

Think Family- Improving Outcomes for Children and Families in Bridgend

A 3- year plan to achieve sustainable improvement

Introduction

This plan has been developed by the Bridgend County Borough Council Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate on behalf of the Council to set out a clear set of strategic objectives and actions that will deliver sustainable and effective support for children, young people and families in the County Borough in the next 3 years.

The plan sets the direction for the work needed over the next 3 years to transform our services in line with national policy and best practice. We aim to embed a culture and practice of, continuous improvement in the way we work with children and families which builds on the strengths in families and communities and places safety, wellbeing and improving outcomes for children and their families at the heart of everything we do.

The plan is located within a wider programme of development being undertaken by the Council in partnership with the people and communities of Bridgend, statutory and non-statutory partners which include:

- Progressing the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plans for 2023-34 onwards.
- The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board (RPB) Population Needs Assessment and Area Plan which set out an assessment of the needs of the populations of Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil and is also an assessment of the range of health, social care and wellbeing services needed to meet those needs.
- The priorities of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board (RSB) which provides strategic leadership for safeguarding children and adults at risk across the region and supports learning through the undertaking and publishing Child Practice Reviews (CPRs) and monitor implementation of recommendations.
- Contributing to the Council's medium-term financial strategy (MTFS).
- Legislation set out in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014), the Regulation and Inspection of Care Act (2016), the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) and other statute and guidance.
- The Bridgend Social Services and Well-being Recovery Plan which was developed to support people, workforce and providers of service to recover from the short, medium and long-term impact of the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Context

Children, young people and families continue to face a number of challenges. The economic conditions mean that many people need state or community help, some for the first time. Others with existing long-term challenges will be looking for additional support. The medium to longer term

impact of Covid-19 lockdowns on children and families are only just starting to be understood. Post-pandemic increases in the need for support are evident. Resource and staffing challenges and close Care Inspectorate Wales monitoring will continue to be a feature. There has been a major impact on the community, local authority workforce and partner services from the terrible murder of a young child in July 2021. Following their inspection in 2022, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) reported that:

'Many of the pressures experienced by the local authority's children's services reflect the national pandemic recovery context including high levels of demand and increased complexity of people's needs. Critical workforce deficits in relation to social work recruitment, retention, and staff absence, had resulted in the loss of experienced staff and a competitive market for and an over reliance on newly qualified and agency social workers. The culmination of these pressures coupled with deficits in some systems and processes, including managerial oversight arrangements, has had a significant adverse impact on the delivery of some children's services in Bridgend County Borough. Concerns were identified in relation to the timeliness of the local authority's Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service and the ability to meet its statutory responsibilities to promote and protect the well-being of vulnerable children and families.'

We fully accept and agree with the report findings. We also agree with the Chief Inspector who said at that time that: *'I am pleased to acknowledge there has been some improvement since our assurance check in April 2021. However, further urgent action must be taken to secure and sustain improvement in the care and support for children and families in Bridgend. This work must be prioritised to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.'*

The focus of this plan is to set the strategy for sustainable improvement in the way Bridgend supports children and families so, over the period of the plan, we move from being an authority that 'requires improvement' to one that achieves consistently good outcomes.

We are not complacent about the work we need to do. We think that all services for children and families will continue to experience unprecedented calls on their resources and capacity for the next two to three years, and our priority is to improve our work with children and young people and their families, and to do so in a way that is meaningful, cost-effective and sustainable. This plan sets out where we will focus our improvement efforts.

Purpose, approach and priorities

Our purpose in supporting children and families as a Council is to exercise our legal and professional duties to help those who need care and support in Bridgend to have the best possible outcomes and experiences in life. Across the Council we are all committed to the following working principles:

Promoting choice and control for the people we work with by actively listening, and acting on what people tell us matters to them.

Treating people with respect for them, their culture, their characteristics and beliefs, and their language.

Being outcomes focused and strengths-based in understanding and acting upon what matters to the people we support.

Working in a constructive and creative professional partnership with our colleagues.

Respecting people's privacy and dignity.

Safeguarding and protecting people whenever needed.

Seeking greater equality and inclusion for people who need care and support.

Taking relationship-based approaches with people, helping them to have autonomy and reach their full potential

We expect our staff and colleagues to:

Be respectful of each other's contributions to the lives of children and families and those of our partners.

Work as a team, and as part of other Council and partnership teams, working to each other's strengths and to improve outcomes for children and families.

Listen and have open and honest styles of communication.

Commit to reflection, understanding and acting on our individual and collective learning.

Work with others to improve systems, practice and process where this will improve outcomes for children and families.

Be passionate and motivated about the work we do and the difference we can make.

Be mindful of our own and our colleagues wellbeing.

Work equitably and fairly, creatively, and innovatively.

Observe cultural considerations, including language.

Between 2023 and 2026, we will focus our improvement efforts on the following 7 areas:

The voice of children and families

Our workforce

Our practice

The impact of our services and interventions

Our response to families with complex needs

Our work with partners

Our intelligence and information systems

This will enable us to address the following key challenges:

Reducing the number and proportion of children and young people who need to experience care and support and require safeguarding in Bridgend.

Helping more families in Bridgend live well together and bring their children up to be resilient and live the lives that they want to live as adults.

Working with our partners to make sure families get the right help at the right time.

Re-focusing our resources on more cost-effective support for families with complex needs rather than expensive substitute care experiences.

We will closely monitor our progress, and adjust our priorities annually if needed, and we will have the governance arrangements described below to ensure that we make good progress.

Governance arrangements

Improving outcomes for children's and families is a high priority for the Council. To ensure that the strategic plan is effectively led and has the right level of resources assigned to support delivery, Improving Outcomes for Children Board (the Board) has been established, chaired by the Chief Executive of the Council.

The Board provides regular reports on progress to the Cabinet/Corporate Management Board, the Cabinet/Corporate Parenting Committee and the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Board also provides effective oversight, challenge and direction and ensures that resources are recommended to enable delivery of this plan.

This Board is in addition to safeguarding as a standard agenda item at each Cabinet/Corporate Management Board meeting in accordance with the Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy (2021). Improving outcomes for children and families is also a partnership priority and it is critical that senior partners from the NHS, police, housing, education and third sector are fully involved in the delivery of this plan. The Board will involve partners as appropriate and reports through the Bridgend Joint Operational Group for Safeguarding to the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board and the Bridgend Public Services Board.

The Board is currently exploring how it can better develop from a Council body to incorporate the Local Health Board and other partners in a shared and joint programme of action.

Seven strategic themes

There are seven key strategic themes which underpin this plan.

1. Hearing and acting on the voice of children and families
2. Securing a stable, well-supported, motivated and permanent workforce
3. Improving practice
4. Maximising the impact of our services and interventions
5. A more effective response to families with complex needs
6. Seamless working with partners
7. Better intelligence and information systems

Each theme is described in a section below. For each theme we have described why it is important, how we have been working to date, and what national policy and guidance we need to take account of in the next period. We then commit ourselves to specific objectives, measures and the key actions we will need to take to deliver them in the next 3 years. The appendices include a summary of our combined objectives, a three-year action plan and a list of immediate priorities we will focus on in the next six months.

1 Theme 1: Hearing and acting on the voice of children and families

1.1 Context

This theme is a building block for more effective and better accepted services, and better outcomes for children and families in Bridgend. We know that that we can do more to work co-productively with children, young people and their families, and there is emerging evidence of good practice we can draw on to help us improve.

1.2 Policy and guidance

There is a clear and strong emphasis in national policy and guidance about the importance of acting on the voice of children and families in both policy and practice including:

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (Welsh Government, 2015).

Emotional health and wellbeing: best practice in schools and early years settings (Welsh Government, 2010).

Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

A Healthier Wales (Welsh Government, 2018).

No Wrong Door (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

These have informed our objectives in this theme.

1.3 Key objectives

Our **key objectives** in this area are:

To work with children and families in a co-productive way based on mutual respect, strong relationships and an emphasis on strengths.

To have better arrangements in place which enable all staff to work in this way.

To ensure that all staff are able to take account of the experience and perspective of children and families they work with.

1.4 Key actions

The **key strategic actions** we will undertake over the 3-year period from April 2023 – April 2026 will include:

Build on the work to enhance the voice of care experienced children and young people in corporate parenting, to develop and implement an engagement and involvement framework so children and young people have an opportunity to become meaningfully involved in all aspects of the work of children's social care in Bridgend.

Ensure that quality assurance (QA) of practice enables the quality and effectiveness of practice to be evaluated through the lens of the experience of the children and families who we work with and for.

Ensure care experienced children and young people lead the monitoring and evaluation of the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, ensuring all parts of the Council and partner agencies understand and act on what matters to care experienced children and young people.

Develop a parent's participation charter so the experience of the families who work with children's social care is understood and used enhanced practices and interventions.

Adopt and implement the standards within a Care Leavers Parent Charter

Celebrate the achievements of our children and families with an annual celebration event.

1.5 Measures

The **key measures** we will use to tell us how we are doing will include:

The extent to which the involvement of children and young people is clearly evident in strategies and service development proposals.

The extent to which quality assurance processes meaningful embed the experience of children and to drive improvements.

The implementation of the Cabinet-approved corporate parenting strategy which clearly responds to what matters to care experienced children and young people in all aspects of their lives.

Whether parents are able to give their view on our work with them and we take their views seriously.

How well care leavers who become parents feel supported by their corporate parents

The extent to which we are able to support vulnerable children and families with complex needs to safely maintain their independence.

2 Theme 2: Securing a stable, well-supported, motivated and permanent workforce

2.1 Context

The effectiveness of our services relies fundamentally on a good team of skilled, well supported and appropriately motivated people who are able to support children, young people and families, often at the most difficult and challenging times of their lives. To develop the relationships needed with children and families workforce need the time and level of caseloads to enable quality work.

Recruitment and retention of staff working with children and families has never been easy, and since the pandemic has become significantly more difficult. We have not been able to fill all vacancies, particularly for qualified social workers, despite all efforts, and we have had to rely very heavily on agency staff. Children's social care have also had to operate above their funded establishment that we are funded for in order to safely comply with all statutory safeguarding and child protection standards.

We recognised this problem as we came out of the Covid-19 pandemic and over the last year we have been working on a comprehensive programme to address this.

2.2 Key objectives

Our **key objectives** in this area are:

To improve the experience of our workforce so they feel consistently well supported and valued.

To get the right balance of skills and experience in our teams to achieve best outcomes for children and families.

To retain and recruit the most able staff to our service and in so-doing reduce reliance on agency workforce.

2.3 Key actions

The **key strategic actions** we will undertake over the 3-year period from April 2023 – April 2026 will include:

Implement new structures, enhancing management oversight within teams, for all levels of social workers in children's social care and continue market supplement to address vacancies for children's social workers in teams that experience particular difficulties.

Focus on support and well-being for the workforce through systematically implementing the standards in the Social Worker Charter which include best practice standards for case-loads, high levels of management support through excellent supervision, promoting flexible working practices such as compressed hours and protecting time for research and reflection.

Review skill mix in children's social care and develop a workforce plan for the optimal numbers of different level of qualified social workers, social work support officers, social work assistants, social services practitioners, support officers, business support, other professionals such as mental health specialist workers, behaviour analysts.

Develop a revised business case for the Bridgend 'Grow our own Social Worker Programme' which sets out the resource requirements for Bridgend to achieve a sustainable permanent recruitment by supporting workforce to develop their careers to become qualified social workers through secondment and traineeship.

Continue to internationally recruit children's social workers.

Ensuring that the benefits of living and working in Bridgend are effectively promoted and success is celebrated so the reputation of the Council as valuing children's social work is enhanced

Ensure timely and effective trauma-informed well-being support to our workforce including through effective line management support, peer support and timely access to specialist support.

Working with other local authorities in Wales to strategically manage the relationship with agency workforce and promoting the benefits of working with the Council to our highly valued agency workers

Continuously improve our recruitment processes, drawing on marketing expertise to enhance campaigns and ensure the most efficient selection processes.

2.4 Key measures

The **key measures** we will use to tell us how we are doing will include:

The proportion of permanent social workers in children's social work teams.

Vacancy rates in children's social work teams.

The level of turnover in children's social work teams and average length of employment.

The proportion of 'home grown' social workers who develop careers in Bridgend.

Levels of sickness and absence by teams.

Workforce morale as evidenced through regular staff surveys and other feedback mechanisms

Numbers of applicants, offers and acceptances for children's social care roles.

3 Theme 3: Improving practice

3.1 Context

We will move forward swiftly with improving the way we work with children and families and achieving greater consistency and reliability from our services. In particular we want to build upon our existing approaches to strength-based practice, and to use the well-established 'Signs of Safety' approach to help us all improve the way we work together. We are very clear that there is more to be done in terms of clear and helpful guidance on practice and improving the way in which we assure ourselves of the quality of our work.

3.2 Policy and guidance

This theme responds to a national emphasis on innovation and practice improvement to support children, young people and families including:

The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (Welsh Government, 2015).

Emotional health and wellbeing: best practice in schools and early years settings (Welsh Government, 2010).

Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

A Healthier Wales Plan (Welsh Government, 2018) and the national Transformation Programme (2018-21).

Regional Integration Fund (Welsh Government 2022-27).

No Wrong Door (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

National Transformation Programme for Children's Services (Welsh Government 2023).

These have informed the objectives below.

3.3 Current position

We have laid the foundations for future improvement in this area in the last year – we have commenced the 'Signs of Safety' approach and worked hard to establish service-wide guidelines for staff and managers in areas such as supervision, quality assurance and working with families. We need to continue to move forward at pace.

3.4 Key objectives

Our **key objectives** in this area are:

To ensure that staff and partners are all working within a common 'Signs of Safety' framework and that this is seen as a valuable approach.

To successfully develop and disseminate clear guidance for managers and workers on key areas of practice including re-unification, learning from practice reviews and family group conferencing, strength-based reflective practice and supervision.

To successfully develop and implement a framework for practice quality assurance which evidences how effective our practice is.

To evidence improved outcomes and experience for children and families through improved practice through qualitative feedback from children and families.

3.5 Key strategic actions

The **key strategic actions** we will undertake over the 3-year period from April 2023 – April 2026 will include:

Delivery of the 'Signs of Safety' programme as planned across the service.

Delivery of a comprehensive ongoing training and development programme to ensure effective and consistent implementation of the preferred strength-based model of social work practice.

Implementation of an evidence based framework to enable practitioners judge the potential for safe reunifications with families for children who become care experienced.

Ensure that learning from CPRs and other in-depth analysis is systematically embedded through learning, training and development and follow up quality assurance and review.

Review the implementation of the agreed supervision policy and whether it promotes strength based reflective supervision and focus on quality.

Ensure the effective implementation of the agreed quality assurance framework across the service.

Effectively engage with children and families to understand and act on their experience of children's social care

Commission a bespoke management and leadership development programme to support all managers in children's social care to develop their skills in leading teams and services.

Ensure that reflective practice is embedded across the service and supported in supervision and peer support.

Undertake a detailed review of integrated family support service and family group conferencing, arrangements within Bridgend with a view to determining if this whole family approach can be expanded for working with more families.

3.6 Key measures

The **key measures** we will use to tell us how we are doing are:

The extent to which the 'Signs of Safety' approach has been understood and applied. The quality and impact of new practice guidance in key areas.

Feedback from children and families about the impact of the 'Signs of Safety' programme on them. The extent to which new guidance for managers and workers is understood and successfully applied in practice.

The extent to which staff understand and apply the framework for practice quality management.

The extent to which we are able to reduce statutory interventions and support vulnerable children and families with complex needs to safely maintain their independence.

The level of timely and high-quality supervision experienced by workers as evidenced through regular quality assurance audits.

The extent to which staff, children and families see the service as having a positive, constructive and supportive culture.

4 Theme 4: Maximising the impact of our services and interventions

4.1 Context

The evidence base which underpins support for children, young people and families is improving all the time. Our services need to constantly renew and improve and draw on this evolving evidence base to ensure they help secure the best possible outcomes for children and families.

A recent review of evidence undertaken for the Council by Oxford Brookes University identified a number of areas where we should explore improved practices and this will inform our work in this theme in the next period.

4.2 Policy and guidance

Evidence in this area is drawn from a range of sources including: The cost

of late intervention (Early Intervention Foundation 2016).

The costs and benefits of early interventions for vulnerable children and families to promote social and emotional wellbeing (London School of Economics and Political Science (?) LSE,, 2011).

What works to improve the lives of England's most vulnerable children (The Early Intervention Foundation, May 2022).

Emotional health and wellbeing: best practice in schools and early years settings (Welsh Government, 2010).

Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

A Healthier Wales (Welsh Government, 2018) and the national Transformation Programme (2018-21).

No Wrong Door (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

National Transformation Programme for Children's Services (Welsh Government 2023).

These will guide the delivery of the objectives below.

4.3 Current position

Because of the challenges we have faced in responding to increasing demand in the last 18 months we have not been able to test, challenge and improve our existing directly delivered and commissioned services to the extent we think is needed. This is our priority in this theme going forward.

4.4 Key objectives

Our **key objectives** in this area are:

To review needs and services in key internal and commissioned service delivery areas to ensure they are operating cost effectively and drawing on latest evidence of impact.

To ensure that where there are gaps in provision or emerging needs they are addressed.

To ensure that we work closely and effectively with key partners to deliver these services.

To ensure that all reviews are conducted co-productively so that children and families are central to service development.

4.5 Key strategic actions

The **key strategic actions** we will undertake over the 3-year period from April 2023 – April 2026 will include:

Undertake a rapid needs assessment, building on existing analysis, for preventative family support and early help needs and trends and develop a development and delivery plan for these services.

Develop and implement a Council-wide and partnership commissioning strategy for family support services from universal to highly targeted edge of care services to drive grant and core investment in an evidence-based way that will maximise the impact of prevention.

Develop and implement a commissioning strategy for the provision of accommodation, care and support services for children with disabilities, working closely with education.

Develop and implement a commissioning strategy with key partners to meet the accommodation, care and support needs of care experienced children and young people and care leavers.

Complete the establishment of the children's assessment hub at Brynmenyn and commence provision.

Work with national and regional partners through the National Fostering Framework to increase the numbers of Bridgend foster families, including carers who have additional skills and experience in caring for children who would otherwise require residential care, or are transitioning from such provision.

Work with regional partners in Cwm Taf Morgannwg ensure there is sufficient quantity and quality of flexible provision for children whose needs cannot be met in standard residential or fostering provision.

Explore innovative and creative solutions including the use of direct payments and family help services as part of care and support arrangements in children's services teams.

4.6 Key measures

The **key measures** we will use to tell us how we are doing are:

Commissioning plans approved by Cabinet in key areas including family support, children with disabilities, care-experienced children and young people in foster care.

Proportion of care-experienced children and young people supported through effective residential care in their local area.

Number and proportion of foster carers.

Number and proportion of families using innovative support arrangements including direct payments and family help.

The range and effectiveness of early help and edge of care provision and the proportion of these resources used to support families with more complex needs.

Positive outcomes for children and families accessing the range of support services.

The extent to which we are able to reduce statutory interventions and support vulnerable children and families with complex needs to safely maintain their independence.

5 Theme 5: A more effective response to families with complex needs

5.1 Context

The Council has a wide range of services across Education and Family Support and Social Services and Wellbeing Directorates concerned with supporting families. A review of these services in 2022-23 concluded that while many of the services were very effective and met their brief very successfully, more could be done to respond to the needs of families with more complex or entrenched problems, particularly those families with children who might otherwise end up experiencing the need for safeguarding or care.

5.2 Policy and Guidance

National policy and guidance is clear about the importance of ensuring that resources are sufficient to address the needs of families with more complex needs, and that by doing so early, many needs can be met without recourse to care experience or safeguarding interventions. This guidance is embedded in all key children's policy and guidance including:

Families First Programme Guidance (Welsh Government 2017). The Children and Young People's Plan (Welsh Government 2022).

Improving Outcomes for Children Programme Legacy Report (Welsh Government 2021). Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

A Healthier Wales (Welsh Government, 2018) and the national Transformation Programme (2018-21).

No Wrong Door (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

National Transformation Programme for Children's Services (Welsh Government 2023).

The costs and benefits of early interventions for vulnerable children and families to promote social and emotional wellbeing (LSE, 2011).

Emotional health and wellbeing: best practice in schools and early years settings (Welsh Government, 2010).

This policy guidance will inform the delivery of the objectives below.

5.3 Current position

Demand for social care services to address the needs of families with more complex or long-term problems continues to rise. The Council has decided that to address these challenges a more integrated approach is needed, and that early help, edge of care, IAA and locality social work services need to be part of the same function, with common frameworks, referral and support arrangements to support them. It has also agreed that further investment is needed in these services to deal with the significant increase in demand from these families since the Covid-19 pandemic and the current economic challenges facing the UK.

5.4 Key objectives

Our **key objectives** in this area are:

To reduce the proportion of children who experience safeguarding and care interventions and keep more children safely with their families.

To respond more effectively to families who require support, particularly those with more complex or long-term problems.

To improve the systems and processes which ensure that families get the right response at the right time.

5.5 Key strategic actions

The **key strategic actions** we will undertake over the 3 year period from April 2023 – April 2026 will include:

Introduce integrated management arrangements for IAA, early help, locality social work, locality early intervention and edge of care teams with direct responsibility to the Director of Social Services and Wellbeing.

Agree a joined up locality approach between key partners in the Council, third sector partners and other statutory partners in locality clusters, supporting schools, so there is a 'no wrong door approach', to any child or family who needs to access any tier of preventative services. This design will be informed by good practice in other parts of Wales.

Develop a single point of access for all children and family services.

Develop a single no wrong door process for families and professionals including schools based on cluster arrangements.

Redesign the websites and telephone routing systems.

Offer a more extensive range of responses at level 3 of the continuum of need.

Review population needs, planning and commissioning external services and managing grants to support the effective delivery of grant funded services to complement Council provision.

Explore the potential for partnerships with the voluntary sector to manage and deliver services for families with complex needs.

Develop more flexible and effective use of national grants to address the needs of children and families with more complex needs.

Agree a single set of measures and a single monitoring framework to use as the basis of maintaining a close handle on demand, activity and performance.

5.6 Key measures

The **key measures** we will use to tell us how we are doing are:

The number and proportion of children and young people who need safeguarding or care experience.

The extent to which we are able to reduce statutory interventions and support vulnerable children and families with complex needs to safely maintain their independence.

The overall cost of external provision of fostering and residential care. The satisfaction of families with the support they receive from the Council. Pupil attendance rates.

The proportion of interventions closing with a positive outcome.

Satisfaction of children and families with the quality of the contact and communication arrangements for early help and social care.

6 Theme 6: Seamless working with partners

6.1 Context

Meeting the needs of children, young people and families across Bridgend is the shared responsibility of a network of agencies, professionals and citizens. A strong, constructive approach to partnership will help us to be more effective and more efficient together and ensure that no one slips through our safety nets.

6.2 Policy and guidance

Greater integration of services and agencies is a clear national priority emphasised in guidance and legislation such as:

Families First Programme Guidance (Welsh Government 2017). The Children and Young People's Plan (Welsh Government 2022). Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

A Healthier Wales (Welsh Government, 2018) and the national Transformation Programme (2018-21).

No Wrong Door (Children's Commissioner for Wales, 2020).

National Transformation Programme for Children's Services (Welsh Government 2023).

Emotional health and wellbeing: best practice in schools and early years settings (Welsh Government, 2010).

6.3 Current position

Recent inspections have identified that there are instances of good partnership working at both a practice level and at policy and strategy levels. However, there is more that we need to do.

6.4 Key objectives

Our **key objectives** in this area are:

To work more effectively with partners at operational service and strategic levels to agree shared priorities for service improvement and implement them.

To ensure there is no wrong door for access to help and support in Bridgend. To ensure common culture and practice across Bridgend partners.

6.5 Key strategic actions

The **key strategic actions** we will undertake over the 3-year period from April 2023 – April 2026 will include:

We will ensure that senior health, education, housing, NHS and partners work with children's social care services strategically and operationally to deliver the priorities in this plan.

Existing Bridgend children's partnerships will be reviewed to ensure the most effective set of arrangements for joint and integrated working.

Building on the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) partnership model, develop business cases for integrated multi-professional locality teams to meet the needs of children and families with care and support needs, children with disabilities and child protection needs including the integration of mental health professionals, substance misuse workers and specialist therapists.

6.6 Key measures

The **key measures** we will use to tell us how we are doing are:

Level of commitment with key partners to address key areas for joint improvement.

The extent to which we are able to reduce statutory interventions and support vulnerable children and families with complex needs to safely maintain their independence.

Extent to which information is shared safely and effectively between professionals.

Commitment of partners to the 'Signs of Safety' approach which is evidenced in multi-agency practice.

7 Theme 7: Better intelligence and information systems

7.1 Context

Bridgend was a pioneer authority in the implementation of the Welsh Government sponsored Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). This is now embedded in the local authority and is a key information system supporting effective practice. We need to do more to utilise the system most effectively and to share information with our partners, and we also need to continue to improve our capacity to analyse individual and population data to inform our plans and practices.

7.2 Key objectives

Our **key objectives** in this area are:

To ensure that the information that operational staff and managers are using is of the highest possible quality.

That our information can be shared appropriately more often and more usefully with partners.

7.3 Key strategic actions

The key strategic actions we will undertake over the 3-year period from April 2023 – April 2026 will include:

Work with partners regionally and nationally ensure that children's social care teams have an effective case management IT system which enables integrated working and supports strength based practice and the safeguarding and protection of children.

Continue to enhance the use of business intelligence within children's social care teams, through live performance dashboards which support safe and effective practice and management oversight and decision making.

7.4 Key measures

The **key measures** we will use to tell us how we are doing are

The extent to which all teams have a 'fit-for-purpose' system which improves work quality, enables information sharing supports better outcomes for children and families.

The extent to which each team has effective business intelligence systems allowing them to monitor demand, supply, service quality and impact.

Appendix 1: Summary of key objectives

The objectives specified in the plan under the 7 themes are summarised in the table below:

Hearing and acting on the voice of children and families	<p>Work with children and families in a co-productive way based on mutual respect and an emphasis on strengths.</p> <p>Have better arrangements in place which enable all staff to work in this way.</p> <p>Ensure that all staff are able to take account of the experience and perspective of children and families they work with</p>
Securing a stable, well-supported, motivated and permanent workforce	<p>Improve staff terms and conditions so they are competitive with other Welsh local authorities.</p> <p>Get the right balance of skills and experience in our teams.</p> <p>Attract and recruit the most able staff to our service.</p>
Improving practice	<p>Ensure that staff and partners are all working within a common 'Signs of Safety and Wellbeing' framework and that this is seen as a valuable approach.</p> <p>Successfully develop and disseminate clear guidance for managers and workers on key areas of practice including re-unification, learning from practice reviews and family group conferencing, strength-based reflective practice and supervision.</p> <p>Successfully develop and implement a framework for practice quality assurance.</p>
Maximising the impact of services and interventions	<p>Review needs and services in key internal and commissioned service delivery areas to ensure they are operating cost effectively and drawing on latest evidence of impact.</p> <p>Ensure that where there are gaps in provision or emerging needs they are addressed.</p> <p>Ensure that we work closely and effectively with key partners to deliver these services.</p>
A more effective response to families with complex needs	<p>Reduce the proportion of children who experience safeguarding and care interventions and keep more children safely with their families.</p> <p>Respond more effectively to families who require support, particularly those with more complex or long term problems.</p> <p>Improve the systems and processes which ensure that families get the right response at the right time.</p>
Seamless working with partners	<p>To work more effectively with partners at operational service and strategic levels to agree shared priorities for service improvement and implement them.</p>

	Ensure there is no wrong door for access to help and support in Bridgend
Better intelligence and information systems	Ensure that the information that operational staff and managers are using is of the highest possible quality. Ensure that information can be shared appropriately more often and more usefully with partners.

Appendix 2: Three-year key actions by year

The following table details the key strategic actions that will be undertaken each year through to 2026 to enable us to meet our aims and objectives.

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
1 Hearing and acting on the voice of children and families.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an engagement and involvement framework so children and young people have an opportunity to become meaningfully involved in all aspects of the work of children's social care in Bridgend. 2. Revise children's services QA framework so that QA practice enables the quality and effectiveness of practice to be evaluated through the lens of the experience of the children and families who we work with and for. 3. Celebrate the achievements of our children and families with an annual celebration event. 4. Launch the co-produced Corporate Parenting Strategy, develop and implement an action plan on Priority 1 'having a voice'. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the engagement and involvement framework. 2. Apply the revised QA framework. 3. Develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy which is led by the children and young people for whom the Council is their corporate parent, ensuring all parts of the Council and partner agencies understand what matters to care experienced children and young people. 4. Develop a parent's participation charter so the experience of the families who work with children's social care is understood and used enhanced practices and interventions. 5. Celebrate the achievements of our children and families with an annual celebration event. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the implementation of the engagement and involvement framework with children and families. 2. Review the QA framework and its impact on practice. 3. Implement the Corporate Parenting Strategy and parent's participation charter. 4. Celebrate the achievements of our children and families with an annual celebration event. 5. Engage with all stakeholders to review Priority 1 of the Corporate Parenting Strategy

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
		6. Monitor Corporate Parenting Action Plan in relation to Priority 1 'having a voice'.	

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<p>2 Securing a stable, well-supported, motivated and permanent workforce.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement new structures for grade 3 social workers in children’s social care and continue market supplement to address vacancies for children’s social workers. 2. Review skill mix in children’s social care and develop a workforce plan for the optimal numbers of social workers, social work support officers, social work assistants, social services practitioners, support officers, business support, other professionals such as mental health specialist workers, behavior analysts. 3. Develop a revised business case for the Bridgend ‘Grow our own Social Work Programme’ which sets out the resource requirements for Bridgend to achieve a sustainable permanent recruitment by supporting workforce to develop their careers to become qualified social workers through secondment and traineeship. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review impact of new structures skills mix and market supplements. 2. Implement workforce plan. Review impact of ‘Grow Our Own Social Work Programme’. 3. Ensure timely and effective trauma-informed support to workforce including through effective line management support, peer support and timely access to specialist support. 4. Continuously improve our recruitment processes, drawing on marketing expertise to enhance campaigns and ensure the most efficient selection processes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review impact of structures skill mix and market supplements. 2. Implement workforce plan. Ensure timely and effective trauma-informed support to workforce including through effective line management support, peer support and timely access to specialist support. 3. Continuously improve our recruitment processes, drawing on marketing expertise to enhance campaigns and ensure the most efficient selection processes.

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
	<p>4. Ensure timely and effective trauma-informed support to workforce including through effective line management support, peer support and timely access to specialist support.</p> <p>5. Continuously improve our recruitment processes, drawing on marketing expertise to enhance campaigns and ensure the most efficient selection processes.</p>		

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<p>3 Improving practice</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivery of the 'Signs of Safety' programme as planned across the service. 2. Delivery of a comprehensive ongoing training and development programme to ensure effective and consistent implementation of the preferred strength-based model of social work practice. 3. Implement our care experienced children reduction strategy by safely reducing admissions and introducing an evidence-based framework to enable practitioners to make good judgement about the potential for safe reunifications and alternative orders / permanency arrangements. 4. Ensure that learning from CPRs and other in-depth analysis is systematically embedded through learning, training and development and follow up quality assurance and review. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delivery of the 'Signs of Safety' programme as planned across the service. 2. Delivery of a comprehensive ongoing training and development programme to ensure effective and consistent implementation of the preferred strength-based model of social work practice. 3. Review the effectiveness of the framework to enable practitioners to make good judgement about the potential for safe reunifications with families for children who become care experienced. 4. Ensure that learning from CPRs and other in-depth analysis is systematically embedded through learning, training and development and follow up quality assurance and review. 5. Review the implementation of the agreed quality assurance framework across the service. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the effectiveness of the framework to enable practitioners to make good judgement about the potential for safe reunifications with families for children who become care experienced. 2. Ensure that learning from CPRs and other in-depth analysis is systematically embedded through learning, training and development and follow up quality assurance and review. 3. Review the implementation of the agreed quality assurance framework across the service. 4. Ensure that reflective practice is embedded in across the service and supported in supervision and peer support. 5. Review all Children Services contributions and responsibilities to the Corporate Parenting action plan.

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Ensure the effective implementation of the agreed quality assurance framework across the service. 7. Commission a bespoke management and leadership development programme to support all managers in children's social care to develop their skills in leading teams and services. 8. Ensure that reflective practice is embedded in across the service and supported in supervision and peer support. 9. Ensure the recommendations from the PLO working group reforms are embedded in our operating models. 10. Integrate the priorities and elements of the Corporate Parenting Strategy that children services have responsibility for into all other strategic plans and policies across the directorate. 11. Establish a Children's Services dataset for the Corporate Parenting Board that relates to KPIs and Strategy Priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Review the implementation of the agreed supervision policy and whether it promotes strength based reflective supervision and focus on quality. 7. Undertake a review of integrated family support service and family group conferencing, arrangements within Bridgend with a view to determining if this whole family approach can be expanded for working with more families. 8. Monitor all Children Services contributions and responsibilities to the Corporate Parenting action plan. 9. Provide quarterly reports to the Corporate Parenting Board. 	

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<p>4 Maximising the impact of services and interventions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review family support and early help needs and trends and develop a development and delivery plan for these services. 2. Develop an updated commissioning strategy for family support services. 3. Develop a commissioning strategy for the provision of accommodation, care and support services for children with disabilities, working closely with education. 4. Develop a commissioning strategy with key partners to meet the accommodation, care and support needs of care experienced children and young people and care leavers. 5. Complete the establishment of the children’s assessment hub at Brynmenyn and commence provision. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the commissioning strategy for family support services and for children with disabilities. 2. Work with national and regional partners through the National Fostering Framework to increase the numbers of Bridgend foster families, including Carers who have additional skills and experience in caring for children who would otherwise require residential care, or are transitioning from such provision. 3. Continue work with regional partners in Cwm Taf Morgannwg ensure there is sufficient quantity and quality of flexible provision for children who’s needs cannot be 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the commissioning strategy for family support services and for children with disabilities. 2. Continue work with national and regional partners through the National Fostering Framework to increase the numbers of Bridgend foster families. 3. Continue work with regional partners in Cwm Taf Morgannwg ensure there is sufficient quantity and quality of flexible provision for children who’s needs cannot be met in standard residential or fostering provision. 4. Implement the family support and early help development and delivery plan.

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
	<p>6. Continue to work with Foster Wales to recruit a sufficient number of carers to provide foster placements within the local authority.</p> <p>7. Commission and implement a placement support service to ensure the right multi-agency therapeutic input for children, young people and their carers.</p>		

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
<p>5 A more effective response to families with complex needs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Propose and engage on management arrangements for IAA, early help, locality social work, locality early intervention and edge of care teams experience an integrated management approach ultimately responsible to the Director of Social Services and Wellbeing. 2. Review how whole system partners work most effectively together to improve outcomes for children and families, across the tiers of need, from universal to highly specialised. This will be based on best practice in Wales and ensure there is integrated working of all partners on a locality/ cluster footprint. 3. Develop a single point of access for all children and family services and a single no wrong door process for families and professionals including schools. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement revised management arrangements. 2. Redesign the websites and telephone routing systems. 3. Implement arrangements for a single point of access for all children and family services and a single no wrong door process for families and professionals including schools. 4. Offer a more extensive range of responses at level 3 of the continuum of need. 5. Explore the potential for partnerships with the voluntary sector to manage and deliver services for families with complex needs. 6. Develop more flexible and effective use of national grants to address the needs of children and families with more complex needs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the redesigned websites and telephone routing systems. 2. Implement arrangements for a single point of access for all children and family services and a single no wrong door process for families and professionals including schools. 3. Continue to build a more extensive range of responses at level 3 of the continuum of need. 4. Ensure that every child and family receive the right services they need at the right time. 5. Continue to build better partnerships with the voluntary sector to manage and deliver services for families with complex needs.

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
	<p>4. Review population needs, planning and commissioning external services and managing grants to support the effective delivery of grant funded services to complement Council provision.</p> <p>5. Agree a single set of measures and a single monitoring framework to use as the basis of maintaining a close handle on demand, activity and performance.</p> <p>6. Work with regional partners in Cwm Taf Morgannwg ensure there is sufficient quantity and quality of flexible provision for children who's needs cannot be met in standard residential or fostering provision.</p> <p>7. Implement the Direct Payments Policy.</p>	<p>7. Apply a single set of measures and a single monitoring framework as the basis of maintaining a close handle on demand, activity and performance.</p>	<p>6. Continue to use a single set of measures and a single monitoring framework to use as the basis of maintaining a close handle on demand, activity and performance</p>

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
6 Seamless working with partners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Put arrangements in place to ensure that senior health, education, housing, NHS and partners work with children's social care services strategically and operationally to deliver the priorities in this plan. 2. Review existing Bridgend children's partnerships to ensure the most effective set of arrangements for joint and integrated working. 3. Implement our multi-agency exploitation strategy. 4. Provide representation and commitment to the Corporate Parenting Board 5. Agree Corporate Parenting Strategy action plan that shares ownership of aims, objectives, performance indicators and intended outcomes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree and implement a single programme of shared priorities with partners for children in the County Borough. 2. Building on the MASH partnership model, develop business cases for integrated multi-professional locality teams to meet the needs of children and families with care and support needs, children with disabilities and child protection needs including the integration of mental health professionals, substance misuse workers and specialist therapists. 3. Provide representation and resources to work collaboratively on multiagency workstreams to implement the Corporate Parenting action plan 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement and review the shared single programme with partners. 2. Implement integrated multi-professional teams in locality hubs across the County Borough. 3. Review the Corporate Parenting Strategy alongside partners

Theme	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
7 Better intelligence and information systems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work with partners regionally and nationally to ensure that children's social care teams have an effective case management IT system which enables integrated working and supports strength-based practice and the safeguarding and protection of children. 2. Enhance the use of business intelligence within children's social care teams, through live performance dashboards which support safe and effective practice and management oversight and decision making. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree strategy for longer-term use of information systems in Bridgend. 2. Continue to implement and improve live performance dashboards. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement longer-term strategy for use of information systems. 2. Continue to implement and improve live performance dashboards.

Appendix 3: Immediate action priorities to December 2023

Within the overall programme of change for the period 2023 – 26 described above, there are some immediate priority actions that the Council will focus on in the period June 2023 – December 2023. These are described below:

Theme	Immediate priorities
Hearing and acting on the voice of children and families	<p>Develop an engagement and involvement framework by December 2023.</p> <p>Revise the children's services QA framework by December 2023.</p>
Securing a stable, well-supported, motivated and permanent workforce	<p>Implement new structures in children's social care by September 2023.</p> <p>Develop a workforce plan including a revised business case for the Bridgend 'Grow our own Social Work Programme' by December 2023.</p>
Improving practice	<p>Complete stage 1 of the 'Signs of Safety' programme implementation by December 2023.</p> <p>Implement an evidence-based re-unification framework by September 2023.</p> <p>Complete stage 1 of the bespoke management and leadership development programme by September 2023.</p>
Maximising the impact of services and interventions	<p>Develop an updated commissioning strategy for family support services focused on supporting families with complex needs to remain independent and resilient by December 2023.</p> <p>Develop a commissioning strategy for the provision of accommodation, care and support services for children with disabilities by December 2023.</p> <p>Develop a commissioning strategy with key partners to meet the accommodation, care and support needs of care experienced children and young people and care leavers by December 2023.</p> <p>Complete the establishment of the children's assessment hub at Brynmenyn and commence provision from September 2023.</p>
A more effective response to families with complex needs	<p>Introduce new management arrangements for an integrated IAA, early help, locality social work, locality early intervention and edge of care teams service responsible to the Director of Social Services and Wellbeing by December 2023.</p> <p>Develop a single point of access for all children and family services and a single no wrong</p>

Theme	Immediate priorities
	<p>door process for families and professionals including schools from January 2024.</p> <p>Review population needs, planning and commissioning external services and managing grants to support the effective delivery of grant funded services to complement Council provision by January 2024.</p> <p>Agree a single set of measures and monitoring framework by November 2023.</p>
Seamless working with partners	Agree a new set of arrangements with partners for working together to support children by November 2023.
Better intelligence and information systems	<p>Work with partners regionally and nationally to ensure that children's social care teams have an effective case management IT system which enables integrated working and supports strength based practice and the safeguarding and protection of children.</p> <p>Introduce live performance dashboards for each team from October 2023.</p>