

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **25th September 2019**
Report Subject: **Supporting Change Team Internal and Independent External Evaluation**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Heads of Children's Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	13.8.19	11.09.19			2.9.19	25.09.19		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the case to establish the Supporting Change Team on a permanent basis following two positive evaluations of the work undertaken by this team. The first evaluation report was an internal evaluation, the outcome of which was reported to scrutiny members on the 7th March 2019. The second evaluation was undertaken independently by Worcester University, this was completed in June 2019.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In 2017, in response to rising numbers of looked after children, work was undertaken to develop a 3 year strategy to safely reduce the numbers of looked after children.
- 2.2 As part of that strategy, agreement was given to scope the potential for developing a team to work with children at the edge of care. The team's remit would be to work intensively with families with the aim of preventing children entering the care system or, to work intensively with families to support rehabilitation and discharge of Care Orders for those children placed at home with parents under Placement with Parents Regulations.
- 2.3 Upon completion of the scoping exercise and a timely grant from Welsh Government with a specific remit to establish edge of care services, political approval was given to proceed with developing the Supporting Change Team. The team was formed in December 2017 and became operational in January 2018.
- 2.4 Since this time the numbers of children looked after in Blaenau Gwent started to plateau and since the January 2019 the numbers have slowly been decreasing. It is believed that this landscape can in part be directly attributed

to the work of the Supporting Change Team and the work they have done with families to prevent needs escalating to the point where children needed to come into care.

2.5 The internal evaluation presented to scrutiny in March 2019 shared the following information:

- The numbers of referrals accepted by the team;
- Legal status of the child at point of referral;
- The identified issues that required intervention ;
- Summary of the interventions delivered;
- Legal status at end of intervention;
- Feedback from children and families who receive a service from the team;
- 6 case studies providing qualitative information in respect of the team's work.

2.6 The internal evaluation evidenced the work of the Supporting Change Team was preventing children coming into care, and was achieving actual savings and cost avoidance. The internal evaluation report can be found under **Appendix 1**.

2.7 Children's Services felt it was important to seek an external evaluation of the Supporting Change Team to provide scrutiny with additional assurances, due to the plan of establishing this team on a permanent basis. Therefore Worcester University were commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of the Team.

2.8 The independent evaluation report presents a number of key findings. These include recommendations for both the team itself and the programme design, including the ways in which team cohesion and consistency benefit service users. The effectiveness of the Supporting Change Team's extensive training programme is highlighted, along with the intensity of the programme and its options for flexible, bespoke interventions where necessary. The report also recognises the Supporting Change Team's focus on reframing practice, namely shifting away from a risk-based approach and towards a more positive strengths-based model. A range of positive measurable outcomes for families are also identified, including, but not limited to, enhanced relationships, increased confidence and skills and examples of rehabilitation from Care.

The report offers twelve main recommendations it states:

2.9 "Most importantly, the report recommends that funding be made permanent or long-term to ensure the continuation of the programme. It suggests that the threshold for intervention be considered, with the possibility of earlier intervention, should resources allow. Communication with partners is already strong but could be enhanced. The various new roles should be embedded into the programme and evaluated at a later date. Improvements could be made to sustain changes post-intervention, including enhancing effective exit

strategies for families and developing a report at the end of an intervention to inform and support ongoing work. Training on bereavement, loss and change is also recommended in order to fill the gaps in existing training.

- 2.10 In terms of future practice, the report suggests that the programme has potential to be rolled out across the region, with support from neighbouring authorities and Welsh Government. Similarly, good practice should be shared with other Children's Services and partners, both regionally and nationally."

The full report can be found under **Appendix 2**.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option 1 Preferred Option

- Consider the information and recommendations contained within the external evaluation report on the Supporting Change Team.

Option 2

- Consider the information and recommendations contained within the report external evaluation report on the Supporting Change Team and make specific comment for consideration.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic support the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The work of the Supporting Change Team supports the following priorities for social services under the corporate plan:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The internal evaluation report attached under appendix 1 outlines the actual savings and cost avoidance as a result of the work of the supporting change team. The highlights of which are:-

Up until January 2019, 13 of the children the supporting change team had worked with have successfully been rehabilitated home from foster care. The total **cost saving** to the authority as a result, is in the region of £6,632 per

week; saving the Local Authority over £344,864 per year.

When calculating the **potential cost avoidance** of all referrals received in 2018 the potential cost avoidance (assuming all children calculated remain out of care for a full year) is calculated at £1,711,000. This is based on the assumption that had the Supporting Change Team not worked with these families these children would be in Local Authority Care.

Endorsement of Option 1 will support the continuation of the work of the supporting change team and their ability to continue to realise actual savings and cost avoidance for the local authority.

The current cost of the Supporting Change Team is as follows:

Total Team costs are £335, 917.

When agreement was given to establish the supporting change team in 2017 the team was funded in the following way:

- Grant from WG to develop an edge of care service **£147,142;**
- WG Carers Respite Care grant **£77,735;**
- Using part of the regional Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) budget **£123,000.**

The two grants above came into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from April 18/19 and were transferred into the children's social services budget. The regional IFST budget (which was already in the RSG) could be utilised as the regional service was being decommissioned, as each local authority was developing their own edge of care team which negated the need for a regional IFST Service.

These budgets continue to be available to fund the supporting change team on a permanent basis, with no budget pressure being created

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

There are no identifiable risks connected with endorsing Option 1.

The risks with endorsing Option 2 primarily relate to, not identifying needs early enough, to put plans in place resulting in children becoming looked after

5.3 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications connected with the endorsement of this evaluation within Option 1 or Option 2.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

All the staff within the Supporting Change Team are either on a fixed term

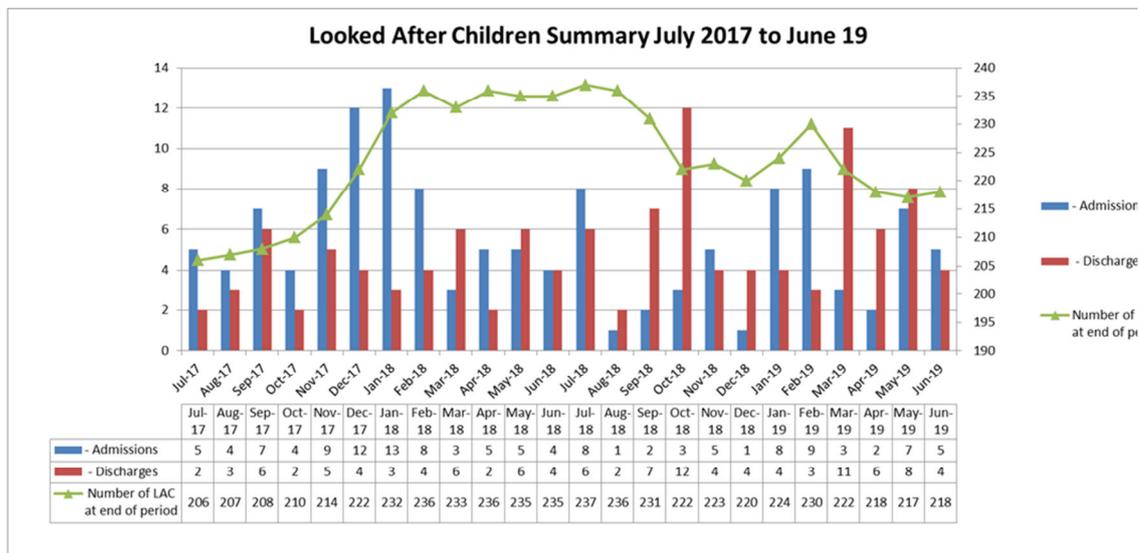
contract or seconded into the team. These arrangements are due to end in December 2020. If the team is not established on a permanent basis it is highly likely team members will leave Blaenau Gwent to take up permanent employment elsewhere. This will have a direct impact on the team as a significant amount of investment has been made to train these staff to a high level. Following the evaluation and in response to the recommendations it is planned to appoint the Team on a permanent basis.

6. Supporting Evidence

6. Performance Information and Data

- 1 Since the supporting change team has been operational children's services have seen a stabilisation of the looked after children numbers and since the beginning of 2019 a reduction in numbers, as demonstrated in figure 1

Figure 1



6.2

Expected outcome for the public

The successful implementation of the safe children looked after reduction strategy will lead to more positive outcomes for children on a number of levels. It will prevent children coming into care in the first place due in part to the work of the supporting change team. For those children who do come into care they will have more local placement choices enabling them to maintain attendance at their local school and contact with family and friends.

6.3 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

There is extensive involvement with the children and families we work with. Their views are gathered through a number of avenues including:

- The National Youth Advocacy Service;
- Formally seeking their views following interventions from the

- supporting change team;
- Formally seeking their views at each review of their plan.
- Views gained as part of the two evaluations

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The Children Looked After reduction strategy is 2 years into its 3 year lifespan. An independent evaluation is underway which will serve to shape a new 10 year children looked after reduction strategy from 2020.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The children looked after reduction strategy has prevention at its heart which is evidenced by the actions under each of the objectives.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The work of the Supporting Change Team includes working co productively with partners and 3rd sector providers to ensure there is early identification of those considered to be the most vulnerable requiring targeted services.

6.7 ***Integration(across service areas)***

As Above

6.8 **Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)**

The work of the Supporting Change Team is a key part of the Safe children looked after reduction Strategy. The strategy aims to reduce the inequalities children would face if they entered the looked after system.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The Children Services Departmental Leadership Team (DLT) are tasked with overseeing the delivery of the children looked after reduction strategy, monitoring the impact on children and their families and driving forward the prevention and early intervention agenda.

The Actions required to deliver this strategy (the supporting change team being one of them) are contained within the Children's Services Business Plans. Progress against each action will be reported quarterly through the Directorate Leadership Team.

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

Background Documents / Electronic Links

Appendix 1 – Internal Evaluation December 2017 – December 2018

Appendix 2 – University of Worcester Evaluation