

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 28TH NOVEMBER, 2019**

**REPORT OF:**

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. THOMAS (CHAIR)**

Councillors K. Rowson (Vice-Chair)  
D. Bevan  
G. A. Davies  
M. Day  
P. Edwards  
L. Elias  
K. Hayden  
J. Holt  
J. Millard  
J. P. Morgan  
T. Sharrem  
T. Smith

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Children's Services  
Head of Adult Services  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<b>No. 1</b>	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
<b>No. 2</b>	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>	

	Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Moore and G. Paulsen.	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>PROGRESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAFE REDUCTION OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STRATEGY 2017 - 2020</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Children's Services which was presented to update Members on the progress made in relation to the implementation of the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2017-2020.</p> <p>The Head of Children's Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding special guardians, the Head of Children's Services said that special guardians were generally extended family members such as grandparents, aunts and uncles.</p> <p>A Member enquired regarding the difficulties of recruiting a consultant psychologist. The Head of Children's Services said that the psychologist role had been advertised on two separate occasions with no applicants. There was a shortage of psychologists and although the Authority were competitive with bandings, grant funding was short term.</p> <p>In relation to the CLA reduction strategy, the Chair commented that the strategy was being independently evaluated by Worcester University and enquired had the Council worked with Newport Council when developing the Supporting Change Team. The Head of Children's Services responded that the Authority had</p>	

looked at both Newport and Gwynedd models and had chosen to follow the Gwynedd model.

A Member enquired regarding payments to special guardians and the level of care provided to break the cycle for young people to live a good life and not come back into care. The Head of Children's Services said the level of support to Special Guardians included:-

- The local authority develop a plan outlining the support given to promote a successful placement.
- Allowances to special guardians – the authority would assess the financial position of the special guardian and support financially if necessary. This was then reviewed annually.
- If a placement breaks down the team would look at the child's situation and seek another family member to look after them as an alternative to coming into care.

In response to a Member's question regarding the Children's Services legal support, the Head of Children's Services said that soft market testing had been carried out with one private law company and one local authority expressed an interest in delivering future legal services for Blaenau Gwent Council. The Member enquired if there would be cost benefits to employing a Children's Solicitor rather than use costly external solicitors. The Director of Social Services commented that this piece of work had been carried out and there had been difficulties in recruiting Local Authority Child Care Solicitors. He was continuing to explore partner working with other local authorities and was awaiting any interest in supporting Blaenau Gwent in this provision.

A Member enquired why the mediation support worker post was part time. The Head of Children's Services clarified that funding only supported one part time post, however, this was in addition to the full time post already in place.

With regard to early intervention, the Head of Children's Services commented that an Education Support Worker had been established in the Supporting Change Team to offer education support for children and families for children at risk of going into care. The Families first programme worked closely with schools to

forge relationships and support children showing difficulties in school.

In response to a Member's question regarding the underspend in Children's Services for quarter 2, the Head of Children's Services said that one area of underspend was staffing, there was currently 8 or 9 social worker vacancies. Difficulties in recruiting externally to Social Worker posts had led to the Department to encourage internal support workers to undertake training to become Social Workers and fill vacant posts. There had also been an underspend in Independent Fostering Agencies costs as the Authority was placing fewer children with external fostering providers. With regard to Residential Placements, Children's Services received a grant of £761,000 and this had been set against the residential placement budget. A Members Briefing session was being held in November on the work of the MyST team, they worked with children in residential care to bring them back to foster care placements to improve outcomes for children and reduce pressure on the residential budget.

A Member enquired as the number of children in residential placements was reducing, had the numbers of foster carers in Blaenau Gwent increased. The Head of Children's Services said that within the last six months there had been an increase in fostering enquiries, however, some children had been placed with extended family members and this had resulted in the reduced number of residential placements.

In response to a Member's question regarding the number of children in foster care to date, the Head of Children's Services confirmed that presently there were 223 children in foster care.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the information contained within the report be approved.

**No. 6** **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2019/20 (QUARTERS 1 AND 2)**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to highlight key points from quarters 1 and 2 of the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/2020.

The Director of Social Services presented the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

### **Children's Services**

The Head of Children's Services spoke on Children's Services.

A Member commented that it was pleasing to note that the Children's Emotional Well-being and Mental Health initiative was in place and moving forward.

### **Adult Services**

The Head of Adult Services advised Members that a co-produced Advocacy commissioning strategy for supporting vulnerable adults had been completed and the new advocacy helpline had been launched. Information leaflets would be forwarded to Members in due course.

A Member commented that some vulnerable adults cared for children and the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service needed to be promoted to get the message to the public. He enquired regarding the number of beds available for respite care for adults with physical disabilities in their 70's who cared for an adult with a physical disability. The Head of Adult Services said that in Blaenau Gwent there were no respite beds for adults with physical disabilities, in these cases beds would be commissioned in other Authorities on a case by case basis to meet specialist needs.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2, namely that the report be accepted as provided.

**No. 7**

### **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 13TH JANUARY 2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair advised that the Preventative Model of Service to meet future social care demand would be presented to the March Committee.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse

Option 2; namely that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 13 <sup>th</sup> January, 2020 be approved.	
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