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THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

29th October 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee will be held in virtually via Microsoft Teams - if you would like to attend this meeting live via Microsoft Teams please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk on Thursday, 5th November, 2020 at 10.00 am.

Please note that a pre and post meeting will be held 30 minutes prior to the start and following the conclusion of the meeting for members of the committee.

Yours faithfully

Michelle Morris
Managing Director

AGENDA

Pages

1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

You are welcome to use Welsh at the meeting, a minimum notice period of 3 working days is required

We welcome correspondence in the medium of Welsh or English. / Croesawn ohebiaith trwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg.

should you wish to do so. A simultaneous translation will be provided if requested.

2. **APOLOGIES**

To receive.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION**

To consider any declarations of interests and dispensations made.

4. **SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES** 5 - 14

To receive the Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 17th September, 2020.

(Please note the Minutes are submitted for points of accuracy only)

5. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME - 10TH DECEMBER 2020** 15 - 18

To consider the Forward Work Programme.

6. **UPDATE ON STRATEGY TO SAFELY REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER** 19 - 26

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

7. **REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE** 27 - 36

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

To: Councillor S. Thomas (Chair)
Councillor K. Rowson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Bevan
Councillor G. Collier
Councillor G. A. Davies
Councillor G. L. Davies
Councillor P. Edwards
Councillor L. Elias
Councillor K. Hayden
Councillor J. Holt

Councillor M. Moore
Councillor G. Paulsen
Councillor T. Sharrem
Councillor B. Summers
Councillor T. Smith

All other Members (for information)
Manager Director
Chief Officers

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COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: **SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17TH SEPTEMBER, 2020**

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

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S.C. THOMAS (CHAIR)

Councillors: K. Rowson
D. Bevan
G.A. Davies
P. Edwards
L. Elias
K. Hayden
J. Holt
M. Moore
G. Paulsen
T. Sharrem
T. Smith
B. Summers

AND: Corporate Director of Social Services
Head of Children's Services
Head of Adult Services
Service Manager for Development & Commissioning
Communications & Policy Officer
Democratic Officer / Advisor

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

	An apology for absence was received from Councillor G. Collier.	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
No. 4	<p><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></p> <p>The Committee AGREED that future meetings be held at 10.00 a.m.</p>	
No. 5	<p><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 13th February, 2020 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
No. 6	<p><u>ACTION SHEET – 13TH FEBRUARY, 2020</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 13th February, 2020 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>PROPOSED SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2020-21</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 2020-21 be approved.</p>	
No. 8	<p><u>SOCIAL SERVICES RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to provide</p>	

Members with information on how the Social Services Directorate had responded to the COVID-19 pandemic over the last 4 months.

The Director of Social Services spoke to the report and gave an overview of the Social Services Directorate response to COVID-19. He said that the Directorate continued to deal with the virus whilst at the same time trying to move slowly and safely towards recovery, although a second wave was possible, especially in the next few months or early next year.

The Director hoped that Members would be reassured that the pandemic had not reached its worst case scenario regarding hospital capacity and support in the community had been able to cope with the initial outbreak locally and regionally first time round due to collaborative working by all partners. There had been spikes in some neighbouring authorities and enhanced in-house protection had been put in place. He stressed that unless people continued to follow social distance rules, hand hygiene and other safety practices then it may become more prevalent in the Blaenau Gwent area.

A Member expressed thanks to all agencies involved, our own and partner agencies, for the wonderful job they had done, their hard work was very much appreciated. The Chair said that all Members of the Committee agreed with these comments and also wanted to express their appreciation to staff and partner agencies in the community.

Children's Services

At the invitation of the Chair the Head of Children's Services gave an overview of how Children's Services had managed during this time. Services had been maintained in relation to Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) and priority had been given to safeguarding investigations for children on the Child Protection Register. Children Looked After cases had fallen from 214 to 207 and there had also been a decrease in the number of children in residential care.

In response to a Member's question regarding Children Looked After and children exiting care and new cases coming into care, the Head of Children's Services said that

there was a combination of both and an increase in children looked after numbers was anticipated. In terms of children exiting care some were returning to their parents and some had been adopted. A full report was being prepared and would be presented to this Committee on 5th November which would include further detailed information.

A Member enquired if the service was anticipating an increase in the number of referrals now that schools had re-opened. The Head of Children's Services said that Education was one of the biggest referrers and as such the Service was anticipating an increase in referrals from Education colleagues, although there had been no upsurge in referrals to date. There were also some proactive measures in place such as preventative services in Families First. It was noted that 4 social workers had been aligned to schools in order to support teachers and children.

A Member expressed disappointment that the 3rd Sector and Voluntary Sector had not been mentioned in the report. The Member gave an example i.e. free school meals. The Head of Children's Services said they had played a significant part in meeting the needs of the community, however, the purpose of the report for the Head of Children's Services was to report on how Children's Services had responded to COVID-19.

The Director of Social Services said that staff had worked collaboratively from across all the sectors to manage the outbreak and that collaboration had been essential.

Adult Services

At the invitation of the Chair the Head of Adult Services gave an overview of how Adult Services had responded during this time. She said that similarly to Children's Services they had maintained the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service and continued to provide support in people's homes with staff wearing full PPE to all visits. The pressure on Adult Services and on the Health and Social Care Sector was significant and there had been a need to move staff to 7 day working from the current 5 day working arrangements. The Service had taken on the operational running of Community Meals from 1st April and the take up of meals had increased. Staffing levels had

initially fallen but quite quickly recovered and the Service was now back up to capacity.

In response to a Member's question regarding increased contact from vulnerable adults and from adults who had not thought of themselves as vulnerable in the past, the Head of Adult Services said there had been a significant increase in terms of contact into the Department, particularly with people who had lost confidence and needed support in accessing community services. There had been a significant increase in referrals from people experiencing impact to their mental well-being. The Member enquired if extra staff would be needed to cope with demand. The Head of Adult Services said the Section was prioritising the workload, staff had worked extremely hard over the last six months and demands on staff would be monitored particularly if there was a new surge.

A Member enquired regarding a further lockdown and the impact this would have on residential care homes and the elderly and disabled residents. He also enquired regarding the provision of community meal services to residential care homes, if the 3rd sector could not mobilise as they had done previously, would there be a surge on the Local Authority to deliver meals to residential care homes.

The Head of Adult Services said that in relation to care homes there were significant concerns regarding sustainability of all external providers but reassured Members that the Service was working very closely with the Council's Commissioned Services who had been able to benefit from the hardship fund and without this investment there may have been care home closures. Working relationships with external providers had been strengthened due to the close working arrangements and the Service was well placed in knowing what community support was available in terms of the Community Meals Service. There was capacity to increase the number of meals delivered daily, however, there had been no significant increase in demand for that service. If there was a surge it would be difficult to predict what that would entail and whether this would impact on elderly people.

A Member enquired regarding staff from the voluntary sector who had been on furlough and had now returned to

<p>work and asked if the Authority could manage without them if there was a second lockdown. The Head of Adult Services explained that the community response to COVID-19 was not the responsibility of Social Services and she would pass this enquiry onto the Commercial Services Department for a response. The Social Services Directorate focused on those people that were known to Social Services, whereas Corporate colleagues focused on wider issues across communities.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Social Services advised Members that they were awaiting details from the Welsh Government regarding a worst case scenario model and would look at the model on a local authority basis to consider what measures could be put in place and staffing levels would form part of this. In the first lockdown some services had ceased and some had continued to be delivered bolstered by staff from the services that had ceased. If there was a prolonged lockdown the Directorate would probably revert back to this arrangement.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding respite for carers and whether those services were back online, the Head of Adult Services said those services had never stopped as they were part of domiciliary care contracts. Respite was now offered for 3 days per week plus a day to deep clean and could also be provided within their own home to provide carer respite. Staff would wear full PPE which could be a challenge when supporting someone with dementia or challenging behaviour. Services were still continuing and were supported wherever possible.</p> <p>A Member enquired if funding would be required from the Welsh Government for extra staff if there was to be another lockdown. The Head of Adult Services said that confirmation regarding funding after October was still awaited. The Director of Social Services confirmed that no confirmation had been received regarding further funding after October 2020.</p> <p>At this time the Chair expressed his appreciation to all the staff in Children's and Adult Services for the great work that had been undertaken. Members also wished to thank the staff and external partners for all their hard work and</p>	<p>Head of Adult Services</p>
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expressed a special thank you to foster carers who had supported the Authority during these difficult times.

National Issues

The Corporate Director of Social Services gave an overview of national issues that had arisen during the pandemic.

PPE – Initially there had been difficulties with the supply of PPE due to worldwide shortages and priority had been given to the NHS, but currently there were approximately 4 weeks supply in place. Over one million pieces of PPE had been distributed across the Blaenau Gwent region and the Director assured Members that all staff had the PPE required to do their jobs safely.

Testing – Testing of staff exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms had been problematic at the beginning of the outbreak as places had been limited to 15 per local authority. The position had improved over the last few months as the limit of 15 places per local authority had been removed. There had been issues around capacity with the UK Government labs and portal and the Welsh Government were considering solutions to ensure that Public Health Wales labs were used for testing.

Care Homes – Care Home residents and staff were now tested fortnightly. Blaenau Gwent owned 1 care home and had commissioned services with 14 privately owned Care Homes. Key data from all Care Homes across Gwent was being collected to ensure rapid response to outbreaks. Currently there were 8 clean homes who had never had an outbreak or had no outbreak in a Care Home for the last 28 days.

In response to a Member's question regarding regular testing of care home staff, nurses and home care staff working in the community, the Corporate Director of Social Services said that in relation to Care Home staff, weekly tests had been carried out up until August, however, as there had been very low positive results it had been decided to move to two weekly testing which had been carried out by the Lighthouse laboratories and some delays had been experienced in receiving results. He was unaware if regular testing in relation to Health staff was being carried out in the

same way as with Care Home staff. In relation to domiciliary care staff who visited people in their homes, the Welsh Government's position was that no regular testing was being carried out.

The Chair and Members of the Committee hoped the Welsh Government would reflect on this going forward as they felt that domiciliary care staff should be tested regularly.

A Member requested clarification regarding the figures in relation to point 6.19 of the report and the update the Director had given. The Director of Social Services confirmed that the figures differed slightly from the report as he had provided Members with the most up-to-date position.

A Member enquired regarding PPE and if the supply currently in stock included Care Home supplies. The Corporate Director confirmed that it did include Care Homes as they now came to the Local Authority to request PPE supplies.

The Member also enquired regarding the number of registered deaths associated with Care Homes. The Corporate Director said that across Blaenau Gwent Care Homes, from March until May there had been 28 deaths that had COVID-19 on the death certificate.

In relation to testing the Corporate Director confirmed that the move from weekly testing to a two weekly testing regime had been a Welsh Government decision as there had been very low positive cases at that time. The Member enquired if the number of positive cases increased would it be possible to revert back to weekly testing as a neighbouring authority had done. The Corporate Director said that Caerphilly Council had reverted to weekly testing of their Care Homes which was carried out by Aneurin Bevan Health Board with test results coming from Public Health Wales labs and felt that if there was a local lockdown within Blaenau Gwent then this process could be followed with weekly testing of staff and residents.

With regard to collaboration and partnership working a Member enquired if this would continue after the pandemic had ceased. The Director said that there had always been

close working relationships with partners across Blaenau Gwent and this had been strengthened by the outbreak of COVID-19. He hoped this would continue and be further strengthened.

A Member enquired if Care Homes followed their own testing guidelines or followed national guidelines and how testing was carried out for them. The Corporate Director said that care homes followed national guidelines from Public Health Wales. Initially Care Home staff and residents were being tested by Health staff, currently swabs were being taken by the staff themselves with support from Health colleagues via online videos so they could correctly carry out the test.

In relation to testing centres at Newport and Cwm, the Corporate Director said that health staff may be encouraged to attend the facility at Rodney Parade in Newport as they used Public Health Wales labs and results were received quicker than the facility in Cwm which was privately run.

Impact on Budget

The Corporate Director of Social Services gave an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on the budget. Claims had been submitted to WG for funding from the Hardship fund for the period March to July 2020 for £2.4m to fund additional costs incurred as a result of the Council's response to the pandemic, of which £1.06m relates to Social Services expenditure. There had been some loss of income from Care Homes due to suspension and reconfiguration of services due to COVID-19, however, the Council had been able to claim against income loss from the Welsh Government.

The Corporate Director of Social Services and both the Heads of Service commended the work of all frontline staff including Council staff, external providers, third sector colleagues, foster carers and their supervisors and managers who had worked tirelessly and compassionately under sustained pressure to ensure services were maintained over the last six months.

A Member raised concern regarding the amount of funding the Welsh Government would provide and what projects

	<p>would be considered for this funding. He said that £8.2 million had been allocated to homelessness across Wales and asked that Members be informed regarding what projects were being considered in their localities.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Social Services said that homelessness was not under the remit of the Social Services Directorate but he would pass these concerns onto the Community Services Directorate to ensure they communicated with Members regarding what projects were being considered in their Wards.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding the effect of COVID-19 on the Social Services budget going forward, the Director said that some claims had been questioned by the Welsh Government but these had been small amounts and had not affected the budget significantly. The Directorate had an underspend after the first quarter and was managing to cope. If there was another spike in cases, then this would depend on further Welsh Government support. The Hardship Fund had enabled the Directorate to claim for loss of income and this had helped significantly.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report be accepted as provided.</p>	<p>Corporate Director of Social Services</p>

Agenda Item 5

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **5th November 2020**

Report Subject: **Forward Work Programme: 10th December 2020**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	23.10.20			05.11.20			

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present to Members the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the Meeting on 10th December 2020 for discussion and agreement.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
 - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's revised Corporate Plan, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
 - 2.3 Effective work programmes are essential to ensure that the work of scrutiny makes a positive impact upon the Council's delivery of services.
 - 2.4 The Committee's Forward Work Programme was agreed in September 2020, recognising the fluidity of the document to enable the Committee to respond to urgent and emerging issues, and included timescales when reports will be considered by the Committee. The work programme is managed and implemented by the Scrutiny and Democratic Officer under the direction of the Chair and Committee.
 - 2.5 The forward work programme for the forthcoming meeting will be presented to Committee on a 6 weekly cycle in order that Members can consider the programme of work; request information is included within the reports, as appropriate and / or make amendments to the work programme.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1:** The Scrutiny Committee consider the Forward Work Programme for the meeting 10th December 2020, and

- Make any amendments to the topics scheduled for the meetings;
- Suggest any additional invitees that the committee requires to fully consider the reports; and
- Request any additional information to be included with regards to the topics to be discussed.

3.2 **Option 2:** The Scrutiny Committee agree the Forward Programme for the meeting 10th December 2020, as presented.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Forward Work Programme – Meeting on 10th December 2020

Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Dates / Deadlines	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council
Thursday 10th December 2020 Deadline: 24 th November 2020	1. Integrated Care Fund	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the future and progress of the Integrated Care Fund.	Alyson Hoskins	Executive
	2. National Adoption Service Annual Report	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed about National and Regional progress of Adoption Services.	Tanya Evans	Executive
	3. Director of Social Services Quarter 1 and 2 update	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the performance and progress of the Social Services Directorate.	Damien McCann	Executive

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Agenda Item 6

Executive and Council Only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **5th November 2020**
Report Subject: **Update on Strategy to Safely Reduce the Numbers of Children Looked After**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Corporate Director Social Services**

Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
17.9.20	22.10.20	23.10.20			05.11.20			

1. Purpose of the Report

The Purpose of this report is to update the Social Services Scrutiny Committee on the progress made in relation to the implementation of the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2017-2020.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 The end of 2015 saw a significant increase in the numbers of children looked after. The numbers continued to increase at a steady rate peaking at an all-time high of 237 in July 2018.

2.2 Blaenau Gwent recognised the need to develop a 3 year “Safe Reduction in Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy” which was implemented in 2017.

2.3 The Strategy has three clear objectives which are: -

1. To support families to stay together;
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care;
3. To provide affordable high quality placements.

2.4 Each of the objectives has a number of actions aligned to them and these actions are embedded in our business planning process which is reported on quarterly basis.

2.5 Since the implementation of this strategy the Local Authority has seen a very slow but steady decrease in the numbers of children becoming looked after. More detailed analysis of this can be found under the performance section 6.1 of this report.

2.6 Welsh Government has also recognised the need to safely reduce the number of children coming into care and has identified this as a priority area. In light of this Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money was allocated to each local authority in Wales via the Regional Partnership Boards in April 2019 to invest

in, and develop services to safely reduce the numbers of children coming into care.

2.7 The following services were developed as a result of this ICF grant funding

- Family Group Conference / Meeting service
- Support to Special Guardians
- Enhance resources in our Supporting Change Team
- Enhance the Young Person's Mediation Service

Details of how these services have performed are included under the performance section of this report 6.1.

2.8 The Blaenau Gwent Safe CLA Reduction Strategy has been independently evaluated by Worcester University. This evaluation was completed just prior to the COVID 19 lockdown. The strategy is in the process of being reviewed and refreshed. This work will provide a detailed overview of the progress made under each of the 3 objectives over the past 3 years and refresh the actions required to continue to deliver these 3 objectives. It is hoped the review will be completed by the end of 2020 provided the department does not have to deal with a second wave of COVID 19 in which case the focus will revert to prioritising service delivery.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Option 1

- Consider the information contained within the report and accept the report

Option 2

- Consider the information contained within the report and provide comment on any amendment or recommendations

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

The implementation of the Safe Children Looked After Reduction Strategy supports the following priorities for Social Services under the Corporate Plan:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support; and
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.

The Safe CLA Reduction plan provides evidence that the Local Authority is delivering the requirements under the Social Service and Wellbeing Act in relation to the following areas:

- **Voice and control** – putting the individual and their needs, at the centre of their care, and giving them a voice in, and control over reaching the outcomes that help them achieve well-being.
- **Prevention and early intervention** – increasing preventative services within the community to minimise the escalation of critical need.
- **Well-being** – supporting people to achieve their own well-being and measuring the success of care and support.
- **Co-production** – encouraging individuals to become more involved in the design and delivery of services.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget

Figure 1

	Budget 20/21	Forecast 20/21 Q1	Favourable/ (adverse)
Children's residential placements	2,403,250	2,363,581	39,669
Foster Parent Payments In house	1,650,690	1,650,623	67
Independent Fostering Agencies	1,686,930	1,606,711	80,219
Legal Costs	381,620	781,319	(399,699)

5.1.1 Figure 1 shows the position at the end of Qtr 1 in relation to the budgets connected to our children looked after. It is important to note the residential budget is forecasting an underspend at this time. This is due to the numbers of children in residential care reducing from 18 in 2019 to 13 in September 2020. The work of the My Support Team (MyST) and our 14 plus Team has led to this decrease of numbers in residential care to foster care and in some cases returned home to parents. It should also be noted that the costs of the MyST has also been achieved by the savings made in the residential budget, as a separate budget line of £300,000 has been created to meet the costs of that team.

5.1.2 It is also important to recognise the underspend in the independent fostering agency budget line. This demonstrates we are becoming less reliant on independent fostering providers and finding more local placement solutions with our local authority foster carers or family members

5.2 Legal

Children's Legal Services in Blaenau Gwent is currently provided by an independent law firm. This is due to continued difficulties in recruiting Local Authority Child Care Solicitors. Over the past few years the legal budget has been significantly overspent due to the number of court applications made. The Head of Service receives monthly information on the number of court applications for section 31 care orders. Year to date we have made the same number of court applications as this time last year, 10 to date. This demonstrates this area of work has (to date) not increased this year.

Prior to the COVID 19 lockdown the Head of Children's Services and the Head of Legal Services started exploring the possibility of neighbouring authorities providing our legal support. This work came to an abrupt halt but will need to be restarted when possible.

5.3 Human Resources

Maintaining a stable workforce is key to achieving the objectives of the safe CLA Reduction Strategy. Just prior to COVID 19 Children's Services had 10 social work vacancies across the various teams. This had a significant impact on the workload on the Teams. A combination of Blaenau Gwent staff finishing their secondments on the Degree in Social Work Course and appointing 3rd year SW degree students who had their final year placement in Blaenau Gwent, has resulted in nearly all these vacancies being filled. A package of support is in place for this new cohort of staff, who, report (even in the throws of a pandemic) they feel very supported and safe in their practice.

6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 Figure 2

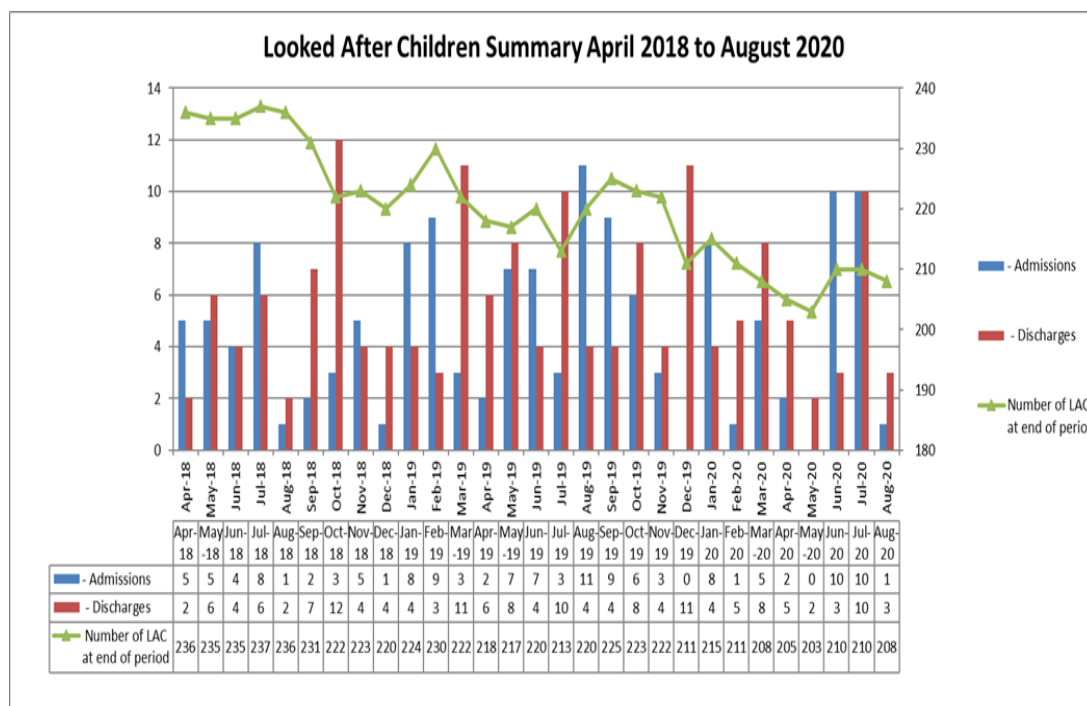


Figure 2 demonstrates the continued slow but steady decline in the numbers of children looked after in Blaenau Gwent during the implementation of the Safe CLA Reduction Strategy. It is interesting to note the significant decrease in numbers at the beginning of 2020, reaching a low of 203 children in care in May 2020. As a department we continue to be committed to reducing these numbers further over the lifespan of the new/refreshed strategy.

The performance information below evidences the positive impact service developments have achieved as a result of the ICF grant money, in relation to reducing the numbers of children looked after.

Family Group Conference (*service active from July 2019*) – held a total of 37 Family Group Conferences for 37 families with 68 children. Out of the 68 children subject of a Family Group Conference: 52 were prevented in becoming looked after, 8 were already looked after and were rehabilitated into their birth families and 8 children became looked after.

Mediation service (*service active from October 2019*) – mediation services were offered to 24 children and young people and their families with 22 children supported to remain with their birth family (one became looked after and one moved into independent accommodation)

SGO support team (*service active from September 2019*) – staff within the team completed 5 SGO assessments for 8 children ending care episodes and 2 SGO assessments for families preventing 2 children to become looked after. 51 families (Special Guardians and children in their care) received support from this team since September 2019. At 31st March 2020 in Blaenau Gwent there were 118 children subject to an SGO. Most of these families receive support and/or financial assistance from the Local Authority in order to maintain these placements on a permanent basis.

Figure 3

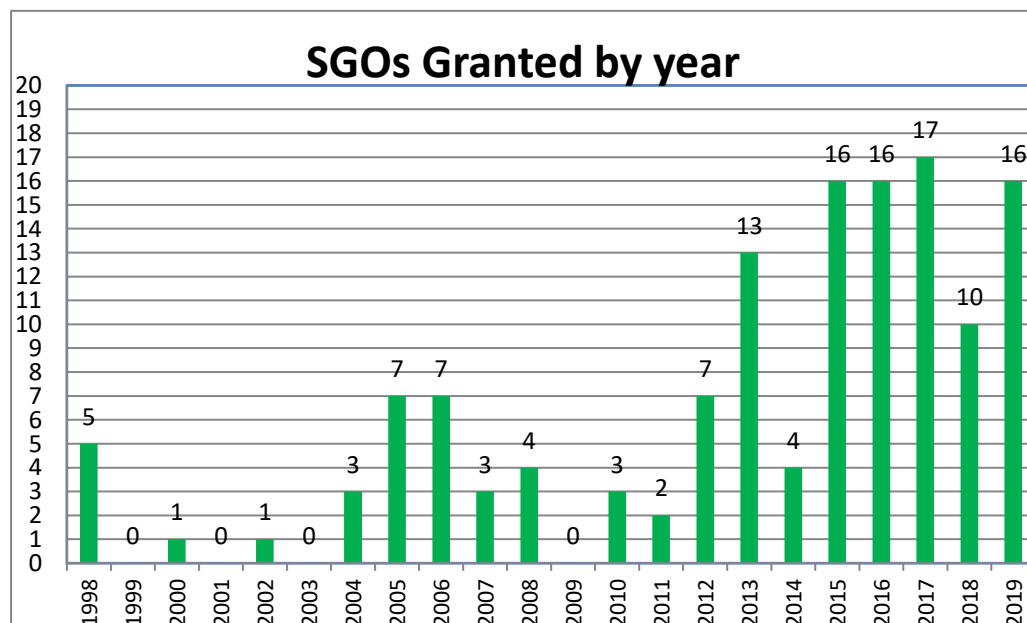


Figure 3 above shows a consistent increase in use of Special Guardianship arrangements as an alternative to children coming into the care of the Local Authority. While the numbers of children subject of SGO is growing in Blaenau Gwent, SGO support team is becoming vital in supporting these placements on long term by preventing family breakdown and children returning into the care system.

Enhanced Edge of Care – The new Community Connector, Education Support Worker and part time psychologist funded through ICF were aligned in the Supporting Change Team. During FY 2019/2020 this team delivered services to 175 children to prevent them coming into the care of the Local Authority and 23 children being rehabilitated from care to their birth family

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The successful implementation of the Safe CLA Reduction Strategy will lead to more positive outcomes for children on a number of levels. It will prevent children coming into care in the first place due to the work under the strategy. For those children who do come into care they will have more local placement choices enabling them to maintain attendance at their local school and contact with family and friends

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

There is extensive involvement with the children and families we work with and individual feed-back was offered as follows:

Family Group Conference:

“I was very happy with the support; the meeting couldn’t have gone any better.”

“The Family group conference was very good in that it brought the family together and enlightened their understanding of the risks and how they can support. There are so many strengths in this family and I believe if they work together the children will have better outcomes.”

13 year old *“things are better because of what we have spoke about and I will listen more and communicate”*

Professional - *“well planned and executed family group conference – workable family plan developed to enable child to return home”.*

Parent – *“I feel a lot more confident now a plan has been put in place”*

Social Worker – *“The family were able to leave the FGC with a safety plan in place to ensure all family members had a plan to keep her safe and to communicate with one another, which is something they have not been able to do until now”*

SGO support team

“I’m feeling much more positive now that I have been referred for some support, thank you so much you have been very helpful”

‘I think the service is fantastic, it is so reassuring to know someone is there when you need them. This should I have been set up years ago.’

‘It is lovely to know that there is a service, it can feel isolating after you are granted the Special Guardianship Order.’

"It's nice to know people are willing to listen and nice to have the support around us"

"It's a comfort to know someone is there if I'm honest during these times [COVID 19- Pandemic]"

"Thank you, it's very reassuring to know the support is there, thank you for continuing to work and help us"

"Thank you for everything you're doing, feel like finally the girls are getting the support they need"

Enhanced Edge of Care

Education Support Worker - Feedback from Teacher: *"(Child) is doing amazing! She's going to all her lessons, working well in class, going to her red card detentions if she's late to school, I hardly see her now if I'm honest. Before when there was an issue she would have roamed around the school looking for me and probably truanted. The pastoral team were saying this morning how incredible she is working and behaving at the moment and hardly hear her name any more. "*

Psychologist: *"The consultation gave me some reflective space and helped me to see the bigger picture of what is really going on in the family. It gave me insight into things I wouldn't necessarily have thought about without the psychology consultation. It gave me a focus of the work needed with the family and children and a plan for me to follow"*

6.4 Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

The initial Safe CLA Reduction Strategy was a 3 year strategy and is due to end this year. It is recognised that the refreshed strategy needs to be longer term in recognition of the significant work required to continue and maintain the downward trend in numbers of children looked after. Therefore, the next strategy will be a 5 yrs.

6.5 Preventative focus

A large part of the Safe CLA Reduction Strategy has a preventative focus.

6.6 Collaboration / partnership working

A number of the actions under the Safe CLA Reduction Strategy rely on partnership working. Senior managers and staff have good working relationships with our partners which will support us in achieving the actions. However, the refreshed strategy will focus heavily on improving our partners understanding of the 3 objectives that sit under this strategy and the part they need to play to achieve its success.

6.7 Integration (across service areas)

As above.

6.8 EqIA

The safe reduction of children becoming looked after involves supporting and engaging with children and families covered by protected characteristics from the Equality Act 2010. It has not been identified that this strategy will have a negative impact on those with protected characteristics.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

- 7.1 The actions aligned to the 3 objectives under the strategy are incorporated under the children's services business plans. Progress on actions is reported quarterly and contributes to the Directors Annual report

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- N/A

Agenda Item 7

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **5th November 2020**
Report Subject: **Regional Partnership Update**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Corporate Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
15.10.20	15.10.20	23.10.20			05.11.20			

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to update Members on the work and decisions taken over the last 9 months by the Regional Partnership Board, developed under statutory guidance Part 9 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB Act). A previous report had been prepared for the Social Services Scrutiny Committee of the 6th April 2020 which was subsequently cancelled because of lockdown due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The SSWB Act came into force in April 2016, Part 9 of the Act sets out statutory requirement for a Regional Partnership Board (RPB), along with the required minimum membership and a regional Citizen Panel, regional Provider Forum and regional Leadership Group (senior officer group) which have all been established.
- 2.2 The Regional Partnership Boards have been established on current local health board footprints – so the Gwent regional partnership board includes Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) and Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen local authorities.
- 2.3 The regulations also set out required membership of Regional Partnership Boards. The Executive member in each local authority, with responsibility for health and social care, sits on the Regional Partnership Board. In a similar vein, non-executive members of the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board also sit on the Regional Partnership Board.
- 2.4 The Regional Partnership Board is an advisory body, that does not take away the existing responsibilities of the individual statutory bodies, but it is expected to take oversight of and provide direction to, any areas of integrated working across health and social care.
- 2.5 Social Services Scrutiny Committee on the 13th March 2017 agreed for the Executive Member of Social Services and Director of Social Services to report

back to Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. This approach was endorsed by Executive Committee on the 15th March 2017.

2.6 The Regional Partnership Board has met on four occasions since the last report to Scrutiny Committee on the 13th January 2020. There were a number of areas which have occupied the Regional Partnership Board at these meetings. Firstly, the Coronavirus outbreak across partner agencies and the effect on services. Secondly, the continuation of the Transformational Offer beyond 2021, in response to the Welsh Government's new long term plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales'. Thirdly, the reallocation of underspend for 2019/20 and the continuation of the Integrated Care Revenue and Capital Funds. Finally, it had considered the Integrated Winter Plan for 2020/21.

2.7 The first meeting in May 2020 of the Regional Partnership Board very much focused on how organisations had worked collectively during the Coronavirus pandemic and what had worked well, not so well and any future lessons should we have a further wave. This included feedback from the Citizen Panel on some of the issues that had been raised with them concerning access to healthcare. The Board were reassured that the pandemic had not reached its worst case scenario regarding hospital capacity and support in the community and the system had been able to cope with the initial outbreak locally and regionally which was very much due to collaborative working by all partners.

2.8 Members may recall from previous reports that the Regional Partnership Board had successfully submitted a 'Gwent transformational offer' to Welsh Government which granted the Gwent RPB £13.4 million of new limited funding over a two-year period. Members may also recall that this was in response to 'A Healthier Wales' which set out a new £100 million transformational programme. The new transformation fund was intended to provide additional funding to catalyse 'whole system change', driven through the Regional Partnership Boards with an expectation that each region develops a 'transformational offer'.

2.9 The offer in Gwent related to four areas, derived from the priority areas within the Area Plan and the considered directions of the Regional Partnership Board. These include:

- The development of early intervention and prevention services (Integrated Wellbeing Networks);
- The development of primary and community care services (Compassionate Communities);
- The redesign of child and adolescent emotional and mental health services (Iceberg model);
- The development of an integrated 'Home First' discharge model;
- The development of workforce planning and organisational development to underpin transformational activity.

A summary of the different projects was previously provided at the 24th January 2019 and 17th October 2019 and 13th January 2020 Scrutiny Committees.

2.10

The Gwent Transformation Programme has continued to make good progress, with the programmes adapting their scope and focus to ensure they are able to support the local response to COVID-19. The transformation programme continues to deliver at pace, given the extremely short and testing time frame provided by Welsh Government of 2 years. The Board has heard that Welsh Government had agreed to roll over some of funding to allow for some of the projects to continue until March 2021 rather than finish in December 2020. However, during the Coronavirus pandemic some of the projects under the transformation programme had to stop, reduce their offer to the public or redirect towards helping fight the Coronavirus. This has delayed the time available for these models to evidence success and for their evaluations to be completed.

2.11

At the time of writing we have been told verbally by Welsh Government that transformation funding will continue for a further transition year in its current format until March 2022, each programme is developing a programme of work around financial sustainability, making clear the value of the programmes in line with the wider strategic improvement objectives of the Regional Partnership Board. To support this work, Welsh Government are working with the regions to develop Communities of Practice, to share the learning and support pan regional scaling and also economic demand and management modelling, to demonstrate where longer term system efficiencies can be secured.

2.12

All four programmes had commissioned evaluation of the models, with the Institute of Public Care being successful for place based care, integrated wellbeing networks and Homefirst and Cedar Associates are leading the evaluation of the ICEBERG model. These had started but again fell victim to the pandemic and are currently being restarted.

2.13

One of the difficulties with the Transformation funding continues to be recruitment to specialist posts, with staff reluctant to leave existing posts for a short term funded post. This has been fed back to Welsh Government and hopefully will be taken on board for future funding streams.

2.14

The Regional Partnership Board is the body who sign off and agree the Integrated Care Fund revenue and capital proposals. We do not intend to go into detail of the funding obtained and the bids made as these will be subject to a further report at the December Scrutiny Committee meeting at which point we hope to be clear about the level of funding provided to continue to deliver existing projects during the transition year of 2021/22.

2.15

During 2019/20 local authorities across Gwent had requested that any slippage funding within existing projects be used for Children with Complex Needs to meet demand for the remainder of this year. Regional Leadership Group endorsed the approach for any ICF revenue slippage to be utilised for

Children with Complex Needs. At the end of the Financial year 2019/20 an updated slippage figure of £956,000 was shared on an equal basis with all local authorities in Gwent which has resulted in an additional £191K for Blaenau Gwent.

2.16

An additional £10 million across Wales was announced by the Minister for Health and Social Services on the 24th January 2020 for Regional Partnership Boards, the Board agreed that this funding be equally split between Health and Social Services on a 50:50 basis and subsequently was shared equally between the Gwent local authorities. An additional £191K was allocated to Blaenau Gwent on top of the £133K from the Winter Plan to flexibly spot purchase step up/step down beds, to purchase additional domiciliary care packages, to purchase additional social work capacity over bank holidays and weekends and funding for hiring an additional 4x4 vehicle for adverse weather conditions. There were also some separate bids for additional health capacity locally and some Gwent wide bids for equipment e.g. single handed hoists.

2.17

Winter Planning is an integral part of the Health and Social Care system responsibility and this year's plan has been developed, in line with Welsh Government guidance, with all partners within the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) who have agreed to recommend a number of the activities in order to support patients within the Gwent area. The plan has been developed with colleagues across the Health Board and partners in Social Care, third sector and Welsh Ambulance Service. The RPB will need to sign off and agreed to submit the RPB Winter plan to the Welsh Government by the end of October 2020. At the time of writing work is being finalised before sign off and submission of the 2020/21 Winter Plan to Welsh Government.

2.18

The purpose of the plan is to demonstrate by region, the agreed partnership activity, to support the provision of care and support services during this winter period, to outline the safe and integrate management of 'winter pressures' and to provide assurance of a whole system approach to the winter period. The plan is structured around the 'Six goals' and 'Four harms' identified in the National Winter Protection plan.

GOAL	OBJECTIVE
Goal 1: Co-ordination, planning and support for high risk groups	Planning and support to help high risk or vulnerable people and their carers to remain independent at home, preventing the need for urgent care
Goal 2: Signposting, information and assistance for all	Information, advice or assistance to signpost people who want - or need - urgent support or treatment to the right place, first time.
Goal 3: Preventing admission of high risk groups	Community alternatives to attendance at an Emergency Department and/or admission to acute hospital for people who need

	urgent care but would benefit from staying at, or as close as possible, to home
Goal 4: Rapid response in crisis	The fastest and best response at times of crisis for people who are in imminent danger of loss of life; are seriously ill or injured; or in mental health crisis.
Goal 5: Great hospital care	Optimal hospital based care for people who need short term, or ongoing, assessment/treatment, where beneficial
Goal 6: Home first when ready	Capacity to ensure effective and timely discharge from hospital, when individual is ready to most appropriate location

For Members information the four harms relate to the Coronavirus pandemic these are:

- The harm of COVID-19 itself;
- The harm from overwhelming the NHS and Social Care system;
- The harm from the reduction in non COVID activity;
- The harms from wider societal actions/lockdowns.

2.19

The plan sets out a coordinated whole systems approach to the delivery of health and social care services across Gwent, in partnership with both housing and Third sector partners. It sets out the required capacity necessary to protect the system in Gwent during the winter period, within the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrates the depth of partnership working across the Regional Partnership Board providing a clear statement of system wide activity in line with the 'Six goals' and 'Four harms'.

2.20

The outlined activity is funded from a range of funding sources provided to the Health Board and Local Authority. At the point of writing it is not expected that any further funding will be forthcoming.

2.21

One of the challenges continues to be the recruitment of medical, social care and nurse staffing to enable the increase in the Health Board's bed capacity and enhance community services. The current staffing gaps and high numbers of unfilled nursing posts presents a real risk to effective delivery of this part of the Winter Plan.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 The options for consideration are:

- 3.2 Option 1 – to scrutinise the report and to support the decisions of the Regional Partnership Board:
- 3.3 Option 2 – to scrutinise the report and propose an alternative approach to Executive Committee in relation to the options taken by Regional Partnership Board.
4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**
- 4.1 The report is fulfilling our statutory functions under the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 and accompanying regulations.
- 4.2 The report is also fulfilling a number of the Social Services aims within the Corporate Plan:
- To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own wellbeing;
 - To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
 - To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support;
 - To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.
- 4.3 A number of the areas being progressed by the Regional Partnership Board will support us to achieve two of the Wellbeing Plan objectives:
- The best start in life for everyone;
 - To encourage and enable people to make healthy lifestyle choices in the place that they live, learn, work and play.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

Option 1 - The Regional Partnership Board have statutory responsibilities laid out within the Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014 and Ministers expect to see the Regional Partnership Boards, maturing into a vehicle for more integrated commissioning, transformation and improvement across health and social care, with an emphasis on providing more care closer to home, maintaining independence and reducing unnecessary hospital admissions. Therefore, by implementing the Gwent transformation offer the Regional Partnership Board are complying with the legislation and Ministerial expectations.

Option 1 – Welsh Government have also determined that the use of the Integrated Care Capital and Revenue Fund, the new Transformational fund and any Integrated Winter Planning funding will have oversight by the Regional Partnership Board. All these funding sources are to assist with the integration of health and social care across the Gwent Regional footprint. It is essential that the Regional Partnership Board has oversight of funding

proposals and subsequent use of these funding streams, and have approved the proposals before they were submitted and agreed by Welsh Government.

Option 2 – The Regional Partnership Board are made up of a number of organisations who collectively make decision for the good of the region. If Scrutiny were to recommend alternative approaches, then it would need the support of neighbouring authorities and the health board to obtain consensus. Failure to do this would mean being in breach of legislation and could result in Welsh Government intervention. Whilst failure to comply with the requirements of the Integrated Care Capital Fund and Revenue Fund, Transformational fund and Integrated Winter Planning fund could result in the withdrawal or ability to receive funding for the Blaenau Gwent and Gwent region respectively.

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

There are no immediate impacts on the budget, the Integrated Care Capital Fund is provided on an annual basis to fund innovative projects within Health and Social Care which has been extended for a further 12 months during a transition year. The transformation fund is to develop new models of transformation at pace and has been agreed for a further 12 months during transition as well. These are all additional funding coming into the system.

The Integrated Care Capital and Revenue Fund provides significant investment to develop a number of projects across Blaenau Gwent and Gwent as a whole and should this funding be removed at the end of the proposed transition period will have significant consequences going forward. In addition, the transformation fund is a time limited fund intended to replace or reconfigure existing services not adding an extra layer; therefore, there is an expectation that these models will be funded from core budgets going forward.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

5.3 ***Legal***

The Legal department becomes involved in considering and advising on any legal agreements before signing such as the Section 33 Agreement.

5.4 ***Human Resources***

The Gwent Transformational Team support senior officers and elected members to deliver and implement the priorities of the Regional Partnership Board. In addition, they administer the Regional Partnership Board and Leadership Group. The Gwent Transformation Team is hosted by Torfaen County Borough Council.

6. **Supporting Evidence:**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Not applicable.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The role of the Regional Partnership Board is to ensure more seamless provision of health and social care services across Gwent.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The Regional Partnership Board has involvement from the third sector and representation from the Citizens Panel to ensure engagement and involvement in its direction.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The Regional Partnership Board provides the opportunity to work collectively and have a long term vision to progress integration and partnership across the Gwent region.

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

The Regional Partnership Board within its strategic intent statement will be considering how Health and Social Services can work together in a more preventative way.

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The role the Regional Partnership Board is to work collaboratively across boundaries to benefit citizens requiring health and social care services across Gwent.

6.7 ***Integration (across service areas)***

The purpose of the Regional Partnership Board is to foster integration between Health and Social Services.

6.8 ***EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The monitoring arrangements for the Regional Partnership Board are through the Social Services Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Committee on a quarterly basis.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

N/A

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