

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) - 14TH JULY, 2021**

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S. THOMAS (CHAIR)

Councillors S. Thomas
H. Trollope
D. Bevan
M. Cook
G. A. Davies
M. Day
P. Edwards
L. Elias
K. Hayden
S. Healy
J. Hill
W. Hodgins
J. Holt
J. C. Morgan
J. P. Morgan
K. Rowson
T. Smith
B. Summers

WITH: Corporate Director of Social Services
Corporate Director of Education
Head of School Improvement & Inclusion
Safeguarding in Education Manager
Safeguarding Team Manager, Children's Services
Communications & Policy Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<p><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p>It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>	
No. 2	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Paulsen, T. Sharrem and D. Wilkshire.</p> <p><u>Co-opted Member</u> T. Baxter</p> <p>Head of Children’s Services Strategic Education Improvement Manager Service Manager, Children’s Services (Safeguarding) Service Manager Education Transformation & Business Change</p> <p>A Member referred to the resignation of Alan Williams, Co-opted Member due to ill health, the Chair and Members expressed their appreciation for his contribution to the Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee and the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee and requested that a letter of appreciation be forwarded to him.</p> <p>This course of action was AGREED.</p>	
No. 3	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS 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> <p>A Member raised concerns on the late receipt of an updated agenda item and requested that in future an explanation be provided with the updated item when circulated at short notice for Members to be aware of the amendments. The Director of Education explained that the narrative in the report remained the same but the Appendix had been amended to include the</p>	

	Education updates in relation to graphs.	
No. 5	<p><u>JOINT EDUCATION & LEARNING AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SAFEGUARDING) MINUTES</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Joint Education & Learning and Social Services Scrutiny Committee (Safeguarding) Meeting held on 26th April, 2021 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 - 26TH APRIL 2021</u></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Joint Education & Learning and Social Services Scrutiny Committee (Safeguarding) held on 26th April, 2021 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
No. 7	<p><u>SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION – 1ST APRIL TO 31ST MARCH 2021</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager, Children’s Services and the Strategic Education Improvement Manager which was presented to provide Scrutiny Members with safeguarding performance information and analysis from Children’s Social Services and Education from 1st April 2020 to the 31st March 2021.</p> <p><u>Social Services information</u></p> <p>The Safeguarding Team Manager, Children’s Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.</p> <p>A Member commented on police being the highest referrer and referred to para 6.3.2 of the report regarding processes developed between Education and the Youth Offending Service to tackle anti-social behaviour in schools and felt this could be extended further between schools, police and the community. He also referred to para 6.3.4 the number of bullying incidents identified by children and young people as an issue that required close monitoring and felt this could potentially be spilling out into the community causing</p>	

further police referrals.

Another Member commented that the figures for referrals had increased throughout the year, which could be due to the pandemic, but referrals from the Youth Services were decreasing considerably.

The Safeguarding Team Manager responded that she would raise the points above with the appropriate colleagues.

The Corporate Director of Education said there had been a slight decrease of overall referrals from the Youth Services and felt this was due to less face to face contact with children and young people.

A Member referred to page 19 - Figure 2.8: relates to review conferences and the percentage held within timescale shows 100% for Q1 and Q4, 84.4% for Q2 and 96.2% for Q3. The data provided does not give rise to concern. The Member requested that the last sentence "the data provided does not give rise to concern" be reworded. The Safeguarding Team Manager agreed to amend the wording in this sentence.

In relation to the high number of police referrals, a Member felt that not all of the referrals needed to be referred to Social Services. The Safeguarding Team Manager said that it depended on the nature of the referral.

Another Member raised concerns regarding police referrals and enquired if there was a follow up process with the Community Safety Team and Social Services Directorate as he felt that some anti-social behaviour was caused by repeat offenders. The Safeguarding Team Manager confirmed that police did visit anti-social behaviour repeat offenders to try to reassure communities. The Community Safety Team were proactive in trying to work with communities and other professionals to reduce anti-social behaviours. If a Social Worker was made aware of a particular behaviour of a child via a police referral, then support would be put in place to reduce that behaviour. The Member felt there should be more co-operation between agencies as there were more and more families needing support.

The Director of Social Services explained that if there were vulnerable adults involved then Children's Services would link in

with Adult Services and Adult Services would then visit the vulnerable individual.

The Director referred to the previous point regarding the sentence “the data provided does not give rise to concern” and advised Members of the rationale for that statement, he said there had been a dip in quarter 2 performance during the summer months due to the pandemic. In relation to Children’s Services and anti-social behaviour the focus was on the child and the family rather than the wider community.

They worked closely with the Community Safety Team to determine if a pattern of anti-social behaviour was developing. With regard to referrals, the Director advised Members that a police officer was now part of the Information, Advice and Assistance Service (IAA) and they reported back to police when referrals to Social Services were not appropriate and this helped to filter out unnecessary referrals.

A Member referred to para 7.4 Preventative focus - the work undertaken by the Social Services Directorate looks to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. Having a proactive rather than reactive approach to service planning can also help with planning resources. He enquired what successful approaches were being used to reduce numbers as he felt that the figures were not coming down. The Director of Social Services explained that in relation to safeguarding they were slowly moving in a different direction more towards contextual safeguarding. At present safeguarding concentrated on the individual and the family but there were other areas where children became vulnerable outside of the home environment and contextual safeguarding looked at other areas such as school, peer groups and the neighbourhood where the individual lived. He advised that a lot of work was being undertaken across Gwent around contextual safeguarding and they were trying to introduce this across the Gwent region to start to look at other areas of communities where potentially children could become vulnerable such as a Park, and may need to start to tackle that environment to make it safer for that child rather than tackle the child and the family themselves. This was some of the work being progressed over the next year and would be a change in culture for practitioners to consider other environments that a child may be in, which could potentially make them vulnerable.

The Member enquired if there was sufficient capacity and resources available for the move to contextual safeguarding. The Director responded that with regard to resources it would be the case of working closely with other Directorates such as the Community Services and Regeneration Directorate in relation to parks etc. to ensure that they consider how to make parks safer for vulnerable children. Working closely with different Directorates would ensure that safeguarding, and particularly the contextual safeguarding element, was seen as important to the whole Authority. From a Social Services perspective, the Director felt that sufficient resource was available but it was important to ensure that Directorates work closely together to try and tackle problems in unsafe environments within the communities.

The Chair suggested that a Members Briefing session be arranged in relation to the new way forward, however, a Member felt it would be more appropriate for a report to be presented to the Scrutiny Committee in the first instance and proposed that a report in relation to contextual safeguarding be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

This course of action was AGREED.

A Member reminded Members of the services of Connect Gwent who were a free and confidential service to help and support victims of crime and anti-social behaviour and would post the telephone number on the chat for Members information.

Education information

A Member enquired what was the extent of cyber bullying experienced in schools. The Head of School Improvement & Inclusion said that nearly all schools were using the "My Concern" system and the Local Authority had access to a dashboard to look at the whole school estate and identify the reasons for incidents such as cyber bullying and racial bullying etc. and could identify any difficulties in particular areas or schools and provide the relevant training and support to those schools who needed it.

With regard to paragraph 6.3.7 Operation Encompass - Figure: 4.5 Domestic Abuse incidents, a Member referred to the numbers quoted and pointed out that the number of high, medium and low risk children did not add up to the total of 185 children. The Head of School Improvement & Inclusion said she would check these

numbers with the Strategic Education Improvement Manager and report back to the Member.

Another Member referred paragraph 6.3.4 bullying incidents and enquired what form of strategy had been put in place to address the issue. The Head of School Improvement & Inclusion said schools had very stringent measures in place and the MyConcerns system supported schools as bullying incidents could be recorded on that system to help schools track and identify a pattern of repeated behaviour. She advised that schools were using a restorative justice approach, working with the young person who may be exhibiting bullying behaviours and also working with any victims to try to restore those relationships, and using preventative measures to ensure that those behaviours change and that families were also involved.

The Director of Education advised Members that the anti-bullying policy was in place and schools had responded well. With regard to the Education data he pointed out that the period between January and April was a disruptive period for Education and reassured Members that the full data set for Education from the 1st April onwards would be presented to Members at the Joint Scrutiny Committee in the autumn term to provide Members with the full range of data and information for scrutiny purposes.

With regard to the Anti-bullying Strategy a Member enquired if all Blaenau Gwent schools were going through the process to attain the anti-bullying quality mark and how many schools already had the quality mark at the moment. The Head of School Improvement & Inclusion said that not all the schools were going for this specific quality mark, several schools were going for the Rights Respecting quality mark, which encompassed anti-bullying strategies and had the ethos of valuing and respecting everyone in the school. She advised there were lots of different schemes and systems and she would gather the relevant data to find out exactly what quality mark each school was pursuing. The Member felt this would provide evidence to parents and pupils to have confidence that staff were fully trained and aware of bullying issues.

The Director of Education felt this would provide a picture of those schools that were looking for accreditation against those initiatives and could also be fed back to the Scrutiny Committee.

With regard to Operation Encompass, the Chair requested

information on what type of referrals were being made, the Head of School Improvement & Inclusion would gather this information for Members.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the approach and information detailed in the report be accepted; and

FURTHER AGREED that a report in relation to contextual safeguarding be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

No. 8 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SERVICES SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Education and the Safeguarding in Education Manager which was presented to provide Scrutiny 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 main points contained therein.

A Member referred to paragraph 6.1 of the report and commented on bullet point 5 - Basic training requirements for all staff and volunteers - and felt this should be enhanced training and not basic. The Safeguarding in Education Manager agreed that the word basic did not capture the level of training involved and clarified that it was an agreed level of training that all members of education settings should have, it was a comprehensive level and that all practitioners were fully aware of their responsibilities for safeguarding and what they needed to do if there was a concern and how to report that concern.

Another Member supported the view that the word 'basic' in relation to training requirements should be amended.

This course of action was AGREED.

The Corporate Director of Social Services advised Members that they were looking at corporate training i.e. three tier training, there would be a basic level, a medium level and an enhanced level of training. They were currently assessing the level of staff and

Member involvement and what level of training would be required and were hoping to bring forward a training programme shortly.

In response to a Member's question regarding the timing of the removal of the annex for responding to Covid from this year's policy. The Safeguarding in Education Manager explained that last year an annex was attached to outline how safeguarding would operate during the early stages of the Covid pandemic. It was a supplementary annex to the policy to guide schools on what they needed to do to maintain contact with vulnerable learners as schools were in a new situation in relation to school closures. As those procedures mirror the content of the safeguarding policy it was felt that the annex could now be removed, but should future situations arise in relation to Covid the Safeguarding in Education Manager would issue timely advice for safeguarding arrangements.

A Member enquired if it was appropriate for Headteachers to also be the Designated Senior Person (DSP) with responsibility for safeguarding. The Safeguarding in Education Manager said that Headteachers were often a DSP and were supported by a deputy and felt they were well placed to coordinate the safeguarding arrangements in their schools. She continued that Headteachers in Blaenau Gwent schools had good relationships with their staff and had created a culture of openness amongst their staffing group and felt there was no barrier to feeling comfortable speaking with Headteachers. Anyone raising a concern could feel assured by talking to someone with a good level of safeguarding experience. The message, reiterated through training was always to report concerns to the DSP.

A Member stated that from a previous meeting with Estyn when the DSP was the Headteacher and the second DSP was the Deputy Headteacher, it was suggested that it may be appropriate to designate a third person, in case the Head and Deputy were both unavailable.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the draft policy be amended and reference to the word 'basic' in relation to safeguarding training be amended.

No. 9

SAFEGUARDING SELF-EVALUATION OUTCOMES

Consideration was given to the report of the Strategic Education Improvement Manager which was presented to provide Members of the Joint Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the findings of ongoing self-evaluation and business planning processes undertaken within the Education Directorate, across the Council and with key partners.

The Head of School Improvement & Inclusion spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

The Chair felt that the policy should put emphasis on pupil's voice as pupils raise safeguarding concerns to teachers through this system.

A Member referred to paragraph 6.1.1. bullet point 3 - Recent work to respond to community safety issues, counter potential terrorism and extremist behaviours has progressed well, for example, the Safer School Partnership, and the Respect and Resilience Action Plan, and felt that extremist behaviours were being witnessed in communities. He gave an example of off-road motorcycles being driven towards cars and people feeling terrorised. He suggested the Head of School Improvement & Inclusion raise these issues in her meetings with colleagues.

A Member referred to the new ALN Bill and commented that this was a massive change for schools on how they worked in this area and enquired if the policies, procedures and appropriate training for schools was in place in readiness for the implementation of the Act. The Head of School Improvement & Inclusion said the Inclusion team had worked hard, particularly with ALN Co-ordinators, so they understood what was needed in relation to the new ALN requirements, particularly around the Individual Development Plans (IDP's). The ALN Co-ordinators had responsibility for training other staff and Tredegar Comprehensive School had been commissioned to support Headteachers and Senior Leadership Teams over the next academic year with regard to processes etc. The Inclusion Team and ALN support workers were all fully trained on the requirements of the Act and were able to support Blaenau Gwent schools. The EAS had trained all their Challenge Advisors who would be School Improvement Partners from September and they would also be able to support teachers and senior leaders.

The Corporate Director of Education said that in relation to ALN reform a report had previously been presented to the Education & Learning Scrutiny Committee around ALN readiness from a Blaenau Gwent perspective. The Welsh Government were taking a pragmatic approach from September around ALN implementation which he felt would be well received across the sector. In relation to capacity within the Education Directorate the Head of School Improvement and Inclusion would be working full-time for the Council from 1st September, 2021, and he felt there was sufficient capacity within the team to roll out ALN reform. He reassured Members that recruitment to the vacant post of Service Manager Inclusion was planned for the autumn term.

The Chair enquired if it would be beneficial for the EAS to add a standard item on ALN and new reforms to the agenda for Governing Body meetings. The Head of School Improvement and Inclusion would discuss this with Governor Services.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report as presented be accepted.