

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **17th March 2021**

Report Subject: **Revised Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020- 2025**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Head 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)
4.2.21	x	24.02.21			17.3.21	14.04.21		

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to present the refreshed Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020-2025.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 In response to the rising numbers of children coming into care in 2017 Children’s Social Services recognised the need to develop a 3 year “Safe Reduction in Children Looked After Strategy”. This 3year strategy has now come to an end however the good work to continue reducing the numbers of children coming into care needs to continue, hence the need to review and refresh the strategy.

2.1.2 The refreshed strategy has the same three clear objectives which are: -

1. To support families to stay together;
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care;
3. To provide affordable high quality placements.

2.1.3 As with the last strategy each of the objectives has a number of actions aligned to them and these actions are embedded in our business planning process which is reported on a quarterly basis.

2.1.4 The 2017- 2020 strategy was independently evaluated by Worcester University. The report highlights a number of key findings. These findings acknowledge the considerable work already undertaken in relation to this strategy. It concludes that the strategy and its underpinning objectives are broadly appropriate at the current time. The report highlights areas of progress towards meeting the objectives and the considerable challenges related to taking the strategy forward, not least in relation to developing and sustaining a stable, highly trained workforce and creating and sustaining a range of high quality, flexible local placements.

- 2.1.5 The report offers twenty main recommendations grouped around six themes:
1. Strategy development;
 2. Workforce issues;
 3. Partnership working;
 4. Placement capacity;
 5. Interventions;
 6. Strategy implementation.
- 2.1.6 The recommendations have been considered and have been translated into actions under the 3 objectives which underpin the refreshed 2020 -2025 Strategy.
- 2.1.7 In summary the evaluation stated the Authority has identified an effective approach to the safe reduction of looked after children within the Borough. However, continued concerted action will be needed in order to build on and improve the work already undertaken and to meet the considerable challenges identified.
- 2.1.8 The refreshed strategy is embedded within this document and covers the following
- Significant service developments during 2017 – 2020;
 - Performance Information 2017 -2020;
 - Overview of progress made on objectives 2017 – 2020;
 - 2020- 2025 CLA reduction strategy action plan.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

Members are asked to scrutinise the report on the Children's Services reviewed Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy and contribute to the continuous assessment of the effectiveness of the directorate by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

3.1.2 Option 2

Accept the report as provided.

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

- 4.1 The implementation of the safe Children looked After reduction strategy 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. **Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)**

5.1 The Strategy has had an impact not only in reducing the number of children needing to be bought into care but also on the budget pressure on the Social Services Directorate and the Council. The table below shows the positive impact on budget by showing the Childrens Services Budget / Outturn and Over/under spend from 2016/17 onwards

	Budget	Outturn	Overspend
2016/17	9,386,570	11,932,760	2,546,190
2017/18	11,757,760	12,523,229	775,469
2018/19	12,606,045	13,566,700	960,655
2019/20	12,960,360	12,884,866	Underspend 75,494

It is hoped the continuation of the strategy will enable children's services to manage their budget in future years.

5.2 **Legal**

5.2.1 No applicable to this report

5.3 **Human Resources**

5.3.1 Not application for this report except to note that this strategy would not have seen the success so far without the hard work and dedication of the children's services workforce.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

See data contained in the refreshed strategy document is attached as Appendix 1.

6.2 **Expected outcome for the public**

6.2.1 The successful implementation of the safe CLA 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 to the work under the strategy. 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)**

6.3.1 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.

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

6.4.1 This refreshed strategy is not a 5-year strategy which lays out the longer term plans to continue to reduce the numbers of children looked after.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

6.5.1 A large part of the safe CLA reduction strategy has a preventative focus

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

6.6.1 A number of the actions under the safe CLA reduction strategy rely on partnership working. Senior managers and staff have good working relationships with our partners which will support us in achieving the actions.

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

As above

6.8 ***EqIA***

6.8.1 The safe reduction of children becoming looked after involves supporting and engaging with children and families covered by protected characteristics from the Equality Act 2010.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The safe reduction strategy is in the process of being independently evaluated. The outcome of this is expected in Qtr 4 of 19/20. The actions aligned to the 3 objectives under the strategy are incorporated under the children's services business plans. Progress on actions is reported quarterly and contributes to the Directors Annual report.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- *Appendix 1 – Strategy to Safely Reduce Numbers of Children Looked After*