

Meeting of:	SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2
Date of Meeting:	1 MAY 2025
Report Title:	EARLY HELP, PREVENTION AND EDGE OF CARE
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING
Responsible Officer:	DAVID WRIGHT DEPUTY HEAD OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules.
Executive Summary:	The report reflects on 2024/25, highlighting key achievements and challenges whilst also outlining the priorities for 2025/26. The report covers the restructure of Early Help and Edge of Care into the Social Services and Wellbeing (SSWB) directorate and the impact this has had in supporting the directorate in achieving outcomes referred to in the “Think Family”, 3-year plan. The report also summarises the findings from the recently completed Family Support Commissioning Strategy. This report highlights six priorities that need to be focused on over the next 18 months to achieve the outcomes identified in the 3-year plan: • Streamlined systems • More intensive targeted support • Parenting support • Support for older children and young people • Support for children with learning disabilities, neuro-diversity and mental health challenges • Working in partnership with families The report provides a clear action plan that will require effective multi-agency and cross directorate working in order

	to achieve more positive and preventative outcomes for children and families in Bridgend.
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 an overview of Early Help, Prevention and Edge of Care and how it has supported Children and Family services achieving elements of the “Think Family”, 3-year plan (the plan).

2. Background

- 2.1 In September 2023, Bridgend County Borough Council Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate, on behalf of the Council, 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 via its strategic plan. The Think Family Improve Outcomes plan was approved by Cabinet on 19 September 2023 and Council on 20 September 2023.

- 2.2 The plan sets the direction for the work of the service and aims to transform the way children and families are supported in Bridgend in line with national policy and best practice. The plan intends to embed a culture and practice of continuous improvement for 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.

- 2.3 Theme 5 of the plan focusses the Authority on “A more effective response to families with complex needs”. The specific objectives of this theme 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.

- 2.4 Some of the **key strategic actions** that were set within the plan include:

- Introduce integrated management arrangements for Information Advice and Assistance (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, so there is a ‘no wrong door approach’, to any child or family who needs to access any tier of preventative services.
- Develop a single point of access for all children and family services.
- Offer a more extensive range of responses at level 3 of the continuum of need.

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

2.5 Significant progress has been made by Children and Family services in achieving the actions included in the 3-year plan across all themes including theme 5. However, there is more to do to achieve sustained practice improvements that continue to ensure that children and families have access to the right support, at the right time and prevent their issues escalating.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 Children and Family services in Bridgend has seen ongoing increases in demand for support since the Covid-19 pandemic. The following table demonstrates the significant increases in demand since the pandemic and the challenges facing families over the last 5 years:

Year	No. of Contacts	% increase/decrease in contacts to previous year
2019/20	6,810	-
2020/21	4,742	-30.37%
2021/22	5,667	19.51%
2022/23	8,334	47.06%
2023/24	11,940	43.27%
2024/25	14,828	24.19%

3.2 As set out in the plan, a specific action was to consider a restructure of Early Help and Edge of Care services into Social Services and Wellbeing (SSWB) Directorate to assist the Authority in responding to these increases in demand and ensure support for children and families is provided in a timely way.

3.3 Consultation was undertaken between SSWB and Education, Early Years and Young People (EEYP) directorate. A restructure was commenced and concluded in July 2024. This restructure involved the move of some Early Help services specifically Family Support Workers, Wellbeing Workers, Play Therapist and the Edge of Care teams.

3.4 Some support services remained within the EEYP Directorate specifically those that supported education issues including family engagement officers, education welfare officers, school based counselling, youth justice services and youth services.

3.5 Since this restructure, work has been completed to create a single point of access for all children and family services. This led to all referrals for support (those services that are placed in SSWB) being submitted to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The MASH then consider whether there is a need for non-statutory or statutory support.

3.6 In 2023/2024, MASH signposted 192 referrals to Early Help. This equated to 1.62% of the demand being received being diverted to preventative services.

- 3.7 In 2024/2025, this increased significantly to 1,469 referrals equating to almost 10% MASH demand being diverted, demonstrating that the new arrangement is raising awareness of Early Help support at the first point of contact.
- 3.8 Further to the demand being managed in a different way, there has been an impact on the number of children on the Child Protection Register (CPR) and those becoming care-experienced.
- 3.9 On 30 June 2024, prior to the restructure, there were 169 children on the CPR. On 31 March 2025, there were 74 children which is a 56.21% decrease.
- 3.10 In regards to care-experienced children, on 30 June 2024, there were 368 care-experienced children. On 31 March 2025, this had reduced to 333 which is a 9.51% decrease.
- 3.11 Children open to SSWB on a care and support basis also reduced from 1,077 on 30 June 2024 to 802 on 31 March 2025 which is a 25.53% decrease. This progress is due to a range of reasons which include the following:
- More stable and permanent workforce
 - Implementation of Signs of Safety practice model
 - Improved management oversight
 - Manageable caseloads
 - Care plans being implemented and monitored
 - Improved interface between Early Help and Social Services
 - Edge of Care services aligned to Children and Family services.
- 3.12 It is evident that following the restructure of Early Help and Edge of Care into SSWB, there has been considerable impact in regards to how demand is managed and the number of children and families being supported on a statutory basis. However, there is more to do to ensure that support provided meets the needs of children and families in Bridgend on an ongoing and preventative basis.

Priorities for 2025 to 2027

- 3.13 To support the long term work of Early Help, Prevention and Edge of Care and ensure children and families receive the right support, at the right time, from the right service, the Institute of Public Care (IPC) were commissioned to undertake an exercise in developing the local authority's approach to commissioning Family Support for 2025-2027 (**Appendix 1 and 2**).
- 3.14 IPC worked with a range of partners from across the Council including the Children and Family Service, Education, Early Year and Young People Directorate and the Chief Executive Directorate, specifically Finance and the Central Grants Team.
- 3.15 IPC held a range of workshops with staff working directly with children and families in Bridgend, reviewed data from across the Council to inform 6 key commissioning priorities. These priorities consist of the following:

Streamlined systems

- 3.16 This priority re-iterates the importance of the “No Wrong Door” approach and although work over the last 12 months has improved some aspects as referred to earlier in the report, there continues to be inconsistency in response to family need, a lack of awareness and understanding of support services available across the county and how those services can be accessed.

More intensive targeted support

- 3.17 The findings from IPC highlight the need to build the skills and capacity of staff within the Family Support services so they are able to work intensively with families who need support on a preventative basis. Those staff will need to be supported to establish a common skill set to be effective in their work.
- 3.18 The strategy demonstrates that with the reductions in demand for statutory support, a refocus of current services to enable them to undertake a higher proportion of their work with families on a preventative basis will be required.

Parenting support

- 3.19 There is evidently a range of parenting support being delivered to families in Bridgend through services from within the Council but also via commissioned services and local community based services. IPC identified that the Council needs to undertake a review of parenting programmes delivered via or by the Council, including the needs that they address and the impact they have.
- 3.20 This review will inform whether the interventions and programmes delivered by the Council are impactful or whether there are better placed organisations available to deliver such work, enabling the local authority to target children and families who are vulnerable and more at risk of becoming known to statutory services.

Older children and young people

- 3.21 The workshops held by IPC provided opportunity for staff to discuss some of the challenges they face when delivering support in local communities. The challenges for older children and young people were a strong theme. IPC have recommended that the local authority consider its current and potential approach to working with children and families in conflict and how best family breakdowns can be avoided.

Children and young people with neurodiversity, learning disabilities and mental health challenges.

- 3.22 An area identified via the review by IPC acknowledged the challenges faced for families experiencing neurodiversity, learning disabilities and mental health issues requiring partnership working locally and regionally. The issues identified will require a collective response across partnerships to ensure the needs can be met in a way that can reduce escalation.

Partnerships with families

- 3.23 Finally, IPC highlighted the importance of family support services working in partnership with families and enabling families to take control of the support they need. The approach from Children and Family services aligned to the Signs of Safety model will be a key principle within this area, however, it will also require services moving from a “doing for” approach to a more empowering, enabling and coaching model of intervention ensuring families do not become dependent on services.
- 3.24 The action plan identified by IPC will lead to a range of multi-agency working groups to respond, address and implement over the coming years. The monitoring of this plan will take place in a range of forums to ensure there is a partnership approach to the implementation of the plan. These will include the following:
- Children and Family Services Senior Management Team
 - Social Services Improvement Board
 - Joint Operational Group
 - Joint Partnership Board
 - Regional Partnership Board
- 3.25 Using the above governance arrangements will ensure there is involvement from partners to support the implementation and impact of the strategy in achieving positive outcomes for children and families in Bridgend.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 Within the County Borough of Bridgend, the implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the well-being goals of a Healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.
- 5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Authority should work to deliver well-being outcomes for people. The following is a

summary to show how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report:

- **Long Term:** Social Services is demand led and the SSWBA focusses on sustainable prevention and well-being outcomes for the future. There is a requirement to meet the needs of people in the longer term and, due to increased contacts, rising demographics and increasing complexity, the continued improvement and transformation of services remains a priority.
- **Prevention:** The report highlights developments by the Directorate in line with the SSWBA and the intention to prevent child and family need escalating.
- **Integration:** The implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners to ensure care and support for people and support for carers is provided. The report demonstrates the importance of integrated working as the issues impacting on children and families are cross-sector cutting.
- **Collaboration:** The collaborative approaches noted in the report, are managed and monitored through various regional collaborative boards. These include the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board (CTMSB). Working regionally enables the Directorate to strategically plan and deliver local services by optimising available resources. At a local the Bridgend Multi-Agency Safeguarding Team (MASH) is co-located with agencies including South Wales Police, social landlords and the third sector to provide a collaborative approach to safeguarding and our Integrated Network Cluster Teams work with CTMUHB in the delivery of services.
- **Involvement:** Our key stakeholders are the people who use our services and it is important their voice is heard and acted upon. The report produced by IPC demonstrates the engagement of a range of services to inform future work for the local authority.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There is no impact or link to Bridgend County Borough Council's climate change aspirations as a result of this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 How we support and continue to improve and strengthen our prevention, safeguarding and corporate parenting arrangements is a key theme throughout the report and remains a key priority for 2025/26.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no immediate financial implications related to this report. However, the Family Support Commissioning Strategy may require us to revisit funding allocations currently in place to ensure that services are impactful and make a difference for children and families.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2 note the content of the report and provide any comments.

Background documents

None