

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 10TH DECEMBER, 2020**

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

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

Councillors K. Rowson (Vice-Chair)  
D. Bevan  
G. A. Davies  
P. Edwards  
K. Hayden  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
M. Moore  
G. Paulsen  
B. Summers  
T. Smith

**WITH: Executive Member for Social Services**  
Councillor J. Mason

Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Children's Services  
Head of Adult Services  
Service Manager, South East Wales Adoption Service  
Communications & Policy Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

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

<b>No. 2</b>	<p><b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b></p> <p>No apologies for absence were reported.</p>	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 5th November, 2020 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>INTEGRATED CARE FUND (ICF) UPDATE 2019/20</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Adult Services which was presented to provide an overview on the current allocation of funding for projects monitored by the Social Services Department and funded via the Welsh Government Integrated Care Fund (ICF) as at November 2020.</p> <p>The Head of Adult Services spoke to the report and advised Members that the Welsh Government had given a verbal update for a further extension of the fund for the transition year (2021/22), however, official confirmation of the exact allocation had not yet been received. The four key areas of the ICF were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older people with complex needs and long term conditions including dementia</li> <li>• People with Learning Disabilities</li> <li>• Children with Complex Needs due to disability or illness</li> <li>• Carers, including young carers</li> </ul> <p>With regard to projects ranked as a high/critical priority, the Chair enquired if the Regional Partnership Board and Regional Partners had made concerted efforts to raise concerns with the Welsh Government on the detrimental impact removal of the funding would have on these projects. The Head of Adult Services said that both the Director of Social Services and the Executive Member for Social Services as representatives on the Regional</p>	

Partnership Board had, for the last two years, continually highlighted the concerns. Risk rating of the projects had provided a clear understanding of the impact moving forward and the final report on the risk rating and the financial pressures had been reported back to the Regional Partnership Board.

In response to a Member's question regarding how the impact of staff leaving could affect the running of the services, the Head of Adult Services said this had been a challenge all through the ICF projects, but with assurances from the Welsh Government for funding for the additional year, staff had not left in significant numbers but this was a high risk in relation to any grant funded programme.

In relation to posts a Member enquired about the differential between wte (whole time equivalent) posts and fte (full time equivalent) posts. The Head of Adult Services clarified the differential between the two; a number of posts were part time and some staff who had part time permanent posts within the Local Authority may be working full time by making up the hours using ICF funding.

A Member requested an update on the proposed extension to Augusta House, Ebbw Vale. The Head of Adult Services said initially there had been a delay due to the pandemic, but plans had been reviewed and gone back out to Planning. Exploratory work in relation to the groundworks were already underway.

In response to a Member's question regarding Blaenau Gwent's funding allocation for Adult Services and Children's Services, the Head of Adult Services explained that the allocation and bidding process can be complex as there were both revenue and capital funding streams within the investment plan of ICF. Since 2014 there had been bidding rounds every year, if a project that was suitable for ICF and aligned to the strategic priorities of the local authority, then a bid was submitted to the Regional Partnership Board. Some projects were regional so Blaenau Gwent's proportion of grant monies would be less, as it could be split five ways. In relation to Children's Services and the critical numbers of children they support, some of the grant monies allocated could be contributed to support wider Gwent projects.

The Director of Social Services explained that in 2014 when the Integrated Care Fund first started, it had been around older adults,

funding for complex children came into being from 2016, historically a lot of the funding had gone to older people and adult services, only lately had the Authority been able to apply for children's funding this could be part of the reason for the differential of the funding allocation.

In relation to the recommendations, a Member enquired if neighbouring authorities had alternative approaches for consideration. The Head of Adult Services said that no alternative approaches had been raised by neighbouring authorities, if Blaenau Gwent wanted to do anything specifically different then that would be presented to the RPB for discussion.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the actions currently underway to evaluate the future impact of the cessation of the ICF funded posts and services be approved.

**No. 6**

**NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Social Services which presented the performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) and the National Adoption Service (NAS) for 2019/20.

The Service Manager, South East Wales Adoption Service spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein. The key areas of the report covered:-

- Children placed and waiting for adoption;
- Demand for adoptive placements and adopter recruitment;
- Life journey materials; and
- Adoption Support.

The National Adoption Service (NAS) was formed in 2014 with the remit to improve recruitment, waiting times for children and improve options support.

**Shortage of Adopters**

In relation to recruitment of adopters a Member said that now a Recruitment Officer was in post, the Authority needed to be proactive in its attempts to recruit adopters, there needed to be some form of advertising to attract people to visit the website i.e.

adverts on roundabouts etc. The Service Manager said that improvements to the website had been undertaken and the combination of social media and the website were attracting visits and also mentioned that a national campaign had taken place in October. The Head of Children's Services said SEWAS had a clear plan of attending events to raise awareness in the community throughout the year, unfortunately a lot of those events had been cancelled due to the pandemic.

The Chair proposed that to meet the needs of the service further advertising options for recruitment of adopters be explored.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

A Member enquired what support was in place for adopters in relation to training. The Service Manager advised Members that there was a four day full training programme before the assessment started.

In relation to the shortage of adopters, a Member enquired if there was a national shortage or was the shortage just in South East Wales. The Service Manager said that some regions did better than others, but there were peaks and troughs. Some regions, after approving adopters, had delays matching adopters with children, this was not the case with SEWAS which was in part due to the quality of the assessments undertaken to get the right people, which helped to match them quickly.

The Chair and Scrutiny Members expressed their thanks to the staff and officers for all their hard work and diligence during the challenging year.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that to meet the needs of the service further advertising options for recruitment of adopters be explored.

**No. 7**

**FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME: 21ST JANUARY 2021**

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

After a brief discussion,

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that three additional reports be prepared and included in the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme;

- i. An update report on legal costs associated with the service, the report to include anonymised case studies;
- ii. Report on the use of consultants and with particular focus on costs and benefits associated within the service; and
- iii. An update report on vulnerable children during COVID-19 with focus on issues arising from school closures, to be presented to the meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March, 2021.

As this was the last meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee for 2020, the Executive Member for Social Services took the opportunity to thank Members for the support given to Senior Management and staff that support the Scrutiny Committee in its work, especially in this challenging and difficult period and for the professional way Members approach the very important work of the Social Services Committee.