other services are required in order for young people to be supported to return home. It should only be those young

people who genuinely do not have a suitable place to live that can access accommodation provided by the Council. In those instances where there are additional complexities, the Social Work assessment may conclude that the young person should become Looked After. If we are to succeed in supporting this group of vulnerable young people, it is important that we continue to work in partnership with Housing Services and Supporting People to enable access to appropriate short-term accommodation that allows the assessment to be completed and any family mediation to be undertaken. Such accommodation allows us to avoid making more expensive short-term arrangements which can often create false expectations and hamper efforts to return young people home.

- **Supervision of Staff-** All staff receive monthly supervision. This is an imperative priority to maintain a safe working environment and support staff when managing risk.
- **A workforce trained and confident to deliver appropriate interventions-** The workforce development team have a key role play in commissioning and delivery of the training needs identified within the child care workforce. Team/ Service Managers have a key role in identifying the training needs of the workforce.

## **Actions Required**

### **Management Responsibilities**

- Propose the development of an edge of care team to work intensively with families whose children are on the edge of becoming looked after. An edge of care team is a dedicated team of workers who do not case hold but work intensively with families who are experiencing issues such as substance misuse, domestic violence, mental health issues, etc.
- Engage with the Gwent Children and Families Partnership Board who are undertaking research into preventing the escalation of complex needs and use these findings to improve and shape future service delivery...
- Develop a system to highlight those cases on the edge of care
- Review the way in which IFSS deliver services to widen their remit

### **Developing Practice**

- Use the South East Wales Safeguarding Childrens Board multi agency supervision guidance to review cases where children continue to be on the child protection register following their 3<sup>rd</sup> review.
- Ensure the workforce are trained and skilled in a variety of interventions such as motivational interviewing, adopting strengths based approach to practice.
- Support social workers to manage risk for children on the edge of care.
- Embed a family meeting culture in practice
- Embed the use of risk management tools to ensure accurate assessment of risk
- Roll out attachment theory training currently being provided by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) Psychology and embed into practice using bi monthly Team consultations to discuss complex cases.

## How will we know when the Objective is achieved?

- We will be confident we are looking after the right number of children
- There will be a stabilisation or possible reduction in the numbers of looked after children
- There will be a possible reduction in the numbers of children receiving statutory social services
- Also possible lower numbers of children on the child protection register
- Evidence via case audits that family meetings are occurring and embedded in practice.
- Feedback from the workforce via staff survey they feel confident and supported when managing risk and delivering a variety of interventions.
- Evidence of children being cared for by extended family members without having to enter the care system

## 9. OBJECTIVE 3: TO PROVIDE AND COMMISSION FLEXIBLE AND AFFORDABLE RANGE OF HIGH QUALITY PLACEMENTS

For children and young people who are accommodated we will continue to ensure we have the right range of placements available to promote positive experiences and meet diverse need.

The Placement Team aims to recruit a range of foster placements within the County Borough to meet demand and to meet the individual needs of children and young people.

In order to ensure our range of placements are good value for money and affordable within the budget available, we need to focus on achieving the following areas:

### What is available to help achieve this objective?

- **Placement Team** – Blaenau Gwent has a dedicated Placement Team who are responsible for the recruitment, assessment and ongoing support of our in house foster placements. The Team is also responsible for identifying Independent foster placements and residential placements when the need arises.
- **Childrens Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs)** - The Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru is a partnership of authorities across Wales who work together to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and achieve value for money through working together collaboratively. As a collaborative partnership of 15 Welsh local authorities 4Cs continue to shape the children's placement market to deliver the range and volume of placements needed in South, Mid, and West Wales at value for money prices which deliver quality outcomes, in particular placement stability and a range of positive transitions for vulnerable children
- **(Greater Gwent) Children and Families Partnership Board-** This Board aims to strategically direct the multi-agency development and implementation of services for vulnerable children, young people and their families/carers across agencies in the Greater

Gwent area (services to be identified by the Partnership). The Partnership will be between Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and the Local Authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport, Monmouthshire and Torfaen ('the 5 Authorities') and the Independent Sector (to be identified as work streams develop).

## **Actions Required**

### **Management Responsibilities**

- Increase the number and capacity of in-house fostering placements to ensure we have enough families with the right combination of skills who are supported to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in the Blaenau County Borough
- Reduce our dependence on Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and clearly specify their role.
- Work with Supporting People and the independent providers of accommodation to ensure an appropriate range of accommodation for young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years
- Continue to work with the Improving Outcomes for Children Ministerial Advisory Group to implement the work programme which includes the development of a National Fostering Framework.
- Continue to collaborate with authorities in Gwent to develop a regional approach to providing and supporting local authority foster placements.

### **Developing Practice**

- Manage demand for residential placements ensuring children and young people only use this resource for the minimum amount of time possible before moving on to alternative accommodation which will meet their needs
- Ensure all foster carers have the correct level and access to training according to their needs

### **How will we know when the Objective is achieved?**

- An increase in the number of local authority foster placements
- Reduce the number of Blaenau Gwent children being placed with independent fostering agencies.
- Regional ways of delivering a fostering service will have been explored and improvements to service delivery will have been made.
- The current research projects being undertaken by the Greater Gwent Children and family partnership Board will be complete and service delivery changed as a result of the findings.
- Service delivery will be maintained within the looked after children's budget

## **10. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

This Strategy sets out how we will deliver our commitment to families to stay together, to manage risk confidently and ensure when children do need to be looked after we have the a wide range of placement options to meet these needs.

The development of this Strategy simply marks the start of a journey. It is delivery of the objectives included in the document that will make the difference. The work will require a continued, coordinated Council wide effort.

The Children Services Departmental Leadership Team (DLT) will be tasked with overseeing the delivery of the strategy, monitoring the impact on children and their families and driving forward the focus on reducing admissions to care.

The Actions required to deliver this strategy will be contained within the Childrens Services Annual Business Plan. Progress against each action will be reported quarterly through the DLT.

We will continue to refine the plans and build our evidence base over coming months; as our thinking evolves, so will this Strategy. As a result, this Strategy and the associated action plan will continue to be live documents, regularly updated and reviewed on an annual basis.