

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE JOINT  
EDUCATION AND LEARNING & SOCIAL SERVICES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SAFEGUARDING)**

**SUBJECT: JOINT EDUCATION AND LEARNING & SOCIAL  
SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
(SAFEGUARDING) - 8TH OCTOBER, 2020**

**REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H. TROLLOPE (CHAIR)**

Councillors S. Thomas (Vice-Chair)  
D. Bevan  
M. Cook  
G. A. Davies  
P. Edwards  
L. Elias  
K. Hayden  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
J. C. Morgan  
L. Parsons  
T. Smith  
B. Summers

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Interim Corporate Director of Education  
Strategic Education Improvement Manager  
Service Manager for Development & Commissioning  
Service Manager, Children's Services  
Safeguarding in Education Manager  
Communications & Policy Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<b>No. 1</b>	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>	

	<p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
<b>No. 2</b>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Collier, C. Meredith, M. Moore, G. Paulsen and T. Sharrem</p> <p><b><u>Co-opted Member</u></b> Alun Williams</p>	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>JOINT EDUCATION &amp; LEARNING AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SAFEGUARDING) MINUTES</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Joint Education &amp; Learning and Social Services Scrutiny Committee (Safeguarding) Meeting held on 2nd December, 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>ACTION SHEET - 2ND DECEMBER 2019</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Joint Education &amp; Learning and Social Services Scrutiny Committee (Safeguarding) held on 2nd December, 2019 was submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>COVID-19</u></b></p> <p>A Member expressed disappointment that there had been no discussion with the Chair and Lead Officers in the Authority regarding the COVID-19 situation and the knock on effect in relation to the Education Directorate and felt that Members should be kept fully informed of the situation.</p> <p><b><u>Water Testing &amp; Quality</u></b></p> <p>A Member commented that a joint meeting between the Community Services Scrutiny Committee and the Education &amp;</p>	

Learning Scrutiny Committee was to be arranged. As the host Committee, only Members of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee would have voting rights, and Members of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee would not. He felt strongly that water testing and quality was a safeguarding issue and should be considered at this Committee.

The Interim Corporate Director of Education said that it had been decided to hold a Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting between the two Scrutiny Committees as Community Services had Corporate Landlord responsibilities.

Another Member commented that as a Safeguarding Committee it was important that Members were aware of the position in relation to how decisions were made and who by and that the right decisions were being made and followed correctly.

The Interim Corporate Director of Education said that the water quality issue had delayed the reopening of some schools and an independent investigation to review processes had been carried out. A report would be presented to the Joint Scrutiny Committee highlighting a number of areas for development and improvement moving forward.

The Member reiterated his disappointment regarding voting rights for the Education & Learning Scrutiny Members. The Chair also felt strongly that Members of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee should have voting rights on this issue.

The Democratic & Scrutiny Officer said she would take these points back to the Head of Governance & Partnerships.

The Chair and Vice felt that a meeting with the Managing Director and Leadership of the Council should be arranged to discuss this issue.

Another Member raised further concerns regarding the Local Government Education Services report written in June 2020 in relation to the responsibilities of safeguarding. He felt that issues within schools such as health & safety, water quality and COVID-19 were all safeguarding issues and were the responsibility of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee and as such Members of the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee should be involved in any decisions being made.

The Interim Corporate Director of Education said the primary responsibility of the Joint Safeguarding Committee was around child protection. In relation to water testing these procedures would largely fall under Health & Safety Regulations and was aligned to the work of Technical Services e.g. Legionella. Therefore, it had been necessary to arrange a Joint Scrutiny Committee to consider discussion from Members of both Committees.

The Chair felt that a Joint Scrutiny Committee with full voting rights for all Members should have been arranged. The Interim Corporate Director of Education said that he would take these comments back to Democratic Services in advance of the Joint Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

A Member pointed out that no child had been at risk as a stringent testing regime had been put in place and schools had remained isolated until that testing had been concluded. He felt that learners' educational settings had been protected and it would be appropriate to wait for the findings of the report for discussion at a future meeting.

The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.

**No. 6**

**TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee AGREED that future meetings be held at 10.00 a.m.

**No. 7**

**360 DEGREE SAFE ONLINE SAFETY POLICY FOR SCHOOLS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director of Education which presented the 360 Degree Safe Cymru Online Safety Policy for schools and sought Members' views on the policy template prior to the adoption of the model policy for schools.

The Safeguarding in Education Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. The policy was provided by Southwest Grid for Learning who work in partnership with the Welsh Government and was intended to ensure that

learners were able to use the internet and related communications appropriately and safely. The policy templates were extremely comprehensive and covered a whole range of considerations for online safety and schools were permitted free use of the policy to adapt to suit their particular setting. Other pre-existing policies within schools would be superseded upon the implementation of this policy.

The Chair enquired what safeguarding tools were available for parents to put on their children's devices. The Safeguarding in Education Manager said that the Welsh Government regularly updated their 'Keeping Safe Online' website and would include a link to the website within the Policy document. The Corporate Director of Social Services said that the Gwent Safeguarding Board website also gave advice in a simple format on parental controls in relation to mobile and computer devices. He would liaise with the Safeguarding in Education Manager to forward the online link to parents.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager echoed the Director's comments and said that during the COVID-19 situation a protocol for streaming online teaching etc. had been developed to support parents and some form of communication from schools could be passported onto parents to support them with this issue.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely:

- that the Welsh Government 'Keeping Safe Online' link be forwarded to parents; and
- the policy be recommended for approval by the Executive Committee.

**No. 8**

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES**  
**SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Corporate Director Education and the Safeguarding in Education Manager which was presented to provide Members with the opportunity to scrutinise the Local Government Education Services Safeguarding Policy following its annual review.

The Safeguarding in Education Manager spoke to the report and highlighted the following updates to the policy:-

- Reference to Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019, replacing previous reference to All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2008;
- Inclusion of the Blaenau Gwent Youth Service safeguarding policy in appendix 3 of the policy;
- Inclusion of the safeguarding data collection protocol; and,
- Inclusion of a COVID-19 annex to reflect the current situation and reinforce the procedures for reporting concerns. This appendix can be updated regularly as the emergency situation develops and changes.

A Member raised concerns regarding the pressure on home life such as financial issues, job losses etc. and the changing dynamics at home with many parents homeworking. He enquired how feedback from these situations could be captured as this could lead to future increases in children looked after. The Service Manager, Children's Services reassured Members that those referrals with safeguarding concerns, i.e. child protection, abuse or neglect, regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic were responded to appropriately, and for those children who were at home because of the lack of school provision nothing had alerted the local authority to any safeguarding concerns.

The Member referred to the wider implications of safeguarding and how the stresses of the workplace going into the family home were affecting children's lives in general. The Service Manager, Children's Services said that additional funding via the Child Development Fund had been made available and was specifically targeted at those children that had suffered as a result of COVID-19, either educationally, emotionally or through holistic well-being. The Directorate would be looking at these cohorts of children in conjunction with Families First and Flying Start. There would be an opportunity to look at statutory settings as well. The additional funding would help explore what alternative support could be put in place for those children who may have suffered at a lower level, through non attendance at school and through the social isolation they may have experienced while schools were closed.

A Member raised concerns regarding increased COVID-19 rates and protecting school staff, some were waiting up to one week for results, whilst remaining in school looking after pupils. He enquired if there was a way to ensure school staff had regular testing similar to staff in care homes. The Director of Social

Services said that over the last week the rate was down to 83 per 100,000 so there was progress in reducing the rate in communities. In relation to the UK portal people may not be able to access tests locally and discussions were being held with the Welsh Government to find a solution. A further lab in the Newport area to enable an additional 20,000 tests per day to be carried out was being developed to come on line in November. Many people, not just in Education but across Council services would need to stay at home whilst awaiting test results. This issue existed across the UK and until test results could be turned around within the 72 hour target then there would be issues throughout the winter period.

Councillor Tommy Smith left the meeting at this juncture.

A Member commented that whilst he supported the policy he had concerns regarding the COVID-19 Annex in relation to the mixed messages parents received regarding isolation of children with siblings who attended a different school. He enquired if clear information could be relayed to parents to enable them to make appropriate decisions to protect their children without the fear of repercussions. The Director of Social Services said there had been confusion regarding mixed messages across the UK, he clarified that if a child tested positive then that child needed to self-isolate and stay off school along with any siblings. If a child had been in contact with someone who in the school was positive then that child would have to self-isolate but their siblings would not, so a contact of a contact did not need to self-isolate and could continue to attend school. This was national advice and guidance, however, he accepted parental decisions if parents had concerns with their children attending school during the pandemic.

The Member reiterated that the Council should relay to parents that if they had any concerns or doubts they should take appropriate action without the fear of repercussions. He felt that this would give parents an element of self-choice. The Interim Director of Education said that the Directorate liaised with Environmental Health colleagues when a positive case had been identified and clear advice was given to the family and was also followed up by the Test, Trace and Protect element. In relation to non-attendance at school due to the emergency COVID-19 situation there was no intention of penalty notices being issued at this point in time. He referred to the national advice and guidance and said the Council had adhered to the national arrangements.

A Member raised concerns regarding children who should be self-isolating, being allowed out in the community by their parents whilst awaiting test results. He felt that some parents were putting youngsters health at risk by allowing them out in the community. This could be considered as neglect and enquired if Social Services and the Police, who had responsibility for fines, were looking at this issue.

The Service Manager, Children's Services said that she would air on the side of caution if Members were minded to send a generic message to parents with regards to those children that may be asymptomatic, symptomatic or even tested positive that are being allowed out into the community. She pointed out that the responsibility was not with the school after children had been told to self-isolate, it was a parental decision if parents were concerned for the safety of their children. The Service Manager advised Members that it would be better to try a supportive approach to encourage parents to keep their children in school and point out the ramifications for not following national guidelines. If the behaviour continued the Directorate could liaise with the local Community Engagement Officers on the ground to further advise whether it would meet the criteria for a safeguarding concern and ultimately a joint visit with the police, but this would depend on other factors.

The Service Manager advised that she would look back at the referrals from Quarters 1 and 2 to check if any had identified children that were out in the community when they should have been self-isolating. She would also liaise with Families First, the lower tier preventative services, to check if they had received any referrals of a similar nature.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

A Member commented that no matter what action was taken there would always be exceptions, this was a difficult situation with parents unsure of what approach to take.

The Strategic Education Manager said that she would work with Social Services colleagues to identify pinch points where such incidents may happen when children were not in school.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be

accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that the draft policy as presented in Appendix 1 be accepted.

**No. 9** **SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICES – 1ST APRIL 2019 TO 31ST MARCH 2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services and Service Manager, Children’s Services which was presented to provide scrutiny Members with safeguarding performance information and analysis from Children’s Social Services from 1st April 2019 to the 31st March 2020.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager provided an overview to Members on the reasons why the Education Directorate had been unable to provide performance information to be included in the report at this time.

The Chair said that he understood the need for Headteachers and staff to focus on operational challenges within schools during the pandemic and accepted the reasons why the routine collection of performance data was not available at this time. He requested that the briefing note be circulated to Members.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

The Service Manager, Children’s Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. She explained that due to the pandemic the information contained in the performance report was historic information. It was reported that throughout the four quarters there was consistency with regard to referrals and the Service Manager reassured Members that safeguarding remained a priority for Children’s Services and safeguarding responsibilities continued for those children that had been deemed at risk.

A Member commented that safeguarding had been one of a number of recommendations from Estyn when Blaenau Gwent Education Services had been in special measures and enquired when safeguarding was last reviewed by Estyn. The Interim Director of Education said that since the Council had been removed from special measures, termly meetings with the Local Authority and Estyn Link Inspectors were held and periodically safeguarding featured on the agenda whereby Link Inspectors were advised of any developments such as policy updates etc. At

the last Estyn monitoring visit they had recognised that good progress had been made against the recommendation that had been put in place against safeguarding procedures. Estyn now regulated local authorities on a wider education perspective as part of the Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager said that in relation to the Local Government Education Services (LGES) framework the Directorate had completed their Self Evaluation of which safeguarding was a key component under the leadership and management aspect of that framework. She enquired if Members wanted a future report in terms of the safeguarding extract from the Self Evaluation to be prepared for a future meeting.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely

- that the briefing note, on reasons why the Education Directorate had been unable to provide performance information to be included in this report at this time be accepted; and
- a report on the safeguarding extract from the Self Evaluation be prepared for a future meeting.

**No. 10**

**ADULT SAFEGUARDING REPORT 1ST APRIL 2019 TO 31ST MARCH 2020**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Social Services which was presented to provide Scrutiny Members with Safeguarding Performance information relating to Adult Services from 1st January 2020 to the 31st March 2020 for the 4th quarter of the financial year and also the information of the financial year 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020.

The Service Manager for Development & Commissioning spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. There was a similar position to Children's Services, historically the trends remained static and the Department were still working closely with key partners. He reassured Members that with the different ways of working communication with care homes and partner agencies was maintained on a regular basis, working with providers, offering financial support in terms of referrals and

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discussions around testing. In domiciliary care, agencies were working together to develop contingency plans, working through the risk management process with regard to a spike in the second wave. The Department continued to support care homes and work closely with health colleagues and partners. Currently there was a stable workforce which continued to support providers in extremely challenging circumstances.

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

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