

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **10th November 2021**
Report Subject: **Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance Check 2021:
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social
Services**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member for Social
Services**
Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
23.6.21	17.6.21	20.10.21			22.07.21			

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance check summary as identified in their letter dated the 11th June 2021 (Appendix 1). The purpose of the assurance check was to review how well the local authority's social services continue to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being. This letter summarises the findings of CIW assurance check on 17 May to 21 May 2021.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In March 2020, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) suspended its routine programme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable local authorities and providers to focus fully on responding to the challenging circumstances. A revised programme with local authorities recommenced in September to provide assurance about how people are being safeguarded and well-being promoted during the pandemic. We considered safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services, the safety of services they access and the safety and well-being of people who work in services.
- 2.2 We focused our key lines of enquiry within the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and have recorded our judgements and findings aligned to these: People - Voice and Control, Prevention, Partnerships and Integration, Well-being.
- 2.3 CIW asked the following two questions:
1. How well is the local authority discharging its statutory functions to keep people who need care and support and carers who need support, safe and promote their well-being during the pandemic?

2. What is the local authority doing to prevent the need for children to come into care; and are children returning home to their families quickly enough where safe to do so?

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Report has been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team and Social Services Scrutiny Committee.

3.2

Option 1

Executive are asked to note and accept the information detailed within the CIW Assurance letter.

Option 2

3.3

Executive agree not to accept the information detailed within the CIW Assurance letter.

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

4.1 The CIW Local Authority Assurance Check letter links to the following key priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- 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.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

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

There are no impacts from this CIW Assurance letter on the directorate's budget.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

Social Services maintain a directorate risk register which is aligned to both service level and corporate risk. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business planning process and included within the performance reporting of the director of Social Services.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 The CIW letter of Assurance is included within Appendix 1.

6.2 Headline updates include: **People - voice and control – We asked:** How well is the local authority ensuring people, carers and practitioners are having their voices heard, making informed choices, and maintaining control over their lives.

- 6.3 The letter states 'People we spoke with told us how the local authority had maintained safe contact with them throughout the pandemic. Where needed, direct safe face-to-face contact has continued, subject to a COVID risk assessment. Many people spoke of staff going above and beyond; including where required 7 day a week contact aimed at managing risk to successfully maintaining children at home or supporting adults to remain within the community.'
- 6.4 It also highlighted how 'Senior managers with staff and partners have worked hard to embed strength based outcomes focussed practice. The authority's commitment to strength based outcome focused practice was evident in the files reviewed and staff spoke of how this underpinned their work in both adult and children's services.'
- 6.5 It goes on to say 'Evidence showed people's views were sought and their voices heard. Information gathering to represent people's circumstances was also informed by intelligence from a number of relevant partner agencies, notably during early stages of intervention.'
- 6.6 Further, 'Most practitioners who responded to our survey felt supported by colleagues and managers and regarded their workload as manageable. During the Assurance Check we found staff morale to be good and most practitioners were positive about their experience of working for the local authority. We heard how training opportunities had continued with a number of digital platforms used to enable staff and partners to access on-line training. Newly qualified staff told us they are supported in their first years of practice by regular supervision and mentoring arrangements. The recruitment and retention of staff is a recognised business critical priority. We found the local authority have adopted a proactive 'grow your own approach' through the secondment of staff to undertake their social work qualification.'
- 6.7 In relation to the second question asked by CIW, then the following was highlighted 'The local authority has successfully implemented its safe Children Looked After (CLA) strategy, leading to positive outcomes for children within the care system. Working with partners to deliver integrated responsive care, the number of looked after young people has not only stabilised, it is also continuing to decrease.' Also 'Staff spoke of the significance of the Support Change Team and My Support Team (MyST) who work intensively with families to prevent young people entering the care system, The Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Team have been vital in supporting the placements of Special Guardianship arrangements as an alternative to care supporting those families to prevent family breakdown and the return of children into the care system. The authority has been proactive in the revocation of a number of care orders into SGO's ensuring the best outcomes are achieved for young people.'
- 6.8 Two areas were identified requiring improvement, firstly '...we were not confident IRO's consulted with all children prior to their reviews and mid-point review. We found practice to be inconsistent particularly in relation to

younger children. The local authority must ensure IRO's actively support younger children to express their wishes and feelings and contribute towards the review process.' Secondly, they raised concerns about WCCIS, 'All staff and managers reported negatively about the constant issues with accessing and uploading information onto the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). Staff told us of many instances of how they had lost information or been unable to access the system, often having to download work outside working hours to ensure people's information was recorded on the system. Senior managers were aware of these issues and are continually taking appropriate action to try to resolve the issues.'

- 6.9 **Prevention - We asked:** To what extent is the local authority successful in promoting prevention and reducing need for increased or formal support from statutory agencies?
- 6.10 CIW stated 'Prevention is an integral part of the local authorities business. Within children's services we found the commitment to developing Early Help and Prevention services following our inspection of Children's Services in 2018. This approach is now fully evident across both children's and adult services. We found a positive integrated approach to a culture of prevention through joint working, supportive infrastructures and aligned delivery systems between social and health care.'
- 6.11 They further identified how 'From the front door Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) operating as business as usual during the pandemic, allowing people to access appropriate support including reablement provision. To the development of Critical Outreach Teams as alternative to respite and day activities, the authority has strived to promote independence and support people who require care and support.'
- 6.12 They were also pleased to see how 'Staff awareness and practice to establish whether people have mental capacity to make specific decisions and where necessary to make best interest decisions on their behalf was reflected in records and the sample of assessments seen were of a good quality.'
- 6.13 **Partnership and Integration: We asked:** To what extent is the local authority able to assure itself opportunities for partnership working are positively exploited to maximise person centred planning and ensure integrated service delivery and service sustainability?
- 6.14 It was highlighted how 'Strong partnership arrangements and a whole-council response has ensured the provision of support to the most vulnerable adults and children in Blaenau Gwent throughout the pandemic. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the service and have maintained a firm focus on doing the best for delivering services to adults and children who are in need of care and support, despite the disruption and financial strain caused by the continuing pandemic. Leaders and senior managers continue to keep under review new ways of working due to the pandemic, evaluating impact and/or lessons learnt in order to improve

future delivery of services.’

- 6.15 They identified how ‘We heard and saw positive examples of a multi-agency approach to risk management and of practitioners, and managers working together during the pandemic to share information/intelligence to ensure they meet the needs and manage the risk of people with the most complex needs. Providers told us about the good communication and positive meetings with local authority commissioners during the pandemic, with contract-monitoring staff maintaining daily welfare calls with independent providers.’
- 6.16 Feedback from partners also showed how ‘Providers of commissioned services told us of the support offered by the local authority in navigating the vast amount of information and guidance related to their service introducing new ways of safe COVID working. Working in partnership with Public Health Wales, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) and Environmental Health the prompt distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) and recently coordinating the roll out of Lateral Flow Devices.’
- 6.17 They also considered some of the good internal working ‘Communication between the authority’s education directorate and children’s services has been assisted through CLA education coordinator and mentors having access to WCCIS, allowing prompt action to any emerging issues for children who are most vulnerable.’
- 6.18 In addition, ‘We heard from partners how the Safeguarding Team worked well with people from across the sector. We found evidence of good collaboration between social services, the police, and the third sector working directly with people to meet their safety outcomes. We found positive examples of multi-agency approach to risk management and of practitioners, identifying and monitoring vulnerable children and adults at risk.’
- 6.19 They found ‘Strategically, the authority and its partners had responded to the pandemic through working together to support a shared approach. For example, adapting policy and procedures with health colleagues to support the safe discharge from hospital.’
- 6.20 **Well-being: We asked:** To what extent is the local authority promoting well-being, ensuring people maintain their safety and achieve positive outcomes that matter to them?
- 6.21 CIW identified how ‘Within both adult and children’s services we found safeguarding concerns were responded to promptly in line with statutory requirements. Review of case records and discussion with practitioners provided assurance of a timely and proportionate response to both adult and children’s safeguarding concerns. Strategy discussions and meetings were timely and well-supported by partner agencies; which led to effective enquiries.’

- 6.22 They were also complementary about ‘The Corporate Parenting board is an active advocate of young people’s needs. There is strong involvement and interest from council members and leaders, who often meet directly with young people and show real interest in their lives. They recognised the specific needs of the young people in their care and strive to do their best for them.’
- 6.23 In addition, they also indicated ‘Young people who had left care spoke positively about the support they had received from their personal advisors. All felt the commitment of their personal advisors had helped them feel value and supported them in their transition into adulthood. The authority has undertaken some considerable work with housing and housing providers to improve the priority and availability of accommodation for care leavers and this was reflected in the circumstances of the young people we interviewed.’
- 6.5 *Expected outcome for the public*
The report and letter provides the public with the opportunity to view progress of the Directorate and ensure accountability.
- 6.6 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*
The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 looks to build and strengthen on existing arrangements by involving service users, carers and other key partners where possible in helping shape and influence future design of services.
- 6.7 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*
The Report and letter enables the department to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the department is currently and where it needs to be in the future.
- 6.8 *Preventative focus*
The work undertaken by the department looks to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. Having an active rather than re active approach to service planning can also help with planning resources and not spending as much on services in the future.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The performance of the department is monitored via the business planning process and reported through the democratic process via various reporting mechanisms including the ACRF, the Finance and Performance Report, the Assessment of Performance and various performance monitoring reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance Check 2021: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services