

Social Services Annual Report 2019/20



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Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol

Blaenau Gwent

County Borough Council

Introduction

Welcome to the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services Annual Report 2019/20. Over the past few years the Department has been developing this annual report to highlight the key areas of improvements and challenges that have been faced.

This report has been developed in line with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, referred to as 'the Act' throughout this document. The Act aims to provide the most radical change to the way in which Social Services is provided since 1948. It focuses on improving the well-being of people who come to Social Services for support. It is person centred and focuses on prevention and reducing the need for care and support. It recognises that responsibility lies not only within Social Services Departments, but also within the wider Local Authority and with partners (particularly Health and the Third Sector).

The Act shares similar principles with a number of key national/regional strategies that are being implemented throughout the Council, in particular the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The Director of Social Services has a statutory requirement to publish an annual report in relation to the delivery of its functions, to evaluate its performance and also include lessons learned. A key aspect of the report is showing how the six Quality Standards have been implemented in relation to well-being outcomes.

This report provides a strategic overview of the work undertaken throughout 2019/20 and what plans are in place to move forward. Further supporting information can be found from page 21 of the report.

The report includes evidence of where Social Services have worked collaboratively with partners.

Experiences and learning from service users has been considered as part of the development of the report. Service users have been engaged through a number of forums such as the Carers Group, 50+ Forum and Young Carers Group. Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) findings, Wales Audit Office (WAO) findings, case studies, complaints and compliments and quarterly reporting have all been considered as part of the development of this report and evidence from these has been used to inform future learning.

The annual report is used to demonstrate accountability to citizens and service users. As part of this process, the report will be presented to full Council for ratification before it is published on the Council's website and will then be sent to Welsh Ministers. The report will be available on line bilingually and will be shared with partner agencies in order to share good practice, learning and experiences.

COVID – 19 The Council's Response

In March 2020, a decision was made by the UK Government to put the UK into lockdown in order to try and curb the spread of the global pandemic COVID 19. As part of this, the Council had to act quickly and had to consider alternative methods of service delivery, ensuring that the most vulnerable in society were supported.

Since lockdown began the Council has shifted its sole focus to the emergency response. This has resulted in delivery of only critical services with other available resources being redeployed to support the response. There has been a particular focus on Adult Social Services, supporting some of the most vulnerable in our community. Welsh Government therefore removed the normal timetable for submission of the Directors Annual Report due the COVID-19 pandemic and are now requested the 2019/20 report is submitted by September 2021.



Director's Summary of Performance

As the Corporate Director of Social Services in Blaenau Gwent, I am pleased to present the annual report for 2019/20 which is a requirement of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act). The report is being submitted later than normal due to Welsh Government waiving the need for submission of the report during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

We always seek feedback from service users, carers, families and partner organisations, and together with complaints and compliments and the Act questionnaires are all important learning and development opportunities for the Directorate. However due to the COVID-19 pandemic which began in March 2020 the results were not analysed as staff were redeployed to assist deliver frontline services across the Council. We continue to view complaints and compliments as a great opportunity for the Directorate to improve the services and the service user experience moving forward (See Chapter on How People are shaping our Service).

Under the Act we have continued to invest in the knowledge and learning of our Care Management staff through attendance at Outcomes Training and collaborative working with Social Care Wales to identify best practice and showcase examples where we have supported citizens to achieve their outcomes some examples can be viewed on Social Care Wales website.

The safeguarding of children, families and vulnerable adults remains a priority moving forward for the Directorate. We have strengthened our response to children's safeguarding referrals by placing a police resource within our Children's Information, Advice and Assistance service to better inform our decision making and unsure decisions are taken in a timely manner.

The 3 years Safe Reduction of Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy has been in place for over 2 years now and is supported by a clear action plan which is reviewed on a quarterly basis as part of the business planning process. The development of a Supporting Change Team who work with children and families on the 'edge of care' has evidenced that preventing problems escalating can reduce the number of children becoming looked after. We continue to see a steady reduction in the numbers of CLA during the year. An independent review of the strategy was commenced during the year to ensure it can be reshaped for the coming years.

We have been also supporting the above strategy through the use of Integrated Care Funding (ICF) with a Family Conference service, the development of a special guardianship team, the enhancing of the current Supporting Change team and the development of a Young Person's Mediation service aimed at age 14 plus.

The South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) has now increased capacity in the service to deliver more direct work, birth parent support, sibling contact and improving adoption support plans. The Adoption Service has produced a Life Journey handbook to ensure timely and good quality information is included to support the child. Blaenau Gwent had 14 children who were adopted in 2019/20 compared to 8 children who were adopted in 2018/19. Performance overall of SEWAS continues to be very good.

Supporting families with high quality, flexible and affordable childcare continues, supporting economic regeneration, reducing pressures on family income and helping parents to participate in work, reducing a family's risk of poverty. It also supports the well-being of children through positive and rich childhood experiences. The Childcare Offer is now fully rolled out across both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen by the Blaenau Gwent team.

On a regional basis the Directors of Social Services are committed to looking at collaborative opportunities across Social Services and Health, using the Transformation fund from 'A Healthier Wales' and the Integrated Care Capital and Revenue Funding.

In Adult Services the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) team and Community Resource team have continued to work together to provide an enhanced 'front door' for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent for referrals for both health and social care provision. The IAA outreach pilots at both Nevill Hall Hospital and Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan continues to work well, contributing to the very low numbers of delayed transfers of care being experienced by Blaenau Gwent residents. Our performance on delayed transfers of care was again excellent with our rate at 0.98 for 2019/20 which again puts us in the top quartile of performing authorities across Wales.

The General Practitioner Engagement service for carers delivered by South East Wales Carers Trust who support all GP surgeries reached the final of the South Wales Argus Health and Care Awards and were recognised for the excellent work they undertaking for carers. During carers week, we put a number of raising awareness events and activities for carers across Blaenau Gwent.

We also led the development of a Regional adult advocacy commissioning strategy and helpline which set out a clear direction of travel for advocacy services in the region over the next 5 years.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) recognised the considerable investment officers have made to address the fragile domiciliary care market and how we are procuring a sustainable model jointly with Caerphilly to provide greater choice and options for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent. They also identified how service users attending Cwm Coch described social workers as very supportive and accessible. They also identified how the IAA Service with partners had embraced the 'what matters' conversations, evidencing the MIND workers interface with the Police, Women's Aid and Cwm Coch hospital as well as the emotional support via telephone, signposting to relevant services and cascading information within the team they provide.

Blaenau Gwent Council, along with many other Local Authorities in Wales continue to face serious financial problems and Social Services, like all Council Services, have had to make cuts to ensure the authority delivers a balanced budget for 2019/20. The sustained pressure within Children's Services due to the number of CLA has had a detrimental effect on the budget situation but the Services has achieved a small under spend of £75K in 2019/20. The Directorate received an additional £0.769 million added to the Services base budget to cover these pressures within 2019/20 and the considerable work done through the implementation of the Safe Reduction of CLA strategy, has resulted in a small underspend at end of March 2020. On the other hand, Adult Services have managed to underspend by £182K resulting in an overall underspend for the Directorate of £347K.

The challenge for 2020/21 will be to continue to manage demand and to do more with less. We will undertake a number of reviews within some of the services we deliver internally. We will continue to look to explore further opportunities for collaboration where it will improve the well-being of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and it is right to do so.

Hopefully, this report will help you to understand how we support and safeguard children, young people, citizens, carers and their families within Blaenau Gwent and how we will continue to strive to improve our services.

Damien McCann

Corporate Director of
Social Services



Cllr John Mason

Executive Member
Social Services



How People are shaping our Services

As part of the Act, people who use care and support services are invited to complete an annual survey in relation to the provision of care and support. Again at the end of this financial year, Adults and Carers were sent questionnaires, however due to the COVID outbreak and available resources being redeployed to support the emergency response, analysis of any returned questionnaires was put on hold whilst services were redirected to support the most vulnerable within our community. Welsh Government were also involved heavily in the COVID 19 response and stated that they did not require for the questionnaire analysis to be provided from any local authority.

The Social Services Directorate is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens and prior to the COVID outbreak multiple methods of engagement were implemented throughout the year in order to achieve this, some examples are detailed below.

Consultation

- As part of the Early Years Transformation Programme pilot a consultation has been undertaken with both families and professionals to consider the existing model and to understand what matters to them.



Engagement

- Involvement with children and families occurs on a daily basis and is recoded as part of care planning.

Complaints and Compliments

The Social Services Department is committed to providing high quality services to its users; however, despite best intentions, it is recognised that sometimes things can go wrong and the Social Services complaints procedure provides people with the opportunity to voice their concerns when they are dissatisfied with a service. The service uses learning from these complaints to improve services moving forward. The service also welcomes positive feedback and compliments and also uses this information to further improve services.

Examples of complaints received in Children's Services this year were :-

- Unhappy with a delay in visits from social services;
- Lack of information provided;
- Conflicting advice given;
- Unhappy with the length of time social services took to respond to concerns raised; and
- Unhappy with being passed around departments and having to repeat the information.

In Adult Services examples of complaints were:-

- Unhappy with lack of communication from social services; and
- Unhappy with services being offered but not implemented.

In order to continue to improve services, the outcomes of complaint investigations and learning from them are undertaken to prevent the situation from occurring again. During 2019/20 examples of learning identified and actioned include:

Adults

- Staff were reminded to be clear about their roles and responsibilities when communicating with individuals and their families;
- Staff were reminded that communication should be undertaken on agreed actions/plans with individuals and/or their families so as not to raise expectations ; and
- Staff were reminded to update case records to reflect discussions that have taken place with individuals and/or their families .

Children

- Staff were reminded of the need to engage in clear communication with families and the need to be open and honest with them in regard to the departments limitations of support and expectation on families to work together in the best interests of their children.; and
- Continue to monitor case allocations and to undertake dip sample audits to further inform the local authority of current practice.



Promoting and Improving the Well-being of Those We Help

Priorities

In March 2018, Council approved the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2018/22. The Corporate Plan is the Council's roadmap setting out the vision, values and priorities of the Council. One key priority within the Plan is, 'Social Services'. The business plans within Social Services are aligned directly to the Corporate Plan to ensure that the priorities can be implemented over the next four years. The priorities are shown below and the Quality Standards demonstrate where improvement has been made, challenges have been addressed and where outcomes have been achieved. The Corporate Plan priorities have been written to cover the four year period 2018/22, therefore, the above mentioned priority areas are likely to remain in place until 2022, however, an annual review of the priorities and supporting action will be undertaken to ensure priorities remain fit for purpose.

Corporate Plan Social Services Priorities 2018/22 are:

- **To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own wellbeing;**
- **To work with people to make sure they have a say in achieving what matters to them;**
- **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;**
- **To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm; and**
- **To develop a partnership approach to reducing and alleviating the impacts of Poverty.**

Children's Services Priorities 2019/20

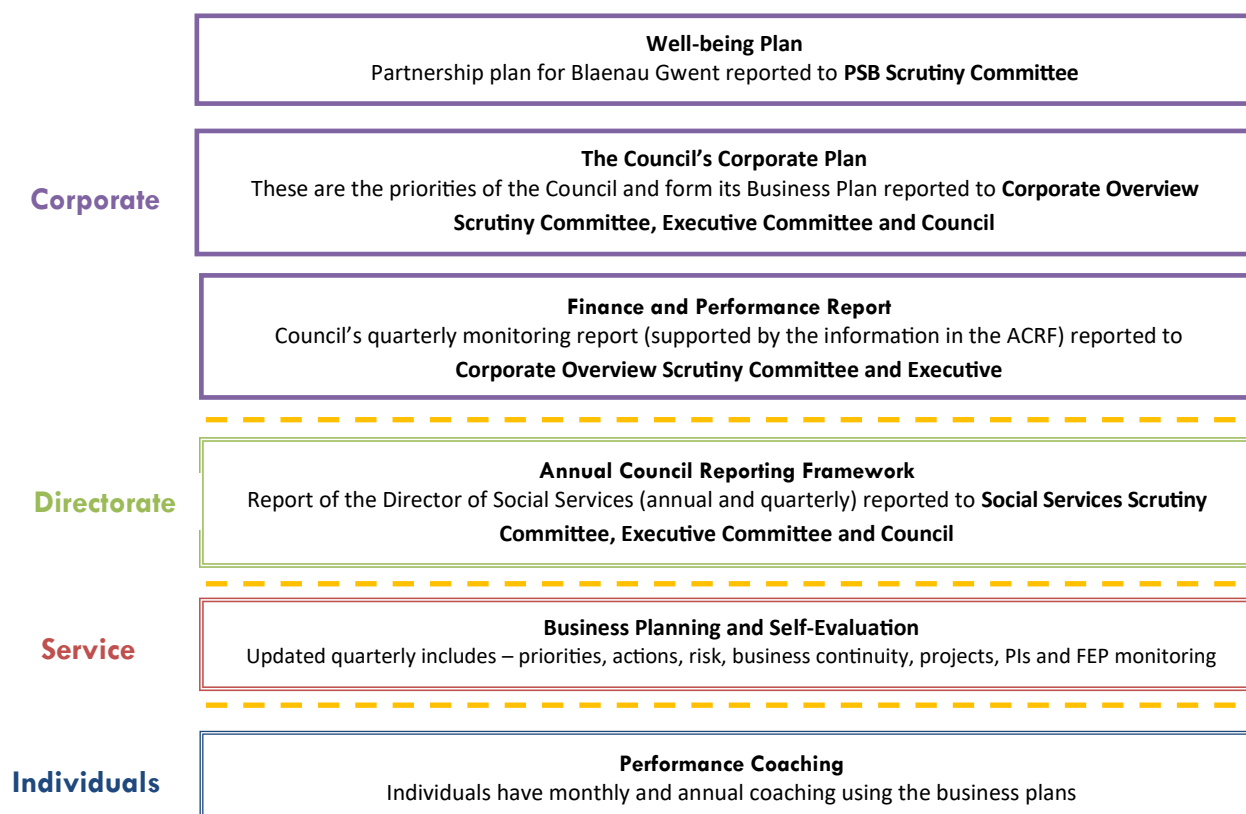
<i>Priority Title</i>	<i>BRAG</i>
• Enhance screening and IAA provision (children and adults)	
• Support and encourage a cultural change across Children's services by ensuring that community members have a say in what matters to them	
• Preventative services target the most vulnerable families in Blaenau Gwent who do not meet the criteria for a care and support plan	
• Implement the Safe Reduction of Looked After Children Strategy 2017	
• Improve outcomes for Looked After Children	
• To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements	
• All teams to ensure the children and young people of Blaenau Gwent are safeguarded	
• Manage the Children's Services budget to ensure expenditure comes within budget	
• Children's Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles	

Adults Services Priorities 2019/20

<i>Priority Title</i>	<i>BRAG</i>
• Enhance screening and IAA Adult Services support at our front door	
• Support and encourage a cultural change across Adults services by ensuring that citizens have a say in what matters to them	
• Ensure that preventative support is available to citizens - promoting personal independence and reducing dependencies	
• Ensure that we provide / commission modern, high quality care and support provision that meet both current and future well-being needs of our citizens	
• To develop alternative models of support that promotes independence and supports well-being outcomes	
• Ensure that vulnerable adults are safeguarded	
• Develop and maximise opportunities for partnership working across Welsh Government Flexibilities Grants and Welfare reform related programmes	
• Manage the Adults Service core budget and grant programmes to ensure that expenditure comes within budget	
• Adult Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles	

The framework below shows how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create a 'golden thread'.

Planning Framework



Progress of the Quality Standards

During a comprehensive assessment of performance at the end of 2019/20, the following achievements and challenges were identified as part of the Council's Performance Management Framework.

Working with people to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve

A police resource is now in place in the Information, Advice and Assistance Team which strengthens our multi-agency response to safeguarding referrals being dealt with within the timescales required under the All Wales Child Protection Procedures.

Over the course of Carers week, awareness raising events and activities took place in venues across the borough along with an information and advice session for Carers of people with learning disabilities. These were all delivered and supported by the Carers Lead Officer, General Practice Engagement Officers and the Voluntary Sector such as Carers Trust Service / Age Cymru.

The numbers of referrals managed by the Adults Services IAA Team continues to increase as the intake model approach continues to be embedded; and the percentage of proportionate assessments that led to a more comprehensive assessment for the care and support of adults was 13% at year-end 2019/20, an improvement from last year when the figure was 64.2%. However, the percentage of proportionate assessments that led to a more comprehensive assessment for the care and support of children was 11.6% at year end, a decline from last year when the figure was 7.4%.

The work of Compassionate Communities and the Integrated Well-being Network continues to evolve linking Placed Based Care, Prevention and well-being Principles together. The General Practitioner (GP) Engagement Service continues to support all GP surgeries and the service reached the finals of the South Wales Argus Health and Care awards and, although they did not win, it is recognition of the excellent work being undertaken.

The IAA outreach pilots at both Nevill Hall Hospital and Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan continues to work well, contributing to the very low numbers of delayed transfers of care being experienced by Blaenau Gwent residents. As a result of the pilots adult services are completing a system review to determine how citizens experiences can improve throughout the whole of adult services.

The IAA Team and Community Resource Team continue to work together to provide an enhanced 'Front Door' for Blaenau Gwent citizens, utilising an intake approach to preventative services. This preventative approach to the screening of referrals to both health and social care systems has been developed via the new Single Point of Access (SPA) pilot project in the team

The Safeguarding / Children Looked After (CLA) education team are developing a framework for CLA child friendly schools, which will include a good practice guide and self-evaluation tool for schools. A task and finish group has been established during which it was agreed the child's voice should help inform these documents.

An internal case audit was devised in 2019 and the theme was 'The Voice of the Child'. A total of 18 cases were randomly chosen and each case audit was completed by either a Team Manager and/or Senior Practitioner, and Independent Reviewing Officer.

As part of the Early Years Transformation Programme pilot a consultation has been undertaken with both families and professionals to consider the existing model and to understand what matters to them.

Working with people and partners to protect and promote people's physical and mental health and emotional well-being

Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money has been allocated to support children at risk of becoming looked after, in care or, who are adopted. This includes a regional approach to a Family Group Conference service; Development of a Special Guardianship Team; Enhancement of the Supporting Change Team to build on the work already being done to prevent children entering the care system; and delivery of a Young Person's Mediation Service aimed at ages 14 years and above.

The Family Group Conference Service is now fully established. We have a clear procedure in place and are targeting families earlier at the point of Child Protection Registration in order to get the extended family on board and involved in the children's plans as early as possible.

Through co-productive working across the five Gwent local authorities and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, a regional adult advocacy commissioning strategy has been published and a new advocacy helpline has been launched. The commissioning strategy sets out a clear direction of travel for the development of advocacy services in the region over the next five years.

The SPACE Well-being programme is working co productively with partners such as Health, Education, Police, Probation, Youth Offending Service and 3rd sector providers to ensure that the mental health needs of children and young people are assessed early with the right agency taking the lead on providing the most appropriate interventions.

The 'hosting' arrangements that have been developed along with Torfaen County Borough Council in respect of the childcare offer show true collaborative working. Blaenau Gwent Early Years Childcare and Play Team have also assisted Newport, Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff in the setup of their Childcare Offer Projects. The Childcare Offer is now fully rolled out and exploration of why some parents did not access the offer has commenced.

The children and families partnership commissioned independent support to develop a regional approach to managing complex cases which need a multiagency approach and a procedure for addressing disputes between agencies when care planning and funding issues arise. This regional approach comprises of a panel attended by all Gwent Heads of Service alongside health and education colleagues who have the authority to agree to release funding. As part of this work, the terms of reference for the local complex needs panels have been re drafted to get a common approach across Gwent.

A Whole Person, Whole System Mental Health Crisis Support Board is in place following a number of Action Learning Sets being developed to provide a timely, person-centred, effective and efficient 24/7 response for those in crisis and their carers across the whole care system in Gwent. A number of task and finish groups have been set up to develop parts of the system to respond:-

- Shared lives – as at January 2020 five arrangements had been completed within Newport which is the pilot area.
- Ty Llys – well-being house – a small sub group has been created
- The second stage of the lottery application has been completed by the Mental Health consortium for the crisis house.
- T&F group for the Crisis Assessment Service Unit (CASU) has completed a piece of work on the benefits and measures of developing this service – all outcomes are to be measured from the CASU launch taking place in the Spring and are drafted into three categories. (i) Benefits to service users, (ii) benefits for staff and (iii) benefits for Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. Local Authorities have reviewed the bed modelling, identifying 13 beds for a potential centralised assessment unit. A Service User engagement event is planned for Spring.

Protecting and safeguarding people from abuse, neglect or harm

The Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy has started to evidence how it is preventing problems faced by children and families escalating to a point which requires children becoming looked after or their names going onto the child protection register. Good evidence of this is the work undertaken by the Supporting Change Team and a full evaluation, which involved consultation with children and families, showed evidence that the team is making a real difference. An independent evaluation is underway which will serve to shape a new 10 year strategy from 2020.

The number of Children Looked After (CLA) has reduced , however there has been an increase in the numbers of children on the child protection register. The numbers of children looked after are now 208 compared to 222 in March 2018. For year end 2019/20 there was 61 children on the Child Protection Register compared to 56 last year.

Partnership work continues with the Police under the Early Action Together programme which supports improvement to the timeliness of undertaking the Child Protection process and in ensuring that information is collated and considered in all decision making.

Performance analysis also shows that 100 of 103 initial Child Protection Conferences were held within 15 days with 97.1% being within the statutory timescale and the average length of time a child in Blaenau Gwent remained on the local authority child protection register was 295 days, an increase from last year when the figure was 277.27.

Education Directorate and Social Services are key partners in the Gwent Early Action Together Programme and continue to work collectively to strengthen safeguarding arrangements which has included the embedding of the Operation Encompass initiative which provides an early alert to schools before the start of the school day of any child that is subject to, or witness to, police-attended incidents of domestic abuse.

The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Board is made up of elected members, Local Authority officers and representation from partner agencies to ensure that the best possible advice, care and safeguarding of our children is ensured across the 7 areas. Attendance and contributions of all members of the board is monitored to ensure involvement.

A Step Down procedure has been communicated with all staff and is working well, enabling staff from Children's Social Care, Early Help Services and a range of other partners to support child/family intervention and plan as they move from requiring statutory, safeguarding and specialist support to targeted and universal services and interventions.

New All Wales Safeguarding Guidance and procedures for both children and adults have been launched and the app is available for practitioners.

All Legal time requirements are being met and the legal support and advice for vulnerable children and adults are being delivered in a professional and timely manner.

The percentage of adult protection enquiries completed within the statutory timescale of seven working days was 98% during 2019/20. This has increased from 2018/19 when the figure was 93.3%. The Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy has been formally signed off by council in March 2019 and is now being embedded in day to day practice.

Encouraging and supporting people to learn, develop and participate in society

At the end of academic year 2018-2019 153 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent.

Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a looked after child moves placement to ensure stability of schooling. When a child does have to move school, processes are in place to ensure that delays in admissions are avoided wherever possible.

Outcomes for children looked after are continually reviewed and the following outcomes were determined at the end of 2018/19 academic year:

- Key stage 2 results were considerably higher when compared with the previous year but lower at the end of key stage 3;
- A total of 16 children looked after completed their statutory studies with 9 achieving recognised qualifications; and
- There has been a decrease in the incidents of exclusions, however, an increase in the number of days lost to exclusions.

Collaborative work continues in respect of the Children Looked After Friendly Schools initiative. The protocol has been developed in draft and will be piloted in one cluster group, where feedback will then be obtained and the protocol revised accordingly .

The Food and Fun Programme was delivered in participating schools this summer, led by school staff with support from the council for catering and cleaning. The school-based programme provided healthy meals, food and nutrition education and physical activity to children in a fun social environment. Around 160 pupils and families took part with the ethos being centred around activities based around fitness, healthy eating and appreciating the environment.

Supporting families with high quality, flexible and affordable childcare continues, supporting economic regeneration, reducing pressures on family income and helping parents to participate in work, reducing a family's risk of poverty. It also supports the well-being of children through positive and rich childhood experiences.

We are minimising the need for individuals to spend unnecessary time in hospital beds by placing the person at the centre of the discussion, as an expert of their own experiences and will continue to put them at the heart of the whole system approach

A child sufficiency assessment has been carried out at which time we consulted with parents on period poverty.

The rate of Delayed Transfers of Care for 2019/20 was 0.98 which is an improvement from 2017/18 when the outturn was 1.16.

Following the Joint Thematic Review of Community Mental Health Teams in Wales, in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in May 2020, we developed an improvement plan with actions to address areas of improvement identified by CIW/HIW.

Progress against this plan will be monitored by health and social care partners quarterly along with other general governance although primarily governance responsibility will be with the Mental Health and the Learning Disability Delivery Group.

Supporting people to develop safely and to maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships

Welsh Government investment monies have been used to improve service provision within the South East Wales Adoption Services (SEWAS). There is now increased capacity in the service to deliver more direct work, birth parent support, sibling contact and improving adoption support plans. The Adoption Service has produced a Life Journey handbook/guide for Social Workers to ensure timely and good quality information is included to support the child. Blaenau Gwent had 14 children who were adopted in 2019/20 compared to 8 children who were adopted in 2018/19.

There has been a decrease in the number of foster carers - 77 Foster Carers in March 2020 (54 Generic Carers and 23 Kinship Carers) in comparison to 80 Foster Carers in March 2019 (58 Generic Carers and 22 Kinship Carers). Placement sufficiency and the difficulty in recruiting foster carers locally despite recruitment campaigns is an area raised as a concern by Care Inspectorate Wales.

A (5 LA's) hospital discharge service (Home First) has been developed, to be funded by the Transformation Fund. Exploration into further expansion of this to other parts of the Health and Social care system is underway.

As part of improving the quality of assessments and ensuring that they demonstrate a full consideration of need and a clear record of analysis of the child's needs and wellbeing outcomes, training has been delivered to staff in relation to the use of historical information being used when assessing risk. In addition a new calendar of weekly training is being delivered to refresh staff awareness on all aspects of assessment and care planning.

A review of the use of contracts of expectations has been undertaken to ensure that children's safety is never compromised. A new procedure has been written, signed off and shared with teams and is now in operation.

Assessment and planning involves active participation of families in the co-production of care and support plans and following the delivery of outcomes training to all statutory staff this is now evidenced in the case recordings. An audit tool to focus on consultation and participation of children and families has been developed.

Care Inspectorate Wales annual performance review acknowledged the work being undertaken to promote the Welsh language and the lead Blaenau Gwent played in developing a five year regional advocacy commissioning strategy. They recognised the work undertaken as a result of the inspection report and how children looked after had steadied and is now slowly declining.

Commitment from the joint MyST team with Monmouthshire to return children from residential care to live closer to home is ongoing. The MyST provides a multi-disciplinary intensive therapeutic fostering service for Children Looked After. The Team continues to work intensively with children currently in residential care with the aim of bringing them back to live closer to Blaenau Gwent and be placed with foster carers or family members. The Team also works with those children in care who present with complex needs and are at risk of going into residential care, to prevent this from happening.

Working with and supporting people to achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) recognised the considerable investment officers have made to address the fragile domiciliary care market and how we are currently procuring a sustainable model jointly with Caerphilly to provide greater choice and options for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent. They identified how service users attending Cwm Coch described social workers as very supportive and accessible and how the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service had embraced the 'what matters' conversations, evidencing the MIND workers interface with the Police, Women's Aid and Cwm Coch hospital as well as the emotional support via telephone, signposting to relevant services.

The Floating Support Service offers housing-related support to people who are at risk of homelessness. CIW however, identified the need of more mental health supportive housing and floating support to provide for the needs of people with mental health problems. Welsh Government Youth Grant will provide an additional £160,000 for mental well-being and homelessness support.

During 2019 / 20 we have continued to develop the support we give to patients in both our Community and Acute hospital settings through the development of an outreach team who are working within Nevill Hall Hospital 'in reaching' into patients on floor 4 of the hospital. The outcomes of this project are due to be analysed early 2020 with a view to extending the model across other areas of the hospital. The project has been further enhanced during the Winter months due to the Local Authority securing additional funding from Welsh Government to support Winter pressures. This has enabled us to increase our capacity to undertake assessments at the local hospitals through additional weekend working.

Our Community Options Service continues to provide a wide range of day activities to citizens across the ages from 18 to 90 years of age. During 2019/20 we completed the remodelling of our Lake View facility in Nantyglo resulting in the closure of our Quiet Minds provision with some citizens being supported in Lake View and a number of citizens transferring to Ash Parc – where we provide support for citizens living with Dementia, and others successfully accessing community or third sector networks.

Our partnership with Growing Space (third sector Mental Health group) was strengthened further in July 2019 resulting in an increase in community based learning opportunities for those attending our Community Options Green Shoots project. Growing Space are providing opportunities for citizens to gain experience in retail by working in the furniture recycling shop in Brynmawr, building confidence in meeting new people. Citizens are also participating in the furniture upcycling workshop, and maintaining and developing the gardens in Tredegar House, Newport. The participants have grown in confidence and become motivated in delivering the Growing Space programme.

Good partnership and working arrangements have continued between our RSL partners including Tai Calon, colleagues in Housing Strategy, the Supporting People Team and the Community Resource Team (CRT) ensuring that key partners are involved when allocating properties to citizens who have complex needs and mobility issues.

The Care Leavers Move on Panel has continued to support care leavers that are ready to move into their own accommodation and a large number of care leavers aged 17+ were offered accommodation throughout 2019/20 Each care leaver was presented to the panel of housing providers who then then offered suitable accommodation that suited their needs. This along with the training opportunities to progress care leavers economic status supports care leavers future independence.

How We Do What We Do

Our Workforce and How We Support their Professional Roles

The Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly Workforce Development Service continue to evidence innovation, success and contribution. The Service continues to lead, on behalf of Gwent, the management of the Social Care Wales Workforce Development Grant, worth over £2 million pounds. The Grant enables investment in training for those who work with the most vulnerable in society. The service also continues to provide leadership for a number of networks and committees, including the All Wales Training Network, the Social Work Degree Programme Management Committee, the vocational route to the Social Services Practitioner Award, and the Consolidation of Practice Programme Management Committee.

All those working in the care sector had free access to learning and development. The opportunities were delivered through the partnership with Caerphilly and during 2019/20 this provided 13,248 places, nearly 60% of the provision in Gwent with only 40% of the grant.

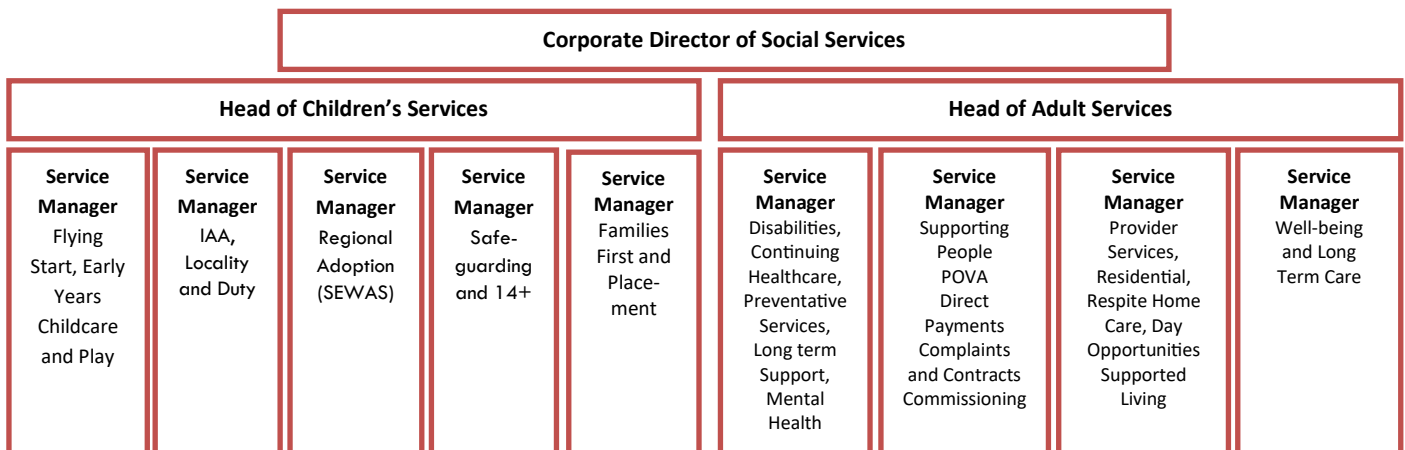
Management support for a Social Worker Strategy continues to deliver a high percentage investment for the Social Services Practitioner Award. As a direct consequence the authority has a guaranteed pool of potential internal social work student applicants. The investment continues through the whole degree and the strategy delivered five internal newly qualified social workers for Blaenau Gwent during 2019/20. There is robust support for newly qualified social workers and 100% passed their mandatory Consolidation of Practice award.

The joint model also delivered over 60% of the achievements in Gwent for front line care worker essential qualifications, the qualifications that are now required for registration.

During late February and March learning for the sector had to speedily transform to a digital model in response to impact of the pandemic. Easy to access YouTube videos were produced to support the army of redeployed staff and volunteers.

Our Partnership Working, Political and Corporate Leadership, Governance and Accountability

All Council Directorates have been required to undertake a review of their service with a view for service efficiency and cost savings. From April 2019, the Social Services review was completed and provides clear levels of management and accountability as shown below:



The Corporate Director of Social Services is a member of the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team, whereby all Council Directors meet on a weekly basis to consider and make strategic and operational decisions (although some decisions need to be considered by Scrutiny and then ratified by Executive or Council).

The Directorate has one Executive Member who has Portfolio responsibility for Social Services as a whole. The Directorate is scrutinised by the Social Services Scrutiny Committee and safeguarding information is reported to the Joint Social Services and Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee. Regular liaison meetings are held with the Directorate, the Executive Member and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

As a whole, the Council has a clear governance and accountability framework and Performance Management Framework in place which all directorates are signed up to. These frameworks are complied with by Social Services who also have additional monitoring requirements as part of the Act.

The Social Services Directorate is subject to audit, inspection and review by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). On a quarterly basis Social Services Senior Managers meet with CIW for liaison meetings. CIW also undertake an annual review and evaluation of the Directorate’s performance.

Audit and Inspection Progress

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Children’s Services

In 2018 CIW reported on their inspection undertaken on Children’s Social Services in Blaenau Gwent. Despite the overall summary being positive, the CIW made recommendations for improvement which have been monitored as part of the corporate business planning process. The progress position of these recommended proposals for improvement, is as follows:-

Number of Recommended Proposals for improvement	Completed	On Track for Delivery	Ongoing Recommendations
7	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise and Implement a number of key policies, procedures and strategies’ • Develop an overarching quality assurance framework to enable coordinated audit and monitoring activity to regularly challenge and support operational multi-agency practice. • Improve the quality of assessments to demonstrate a full consideration of need and a clear record of analysis of the child's need and wellbeing outcomes.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Fostering Services

In 2018 CIW reported on their inspection of the Fostering Service in Blaenau Gwent. Despite the overall summary being positive the CIW made recommendations for improvement which have been monitored as part of the corporate business planning process. The progress position of these recommended proposals for improvement, is as follows:-

Number of Recommended Proposals for improvement	Completed	On Track for Delivery	Ongoing Recommendations
15	14	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Action should be taken to increase the breadth of experience of fostering panel members'

Collaboration

Blaenau Gwent Council supports partnership and collaborative working and the Social Services Department continues to work with a wide range of partners where partnership opportunities provide better outcomes for local residents than the Council could achieve if working on its own. Social Services work in partnership with a variety of stakeholders including staff, residents and businesses. In addition, Social Services fully participates in the sharing of knowledge, good practice and information, which can result in improved services.

Regional Partnership Boards

The Social Services and Well-being Act sets out a statutory requirement for the development of Regional Partnership Boards. The Boards have been established on current local health board footprints. The Gwent Board includes ABUHB and Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen local authorities. The Executive member in each local authority, with responsibility for health and social care, sits on the Regional Partnership Board. It is an advisory body which provides oversight and direction for areas of integrated working across health and social care. The main priorities of the Board for 2019/20 has been the Transformational Offer, supporting a 'seamless system' of care, support and well-being in Gwent, the Integrated Care Revenue and Capital Fund, the Integrated Winter Plan for 2019/20 and finally, the Bevan Commission and Social Care Wales work to help develop future models of services across the Boards area.



'Mwy na geiriau/ More than just words

As a department we continue to monitor compliance with our responsibilities within More Than Just Words and the Active Offer. We continue to ensure that when citizens contact both our Adult and Children Services Departments, that they are offered the opportunity to communicate in the language of their choice. Our assessment tools within our Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) system specifically asks the question "Do you require this conversation / assessment to be carried out in Welsh?" The form is then attached to the person's referral.

Our commissioned providers work in partnership with us to promote the Welsh Language and this is reflected in our contracts and service level agreements.

Our Financial Resources and How We Plan For the Future

The total budget allocation for Social Services for 2019/20 was £44.91m. This is an increase from last year by £0.769m. At the end of 2019/20 Social Services had an underspend of £347,000 and this is due to ICF, Transformation and Winter Pressures Grant Funding.

The provision of regular financial forecasting reports in line with the budget monitoring and reporting framework has enabled the Social Services Senior Management Team to make informed decisions on service delivery.

In setting the 2020/21 budget, Council agreed a number of savings proposals totalling £0.643m. For 2019/20 the department achieved £591,000 of savings.

The allocated budget and outturn for 2019/20 is provided in the table below:

Service Area	Budget	Outturn	Variance (Adverse)/ Favourable
Children's Services	£12,960,360	£12,884,866	75,494
Adult Services	£25,963,430	£25,781,618	181,812
Business Management / Staff Support	£5,991,480	£5,899,102	92,378
Other Social Services Related Costs		2,680	(2,680)
Total	£44,915,270	£44,568,267	347,003

The budget for 2020/21 is provided in the table below and includes a grant of £0.047m that was transferred into the Revenue Support Grant, and Financial Efficiency Project savings of £0.643m.

Social Services Budget 2020/21		£
1	Commissioning & Social Work	3,562,580
2	Children Looked After	6,951,460
3	Family Support Services	188,603
4	Youth Justice	232,922
5	Other Children's and Family Services	2,312,235
6	Older People Aged 65 and Over	6,062,020

Social Services Budget 2020/21		£
7	Adults under 65 with Physical Disabilities	41,800
8	Adults under 65 with Learning Disabilities	3,687,900
9	Adults under 65 with Mental Health Needs	596,710
10	Other Adult Services	357,910
11	Community Care	15,371,780
12	Support Service & Management Costs	1,023,280
13	Corporate Recharges	4,962,770
Grand Total		45,351,970

Conclusion

Throughout 2019/20 there has been substantial progress in the implementation of the Social Services priorities but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives.

The Social Services function remains high on the Council agenda, with a strategic priorities for Social Services identified within the Corporate Plan. The Council is looking to address the areas that will have a long term benefit, ensuring that the needs of people of all ages and future generations are at the centre of service design and delivery.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 was a response to the Welsh Government review of Social Services in 2010 (Sustainable Social Services) which recognised that without radical change to the way we worked, services would become unaffordable in the near future as a result of demographic pressures and the changing expectations of the public at a time of financial austerity.

The Act looks to build and strengthen on existing arrangements by involving service users, carers and other key partners, where possible, in helping to shape and influence future design of services. This is supported by the Directorate who look to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention.

It is recognised that in the current financial climate there is a need to work smarter and in partnership and the report provides examples of where this is working effectively.

This Annual Report of the Director of Social Services provides a snapshot of service activity undertaken throughout 2019/20. Further supporting information can be found below:



Accessing Further Information and Key Documents

Useful Documents

Reports to Social Services Scrutiny Committee – http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SSS

Council Corporate Plan – http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att8386.pdf

Blaenau Gwent Council Budget Monitoring - http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=JBM

Social Services Website – <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/health-wellbeing-social-care/>

Workforce Development - <http://socialservicesblaenau-gwent.caerphilly.gov.uk/>

Useful Websites

Social Care Wales - <https://socialcare.wales>

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) - <https://careinspectorate.wales/>

Data Cymru - www.data.cymru

Dewis Wales - <https://www.dewis.wales>

Gwent Safeguarding - <https://www.gwentsafeguarding.org>

Public Service Board - <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/council/partnerships/partnership-working/>

South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board - www.sewsc.org.uk

Providing Feedback

Social Services welcomes feedback on the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services. Your views are important to us. Please contact us if you would like to give feedback on the plan or if you require this document in a different format e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc.

Fersiwn Gymraeg

Yn unol â Chynllun Iaith Gymraeg y Cyngor, bydd fersiwn Gymraeg o Adroddiad Blynyddol y Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol ar gael ar wefan y Cyngor.

Write to us:

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Visit our website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

The Social Services Directorate is satisfied that the information given in this annual report is accurate based on the information available at the time of publication.

This annual report has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment screening.

