

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

**SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE – 22<sup>ND</sup> APRIL, 2021**

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

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR K. ROWSON (IN THE CHAIR)**

Councillors: D. Bevan  
M. Cook (substituting for Cllr Paulsen)  
G.A. Davies  
P. Edwards  
K. Hayden  
J. Hill (substituting for Cllr Moore)  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
T. Smith  
B. Summers

**AND:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Adult Services  
Service Manager Development & Commissioning  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<b>No. 1</b>	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
<b>No. 2</b>	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>  Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S. Thomas (Chair), G. Collier, G.L. Davies, M. Moore, G. Paulsen and T. Sharrem.	
<b>No. 3</b>	<b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b>	

	<p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 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>LIVING INDEPENDENTLY IN THE 21ST CENTURY STRATEGY – ANNUAL PROGRESS UPDATE 2020/21</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Adult Services which was presented to provide an overview for Members on the ‘Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century’ Strategy.</p> <p>The Head of Adult Services spoke to the report and gave a detailed overview of each of the 8 priority areas as part of the overarching approach to service development.</p> <p><b><u>Priority 1 - Long term care</u></b></p> <p>A Member enquired regarding what areas of good practice could be taken forward post Covid and also referred to the drop in numbers of residents in Care Homes. The Head of Adult Services said that across all 8 priorities there were a number of areas of good practice, specifically in relation to Care Homes they were working closely with ABUHB to develop enhanced infection control processes and taken the learning from that to actually develop a new service moving forward, so that Care Home providers have a robust and easy access to infection control leads, etc. In relation to the reduced numbers of residents in Care Homes, it was too early to say if this was due to confidence and whether this trend would change, people may have decided to stay in their own home because Care Homes had been particularly affected by the pandemic or they may be thinking differently regarding their future care needs.</p> <p>A Member enquired of the number of COVID related deaths in care homes. The Officer responded that this information</p>	Head of

could be provided, but with a note of caution, owing to some people who may not have contracted the infection in the care home, but within the hospital setting.

Adult  
Services

With some Care Homes currently undersubscribed, a Member enquired what impact would the opening of a new Care Home have on the existing provision going forward. The Head of Adult Services explained that Care Homes were regulated by CIW and anyone could open one, the new Care Home in Tredegar had opened early in the pandemic and had already developed that provision pre-pandemic, she explained that some of the residents could be from Caerphilly, Rhymney Valley and Powys and not just from Blaenau Gwent.

A Member commented that the report showed that the Social Services Directorate had reacted swiftly and professionally during the pandemic, engaged with a number of partners and continued to deliver a high level of quality services that affect vulnerable members of society. He thanked all members of staff in the Directorate for their good work and felt the report provided reassurances to both Councillors and the general public who may have relatives in our care settings. All Members of the Scrutiny Committee supported these comments and felt that Social Services staff across the board had performed extremely well during a very challenging year.

With the reduced number of people going into Care Homes a Member enquired how people were managing in their own homes. The Head of Adult Services said that one of the main drivers of Living Independently in the 21st Century Strategy was to reduce the number of people going into traditional Care Home settings. Over the last 15 years there had been a steady decline of the numbers of people who needed to go into Care Homes, however, the Service was managing a much higher proportion of very complex people in the community. With robust Reablement and Domiciliary type services in place this enabled people to be supported in the community with the right support around them.

### **Priority 2 - Reablement/Enabling services**

A Member enquired regarding befriending services co-ordinated with the voluntary sector. The Head of Adult

Services said that the Directorate had not focused on new services, however, within other parts of the Council work was being undertaken with GAVO to actually enhance the befriending and shopping services. There were a number of work streams looking at the recovery of the Council moving forward and one was around Community and the provision of befriending and volunteering services was very much a part of that work.

A Member raised concerns regarding people with underlying health conditions who had been shielding for a year and were a little afraid going back out into the community and enquired if any work had been undertaken with the local Stroke group or Dementia group to enquire when it was possible for them to safely get people back into the community and re-engage with their group. The Head of Adult Services said that a number of groups had restarted, some were still virtual, Wales was still in Tier 4 and a number of Third Sector organisations were waiting for the next Welsh Government announcement to start more face to face groups. The Community Connectors were speaking with those providers regularly and with falling infection rates and the next Tier level announcement, as soon as it was safe to do so they would resume group work. When known, the Officer would circulate the information on when these groups could re-start face to face meetings to Members for their information.

Head of  
Adult  
Services

With regard to virtual groups, a Member enquired if a blended approach would continue in the future as some people may find it easier to access online groups due to their health issues. The Head of Adult Services confirmed they were looking to take forward a blended approach and had been working with Peoples First, a Third Sector group who had received substantial Welsh Government funding for digital devices who support people with learning disabilities. As part of the preventative workstream, Social Services staff had helped set up the devices in people's own homes.

A Member enquired regarding luncheon clubs and when they could re-open, the Head of Adult Services said it would be on a case by case basis, and the operator of the luncheon club would need to check the relevant Welsh Government guidance and put a risk assessment in place

to ensure they can re-open safely. The Civil Contingencies Team have been supporting a number of groups around ensuring that the relevant protocols are put in place. The Corporate Director of Social Services added that at the moment the Regulations did not allow groups to meet indoors and a Welsh Government announcement was awaited, once that was in place the Civil Contingencies Team would support groups with their risk assessments to allow them to re-open and operate again in a safe way.

### **Priority 3 - Day Opportunities/Community Options**

With regard to Community Options, a Member enquired if a future model of provision could include a loneliness prevention programme. The Head of Adult Services informed Members that discussions were taking place with the five Gwent local authorities on what the models could look like across the whole of Gwent. The Regional Partnership Board was facilitating a workshop next week via Teams on this issue.

### **Priority 4 - Assistive Technology**

Members raised no issues in relation to Assistive Technology.

### **Priority 5 - Direct Payments**

Members raised no issues in relation to Direct Payments.

### **Priority 6 - Accommodation**

A Member enquired if there was any evidence that supported the view that people moving into Older People Bungalows saved on financial costs of future care needs and if this evidence could be used in the Housing Strategy moving forward. The Head of Adult Services said that a needs analysis was undertaken across Gwent by a number of housing providers that showed the benefits of living in future proofed accommodation. Under the Regional Partnership Board structure, the Health, Housing and Social Care Partnership Board undertook work across the Gwent area regarding the future housing needs of older people and a number of reports had come back to Housing and Health

Departments around the preferred models of housing moving forward.

A Member enquired what influence the Authority had on housing providers to build future proofed accommodation for older people within their developments. The Head of Adult Services explained that the Supporting People Team Manager was involved in all of those negotiations and promoted future needs for elderly people, she worked closely with the Planning Department in relation to the Local Development Plan and when any development was being proposed the Planning Department would contact Social Services for their input.

In response to a Member's question regarding the impact of Covid on communal living in housing complexes, the Head of Adult Services said she had not taken part in any discussions around the design of housing complexes, but gave an example of learning from Covid such as having a separate entrance and exit in the development and the same for pharmacies attached to Well-being centres to future proof these developments in case of further outbreaks of the pandemic and hoped that these designs and learning from Covid would be built into future design processes.

### **Priority 7 – Carers**

In relation to the number of unpaid carers identified in Blaenau Gwent, the Head of Adult Services said those figures were featured within the Gwent Carers Strategy, however, there were a number of carers who did not identify themselves as carers and it was those carers, both adult and young carers that the Service needed to reach to provide support. Part of the rationale behind undertaking the Carers Engagement scheme with GP's was to research and identify those unpaid carers who were not identifying themselves as carers.

With regard to identifying young carers in schools, this would sit within the Children's Services Department, who had a specific officer responsible for young carers who would link into all schools in the borough. As part of the Estyn process schools had a duty to identify their young carers to provide them with support. Within the Regional

Partnership Board sat the Carers Board who had a specific action plan for all partners across health, social care and the third sector which was around supporting young carers and young carers in schools. There were a number of school programmes operating such as the Carers Trust who gave talks to whole classes and also provided support to individual carers.

The Corporate Director of Social Services commented that the South East Wales Young Carers Schools Project, was trying to get schools to identify young carers in schools and provide them with appropriate support, the programme was being run across Gwent and a number of Blaenau Gwent schools had already taken up the programme. In a bid to promote the scheme further, he said that as some Members were also school Governors they could liaise with their Headteachers to consider taking up the scheme run by South East Wales Carers Trust.

### **Priority 8 - Domiciliary Care**

Members raised no issues in relation to Domiciliary Care.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the evidence provided to support progress in the 8 priority areas, be endorsed, albeit within the context of the unique 12-month period of the 2020/21 COVID pandemic, and for the Directorate to continue to provide progress updates on an annual basis to the Scrutiny Committee as outlined in this report.

Councillors Derrick Bevan and Bob Summers left the meeting at this juncture.

**No. 6**

### **REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE**

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to update Members on the work and decisions taken over the last 5 months by the Regional Partnership Board.

The Corporate Director of Social Services spoke to the report and gave a detailed update in relation to the Regional Partnership Board.

	<p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the decisions of the Regional Partnership Board be supported.</p>	
<p><b>No. 7</b></p>	<p><b><u>SUPPORT AT HOME SERVICES TENDER AND MARKET PERFORMANCE FOR COMMISSIONED SERVICES WITH INDEPENDENT PROVIDERS</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to provide Scrutiny Members with Contracts and Commissioning information relating to care and support for Blaenau Gwent citizens within their own homes.</p> <p>The Head of Adult Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained within the report.</p> <p>A Member enquired how the quality and standard of care given by the private sector was monitored. The Service Manager Development &amp; Commissioning explained this had been a challenge throughout the pandemic, however, through district nurses, telephone calls and the call monitoring service which was an electronic system whereby carers log in to the system, where the length of calls could be monitored, if there were any complaints or issues this could provide an early trigger warning. There was a twice weekly two-way communication flow with providers to ensure the service was alerted to any concerns, etc. and there was the monitoring information to validate some of those calls. There were also copies of reports from providers and their own quality assurance checks. Any reported issues such as PPE non-compliance or two carers travelling together in the front of a car would be investigated and escalated to the service provider.</p> <p>With regard to spot checks, the RI would carry out spot check visits on their own staff and produce daily reports. If a particular area had a number of carers breaching regulations it could ultimately result in an investigation and potentially disciplinary action. A lot of information had been disseminated to the Domiciliary Care agencies, making sure that they were following protocols. Working closely with Environmental Health colleagues had resulted in a</p>	



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good source of information coming into the Commissioning Team to be able to respond to issues at an early stage.

A Member raised concerns with the high turnover of staff for some independent providers, with some clients having new carers on a regular basis. The Service Manager said that continuity of care was vital and was one of the reasons why they had introduced a new tender and not commissioned existing packages as there were concerns around recruitment and growth, providers needed to demonstrate they could recruit a workforce as it was important that service users had continuity. In the past there had been concerns with the high turnover of staff with providers and after consultation and engagement improvements had been made and as part of the new contractual arrangements providers needed to confirm they could recruit a pool of dedicated carers.

The Member felt that this area should be Regulated by the Welsh Government and should make the role of carer more appealing with an increase in salary for the important role they undertake in the community.

A Member enquired if consideration should be given to bring this service back in-house. The Head of Adult Services said there was a new white paper out currently in relation to social care and sustainability in the market position was part of that work. She felt that it was beneficial to have a mixed economy with both internal and external services to promote diversity across the sector. The cost of bringing this service in-house, at this level, would be extortionate and would require a significant Welsh Government investment in funding for Social Services.

The Corporate Director of Social Services commented that 18 months ago an external provider who was providing 23% of Domiciliary Care provision had gone into liquidation and a new provider had to be sought to deliver that care. At that time, consideration had been given to bring the service in-house, however, the cost had been an additional £2m to the sum already being paid to the provider, and this would be an ongoing cost. He also felt that a mixed market needed to be in place to give the right balance between in-house and external providers. Work had been undertaken to try to expand those numbers of providers to ensure sustainability

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going forward so that no one provider would be responsible for delivering a huge amount of care provision.

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