

# Draft Early Help and Permanence Strategy

**2021-2022**

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol



## Introduction

### The purpose and aims of the strategy

This Early Help and Permanency Strategy focuses on how we will improve and promote outcomes for children and young people in Bridgend. The term early intervention has been replaced by the term early help. The successful delivery of early help to children, young people and families in Bridgend is reliant on the strength of partnership working, leadership and management commitment, and having a clear, robust and agreed framework from which to work.

Key to its implementation is a joined up approach between practitioners to share information and ensure the child/young person and their family are at the centre of any support they receive, which is delivered at the right time and in the right way.

This strategy supports the local authority's Corporate Plan and directorate business plans. Its focus is on supporting families to stay together wherever it is safe to do so, and minimising the need of statutory intervention and ultimately children and young people experiencing care.

The Education and Family Support directorate along with the Social Services and Wellbeing directorate are driving a 'whole system' approach to support children, young people and families.

This strategy will describe what will change in relation to our work with children, young people and their families at the earliest possible stage. The emphasis of the work is based upon there is 'no wrong front door' for accessing support. The strategy is complemented by an action plan for future service development and delivery.

Bridgend want all our children and young people to:

- thrive and make the best of their talents;
- live healthy and safe lives;
- be confident and caring individuals throughout their lives; and
- know and receive their rights.

### Early Help and Permanence

The Social Services and Wellbeing Act, Section 15, requires that local authorities must provide or arrange for the provision of a range and level of preventative services which they consider will achieve the following purposes:

- a) contributing towards preventing or delaying the development of people's needs for care and support
- b) reducing the need for care and support of people who have such needs
- c) promoting the upbringing of children by their families, where that is consistent with the well-being of children
- d) minimising the effect on disabled people of their disabilities
- e) contributing towards preventing people from suffering abuse or neglect
- f) reducing the need for:

- proceedings for care or supervision orders under the Children Act 1989
  - criminal proceedings against children
  - any family or other proceedings in relation to children which might lead to them being placed in local authority care, or
  - proceedings under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court in relation to children
- g) encouraging children not to commit criminal offences avoiding the need for children to be placed in secure accommodation;

Early help is taking action as soon as possible to tackle problems for children and families before they become more difficult to reverse. Early help with families will ensure that children, young people and families who are at risk or vulnerable to poor outcomes are identified early and that their needs are effectively assessed and met by agencies working together.

There is a substantial body of evidence that demonstrates that particular early interventions can be very effective at improving outcomes for young people and families.

### **Our ambition**

- Know which children need safeguarding
- Know which children need early help
- Help individuals, families and communities to help themselves
- Work in strong partnerships
- Swift, sensitive and effective help
- Understand how successful we are by ensuring the voice of children, young people and families is central to the support offered

### **Key objectives in early help and permanence planning**

The aim of early help is to prevent the needs of the children and families from escalating rather than to respond only when the difficulty has become so acute as to demand attention to:

- improve outcomes and life chances for children, young people and families placing the well-being of the child / young person at the centre of all that we do
- increase access to timely, targeted and appropriate services
- manage highly predictable risk better (e.g. parents who have been in care themselves and parents who have previously had children removed)
- refocus resources and expenditure from crisis intervention to early help
- provide a focus on the whole family and the role of the family in the planning and delivery of early help
- ensure interventions have a strong evidence base and any services commissioned are able to evaluate and demonstrate impact and outcomes
- further develop multi-agency and integrated working, including using and sharing data and information more effectively
- strengthen the role of universal services provision in early help
- communicate the early help offer and how it can be accessed
- develop skills and management support/supervision for early help workers

## **Underpinning principles of early help**

- A focus on identification of need and swift access to appropriate early help
- Support available for the child/ young person's journey throughout all key life stages offering continuity and flexibility wherever possible
- Equality of access to early help provision
- Families recognised as central to defining and addressing problems and empowered as partners in the process of early help
- Work with the whole family, including fathers and other carers
- Promotion of personal responsibility and resilience rather than dependency.
- Active engagement of children, young people and families in the planning and delivery and evaluation of services
- Commitment to collaboration, joint commissioning and multi-agency working and to overcoming organisational barriers to achieving better outcomes.
- Shared systems in place to provide effective early help

## **Strategic plan for early help**

- High quality universal services are the building blocks of effective early help
- Workforce is able to identify additional needs at an early stage
- Workforce has a clear understanding of the levels of need, and how services and support may be accessed
- There is a clear process in place to support effective multi- agency co-ordination of targeted support
- There is a clear step up and step down process in place
- A co-ordinated delivery programme of early help services and support across all ages and stages of a child's development

If good outcomes are achieved, the different needs of children and young people – social, physical, emotional, cultural and learning – will have been met. However, not all children and young people have the benefits of good health, a stable and nurturing family, the necessary personal and social skills or other attributes which will secure their safety and wellbeing.

## **Striving for stability and permanence for care experienced children.**

Care experienced children are children and young people aged between 0 to 18 years who cannot safely remain with their family and are cared for by the Local Authority. Children are accommodated by the Local Authority either as a result of Court proceedings because they have been or are in danger of being harmed, or with parental agreement. A significant proportion of children who enter the care system have a history of neglect or abuse.

In general, outcomes for children who have had an experience of being in the care system, particularly for long periods of time or after a long period of poor parenting and neglect, are not as positive as those who have not experienced care. Hence, early help is necessary to ensure children and young people receive good parenting and (often specialist) support when in a timely manner.

To support this, Bridgend have identified five areas which will contribute to safely reducing the number of children in the care system whilst ensuring the most appropriate permanence arrangements:

- strategy and leadership;
- prevention and early help;
- approach to practice;
- partnership working, and
- information and intelligence about performance.

### **Using a threshold of need model to support practice (See Appendix A)**

Because a child or family can experience an array of problems all at once, early help requires a multilevel, holistic approach. For example, at a local level early help may involve Family Engagement officer and a youth offending team working together to get to the root of a family's issues and refer them to the best support for their particular situation.

Threshold levels of intervention act as a guide to professional decision making aiming to maximise opportunities for the right level of support to be offered at the right time, to ensure that a child or young person's needs are met in a proportionate, robust and timely way, improving life chances to keep children and young people safe. The thresholds should always be viewed as a clear and fluid continuum, responsive to changing circumstances and environments through which children may travel both down and up and will on occasion be accessing services across the continuum, as need determines.

As we know the needs of children and young people and their families are not static, these may escalate e.g. in the face of a crisis or unanticipated incident, equally they may diminish, e.g. as a result of a successful intervention, an increase in protective factors, reduction in risk and enhancement of resilience.

Evidence tells us in such circumstances a seamless integrated transition between thresholds is indicated, which can assist a family to maintain positive momentum or indeed manage a crisis or incident, without additionally and instantly losing the input and support of the lower threshold agencies.

It is also intended that this model be used to enable practitioners and their partner agencies to communicate their concerns about children using a common format, language and understanding of levels of need, concern and/or risk for children, young people and their families.

### **Using the model to identify appropriate services**

Having identified an overview of a child and family's needs, practitioners will be able to use the detailed threshold examples to reach a collective understanding of the most appropriate services to respond to identified need aiding consistent and rationalised decision making.

## Permanence

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. It is also important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives although they may not wish (for a variety of reasons) to be in a foster home or to be adopted. For example, they may prefer to live in a children's home where they can also achieve a sense of security and belonging.

The question "how are the child's permanence needs being met?" must be at the core of everything we do.

Where it is necessary for a child to leave his or her family:

- this should be for as short a time as needed to secure a safe, supported return home; or
- if a child cannot return home, plans must be made for alternate permanent care. Family members and friends should always be considered in the first instance with the permanence secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the child's needs;
- where it is not in the child's best interests to live within the family network, it will usually be in the interests of the child for alternative permanent carers to be identified and the placement secured through adoption, long term foster care, Child Arrangements Orders or Special Guardianship Orders;
- residential group living is provided only when a need for this is identified within the Care Plan and when substitute family care is not appropriate;
- for older children arranging for their independent living must be considered.

Where it is clear that families and children are unable to live together, planning must be swift and clear to identify permanent alternative settings.

Wherever possible, care should be provided locally unless clearly identified as inappropriate.

Contact with the family, Connected Person and extended family should be facilitated and built upon (unless clearly identified as inappropriate). The professionals involved work in partnership with parents/families to meet the above objectives whilst the wishes and feelings of the child are taken into account. The older and more mature the child, the greater the weight should be given to his or her wishes.

Whilst it is important, when undertaking permanence planning, to promote the child's links with his or her racial, cultural and religious heritage, this should not be allowed to introduce delay in achieving permanence for the child.

## Priorities for 2021-2022

- Embed our one Council and partnership, whole system approach to improving and monitor performance thorough the use of a shared data set that is accurate, up to date and meaningful
- Identify comprehensive packages of support to safely enable children and young people to remain in their own families where possible with an emphasis on early help
- Identify more cases of children receiving care and support which need to be closed or stepped down to Early Help
- Ensure that effective support systems are put in place so that children who enter the care system can return to live safely with family members at the earliest opportunity
- Support more children and young people at home on Child Protection Plans instead of under Placement with Parent regulations
- Review all children and young people placed on a Care Order with parents and consider whether any can be discharged or stepped down to Supervision Orders
- Support more family members to become kinship carers
- Support more carers to become Special Guardians
- Recruit more local authority foster carers
- Reduce the number and length of time that children and young people are living in residential care settings
- Ensure that effective support systems and therapeutic interventions are put in place to prevent placement breakdown and promote placement stability for care experienced children
- Develop a constructive relationship with the Judiciary alongside mechanisms for regular dialogue with the Child and Family Court Advisory Support Service (CAFCASS) and clarity of expectations of the dialogue and collaborative working with children's guardians

- Develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy which commits the whole Council and partners to committing to taking the actions which result in the best possible lives for care experienced children
- Develop a child's rights approach to participation and involvement of children and young people in the work of early help and permanence services, including the reshaping of services

### So what will be different?

Children and young people will be supported to live in permanent family arrangements which are safe and support them to feel secure, and achieve their potential. This will mean:

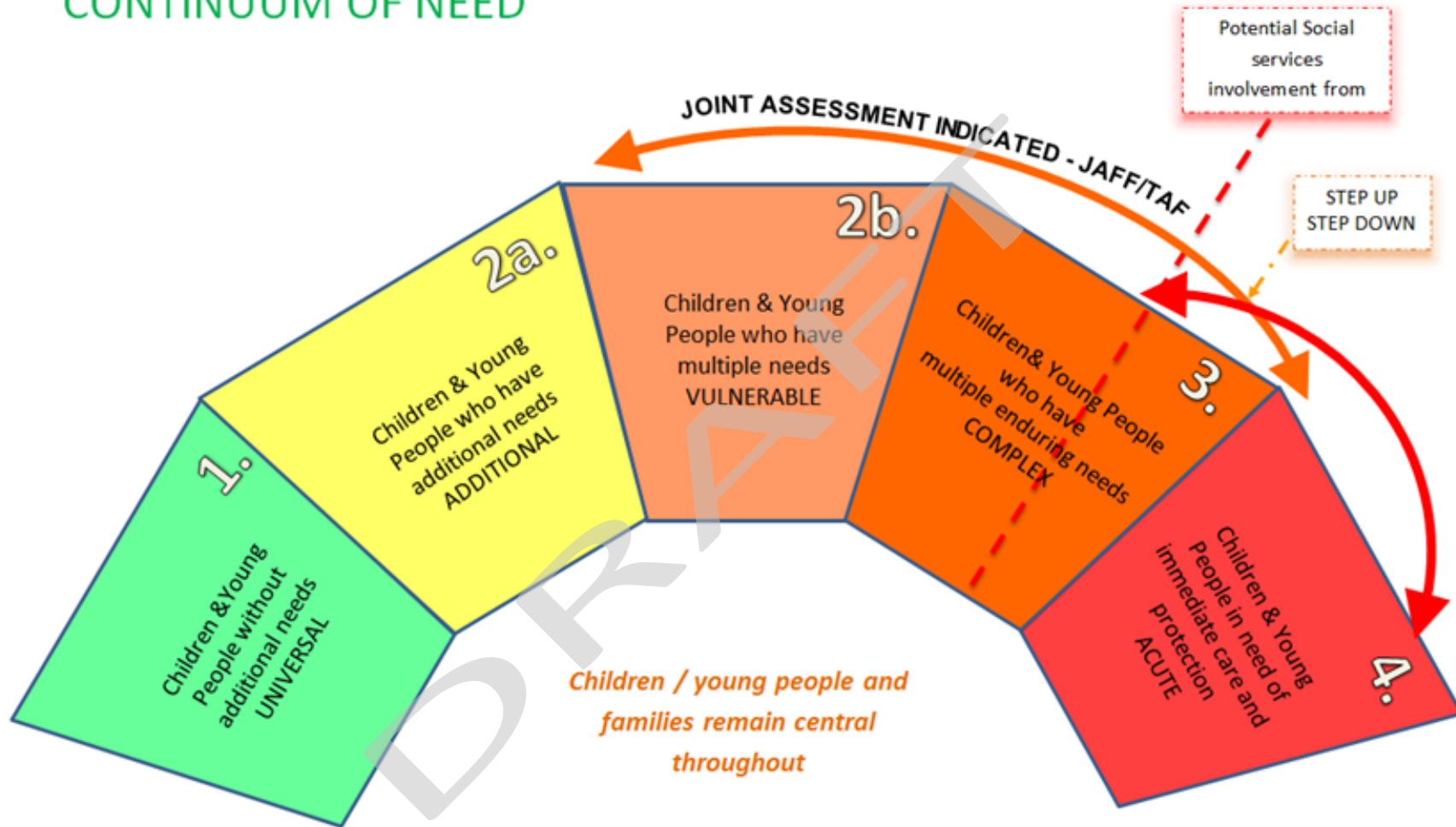
- A safe reduction in the number of care experienced children
- More children living with in families connected to their birth parents
- More children and young people successfully supported to return to live permanently with birth families
- More children and young people supported by early help services
- Less children and young people at home under 'Placement with Parent regulations'
- More children and young people living in families with Special Guardians
- More local authority foster families
- Where children and young people live in residential care settings it is for a shorter time, and to achieve a clear outcome which supports their permanent plan.
- Reduction in breakdown of all caring situations and increased permanence and stability for care experienced children
- A new Corporate Parenting Strategy developed with, and reflecting what matters to, children and young people.
- Children's rights and their participation and engagement at the heart of everything we do.





# Appendix A

## CONTINUUM OF NEED



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1.

At this level, support is 'universal', which means that it is generally available to all children and young people, such as schools, leisure centres, GP surgeries. Children and young people are making good overall progress across all areas of development. It is likely they live in a protective environment where their needs are well understood and met. These children need no additional support other than those universally available within public services.

2a.

Children and young people who need additional support, this may relate to their health, educational or social development. Support is required to improve the chances of reaching their full potential, if not identified and addressed at an early stage, these issues may escalate and become increased concerns under level 2b or 3.

2b.

Children, young people and their families have a range of needs. Multi-agency support is required to reduce levels of vulnerability and/or to reduce risk taking behaviours. If needs are not met then children's health, social development, or educational attainment may be significantly impaired. A Joint Assessment (JAFF) is required along with the appointment of a Lead Professional who will coordinate the support through the establishment of a Team around the Family (TAF).

3.

Children with complex needs which appear chronic and enduring, these children are considered highly vulnerable or living in the greatest level of adversity. The needs of many of these children and young people can be met through a Joint assessment and plan (JAFF) with a lead professional coordinating support. There will be occasions when a child or young person requires a STEP UP\* specialist assessment and support from a range of specialist agencies.

*\* See STEP UP Procedure*

4.

Children in need of immediate care and protection, this is the most urgent category and always requires an immediate referral to children's social care. These are children and young people whose care is so compromised as to place them at risk of significant harm and in need of a Child Protection Plan, and all children and young people already subject of a Child Protection Plan.

This level includes children and young people who are identified as at risk of becoming looked after by the local authority, and all children and young people already looked after by the local authority. These children/young people will be subject to the 'STEP DOWN' process once safety is secured. *\*See STEP DOWN Procedure*

## Step Down Process – Appendix B

