

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	29 January 2026
TITLE	Keeping Families Together Strategy
REASON TO SCRUTINISE	The current provision and available resources need to be scrutinised in order to deliver the strategy.
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CABINET MEMBER	Councillor Menna Trenholme

1. Why does it need to be scrutinised?

1.1 The current provision and available resources need to be scrutinised in order to deliver the strategy.

2. What exactly needs to be scrutinised?

2.1 We will be looking specifically at four questions to scrutinise the keeping families together strategy.

1. What is being done to keep families together?
2. How many families receive support?
3. Do the available resources meet the needs/demand for the service?
4. Do the preventative services help to keep families together and reduce the number of children needing care from the Council?

2.2 To respond to these questions, we will provide an outline of the strategy and which teams within the Children's Department are specifically involved in the keeping families together strategy, as well as multi-agency work.

3. Summary of the Key Matters

3.1 A key part of the Keeping Families Together Strategy is our Preventive Programme and Services. This work is crucial, and it focuses on providing timely and specific support to keep families together and safe before reaching a crisis point and ultimately it prevents children and young people from going into care. The Department's main aim is to keep children and young people with their families if it is safe to do so.

3.2 In this report we will look at which services in the Children's Department are principally involved in the Keeping Families Together Strategy. The main

preventative services are the Families First Programme, Team Around the Family, Family Support Team and the Operational Teams. The Trobwynt Service, Post-16 Team and Derwen also provide support for young people and families. Good collaboration also takes place through community hubs to facilitate multi-agency work and provide the best service to the people and children of Gwynedd.

Any request for services (referrals) will go through our Intake Team, referrals, who decide about the need to carry out an assessment, agree thresholds and then pass it on to the appropriate service if this is appropriate.

4. Background / Context

- 4.1 Families First was designed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. It places an emphasis on early intervention, preventative activity and offering support for whole families, rather than individuals. The programme promotes multi-agency work to ensure that families receive coordinated support when they need it.
- 4.2 The programme is intended to provide early support to families, with the goal of preventing problems from becoming worse. Families First supports the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy and works alongside other programmes such as Flying Start.
- 4.3 The Welsh Government provides funding to local authorities to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.
- 4.4 Each local authority has developed a Families First Action Plan which describes how they will implement Families First locally:
 - People of working age in low-income families who gain employment and make progress
 - Children, young people and families, who live in or are at risk of poverty, who are fulfilling their potential
 - Children, young people and families who are healthy and enjoy well-being
 - Families who are confident, nurture resilience and are safe.
- 4.5 Performance measures have been established to ascertain how well the programme is performing within local authorities.
- 4.6 **What do we want to see Families First achieve?**
- 4.7 Families First must demonstrate that it can improve outcomes for families, to ensure they are confident, nurturing and resilient. Moving Wales Forward includes a commitment to supporting families and parents to reduce adverse childhood experiences, and Families First is a key approach to achieve this.
- 4.8 Specifically, the programme should seek to:
 - Design and develop innovative services which can support families to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes

- Encourage a culture of learning around continued improvement to service delivery, sharing best practice and lessons learned
- Promote effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery through an “invest to save” approach, which has a sharp focus on early intervention and prevention
- Work collaboratively and cooperatively with other agencies and programmes to ensure service delivery is aligned with no gaps or duplication in services

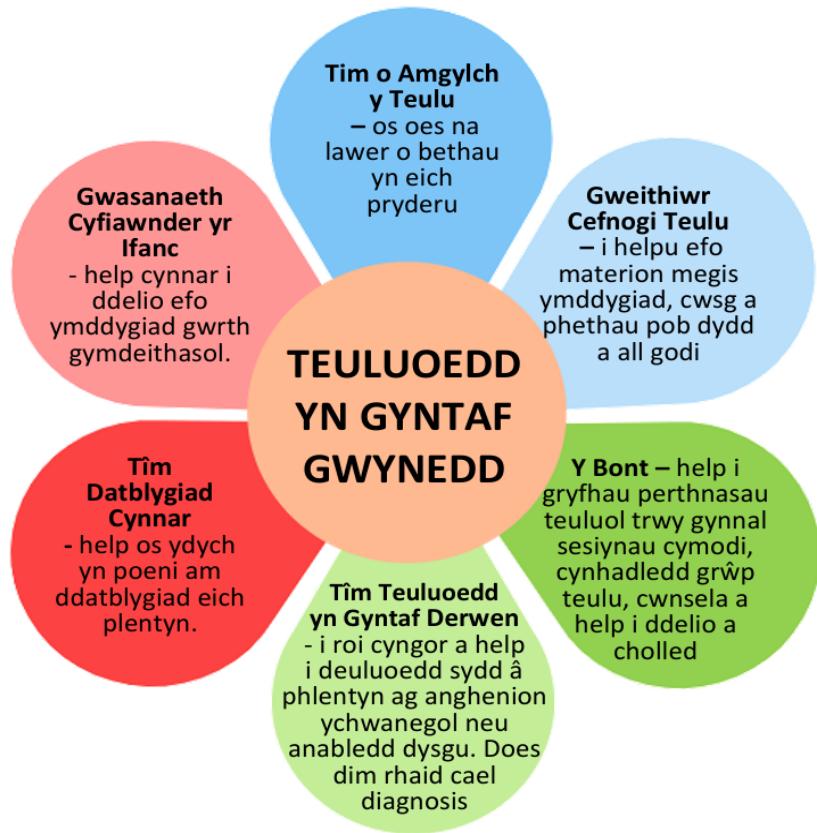
4.9 The Families First Principles delivered through the programme consider the following key principles:

1. Family-focused
2. Bespoke
3. Empowering
4. Integrated
5. Intensive
6. Local
7. Proactive
8. Sustainable

4.10 Commissioning Gwynedd Families First – 2025/26

4.11 Cyngor Gwynedd is clear in its intention to improve the alignment of support for the Families First programme with statutory provision, and as part of this the council has created a Children and Families Early Intervention and Preventive Structure which reflects the existing statutory area teams (Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd).

4.12



4.13 Team Around the Family - TAF

4.14 Anyone can make a referral to access a wide range of Families First and Team Around the Family services.

4.15 The number of single referrals has increased (families receiving one commissioned service rather than families with a higher number of needs needing coordinated services).

4.16 Here is an overview of some of the needs of families referred for early intervention support during the last quarter:

- Challenging behaviour of children and young people at home and/or school and parents and carers asking for help to address the underlying problem.
- Families of children and young people who are on a waiting list for an ASD/ADHD assessment requesting help while waiting to be seen.
- Families of children and young people diagnosed with ASD/ADHD who don't know what help is available next.
- Concern about children and young people's low attendance or children refusing to attend school.

- Concern about the mental health of children and young people who do not meet the threshold for CAMHS support.
- Concern about the mental health of parents and carers and the impact this has on the children.

4.17 What is being done by the Family Support Team to keep families together?

4.18 The Family Support team undertakes preventive work at different intervention levels to strengthen families and reduce the risk of crisis. We work closely with agencies and other workers to support the families e.g. health, education, third sector services and many more. The work consists of several different elements:

4.19 Sharing information and raising awareness is essential for the service. They will provide information about support to families in areas such as parenting, behaviour and healthy relationships. Virtual resources are used, such as 'Solihull Online' and 'Togetherness', along with Government messages such as "Give It Time".

4.20 The team promotes positive relationships by organising family fun sessions that encourage positive time together and strengthen relationships. Over the past year, 28 Hwyl sessions were held with 813 children and 502 families in attendance

4.21 Parental support groups are held to share parenting practices, post-natal support, strategies to cope with stress, and ACE's. They offer interventions for:

- Challenging behaviour
- Conflict between parents
- Increasing confidence
- Support for parents of children with autism or neurodivergent needs
- Dealing with violent situations (by a child against a parent or domestic violence)

4.22 These situations can place significant stress on families, and therefore the groups offer practical strategies to support them.

4.23 When one-to-one support is needed it's important that it is tailored to the individual family to ensure that they get support that is suited to their needs. Families can receive personal support from a Family Support Officer. Officers assess the family, identify the family's strengths, discuss concerns, and can jointly plan strategies tailored to individual needs.

4.24 Support is offered by specialist officers in the team that works with fathers, young people, Autism, *Out of Court* situations following a Police referral (e.g. where a parent has used physical punishment).

4.25 Working in partnerships and creating networks are essential for the success of the service. The team includes Families First and Flying Start officers, working in partnership to ensure comprehensive support.

4.26 The aim of this work is to strengthen families, reduce vulnerability, and promote the well-being of children and parents in the early years.

4.27 What is being done to keep families together by the Trobwynt Service?

4.28 In addition to the work of Families First and Flying Start, preventative work is also undertaken by the Trobwynt Service. The Service offers a wide range of evidence-based programmes to support parents, carers, children and young people. These interventions help strengthen relationships, improve emotional well-being and create safer and more nurturing homes. Preventive work the service undertakes includes intensive interventions (approximately 10 hours per week) for up to a year with families. The support they provide ranges from parents who are pregnant to post-16 young people. When individuals reach the age of 16+ they receive support from the post-16 team. They also work with parents to break the cycle of recurrent pregnancies and care procedures.

4.29 How do Derwen and Hafan y Sêr work to keep families together?

4.30 Derwen and Hafan y Sêr also support families. Derwen provides training on emotional regulation by offering a weekly skills class to teach and shape the learning of new skills and managing emotions for children and young people with disabilities. There are workshops and courses for parents that focus on some of the key difficulties that families experience and discuss what strategies can be used to support their child. Talking to other parents in a similar situation is often the most effective emotional support. The aim of the service is to provide safe and friendly opportunities for parents to talk to other parents. This is provided through the workshops, art sessions and support groups. Derwen also has a service providing a supportive element for children with disabilities through a support worker taking a child/young person to groups, out into the community and undertaking activities of interest to the child. This helps the children to be involved in activities outside school and enjoy different experiences. This also provides a respite element for the family. Several children who use the Derwen service also use the Hafan y Sêr Service which is a residential setting that provides respite for parents who are also carers.

4.31 When families need a service and support from the Children's Department everything goes through the Intake Team to ensure that the information is assessed correctly in order to provide the best service for families.

4.32 Collaboration with Agencies and Services

4.33 Community hubs are also a way of sharing information for families to know what kind of support is available and for referring individuals to the right services. This also reinforces multi-agency collaboration between statutory, preventive and third sector services. One of the hubs is Hwb Dinas Bangor; they work closely with

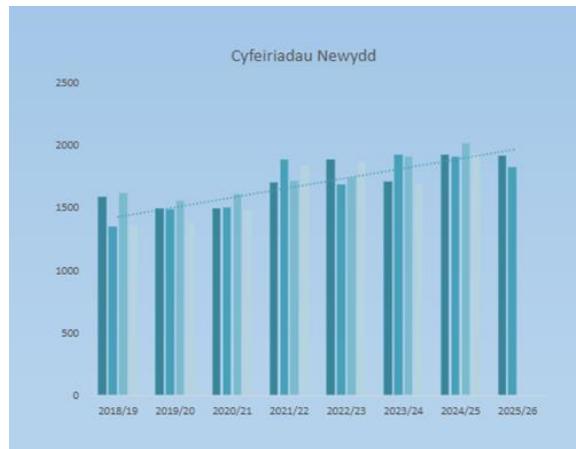
children's services, and we are in the process of setting up a children and young people's hub for Bangor which will complement Hwb Dinas Bangor. This has been requested to ensure that good partnerships are formed, that services are not duplicated, that there is ongoing awareness of who is providing what, joint requests are made ensuring that a consistent and concerted message is promoted to all parents, trusted adults, carers and anyone who works with those groups, as well as, of course, supporting Children and Young People directly. At Hwb yr Orsaf, Penygroes, the Flying Start Family Support team have provided parent and baby sessions. At Hwb Porthi Dre, Caernarfon there is collaboration with several children, autism and family support teams. This is a way for the community to know which services are available to support families.

4.34 We are also collaborating with the Housing and Property Department. The emergency accommodation responsibility for families is operated through the Housing and Property Department. By acting through the Housing and Property Department's protocol, temporary emergency accommodation need not have an impact on keeping families together. The service does not separate families. Its priority is always to ensure that families are kept together, including parents and children, even when emergency accommodation is needed at short notice. When a request for emergency family accommodation is received, they will try, wherever possible, to secure a suitable family room as an emergency solution. If there are children in the household, we work actively to reduce the length of stay in emergency accommodation and to move the family on as soon as possible to more suitable temporary accommodation. In most cases, this will be through a PSL (Private Sector Leasing) property, which is our private sector leasing scheme, or another suitable temporary accommodation option.

4.35 How many families receive support?

4.36 As almost all enquires come through the Intake Team it is possible to gauge the increase over recent years in the number of individuals and families who need support from the Children and Supporting Families Department. The graph below shows an increase in the number of referrals received, last year the number of referrals was almost 8,000 during the year.

4.37



4.38 This means that as more individuals and families receive support, there are more individuals with a statutory care and support plan in place. The figures below also show an increase over recent years.

4.39

21-22	686
22-23	765
23-24	745
24-25	846
25-26	(Approx) 908

4.40 Number of families receiving support from Families First

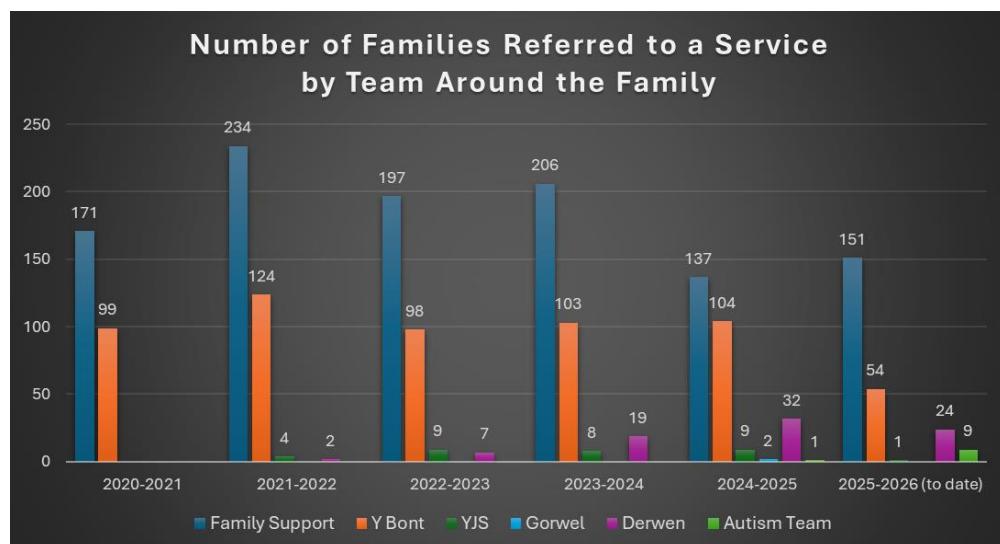
2020 – 21	167 families
2021 – 22	326 families
2022 – 23	279 families
2023 – 24	355 families
2024 – 25	403 families
2025 – 2026 (to date)	281 families

*the above figures show how many families have contacted the Children's Referrals Intake Team and have received early intervention support through Gwynedd's Families First scheme.

There has been a noticeable increase in numbers over the last 2 years. *

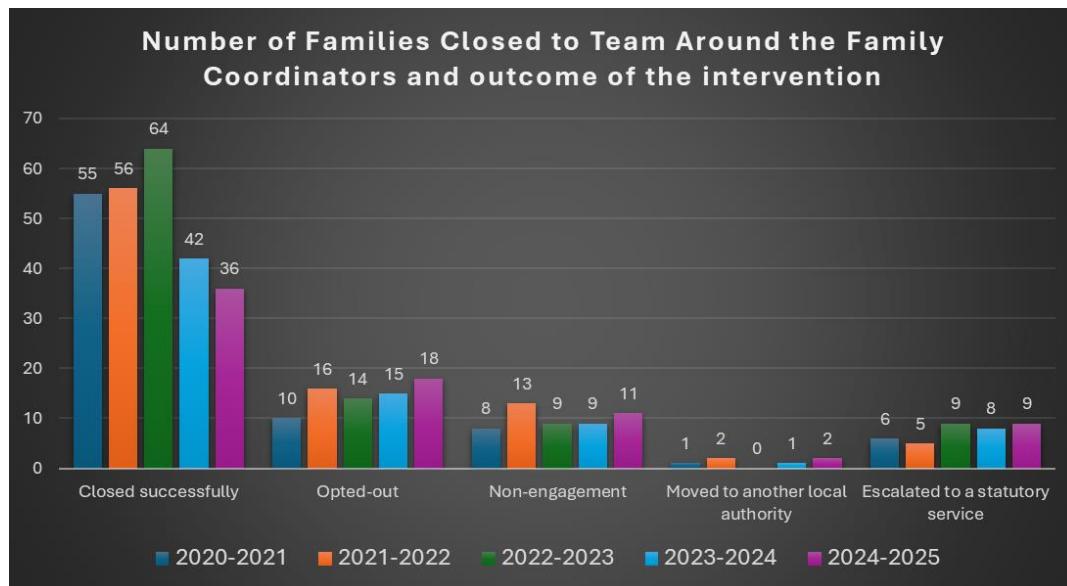
4.41 The next graph shows how many referrals are made to services commissioned by Families First funding here in Gwynedd:

4.42



4.43 The graph below shows how many families have been closed to Team Around the Family coordinators and what was the outcome of the intervention. These are the families who receive the most intensive support:

4.44



4.45 One of the reasons for a reduction in cases having been successfully closed over the last 2 years is due to the fact that the nature of the referrals receiving support has intensified and therefore cases tend to remain open for much longer periods before we see any progress. We measure "distance travelled" through our "outcome star" impact assessment tool and we ask the organisation we commission to report quarterly. To keep an eye on the effectiveness of our programme and to adapt in a timely manner if necessary.

4.46 This is a feature of the Families First programme across Wales.

4.47 Number of families receiving support from Family Support, Flying Start officers

4.48 The table below shows the numbers receiving 1-to-1 support from Flying Start officers who are part of the Early Years service.

4.49

Area	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 (Term 1)
Bangor	28	28	32	6
Caernarfon	65	59	79	21
Blaenau & Dolgellau	94	71	85	17
Bethesda & Deiniolen	26	30	28	6
Talyssarn	18	15	18	8
Total	231	203	242	58

4.50 Number of individuals/families receiving support from the Trothwynt Service

4.51

22/23	23-24	24-25	April 25-December 25
Trothwy worked with 178 children	Trothwy worked with 147 children	Trothwy worked with 209 children	Trothwy has worked with 180 children since April 2025.
48 of the 178 were in the child protection process at the start of the intervention.	40 out of the 147 were in the child protection process at the start of the intervention.	74 of the 209 were in the child protection process at the start of the intervention.	76 of the 180 were in the child protection process at the start of the intervention.
64 of the 178 were children in care with the intention for them to stabilise or return home.	55 out of the 147 were in the child protection process at the start of the intervention.	56 of the 209 are children in care with the intention for them to stabilise or return home.	33 of the 180 are children in care with the intention for them to stabilise or return home.
20 babies before birth.	21 babies before birth.	37 babies before birth.	6 babies before birth.
50 CASP- 11 child protection or ICO ended.	43 CASP-17 child protection or ICO ended.	63 CASP-21 child protection or ICO ended.	52 CASP- 12 child protection or ICO ended.
21 Child out of care through revoking of care orders.	12 Child out of care through revoking of care orders.	12 Child out of care through revoking of care orders.	6 children out of care through revoking of care orders since April.
1 Child on a "step down" plan in this period.	2 Children on a "step down" plan in this period.	6 Children on a "step down" plan in this period.	3 Children on a "step down" plan in this period.

4.52 The data overview from the Trothwynt Service shows that its preventative work helps families stay together when it is safe to do so and for children and young people to potentially return home.

4.53 As can be seen from the above data, the referrals to receive all services are rising and the needs of individuals and families have also intensified in recent years which means that services are working with the families over an extended period of time.

4.54 Number of individuals/families supported by Derwen and Hafan y Sêr

4.55 For disability-focused activities see the table below. Figures here do not include a cuppa and chat, fun sessions and information-sharing sessions.

4.56 Disability-focused activities and groups: -

22-23	128
23-24	103
24-25	170
25-26 (data to date)	90

4.57 Numbers seeking support and service from Derwen have increased, and that is why we have organised a range of different activities and organised group sessions to respond to the demand and to assist families while they're waiting for a specific service or in conjunction with preventative services. The December figure shows that 483 children and young people are open to Derwen services and of the 483 figure, 214 receive a supportive service.

4.58 With a residential respite service provided by Hafan y Sêr, they provide a service to 43 children and young people with disabilities. During 2024 the number of respite nights was 1,048 over the year and there was an increase to 1,417 for the year 2025.

4.59 Do the available resources meet the needs/demand for the service

4.60 Families First

4.61 We use information from the Referrals Intake Team to help understand the nature of the problems faced by families and find any local patterns and use this information to ensure that we commission the most effective and beneficial services and interventions.

4.62 Services commissioned through Gwynedd Families First are now firmly established in terms of the provision available. They are also flexible and able to adapt to the needs of the family.

4.63 Demand for our family support service has greatly increased with a high number of our referrals requesting help with behaviour. There is now less focus on helping families with more practical issues. It would be good to be able to also offer this to families if more funding was available.

4.64 Grant funding funds a large part of the Department's preventive work, including Families First and Flying Start. There is a risk that the Welsh Government could reduce Cyngor Gwynedd's allocation, which would significantly impact the Department's ability to provide preventive services in the same way. This is an issue that has been recorded on the Council's Risk Register.

4.65 Family Support Team

4.66 Currently, there is a waiting list for one-to-one support, reflecting a significant increase in the need for the service. The emerging cases require support at a

more intensive or specialised level, and as a result, the duration of support extends over a longer period.

4.67 The number of families receiving support through groups has decreased, mainly due to family vulnerability and low levels of mental health. In addition, several officers are on maternity leave, which affects our ability to respond fully to the needs of Gwynedd families.

4.68 Trowynt Service

4.69 As the nature, complexity and workloads are increasing, it is not always possible to meet the needs/demands for services in a timely manner. Data from December shows 287 children in care and 116 on the child protection register. The number of cases is high and therefore it is difficult to provide a timely service to everyone. It is possible to allocate one worker to work with four families at a time. Sometimes two workers are required for some families, depending on the risk and nature of the work.

4.70 Derwen and Hafan y Sêr

4.71 As the needs of children and young people have intensified over recent years, there are now waiting lists due to the increases. The service strives to ensure that every family receives the service they need in a timely manner. There is currently a waiting list for the Derwen support service as well as a waiting list for access to a nursing service.

4.72 The situation with the demand for respite nights in Hafan y Sêr is similar, and due to this there are 19 children on the waiting list to receive the service. Hopefully the waiting list will decrease over the coming months.

4.73 Do the preventative services help keep families together and reduce the number of children needing care from the Council

4.74 Families First

4.75 Families may be referred for one of the services we commission, or they may receive more intensive support from a Team Around the Family co-ordinator. This reduces pressure on statutory and more complex services.

4.76 If the family is open to Families First for any support, this Team deals with any incoming police report or further referrals for support if it is not of significant concern. We work closely with the Intake Team to ensure that families receive the right support and make joint visits if there is a growing concern about a family. Sometimes it is inevitable that a family is escalated to receive statutory support.

4.77 We will certainly see a significant increase in the statutory workload if the Families First resources and funding are lost or reduced by the Government.

4.78 Family Support Team

4.79 This is certainly the best opportunity for us to meet the needs of the families and provide information and support that builds on the parents' strengths and skills. The parents have provided very positive feedback regarding the support.

4.80 Trobwynt Service

4.81 Many more children would need care or would be unable to return home without the preventative services.

4.82 Derwen and Hafan y Sêr

4.83 The work that the Derwen and Hafan y Sêr service undertake is invaluable with disabled children and young people. The sessions and training enable families and young people to cope before things reach a crisis point. It also provides a forum for parents to discuss with each other in groups and form connections. It also provides a respite for parents who are the carers of children and young people. This benefits the child/young person as well as the whole family because otherwise families can break down due to the stress and demands of care, therefore preventing them from reaching crisis level.

5. Consultation

5.1 Consultation is constantly undertaken in this area, because much of the work is grant funded, which means that various agencies and families need to be consulted to see whether the scheme is working as part of assessing the efficiency of the work. Families First supports the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy, therefore consultation takes place through the Welsh Government as well as services such as Flying Start to consult with families to see what kind of services they require. Following this there will be decommissioning/recommissioning at the beginning of a new financial year.

6. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

6.1 Have you **included** residents / service users? If not, when and how do you intend to consult them?

6.2 We have considered the relevant well-being goals under this act. We are already involving residents and service users in the development of work in this area. In addition, collaboration at a multi-agency level, both internally and externally, is already taking place.

6.3 Have you considered **collaboration**?

6.4 Collaboration happens regularly, as the strategy of keeping families together relies on multi-agency collaboration through joint working between Council Departments and the third sector.

6.5 What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems arising or worsening in future?

6.6 Prioritising preventative work will help to reduce the need for statutory services within the Children's Department which is already overwhelmed. Preventative work prevents problems from getting worse for the families who really need help and provides support to families before reaching crisis point.

6.7 How have you considered the **long-term** and what will people's needs be in future years?

6.8 Looking at statistics for the last 5 years, more families need support from the Children's Service, particularly the preventative element. In addition to this, the support needed by families has been more intense over recent years because needs are now more intense and complex. We hope that the programme will continue to be funded by the Welsh Government for the coming years. Without the receipt of grant funding it is not possible to provide the service we offer.

6.9 To ensure **integration**, have you considered the possible impact on other public bodies?

6.10 Integration is constantly taking place between the Children and Supporting Families Department and the third sector. Without the grant funding to carry out preventive duties that are either within the Department or commissioned by the third sector, more money would have to be invested by the government because more children and young people would come into care. In addition to this, families would have to receive a statutory rather than the preventative service they currently receive.

7. Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Socio-Economic Duty

7.1 We have addressed the above features and as a Department we follow the Equality Act 2010 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 in our daily work. This ensures that individuals and families receive a service and receive their assessments in their language of choice.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1 We will be submitting a revised Families First and Flying Start Action Plan in February for Government approval through the CCG Grant. We hope there will be minimal change to the amount we receive through the grant.

Appendices

Keeping Families Together Strategy