

Research shows that ensuring all children have the best start in life is the best way to prevent the long-term implications of a poor experience in the early years and ensure we build strong and resilient individuals, families and communities.



### Well-being Objective 3

## Give children the best start in life



People who experience Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as children often end up trying to raise their own children in households where ACEs are more common. Such a cycle of childhood adversity can lock successive generations of families into poor health and anti-social behaviour for generations. Equally however, preventing ACEs in a single generation or reducing their impacts can benefit not only those children but also future generations in Wales.

Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, Public Health Wales



## Where are we now?

Experiences at a young age not only affect the life chances of our current future generations but the generations they will go on to bear themselves. Our evidence demonstrates that investing to ensure all children have the best start in life is the best way to prevent the long-term implications of a poor experience in the early years and ensure we build strong and resilient individuals, families and communities. Our Well-being Assessment showed that in general young children in the Vale have a good level of well-being across a range of outcomes and is a strength that we can build upon in the Vale.

Education acts as one of the key factors for the economic success of not only individuals but of the area as well. The Understanding Wales' Future report highlights how international evidence suggests the biggest opportunities for changing life chances lie in the pre-school years with the factors that lead to educational under-attainment starting very early in childhood. In 2015/16 in the Vale of Glamorgan, the percentage of Foundation Phase children reaching the expected development outcome or above across all areas of development was the highest across the Central South Education Consortium Area and was the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest in Wales behind Monmouthshire.

Our assessment also found that the Vale performs well in relation to health outcomes, with the percentage of reception age children in the Vale of Glamorgan who are overweight or obese reducing in recent years and is now the lowest rate in Wales, significantly lower than average. This is an area where we are 'turning the curve' when compared to the national trend although it should be highlighted that this rate is still higher than it should be in order to protect the health of future generations. The Vale also has the lowest average number of decayed, missing or filled teeth in children aged 5 years in Wales. The rate of teenage conceptions is consistently low for under 16s, under 18s and under 20 year olds and the Vale of Glamorgan observes a lower than Welsh average percentage of low birth weight babies.

However, Vale of Glamorgan level data masks inequalities within the county, and this is true for a range of indicators in relation to young children's health and development. Our second well-being objective – to reduce poverty and tackle inequalities linked to deprivation – seeks to address these issues in the Vale and it is clear that by addressing inequalities we will contribute towards ensuring all children, regardless of where they live, have the best possible start in life and opportunities to thrive. Similarly by working to ensure all children have the best start in life we will address the inequalities that exist within the area.

Our assessment showed that the number of children with decayed, missing or filled teeth, levels of obesity and rates of low birth rate babies were higher in areas that are ranked as more deprived than those that are least deprived. Similarly, educational outcomes for pupils in these areas are lower than those of their peers with the differences in achievement between pupils eligible for free school meals and those not eligible demonstrating this. Our assessment found that there are stark inequalities within the Vale across a range of factors which ultimately impact upon the differences in life expectancy that exist within the area. It is concerning that inequalities can already be seen when considering the findings of the assessment in relation to a number of factors around young children's health, education and development, and that these inequalities already exist even in the early years.

A range of social, economic, cultural and environmental factors will impact upon a child's development and research shows that poor experiences in the early years can have a detrimental impact on a child's future prospects and well-being. Adverse childhood experiences are defined as stressful experiences occurring during childhood that directly harm a child (e.g. sexual or physical abuse) or affect the environment in which they live (e.g. growing up in a house with domestic violence, alcohol abuse, drug use etc.). Evidence suggests that children living in more deprived areas are more likely to be at risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and experiencing ACEs means individuals are more likely to perform poorly in school, more likely to be involved in crime and ultimately less likely to be a productive member of society. This may further compound inequalities that already exist in the Vale, in addition to being a causal factor of them.

We are already working to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences and our self-assessment found that for many partners, activities being undertaken will have a direct or indirect impact on young children or their parents in order to help prevent the root causes of ACEs. However, there was a lack of strategic overview across organisations as a whole in relation to a specific focus on early years and a lack of evaluation of the impact of activity on early years and ACEs unless linked to grant funding conditions. Some partners also identified that this was an area where they needed to develop a better understanding of how their organisation could contribute to the objective. Our evidence clearly showed that we must build upon our strengths and continue to maintain and improve upon good levels of development in the early years whilst reducing inequalities to ensure that this applies to all children in the Vale and that all children have the best start in life to ensure good levels of well-being for our future generations. This will help bring about a range of well-being benefits and by working together we can make a positive difference.

# Our Future

We recognise that only by working together can we ensure all children have the best start in life and the inequalities that exist in the Vale of Glamorgan are reduced. Population projections show that the percentage of young people in the Vale of Glamorgan is set to slightly decrease, however it is important that we continue to work together to ensure all our children have the best start in life. The actions in our plan will also seek to improve the well-being of the parents and carers of young children who have such a big influence upon their development.

Research shows that disadvantage starts “before birth and accumulates throughout life” and action to reduce inequalities must start before birth and be followed throughout the life of the child. Only then can the close links between early disadvantage and poor outcomes throughout life be broken. Experiences at a young age not only affect the life chances of our current future generations but the generations they will go on to bear themselves. Ensuring all children have the best start in life is the best way to prevent the long-term implications of a poor experience in the early years and ensure we build strong and resilient individuals, families and communities.

The Public Health Wales Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study highlights that “children who experience stressful and poor quality childhoods are more likely to adopt health-harming behaviours during adolescence which can themselves lead to mental health illnesses and diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes later in life.” Adverse Childhood Experiences are not just a concern for health. Experiencing ACEs means individuals are more likely to perform poorly in school, more likely to be involved in crime and ultimately less likely to be a productive member of society. We need therefore to take action to ensure we both prevent the root causes of ACEs and respond to the needs of those who have experienced them. To do this we need to ensure we work together as partners but also with communities, families and individuals to understand people’s needs holistically and tackle the root causes of ACEs.

The range of actions relating to other objectives in our plan will also help ensure we give all our children the best start in life and the best platform from which to build. We need to ensure we involve our residents to ensure services respond to their needs and to ensure our young people feel part of a safe and cohesive community and have support available if and when they need it to improve their physical, mental and emotional well-being.

By reducing ACEs we will also reduce inequalities in the Vale and ensure the health of our residents is improved and our residents have opportunities to prosper economically. We need to ensure all children have a good education and by reducing harmful influences and ensuring all children have positive influences in their lives they are more likely to gain a good education and have the skills and confidence to gain good employment. We need to ensure we are equipping our young people with the skills needed for the types of jobs that are likely to be available in the area in the future ensuring we keep up to date with global trends.

We also need to ensure we protect our environment so our young people can grow up in an area where there is good access to green space for improved physical and mental health and where harmful carbon emissions have been reduced.

We must work together to understand and prevent the long-term effects of the worst start in life, recognising that the costs of this are enormous, both to the individual's life and to public services.. By ensuring the right

joined up support is in place we can break intergenerational cycles and build up resilience for individuals, families and communities now and in the future.

Through delivering our actions and achieving this objective our long term vision for the Vale is;

## Well-being Objective 3: Our Vision

Every child in the Vale is provided with the best possible start in life regardless of where they live. The health of children has improved and rates of low birth weight babies, childhood obesity and poor oral health have decreased across the Vale and particularly within areas in eastern Barry. Investment in the first 1000 days has resulted in long lasting positive impacts creating individuals, families and communities that are resilient, safe and confident. Children continue to perform highly in the foundation phase with the attainment gap narrowing between those entitled to Free School Meals and those who are not across all ages. Children are protected from Adverse Childhood Experiences with the root causes prevented and a strong support system in place for those with complex needs.

# Our Steps

Outlined below are the actions we will deliver towards achieving this objective and shows the first set of steps we will be taking from 2018 to 2023 towards realising our longer term vision for the future Vale of Glamorgan.

## What will we start doing today?

Use the findings of the First 1000 Days pilot to challenge and inform early years provision in the Vale exploring the contribution that different partners can make to supporting prevention and early intervention.

Develop a more strategic and innovative approach to improving parenting skills, linking activities to play and the natural environment to help reach more people and promote links to the environment and well-being from an early age.

Develop a better understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to take effective action to ensure people are protected, support systems are in place and the root causes of ACEs are prevented.

Review services across partners and work together to identify the contribution that we can make towards giving all children the best start in life, recognising the role played by both universal and statutory services.

## What will take us a little longer to deliver?

Review multi-agency arrangements for the delivery of preventative and statutory services for children and young people.

Recognising the role played by adults in children's lives, explore how partners can work together to provide the right support and preventative services for adults who may otherwise be at risk of losing their home or entering the criminal justice system through for example domestic abuse, poor mental health or anti-social behaviour.

## What will success look like in 2023?

We all understand how our organisation's activities can contribute to giving children a good start in life and what the long term effects of not doing this can be.

Across the Vale more children achieve their developmental milestones in the early years.

Parents across the Vale are able to access information and services to develop their parenting skills.

Parents and children recognise the value of play, being outside and the contribution it makes to well-being and a child's development.

Referrals for services are more meaningful. Agencies know when it is appropriate to refer, to which services and the potential outcome.

We recognise the impact of ACEs and work together to both prevent the root causes of and respond to ACEs.

We understand people's holistic needs and adapt provision accordingly to take a more preventative approach.

The right help is available to parents and children at the right time.

Improvements in emotional and mental well-being for children and young people.

Individuals, families and communities are safer, stronger and more resilient.

# Our Contribution

The following illustrates just some of the ways we will be contributing to the national well-being goals, how we will be putting the five ways of working into practice and how by achieving this objective we will also contribute towards achieving our other well-being objectives.

## By giving children the best start in life we will also contribute towards achieving our other objectives



A high quality environment can provide opportunities for play and physical activity providing a range of well-being benefits to young children.



Tackling inequalities will help to ensure we give all children a good start in life through improving the well-being of parents and future parents.



Ensuring we engage with all sections of our community will help ensure that all young children and parents who need support receive it and that children themselves have opportunities for their voices to be heard

Give children the best start in life

## By working sustainably to deliver this objective...



Understanding the importance of early years for all children and the **long term** impact of ACEs and the need for support services and preventative actions.



Working together to **prevent** poor outcomes for future generations by giving all children the best start in life, recognising the importance of good parenting skills.



Recognising the need to review how preventative services are delivered to ensure better **integration** of services and a more holistic approach.



Working in **collaboration** to recognise that all partners have a responsibility to give all children the best start in life.



**Involving** our population and engaging more effectively with children and young people to inform improvements to services.

## ...we will maximise our contribution to the national well-being goals...

**A Prosperous Wales**  
Improving early years provision will lay the foundations for a good start in life, improving opportunities to gain qualifications and secure good employment.

**A Resilient Wales**  
Encouraging a better understanding of the importance of the natural environment and its contribution to our well-being from an early age.

**A More Equal Wales**  
Working to ensure all children have the best possible start in life, regardless of their background or where they live.

**A Healthier Wales**  
Promoting healthy choices for parents and children and raising awareness of the importance of the early years.

**A Wales of Vibrant Culture and Thriving Welsh Language**  
Providing opportunities for individuals and families to participate in cultural activities, play and sport and to recognise the benefits for their well-being.

**A Wales of Cohesive Communities**  
Breaking inter-generational cycles of ACEs and incidents such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse and domestic violence leading to safer communities.

**A Globally Responsible Wales**  
Contributing to global well-being by creating healthy, happy, safe and resilient individuals, families and communities.