

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 13TH JANUARY, 2020**

**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  
G. Paulsen  
T. Sharrem  
T. Smith

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Adult Services  
Service Manager, Provider Services  
Service Manager, Children's Services  
Mary Welsh, Manager Community Options  
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.	

No. 2	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M. Moore.</p>	
No. 3	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><b><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 were submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>Item 6 – Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/20 (Quarter 1 &amp; 2)</u></b></p> <p><u>Adult Services</u> - a Member proposed an amendment to the second paragraph:-</p> <p>‘The Member commented that the only respite beds available for adults with physical disabilities had been in Cardiff and enquired regarding the number of respite beds available in Blaenau Gwent for adults with physical disabilities who had elderly parents caring for them. The Head of Adult Services said that in Blaenau Gwent there were no respite beds for adults with physical disabilities. In these cases respite beds would be commissioned in other Authorities on a case by case basis to meet specialist needs’.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 5	<p><b><u>EXECUTIVE DECISION SHEET FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Executive Decision Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Executive Decision Sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 6	<p><b><u>PROGRESS REPORT - SOCIAL SERVICES ASSISTED TRANSPORT PROVISION</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Adult</p>	

Services which was presented to provide an update on the outcome of assessments undertaken during 2019, for eligibility to Assisted Transport.

The Head of Adult Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

Of the 149 assessments undertaken the Chair commented that one person had ceased accessing the Community Options Service and potentially there could be others. The Head of Adult Services reassured Members that through ongoing communication no other citizens had indicated a wish to cease accessing the Community Options provision.

A Member referred to taxi fares from Trefil and pointed out that mobility vehicles could be withdrawn at any time. The Head of Adult Services said that taxi fares from Trefil were being looked at. With regard to mobility vehicles if an individual's circumstances change then the exceptional circumstances element of the policy would be invoked and the citizens circumstances reviewed.

A Member enquired regarding the operating hours of the vehicles and whether alternative uses could be found when not in operation. The Service Manager, Provider Services said the vehicle operating hours were 8.00 am to 10.30 am and then started again at 3.00 pm and confirmed that vehicles were parked up in between these hours. Alternative uses had been looked at but would have cost implications due to increased drivers contracted hours. The current Community Options budget was not sufficient to cover an increase in drivers contracted hours.

The Chair commented that the Authority did not have a Corporate Transport Policy, an Executive decision had been made to keep home to school transport and felt that a two tier transport policy was operating with vulnerable people being penalised.

The Head of Adult Services said that the Service had positive feedback regarding the flexible approach to citizens accessing Community Options using own transport and not being reliant on the Local Authority transport runs. They also confirmed that the relevant equality policies had been considered to ensure people were being treated fairly.

Another Member also raised concerns that the Authority was

running a two tier transport policy with regard to home to school transport and commented that the Authority was now in an improved financial position and these transport services should be provided for vulnerable people in the community.

Another Member enquired regarding cost implications for assisted transport. The Head of Adult Services said the costs of providing assisted transport was approximately £321,000 currently. She also highlighted the potential inequalities that could happen if the Council decided not to charge for provision for those continuing to use the Local Authority transport when those who had already opted to make own arrangements for transport via taxi's were paying to attend following their social care review.

A Member pointed out that not many taxi's could accommodate wheelchair users.

In response to a Member's question regarding development of a Corporate Policy for reviewing the leasing costs of vehicles, the Head of Adult Services said that existing vehicle leases within Social Services had recently been renegotiated and savings made. The Head of Service reminded Members that the report presented to them outlined the new model for the service with anticipated reduction in fleet and staffing from 8 to 4 vehicles. This would result in further savings being made.

A Member said it was important to sustain this provision so that vulnerable people had access to assisted transport to enable them to attend day centres and felt that a balance needed to be maintained.

A Member enquired if mental health views had been captured in the report and further enquired regarding the low number of wheelchair adapted taxis. The Head of Adult Services confirmed that the views of people who experienced mental health issues had been captured in the report and agreed there were not enough wheelchair adapted taxis in Blaenau Gwent.

With regard to the 6 objections received to date regarding the outcome of assessments, the Head of Adult Services said that some of the reasons for objection had included that family members may be using the mobility vehicle to travel to work or the cost of alternative transport for example taxis. She added that for some of these citizens they had been considered under the

exceptional circumstances policy and would be eligible to continue to use the assisted transport provision to attend Community Options, however, dependent on the outcome of the proposals being presented they may be charged.

A third option was proposed and seconded by Members that the status quo be maintained prior to the implementation of the Assisted Transport Policy and that all citizens accessing Community Options who are assessed as requiring transport, are offered Local Authority Community Options Transport, free at the point of contact.

Upon a vote being taken, the following votes were recorded:-

### **Option 1 (3 votes)**

Members note the progress made in assessing the needs of citizens in line with the Assisted Transport Policy including the outcomes of the assessments. **Plus**, Members recommend that only those citizens who remain eligible for assisted transport continue to receive support **free of charge**. And that those citizens who are deemed **ineligible** but have **exceptional circumstance** continue to receive support but at a charge based on a full cost recovery model. The full cost recovery charges will be based on the configuration of transport required to deliver the future model of Community Options services.

### **Option 2 (4 votes)**

Members note the progress made in assessing the needs of citizens in line with the Assisted Transport Policy including the outcomes of the assessments. **Plus**, Members recommend that only those citizens who remain eligible for assisted transport continue to receive support **free of charge**. And that those citizens who are deemed **ineligible** but have **exceptional circumstance** continue to receive support but at a charge based on similar costs illustrated earlier in the report reflecting public transport rates. The charges will be based on the future configuration of transport required to deliver the future model of Community Options services.

### **Option 3 (6 votes)**

Community Options revert back to the previous situation (i.e. the

status quo prior to the implementation of the Assisted Transport Policy in January 2019) and that all citizens accessing Community Options who are assessed as requiring transport, are offered Local Authority Community Options Transport, free at the point of contact.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and to recommend Option 3 Community Options revert back to the previous situation (i.e. the status quo prior to the implementation of the Assisted Transport Policy in January 2019) and that all citizens accessing Community Options who are assessed as requiring transport, are offered Local Authority Community Options Transport, free at the point of contact.

**No. 7**

**CORPORATE PARENTING PROGRESS REPORT**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Children's Services and Service Manager, Children's Services which was presented to inform Members of the progress made by Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) throughout 2019 to improve outcomes and services for our Children Looked After (CLA).

The Service Manager, Children's Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

In response to a Member's question regarding the use of unregistered care facilities, the Director of Social Services said that the Authority only used unregistered care facilities on a temporary basis until a suitable registered facility could be found.

A Member requested an update on capacity within the 14+ team. The Service Manager, Children's Services confirmed that the Safeguarding Manager was now in place and the team were at full capacity and were able to progress outstanding issues.

A Member enquired regarding the 10 young people in the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Traineeship Programme established in 2017, the Service Manager said that 2 young people were engaged, 1 in Housing Solutions and 1 in Tai Calon and the other 8 had either moved on to paid employment or undertaken further training. The Service Manager would provide Members with further details on their current status.

A Member enquired regarding mental health and well-being support for young people. The Service Manager said that recruitment of a Psychologist in the Placement Team had been unsuccessful as applicants were reluctant to accept a short term contract, however, other options for access to psychology were being explored. The Task and Finish Group which included key partners such as the Aspire programme were still looking at this area of work even though no psychologist was in place.

With regard to the Looked After Children (LAC) reference no longer used, a Member requested that the reference Children Looked After (CLA) be used consistently in future reports.

The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that Members acknowledge progress made throughout 2019 and feel confident that the Local Authority and its partners are doing well to improve outcomes for our looked after children as part of our corporate parenting responsibilities.

Councillor Jonathan Millard left the meeting at this juncture.

**No. 8**

**REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to update Members on the work and decisions taken over the last 6 months by the Regional Partnership Board, developed under statutory guidance Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB Act).

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

A Member raised serious concerns that home assessments to safely discharge people from hospital were being carried out after a patient was discharged. The Director said that an individual would have been declared medically fit before being discharged from hospital and a planned model of discharge to return home would need to be prepared. The Head of Adult Services commented that sometimes patients agreed to be discharged from hospital before the Home Service was made aware of the discharge and this could lead to delays in home assessments.

A Member enquired regarding mental well-being for children and

young people. The Director said he recognised the Member's concerns as often young people visited their GP and then the next step would be they were referred to specialist intervention provided by CAMHS. The Authority were looking to develop something in between to work in Blaenau Gwent and across Gwent.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely to scrutinise the report and to support the decisions of the Regional Partnership Board.

**No. 9**      **SOCIAL SERVICES WORKFORCE SICKNESS ABSENCE PERFORMANCE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Organisational Development and Director of Social Services which was presented to provide Members of specific scrutiny committees the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge relevant Directorate sickness absence performance and the proposed actions for improvements.

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

Members welcomed the report but raised concerns regarding high sickness levels in the Directorate and refresher training for managers on the iTrent system. The Director explained that reducing sickness absence levels remained a priority for the Council and CLT were working towards developing an action plan to reduce sickness levels. The Directorate had a duty of care towards staff and protecting vulnerable people who used their services. Provider Services would always have a higher than average sickness absence level than the general Council due to the nature of the services they provide, i.e. staff with flu would need to be absent for a period of 48 hours before visiting service users to prevent the spread of infections.

A Member raised concerns with the number of staff on sick leave due to mental health issues. The Director responded that over the last 5-10 years the numbers of staff on sick leave due to stress and anxiety had increased, but it was important to note that staff formed relationships with service users and may be affected by bereavements. Well-being courses were being piloted to make staff and managers more resilient.



A Member enquired if the Council provided mental health care for employees. The Director explained that staff with stress and anxiety would be referred to Occupational Health to try to intervene early to prevent sickness absence occurring.

Another Member raised concerns that only 45% return to work interviews were being carried out and recorded. The Director stressed that return to work interviews were important to establish the reasons why staff were on sick leave. However, there were some difficulties due to employees shift patterns, whereby some staff did not see their line manager for up to 2 days. The Council had a Corporate Sickness Absence Policy which worked well for staff who work 9-5 and office based, however, there were some anomalies i.e. provider staff who work shift patterns.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report and proposed arrangements to support the improvement in attendance be approved.

**No. 10**

**FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 13TH FEBRUARY 2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny 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> February, 2020 be approved.