

# Introduction

Monmouthshire County Council is required to provide reports in relation to the Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF). As part of this process Children's Services provide information to inform the Directors ACRF Report in relation to Adult and Children's Services. The purpose of this report is to give an accurate and honest appraisal of current services in Monmouthshire from a Children's Services perspective and outline the priorities for service development over the next year.

This report uses a number of sources of information including statistical information, feedback from service users, staff and other partners.

My overall view is that the service has continued to improve in the past 12 months. The work plan for the service from April 2014- March 2015 has been extensive, requiring the whole service to continue to change working practices and develop a more efficient and effective service for children, young people and their families.

During April 2014 a CSSIW inspection took place, which caused concern for the inspectorate resulting in a re-inspection during November 2014. The outcome of this additional inspection was that no widespread or serious failures were identified by inspectors that left children being harmed or at risk of harm. [Inspection of Children's Services Report](#)

In addition a baseline fostering inspection took place in November 2014. The outcome of this inspection advised that the fostering service has an experienced staff team with staff who have knowledge in other areas of children's social work.

The inspection also noted that mechanisms were in place to elicit foster carer views and to involve them in the development of the service. Very good progress has been made on issues identified at the last two inspections. [Fostering Inspection Report 2015](#)

During the year the service continued to experience significant pressure on its budgets due to increased demand and high cost placements in relation to a small number of children. Due to the increased demand on the service additional staff were brought in to assist with this. Court costs and transport have also continued to be high cost areas for the service.

This report will outline what we have achieved in 2014/15, our plans for 2015/16 and information on what the teams do within the service.

## **What did Children's Services Achieve in 2014?**



As noted from the diagram above a number of key pieces of work took place, to begin redesigning how we work in Children’s Services. The service has spent the past year developing better services for children, young people and their families. This has included looking at issues such as suitable contact venues, availability of fostering resources, improving the working environment for staff and enabling more effective direct work with children and young people.

The service moved into one location, in July 2014, which has had a significant positive impact on the service. It has improved communication amongst the teams and created a better working environment for staff.

The service had a number of key performance indicators, which were unacceptably poor. Work was undertaken over the summer of 2014 to resolve this, commencing with a work shop. Following this the service worked on improving the data so that our performance was reflected appropriately. Since this work has taken place we have seen improvements for these 5 key indicators and other performance indicators that the service reports on.

**Table 1:**

Ref	Description	2013/14 Actual	2014/15 Q1	2014/15 Q2	2014/15 Q3	2014/15 Latest	2014/15 Target	2013/14 Welsh Av	Direction of Travel
SCC/011b	The percentage of initial assessments that were completed during the year where there is evidence that the child has been seen alone by the Social Worker.	33.2	25.9	46.9	58.8	57.3	48	42.9	↑
SCC/025	The percentage of statutory visits to looked after children due in the year that took place in accordance with regulations.	65.3	47.9	79.5	81.9	82.8	90.6	85.3	↑
SCC/041a	The percentage of eligible, relevant and former relevant children that have pathway plans as required	73.3	54.2	100	100	96.1	98	89.2	↑
SCC/001a	The percentage of first placements of looked after children during the year that began with a care plan in place	83	100	100	100	100	100	90.9	↑
SCC/016	The percentage of reviews of child in need plans carried out in accordance with the statutory timetable.	57.5	45	90.4	92.6	90.9	86	78.8	↑

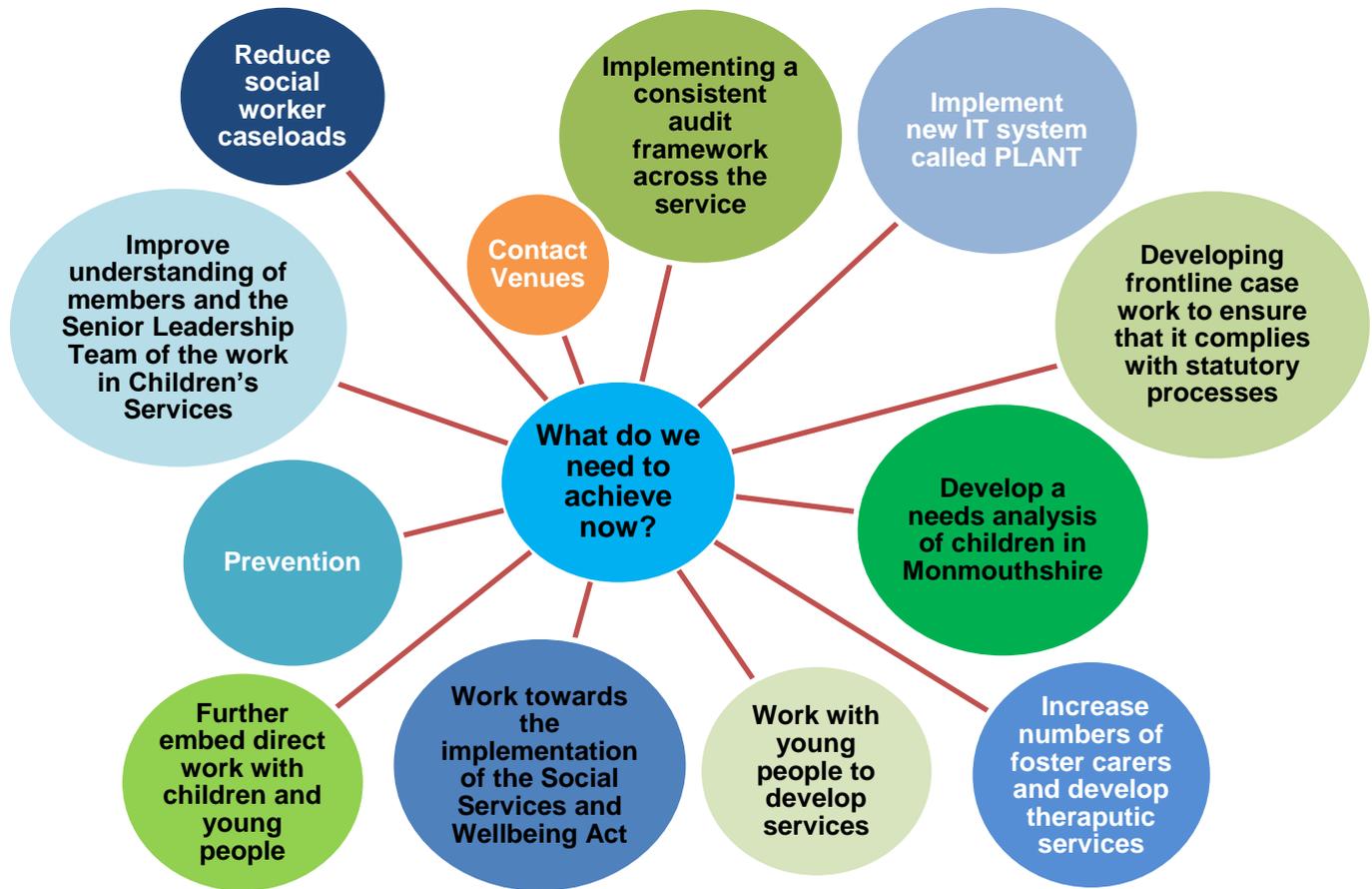
Data above is as at 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2015

Children's Services has completed significant work to develop a clear understanding of expenditure, which has enabled a unit cost approach to budgets and analysis. It has also enabled the Senior Leadership Team to have a better understanding of the needs of the service.

Alongside colleagues in the Children and Young People Directorate and within the wider Council, significant work has taken place regarding safeguarding in the county. Work has been undertaken to continue to deliver the required training across the Council for staff who are in contact with children as part of their work, audits have continued to evidence work undertaken and areas for development.

Although a significant amount of work took place, during the year in Children's Services, staff have already begun working on plans to further develop and improve Monmouthshire Children's Services.

**What are Children's Services working on in 2015-16?**



Recommendations from the CSSIW inspections have formed part of the work planned by staff for 2015/16, however developments are also in a number of other areas such as increasing the workforce within Children's Services and making changes to develop support to those families who have a Special Guardianship Order in place, continued developments of direct work with children and includes a focus on clear delivery of statutory requirements within all aspects of the service.

Work has commenced on developing a Prevention Pathway to enable families to have access to support at the earliest opportunity therefore reducing the number of families becoming known to Children's Services.

Another area of work will be to provide further engagement of senior leaders across all of the Directorates in Monmouthshire and for Members. This will involve Children's Services providing case examples of the types of work that we do and enable senior leaders and staff to spend time with the service to gain a better understanding of what the service does on a daily basis.

The priority of this service is to safeguard children and young people. Plans are being organised to engage children and young people directly in the development of the service. This will ensure that we know what children and young people need from us, but will also look at how we shape things in the future.

These are my views and I would like to hear what your views are about what we are delivering and what else you would like to see improved.

Tracy Jelfs

Head of Children's Services

[tracyjelfs@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:tracyjelfs@monmouthshire.gov.uk)

# SERVICE CONTEXT

Children's Services provides a range of services to children, young people and families in Monmouthshire. There are 19,570 children who live in Monmouthshire. The service works with approximately 525 children at any one time.

The county covers a large geographical area and is predominantly rural with four comprehensive schools in Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth. There are 31 primary schools and a number of pre-school venues for children. Children's Services are required to provide services that are compliant with statutory obligation to meet the needs of children and young people. The service works closely with Health, Education, Adult Services, Police, Housing, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector organisations and other Local Authority areas.

In Children's Services we are required by Welsh Government to collate data on a number of areas of service delivery to report on Performance Indicators. Throughout this report relevant data will be provided to show trends over the past few years.

## The teams in Children's Services are:



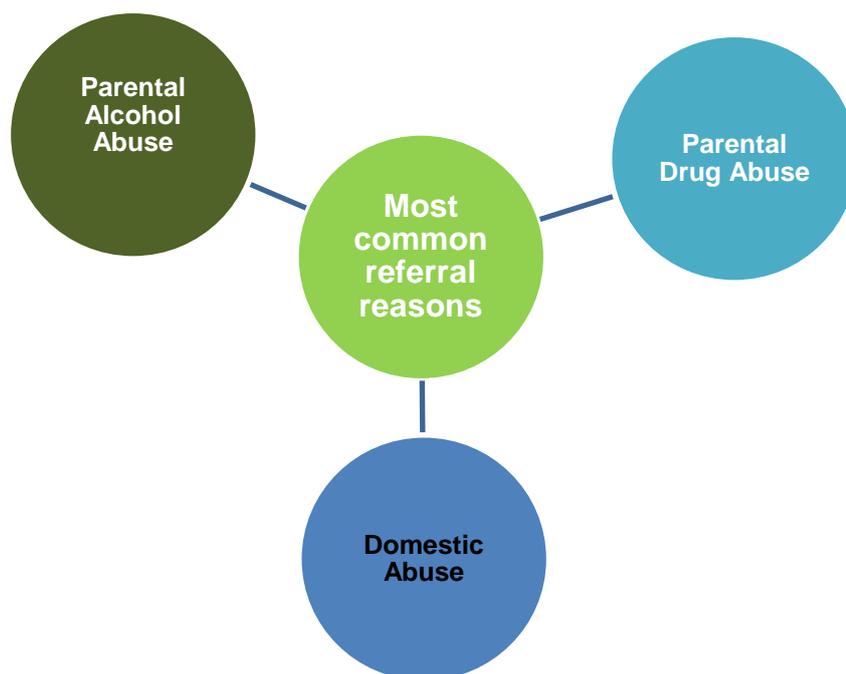
These teams all have different functions and requirements to support children, young people and their families.

## **FAMILY SUPPORT TEAM (FST)**



As noted from the diagram above the Family Support Team undertake a range of tasks from initial contact with the service through to presentation of cases to Court. Children and families known to the service are considered as being in need and are assessed to see what services would assist them. As part of this work the social worker assesses whether the parenting is of a good enough standard and whether the child is at risk of significant harm.

Main reasons for referrals during 2014/15 were:



The 3 main referral reasons during the year were, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse for children and young people becoming known to the service. All of these reasons for referral can have a significant impact on children reaching their full-potential due to living in these adverse situations.

During 2015/16 work will continue to consider a needs analysis of children and young people and also develop a clear prevention pathway to reduce children and young people becoming known to Children’s Services. This will be completed alongside other relevant directorates within Monmouthshire County Council and partners.

**Table 2:**

**Family Support Team Information**

<b>DATA</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15 -mid march</b>
<b>Number of contacts</b>	3,941	4,002	3,855
<b>Number of children concerned</b>	1,772	1,787	1,704
<b>Percentage of referrals where a decision is made in one working day</b>	93.9%	99.0%	99.3% (Feb)
<b>Number of re-referrals</b>	69 (16.2%)	55 (13.3%)	59 (14.5%) (Feb)
<b>Children seen alone</b>	22.4%	33.2%	57.3% (23 Mar)

Source: ICS Database

Overall the work undertaken to develop staff understanding across the service of the purpose of performance indicators has improved the quality and accuracy during the past year. However, data on its own does not give an accurate picture of what is taking place within a service. This is just one element of how we assess how the service is progressing.

For example, in relation to 'children seen alone', not all children will be seen alone, some are unborn, too young or have additional needs. All Social Workers undertaking work within a family will need to take a professional view of the needs of the child, the reasons for the referral and what the worker needs to understand about the case to assess how to do this.

In table 2 above the data is complete with current data available at the time of writing this report. The numbers of referrals are on a par with previous years. The service however has seen an increase in complexity of referrals, which resulted in a significant increase in workload for staff.

## **SAFEGUARDING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT**

**What does the Safeguarding and quality assurance unit do?**



The safeguarding unit works across the whole authority to ensure that everyone is doing what they need to do to keep children and young people safe from harm, abuse and neglect.

This is done through ensuring that all workers are trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse and so that they know what to do if they have a concern. At a higher level, multi-agency training is organised so that all those working in child protection can develop their knowledge and skills. The unit works closely with the Regional Safeguarding Children Board to ensure that cases are looked at and reviewed. This helps us to learn through examples of good practice as well as from when things go wrong.

The unit also undertakes safeguarding audits with all services in the authority to check that they have proper safeguarding arrangements in place, and where required we help them to make improvements.

Together with Employee Services we work to ensure that when we recruit people to work with children or young people this is done safely with all proper checks in place. If there are any concerns raised about the suitability of staff working with children or young people we ensure that these are properly investigated and managed.

The South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board has been chaired by Monmouthshire during 2014/15.

People who work with the unit include:

**Service Manager Safeguarding Unit** – is responsible for leading staff within the unit and assists with the Council wide safeguarding approach. In addition this role has a regional element to it and the post holder works as part of the sub groups set up via the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board and the local Learning and Review Group. They also provide regional training and assists with Child Practice Reviews as necessary.

**Child Protection Coordinator** – is responsible for reviewing and overseeing the children on Monmouthshire's Child Protection Register.

**Independent Reviewing Officer** – responsible for reviewing arrangements for our Looked After Children and to check that we are planning for their futures appropriately.

**Lead Officer for Safeguarding in Education** – responsible for helping schools and other educational settings make good referrals and have all their safeguarding arrangements in place.

**Senior Practitioner Court and Public Law Outline**- this post is new to the service during 2014/15. The worker oversees quality of information going to Court and supports staff to develop and implement skills for this environment. The worker is

also involved in the pre-proceedings stage to ensure that process is followed and is timely.

### **Child Protection Register and Looked After Children**

**Table 3:**

#### **Safeguarding Unit Information**

<b>Data</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
Number of Children on the child protection register	55	37	51
Number of Looked After Children	102	103	108

Source: ICS Database

Numbers on the Child Protection Register vary throughout the year. Workers make decisions along with multi-agency partners as to whether a child should be placed on the register. Over the past 2 years the service has worked to ensure that prompt decisions are made in relation to children and children are moved on into other processes if it becomes apparent that parents are unable to make the changes they needed to in an appropriate timeframe for the child.

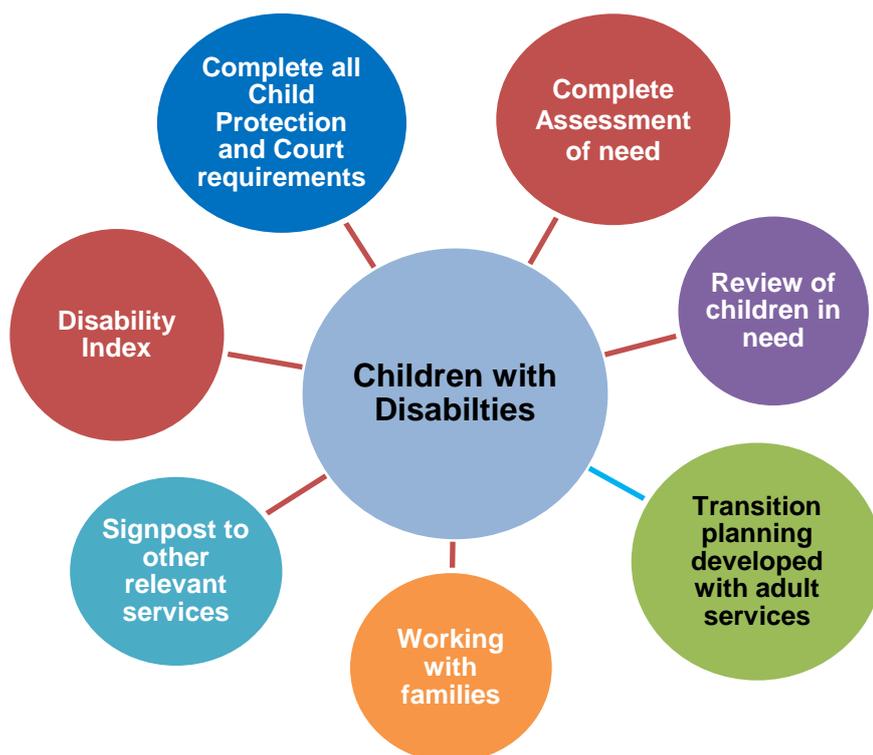
Similarly numbers of children who are looked after vary during the year. Multi-agency reviews take place at specified intervals to ensure that plans in place for the child are progressed effectively.

Monmouthshire Children's Services does not have a specified number of children and young people that they wish to have on the Child Protection Register or looked after, during any year. The service seeks to ensure that any child at risk of significant harm or experiencing harm, are placed on the Child Protection Register or brought into the care system, as appropriate, with the relevant plan in place to achieve the necessary outcomes for the child.

### **CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES TEAM (CWD)**

Over the past year the Children with Disability Team with the assistance of a permanent experienced manager in the team have developed the service. A focus on developing practice has been implemented in the team. The team have also set up events for children with complex needs, who cannot access other play schemes, events organised that enable parents to meet with transport, finance etc., so that they have an understanding of those people involved in providing services 'behind the scenes' to their children. The service has also had a number of student social workers, who have been enabled to run wellbeing groups for young people as part of their placements.

### **What does the Children with Disabilities Team (CWD) do?**



Need to add:

The team supports families coming to terms with their child’s diagnosis and assesses families to consider what additional support they need in relation to their child. This may include access to other services, short breaks or support for suitable housing

**Table 4:**

**Number of children receiving a service from CWD**

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
161	126	121

Source: ICS Database

**SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TEAM (SCYPT)**

This team complete a range of tasks (see diagram below). The team work specifically with care leavers, looked after children and 16-17 year olds that present as homeless. There are a wide range of tasks and responsibilities in this area of work including liaison with education, health and other professionals to develop and progress plans for children and young people. Social Workers work with young people to develop social and independence skills. The service provides Carer Leavers with support in relation to independence, accommodation, training and employment.

Significant amounts of time are spent writing statements for Court and complying with statutory requirements in relation to a number of performance indicators e.g. statutory visits to looked after children.

Staff also work with children and young people to enable them to tell us their wishes and feelings so that plans can be developed appropriately for them. Over the past year the service has been trained in play therapy and have focused on increasing the time they spend with children and young people. Staff within the team have developed a young people's football team, during the year, which as well as providing activity for young people has also worked to develop young people's awareness of health issues, and improved self-esteem and confidence

**What does the Supporting Children and Young People Team do?**



The service has continued to develop how it meets the needs of children and have worked to increase psychology and play therapy within the service. This will support foster carers and those who are caring for children who have experienced abuse.

The Corporate Parenting Group has continued to develop over the year and is chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services. The apprentice post noted in last year's report was advertised but we were unsuccessful in recruiting. It is currently being re-advertised and there are a number of candidates keen to join the service in this role. The post holder will be a care leaver and will therefore have experienced being a looked after child themselves. Once this post is in place plans to progress the Children in Care Council will develop further. This group currently

meets around a range of issues and this will increase into service design over the coming year.

Last summer the service invited a care leaver to speak at an event where he explained his experiences to Children’s Services staff, finance, transport, senior leaders, members and others within the Council. The care leaver is now completing work with Monmouthshire’s children in care to enable them to explain their experiences via DVD for others to understand their story. They will also work with foster carers to enable a better understanding from a child’s perspective of their experiences of being in care. The work will continue during the year.

**Table 5:**

**Numbers of statutory visits completed to children within timescales**

<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>
66.9%	65.3%	82.8% (23 Mar)

Source: ICS Database

**ADOPTION**

As planned, the regional South East Wales Adoption Service commenced in April 2014. In addition the National Adoption Service has also been put in place during the past year.

As previously advised the national service will not provide adoption services or work directly with Children’s Services in enabling social workers to deliver permanency outcomes to children, this will remain at regional level.

This has been a key piece of work over the past year to organise and implement the regional service. The service is based in Mamhilad and managed via Blaenau Gwent. As noted in the diagram below the joint service has developed an increased service provision in relation to adoption.



Challenges continue on a national level to find adopters for children with disabilities, sibling groups and older children. The adoption service delivers support to adopters and their children both before the age of 18 years and into adulthood. The service is also responsible for providing post adoption counselling and support.

**Table 5:**

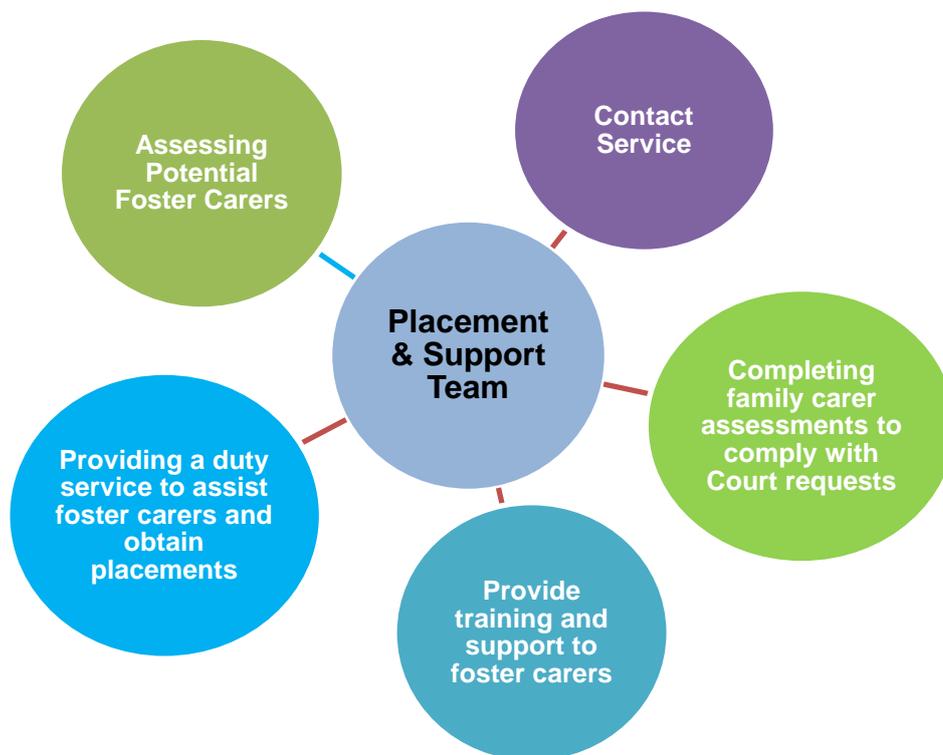
**Adoption information**

	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>
No of children where a placement order was made	7	9	5
No of children placed for adoption	1	11	4
No of children where an adoption order was made	1	1	10

There have been 10 Adoption Orders made during 2014/15, which is a significant increase on last year. 4 children are in their adoptive placements, which will be progressed to adoption orders being made in due course.

### **PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT TEAM (PAST)**

The Placement and Support Team has continued to make progress over the past year with a small staff group. This team completes a range of tasks (see diagram below) to assist Social Workers to find appropriate placements for children and to support and train foster carers.





As noted from the information above, a significant amount of time is being spent on completing assessments of family members at the direction of the Court. However, the numbers of children placed with family members as a result of these assessments, compared to the number of assessments taking place is minimal.

This has a detrimental effect on the team’s ability to continue completing assessments for generic foster carers, i.e. those assessed to care for children who are not family members. Work was completed during 2014/15 to ascertain the needs within this team and develop business cases to support the changes required. These business cases are progressing through the political process at the time of writing this report.

It is envisioned that with the additional resources it will reduce the need for independent fostering placements, which cost more than internal placements. It will also increase the level of service to those families who pursue a Special Guardianship Order. The service is seeing an increase in these Orders from the Court and it is essential that these families have effective support in place.

**Table 7:**

**Completion of assessments for generic foster carers (data awaited end of May 2015)**

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15

Source: ICS Database

Within this area of service a contact team is in place which provides contact officers for children across the service who need contact with birth family members. Over the past 12 months work has been completed to plan a resource that will support this area of service more effectively. Increasing financial resources are being used to

provide this service, which is as a result of not having suitable venues available to us internally. Currently the service is experiencing increased demand for this service, which results in increased cost to rent rooms. Facilities are often not child friendly and overall do not meet the needs of families using them.

During 2015/16 work will continue with a plan going through formal political process to develop 3 venues that will be run by Children's Services to meet the needs of families during contact. These will be in Monmouth, Chepstow and Abergavenny. In addition these venues will also be used for child protection conferences, reviews, meetings and for young people groups. This will further reduce our costs to provide these meetings as we currently are charged to use facilities for these meetings.

## **YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE (YOS)**

The Youth Offending Services is delivered jointly with Torfaen. The service is based in Mamhilad and is managed by Monmouthshire and works to a Youth Justice Plan, which is reported separately.

During 2014/15 the 'Children and Young People First' (joint strategy between Welsh Government and the Youth Justice Board) was published in July 2014 setting the vision for improving services for young people from Wales who offend, or are at risk of, offending. There has been a continued reduction in first time entrants (FTEs) and the numbers of young people in custody was at its lowest ever recorded in 2013. However, re-offending rates continue to be of concern and there is a growing appreciation that those remaining in the Youth Justice System have more concentrated levels of complex needs and more persistent patterns of offending. The priority areas set out in the joint strategy are:

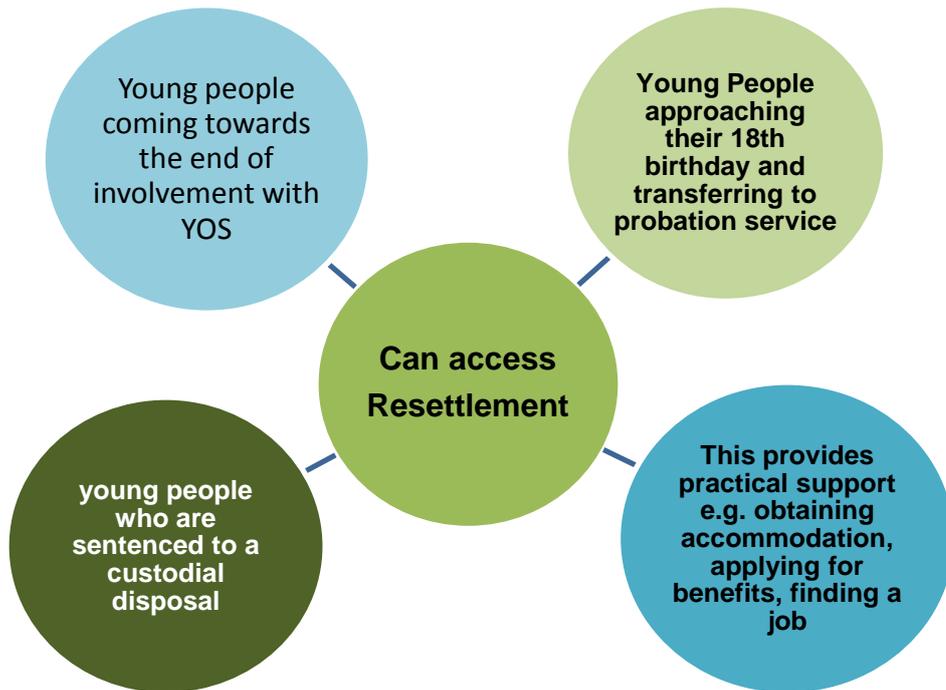
- A well designed partnership approach
- Early intervention, prevention and diversion
- Reducing re-offending
- Effective use of custody
- Resettlement and reintegration at the end of a sentence

Monmouthshire & Torfaen Youth Offending Service (YOS) are in the process of completing the Youth Justice Board re-offending toolkit with a view to enabling better analysis of local data on offending behaviour and the characteristics of those perpetrating it, to support targeted prevention strategies and to inform resource allocation.

Monmouthshire & Torfaen YOS (in partnership with the two other Gwent YOS) have launched the 'Restorative Justice for Looked After Children' project across Gwent with a view to reducing prosecution of Looked After Children. The project has provided training to over 100 professionals across Gwent to raise awareness of the service and restorative justice approaches and are now accepting referrals from foster carers, care home staff and supervising Social Workers with a view to supporting the use of restorative approaches as an alternative to prosecution (where appropriate and proportionate).



An example of the work in Monmouthshire & Torfaen Youth Offending Service (YOS) during 2014/15 has been the successful application in securing resources from the Youth Crime Prevention Fund to develop resettlement support services locally. The Resettlement Support Project has been receiving referrals since November 2014 with a view to providing additional voluntary support to young people upon release from custody and at the end of statutory intervention with the YOS. It is pleasing to report that there have been positive levels of engagement with the project and none of the young people referred to date have re-offended. The YOS will continue to build upon the success of the project with the launch of multi-agency Prevention, Resettlement and Support Panel in 2015/16.



## **MOVING FORWARD IN 2015-16**

The diagram below provides an overview of what the service will focus on during the next year. These are essentially around three areas of work strategic, practice and children and young people.

