

Meeting of:	Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 11 June 2024
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Family Information Service Annual Report 2024
Purpose of Report:	To update Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Vale Family Information Service (FIS)
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Head of Resource Management and Safeguarding
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Operational Manager, Business Intelligence and Service Development
Policy Framework:	This report is consistent with the Policy Framework and Budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Report provides information on the performance of the Vale Family Information Service (FIS) during 2023-2024. • The Family Information Service plays a vital role in contributing to the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) requirement of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. • The FIS enables the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Childcare Act 2006, Section 27, regarding the provision of prescribed information to parents and prospective parents, on childcare and other services or facilities. 	

Recommendations

1. That Scrutiny Committee considers the Annual Report of the Vale Family Information Service (FIS) and the work undertaken to support parents/carers and providers in the Vale of Glamorgan.
2. Scrutiny Committee receives updates on the Family Information Service every two years.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To ensure effective oversight of this important area of social services activity.
2. To ensure Scrutiny Committee continues to be updated with regard to the Family Information Service. However, given the current stability and quality of the service we are proposing that the report should be completed bi-annually and presented to Scrutiny Committee every two years.

1. Background

- 1.1 The [Family Information Service \(FIS\)](#) provides families in the Vale of Glamorgan with information and guidance on childcare, help with childcare costs, activities and support services for families. These include additional needs support, activities and groups for children and young people. FIS has received 1,429 enquiries over the past year.
- 1.2 This year the FIS achieved the Families First Quality Award, a national award recognising Family Information Services that demonstrate excellence in providing information, advice, and assistance to local families. The assessment required the team to evidence 16 standards, including how the service supported families of children with disabilities. This was highlighted as a strength in the assessor's report following interviews with parents and carers.
- 1.3 They also recognised the service for their excellent partnership working to deliver an outreach service to parents in the community. An example of this was the Family Christmas Party that the FIS organised. It saw over 700 children, young people and parents attend Barry Memo for a party. There was no cost to attend and the event received excellent feedback.
- 1.4 The FIS maintains a database of these services, to ensure families, professionals and providers have access to information that is accurate and up to date. FIS uses the [Dewis Cymru online directory](#), which feeds through to the national [Childcare Information Wales](#) website.
- 1.5 The FIS provides an integral part of the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service for the Council, as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014). Together with the Families First Advice Line and Children and Young People's Services Intake Team, the FIS ensures that families are provided with the correct information and guidance. It also ensures that they are appropriately put through to the correct service if further advice and assistance is required.

- 1.6 The FIS enables the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Childcare Act 2006, Section 27, regarding the provision of prescribed information to parents and prospective parents, on childcare and other services or facilities, and revised [Childcare Statutory Guidance 2016](#).
- 1.7 The FIS receives funding to promote the [30 Hour Childcare Offer for Wales in the Vale](#), which provides working parents and parents who are studying or training, with funding for childcare for 3 to 4 year olds. The team staff the National Childcare Offer Helpline for the Vale and in the last year, they have received over 600 enquiries from parents and providers.
- 1.8 The FIS also receives funding through Families First to administer [The Index for Children with Disabilities or Additional Needs](#). This is a voluntary register and once signed up, families receive newsletters and ebulletins connecting them to services, schemes, groups and much more. In the last year 153 children have been registered. There are now 1,004 children and young people on The Index and their parents and carers are being provided with information.
- 1.9 Enquiries to the service have slightly decreased from the previous year. However, the pattern of enquiries remains consistent throughout the year. The reason people contact the service also remains consistent, with the most common reasons being the 3 to 4 year old Childcare Offer, additional needs information and support, and childcare. However, there has been a significant increase in enquiries regarding the Flying Start 2 year old Offer, as it's being rolled out across the Vale.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 The Childcare Offer for 3 to 4 year olds requires childcare providers to register with the scheme in order to care for children who receive the funding. Welsh Government pay an hourly rate to childcare providers and for most of them, this doesn't cover the provider's usual fees, which then results in childcare providers passing these costs to parents. This can lead to a breakdown in relationship between the parent and provider, with the FIS team trying to support both. Positively, Welsh Government plan to undertake a review of the hourly rate this coming year.
- 2.2 The implementation of the Welsh Government's Flying Start 2-year-old Offer has presented the team with some challenges. As this is a separate scheme to the 30-hour Childcare Offer, parents can be confused and unsure what they are eligible for and what to apply for. The FIS Team have been working closely with Flying Start to improve the information available and this is a key action for the coming year.
- 2.3 An ongoing challenge for the team is to keep the information about childcare, family support services and activities up to date. There is the facility for providers to register on Dewis Cymru and update the information themselves. However, few actually do this, and it relies on the team to make contact with the provider and update the information for them. This is very time consuming as the team manage over 550 'resources' on Dewis.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** FIS is a preventative service, reaching families in the community and providing relevant information that can prevent families reaching crisis point. Enquiries to FIS vary greatly from childcare, help with childcare costs, support for a family who has a child with additional needs and doesn't know where to turn, to groups for parents and children who feel isolated. FIS works closely with colleagues, especially the services that form the single point of access for information for families - the Families First Advice Line and Child & Young People Services Intake Team.
- 3.2** FIS works collaboratively with other departments and external organisations whose end goal is to keep children safe, happy, and supported to live their best lives possible. This is evident by FIS working with employability partners, to reach parents who may be looking to go back to work or training. FIS can support them with information on childcare and help with childcare costs. FIS and partners have arranged sessions in schools and Job Centre Plus, which have been successful. They also work with the Childcare and Early Years Team and colleagues to identify any gaps in childcare and support the development of new childcare. They have helped run a recruitment campaign to encourage people to work in the childcare sector.
- 3.3** Another example of collaborative working is the Family Christmas Party that FIS organised. They worked with 19 different partners, who provided free activities for children and took the opportunity to share information about their service to parents and carers. Feedback was very positive, and the next party has already been booked.
- 3.4** FIS has been enhancing the information they hold about services and activities for children with additional needs, as well as childcare services offering Welsh medium childcare, and this work will continue in the coming year.
- 3.5** The Team have consulted with parents and carers about the service, the information provided and whether it has made a difference to them and their family. This information is used to improve the service and some lovely comments were received from parents during the assessment for the Families First Quality Award. Feedback from parents about the Summer Holiday Activity Programme are being used to help create future programmes.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** The FIS team has moved to mostly digital information, by using social media, animations, digital flipbooks, and accessible pdfs. However, several hardcopies of The Index newsletter are still produced to send to those who would prefer a hard copy and to community outlets, including schools. This is monitored closely to ensure copies aren't wasted. At the Family Christmas Party, printing was kept

to a minimum, with tickets being scanned by a QR code. The promotional items that have been purchased have been ethically sourced.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** The Family Information Service is funded from the Social Services Budget.
- 5.2** Additional funding to support The Index is provided under a Service Level Agreement funded from Welsh Government Families First Grant.
- 5.3** Welsh Government funding for the Childcare Offer has allowed us to be able to recruit to a fixed term Engagement Officer and Support Assistant who sits within the Family Information Service.

Employment

- 5.4** The FIS Team comprises of seven members of staff, including the Social Care Information Team Manager, four of whom are part time. Three staff are grant funded and one member of staff is employed through an agency on a temporary basis. Two members of staff have recently been regraded to a higher grade, which will support the Team Manager, build resilience into the team and opportunities for development.
- 5.5** The FIS Team also has a remit to develop and review social care information for the Social Services Directorate, both internally and externally.
- 5.6** The FIS Team sits within the wider Social Care Information Team.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.7** The Family Information service enables the Council to fulfil its responsibilities under the Childcare Act 2006, Section 27, regarding the provision of prescribed information to parents and prospective parents, on childcare and other services or facilities.
- 5.8** It also provides an integral part of the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service, as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014).

6. Background Papers

[Vale Family Information Service Annual Report 2024](#)

Reports to Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee: 13th June, 2023; 7th June, 2022; 11th May 2021.