

Social Services Annual Report 2020/21



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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 2020/2021
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 2020/2021 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. Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) findings, Audit Wales (AW) 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.

There has been a particular focus on continuing our services to ensure that our most vulnerable residents and children continue to get the care and support they require, both in their own homes and registered settings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been one of the most dramatic and far reaching events to impact on everyday life. Whilst departments like Social Services are still in part in the responsive phase, there is a need for reflection on how we responded to this pandemic in order to inform and shape the recovery phase, as well as prepare for the possibility of any future outbreak. The significant input from staff and volunteers at all levels across organisations was extremely positive which enabled services to adapt to change in working conditions and was key to the response across Blaenau Gwent and the region.

The Directorate has had to work at speed to try and ensure our communities safety against contracting the virus and has sometimes had to make decisions without the consultation or engagement of the public. This has often been as a result of implementing Welsh Government and Public Health Wales guidance speedily. If at all possible we have tried to consult with providers who have delivered services to the public and there has been involvement with the children and families we work with.



Director's Summary of Performance

As the Corporate Director of Social Services in Blaenau Gwent, I am pleased to present the annual report for 2020/21 which is a requirement of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act).

As I reflect on 2020/21 I have to say it has been a year like no other, it has been extremely challenging, difficult, exhausting and traumatic for all our staff in Social Services. It has been a roller coaster of a year with many ups and downs throughout. I have nothing but admiration and pride for our staff who in the face of the virus did not take a backward step, they were truly inspiring, courageous, focussed, committed and professional throughout as we all fought this relentless and indiscriminate virus.

At the beginning of the pandemic, the worst-case scenario was that hospitals and the wider Health and Social Care system would be unable to cope with anticipated massive numbers of patients. The first peak of the pandemic had been less intensive than had been predicted. Hospital capacity and care support in the community was able to cope. The significant input from staff and volunteers at all levels across organisations was extremely positive which enabled services to adapt to change in working conditions and was key to the response across Blaenau Gwent and the region. However, following a short period of some normality during the Summer of 2020, we saw the virus start to return again as we moved into the autumn, a second wave which was much bigger than the first wave and one which really tested our capability, capacity and resources to the full across Health and Social Care.

There have been difficulties along the way, there was a shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at the very start of the outbreak but this was resolved and enabled us to ensure the whole social care system had sufficient and appropriate equipment. Testing initially was also problematic with a small number of social care staff being able to be tested but they needed to travel down to Cardiff to undertake the test, again this was eventually improved with more local testing facilities. Testing of patients coming out of hospital was not put in place until the 29th April 2020, so prior to this discharges were occurring without any testing which may have resulted in some of these bringing the virus into Care homes. Couple this with no or limited staff testing in Care Homes to begin with created some of the outbreaks spreading within these Homes and sadly resulted in a number of deaths related to COVID -19 across Gwent.

Across Children's and Adult Services, we have maintained the majority of our services throughout the pandemic and prioritised home visits to safeguarding investigations, children on the Child Protection Register, Children Looked After, care leavers, those children on the 'edge of care' and have continued to discharge patients from hospital (including those recovering from COVID-19) and any emergency assessments. However, Adult Services at the outset of the pandemic had to close our day services and respite care facility to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable people and to maintain social distancing, it also allowed us to ensure resources were concentrated at caring for people in their own homes and care homes. We have successfully redeployed staff from community options and Flying Start to our care homes and home care teams to provide cover when staff became sick with Covid-19 or more residents required 1:1 support due to isolation.

In Children's and Adult Services all cases were risk rated by team managers which were continually reviewed throughout the pandemic. Prior to any visits by social care staff, we adopted a triage approach which consisted of contacting the family/individual to check if they were self-isolating or presenting symptoms of COVID if they were the visits would be delayed if possible. If due to immediate safeguarding concerns the visit needed to take place staff would comply with public health advice in relation to social distancing, hygiene and PPE if required. Staff have continued to work from our main offices at Anvil Court, the Vitcc and Beaufort Road. Each team has provided a skeleton staff to work from the offices on a rota basis and also from home. We have continued to meet with partners, agencies and people virtually through a number of digital platforms included teleconferencing, SKYPE and Microsoft TEAMS.

Children's and Adult Services have been able to continue working throughout the pandemic outbreak to meet the needs of our children and families, in Adult Services we moved to 7 days a week to ensure we could react appropriately to the issues being faced i.e. getting recovering COVID-19 patients home, ensuring our care homes and domiciliary care agencies were being supported and provided with PPE and reacting and supporting our NHS colleagues to maintain bed capacity within the hospital system. This has meant our Adult Services staff working on the wards at our community and acute hospitals including on COVID wards.

Our Early Year's Child Care and Play Team have played a crucial role during the crisis. They have worked closely with colleagues in Education to ensure school/child care provision was available for keyworker staff and the most vulnerable children in the borough. The Early Years and Child Care Team have provided significant support to child care providers during COVID-19 which has played a large part in 64% of providers remaining open throughout the crisis. Three of our Flying Start children's hubs remained open for children of keyworkers throughout the pandemic.

We also supported the community hubs set up for those shielding and vulnerable in our communities, our community connectors and supporting people staff have been instrumental with corporate colleagues in delivering this service to vulnerable people in our communities.

Despite the pandemic we have still continued to improve services, the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy continues to reduce the numbers of children looked after and at the end of March 2021 it stood at 200 down from 211 the previous year (down from a high of 237). The My Support Team have continued to engage with our most complex children in residential care by providing face to face support in line with public health guidance. We have seen a decrease in the numbers of children in residential care reduce from a high of 18 down to 13.

Social Services took over the operational running of the Community Meals service from the 1st April 2020, at the point of taking the service on 4 of the 7 drivers had to be shielded. We redeployed some of our community option staff to drive the vehicles and also due to the social distance rules only one driver could go out on a round rather than 2 staff previously. Since we took over the services the hot meals have increased from 91 meals to 128 meals a day on average.

The continuation of the Integrated Care Fund was very welcome news during the year as this supports key preventative projects across both Adults and Children's Services, it also enabled us to purchase technology such as iPads and Amazon echo's to keep families and their loved ones connected during lockdowns. In addition, the Children's and Communities Grant has also sought to address the support needs of the most vulnerable children and adults in our communities through a range of early intervention and prevention mechanisms.

We have been supporting our Foster Carers during these difficult times and we sought feedback through two questionnaires during the pandemic and we received very positive feedback about the level of support the Directorate had provided our foster carers.

The vaccination programme which commenced during 2020 has moved at pace ensuring our residents within care homes and their staff have been vaccinated to reduce the risk of transmission, this has moved quickly through the priority groups with excellent take up across Blaenau Gwent. As the year progressed in early 2021 then Welsh Government has slowly gradually reduced or eased restrictions and as we look forward then we will need to carefully consider the timings of the reopening of some of our services.

Finally, I would want to say a huge 'thank you' to all staff, as they have worked immensely hard during these difficult times. Some of them have been unfortunate enough to have caught the virus particularly during this second wave whilst we have had more access to testing. Hopefully they have fully recovered or if not are well on the way to recovery. Looking forward let's hope this year is one which sees us take control of the virus and a start on the long road to recovery.



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. Due to the COVID outbreak and available resources being redeployed to support the emergency response, questionnaires were 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 require any local authority to provide a questionnaire analysis.

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 in order to achieve this. Due to the pandemic this high level of engagement was not possible throughout the year however some examples are detailed below.

Consultation

- Foster carers have been consulted twice via questionnaires during the pandemic and the feedback is very positive about the level of support they have received from the department.
- During the Pandemic Provider services have consulted twice via letter to those who attend Augusta, Cwrt Mytton relatives and supported living. Feedback has been positive about the level of support received.

Engagement

- Involvement with Individuals, children and families occurs on a daily basis and is recorded 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 communication from the department;
- Unhappy with the way staff dealt with concerns;
- 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 the service provided by in-house carers; and
- Poor communication.

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 2020/2021 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 of the importance of sharing information between teams, staff and the importance of recording conversation and actions agreed. Regular audits to be undertaken to ensure compliance

Children

- Staff were reminded of the need to engage in clear communication with families and the need to be open and honest with them Staff offered further training to improve their communication; 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

The Corporate Plan 2020/22 is the Council’s roadmap setting out the vision, values and priorities of the Council. One key priority within the Plan is, ‘To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their Communities’. The business plans within Social Services are aligned directly to the Corporate Plan to ensure that the priorities can be implemented over the plan period. 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 were written to cover the four year period 2018/22, however, an annual review of the priorities and supporting actions was undertaken to ensure priorities remain fit for purpose.

Corporate Plan Social Services Priorities 2020/22 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 promote and facilitate new ways of delivering integrated responsive care and support with partners;
- To continue our programme of public engagement and respond in a timely and effective way to feedback;
- To build a collaborative culture between services, partners and communities working together and with people directly to shape and deliver services. i.e. (Community Asset Transfers);
- To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm; and
- To develop a partnership approach to maximising income reducing the impacts of Poverty.

Children’s Services Priorities 2020/21

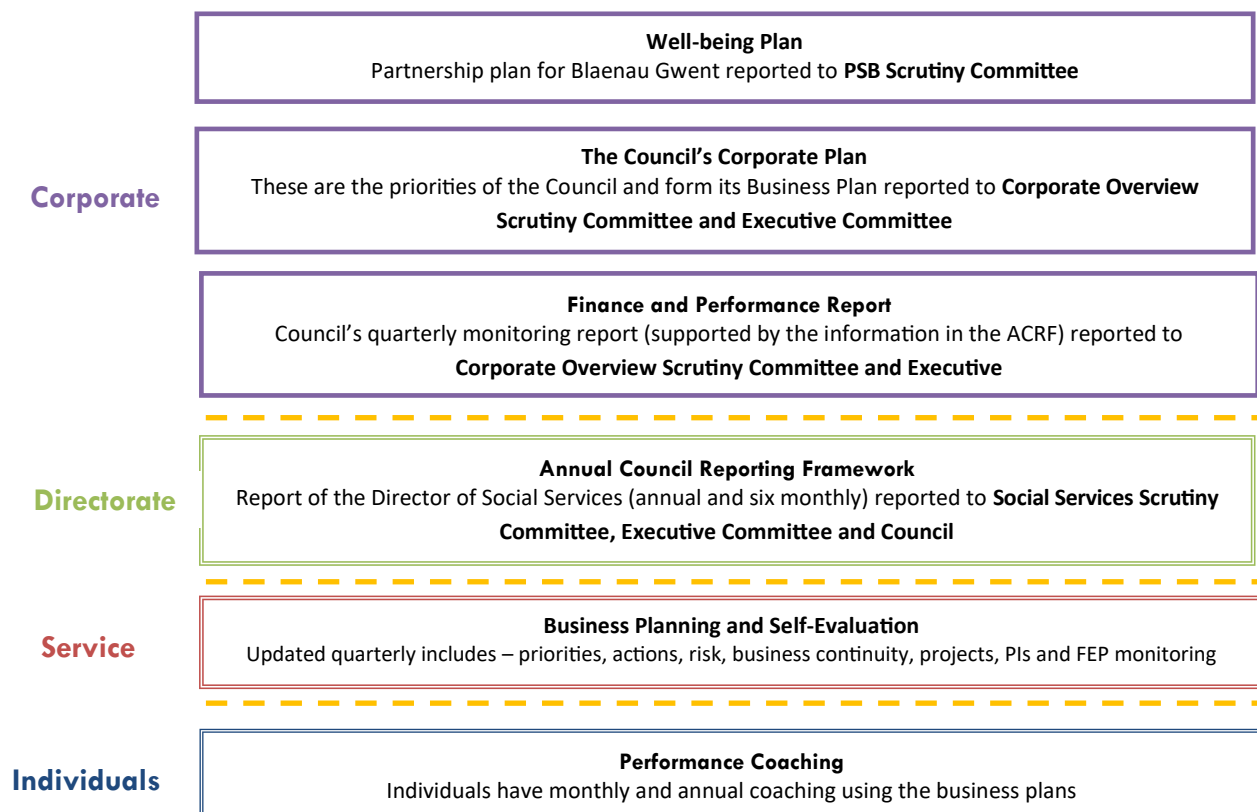
<i>Priority Title</i>	<i>BRAG</i>
Enhance screening and IAA provision (children and adults)	Amber
Support and encourage a cultural change across Children’s services by ensuring that community members have a say in what matters to them	Green
Implementation of the Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy	Green
Improve outcomes for Children Looked After by implementing the Corporate Parenting Action Plan	Green
Implement the Safe Reduction of Looked After Children Strategy 2017 –2020	Green
Ensure that all children in Blaenau Gwent have the best start in life (Early Years)	Green
To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements	Green
All teams to ensure the children and young people of Blaenau Gwent are safeguarded	Green
Manage the Children’s Services budget to ensure expenditure comes within budget	Green
Children's Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles	Green

Adults Services Priorities 2020/21

<i>Priority Title</i>	<i>BRAG</i>
Enhance screening and IAA Adult Services support at our front door - in line with recommendations within the SSWB (Wales) Act 2014	Green
Support and encourage a cultural change across Adults services by ensuring that citizens have a say in what matters to them	Green
Ensure that preventative support is available to citizens - promoting personal independence and reducing dependencies	Green
Ensure that we provide / commission modern, high quality care and support provision that meet both current and future well-being needs of our citizens	Green
To develop alternative models of support that promotes independence and supports well-being outcomes	Green
Ensure that vulnerable adults are safeguarded	Green
Develop and maximise opportunities for partnership working across Welsh Government Flexibilities Grants and Welfare reform related programmes	Green
Manage the Adults Service core budget and grant programmes to ensure that expenditure comes within budget	Green
Adult Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles	Green

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 2020/21, 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

Children's and Adults Services have been able to continue working throughout the pandemic to meet the needs of our vulnerable adults, children and families. This included continued engagement with individuals, parents and children.

The Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) service prioritised home visits to families and individuals in order to undertake safeguarding investigations and provide support to children on the child protection register, children looked after, care leavers and those children on the 'edge of care'. This service has continued to provide a timely response to all referrals without disruption. The IAA service have continued to enable citizens to access appropriate support including access to reablement provision that aims to promote independence and reduce dependency on traditional models of care and support. Throughout COVID 19, they have supported the Council Locality Hubs, providing support and advice to those people who were previously not known to Social Services but who required support due to a deterioration in their well-being or owing to isolation and shielding.

A successful bid for additional funding from the Welsh Government Integrated Care Fund (ICF) allowed us to purchase iPads & Amazon echo's to promote and install throughout Blaenau Gwent. This use and access of technologies has been extremely important during the past few months in not only linking our staff with their colleagues and peers but, importantly, using social media and other IT platforms to keep in contact with families, offering day to day support and supporting vulnerable citizens to remain safely at home. Where possible we have ensured that welfare and 'keep in touch' systems have been put in place using technologies such as community alarm systems, mobile phones, tablets and iPads etc as part of a loan system as part of care and support planning. These devices are popular with our Visual Impairment services as they have enabled individuals to communicate with family members via voice or video calling. They are also used to organise appointments, set reminders, order shopping and even use apps which read out letters or describe the home setting and people around them.

An extension of the Integrated Care Fund (ICF) for a further 12 months' (2021/22) has been announced. This funding supports key preventative projects across both Adult and Children's Social Care including; older people with complex needs and long term conditions including dementia; people with learning disabilities; children with complex needs due to disability or illness; and carers, including young carers.

There has been a significant cultural change in relation to adopting a strengths based approach to the work we do. This in turn has enabled the children and families we work with to have a stronger voice in saying what really matters to them. Social Care Wales have recognised the progress that has been made and, as a result, we have been asked to speak at an event promoting this approach.

The active offer of advocacy is embedded into practice and quality assurance meetings take place on a quarterly basis with NYAS our advocacy provider.

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

In many cases responding to the pandemic has strengthened joint working at local, regional and national levels, with more agile and responsive decision making and action planning being enabled. Relationships with providers have been strengthened by the continual dialogue, with local authorities and others, supporting homes with the provision of advice and updates, and sharing learning. Gwent Heads of Service have also worked very closely together to ensure the work of social services, being delivered throughout the pandemic, have been consistent.

The corporate parenting board has continued to meet throughout the pandemic via Microsoft Teams. Despite the disruption caused by the pandemic, progress has continued to be made on the action plan.

The Gwent Transformation Programme has continued to make good progress, with the programmes adapting their scope and focus to ensure they are able to support the local response to COVID-19. However, due to the pandemic, some of the projects under the programme had to stop, reduce their offer to the public, or redirect services. This has delayed the time available for these models to evidence success, and for their evaluations to be completed. Transformation funding will continue for a further year in its current format until March 2022.

Winter Planning is an integral part of the Health and Social Care system responsibility and this year's plan was submitted to Welsh Government, following development with all partners within the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) who agreed to recommend a number of the activities in order to support patients within the Gwent area. The development of the plan also involved colleagues across the Health Board and partners in Social Care, third sector and Welsh Ambulance Service Trust.

Collaborative working with our health visiting colleagues and education colleagues has ensured that all vulnerable children in Blaenau Gwent were identified and supported. Due to access to GP surgeries being restricted over the past year, we enabled health visitors to use the Flying Start hubs to undertake routine health checks under the Health Child Wales Programme. Also, close work with education colleagues ensured that all vulnerable children were offered school hub placements. The numbers of social workers in Families First who are aligned to schools to support when needs have been identified and take steps to prevent them from escalating have been increased.

Work has continued with the third sector to support vulnerable families. In particular working with Phoenix Domestic Abuse Service when dealing with domestic violence, Llamau when dealing with mental health issues and GAVO who sit on our Children and Communities Grant (CCG) Steering group. This group is responsible for seeking to address the support needs of the most vulnerable children and adults in our communities through a range of early intervention, prevention and support mechanisms.

During this period, adult services have also worked closely with our Gwent Local Authority Partners and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to implement Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for all discharges from hospitals to care settings, including a person's own home if they are to receive a domiciliary or reablement care package. We have also devised a similar SOP for admissions to a care setting from the community in an emergency situation, for example, as a result of carer breakdown or deterioration in a person's condition.

A significant change in service delivery for our disability team has resulted from an Evaluation by Worcester University. After listening to those that use the services it has been decided to change the team to 0 – 25 which will include children and young adults with disabilities going through transition. Those over 25 will be picked up by the Long term social work teams.

Protecting and safeguarding people from abuse, neglect or harm

Service developments have continued despite the pandemic. The police restructured Public Protection Services allowing the development of local, multi-agency, all age safeguarding, early intervention and prevention hubs. These hubs were piloted in Newport and Blaenau Gwent and led to improving: early information sharing; timely decision making; improved quality of Public Protection Notice referrals; improved integrated service responses to children and families; and timeliness of referral pathways and effectiveness of support and interventions offered by the Early Intervention Projects.

Social Work Teams have continued to provide services to all vulnerable adults, children in need of care and support, children on the child protection register, children looked after, children with disabilities and care leavers. At the start of the pandemic, all Team Managers risk rated their caseloads and only those identified as red (high risk) received face to face visits. These visits were undertaken in line with the regional home visit guidance developed, which was based on advice from Public Health Wales and Welsh Government. When the initial lockdown ended, face to face visits were offered to all open cases and this has remained in place to date to prevent needs from escalating. The teams have also used social media to support and keep in contact with individuals, children and families which has worked very well for some. If a person was deemed 'at risk' then they would always be seen face to face to ensure they were safe. We have continued to see children who are on the child protection register face to face for their statutory visits and we have continued to work face to face with children and families where there is a high risk of them coming into care.

The various meetings required under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures have continued to take place but by virtual means. This has seen greater participation of partners, however some individuals, children and families initially struggled to engage with the process. The department saw this process as crucial so worked with these to engage. Child Protection Conferences, core groups and reviews have been undertaken virtually as have all Court attendances. However, contested Court Hearings and Final Hearings have been postponed. A number of digital platforms have been used to undertake these virtual meetings.

The initial Safe Children Looked After (CLA) Reduction Strategy was a 3-year strategy and is due to end this year. There has been a continual slow but steady decline in the numbers of children looked after in Blaenau Gwent during the implementation of the Strategy with the number of CLA reducing from 211 in March 2020 to 200 in March 2021. The Strategy has been independently evaluated by Worcester University which supports the strategy review. The review includes a detailed overview of the progress made under each of the 3 objectives and a refresh of the actions required to continue to deliver these. It is recognised that the refreshed strategy needs to be longer term to recognise the significant amount of work required in order to continue and maintain the downward trend in numbers of CLA. Therefore, the next strategy will be over a period of 5 years. As a department, we continue to be committed to reducing these numbers further over the lifespan of the new/refreshed strategy.

The number of children on the child protection register have remained stable over the last 12 months and much progress has been made in relation to the prevention agenda. This includes the development of the multiagency hub which sits in the IAA team.

The Regional Safeguarding Board continued to meet virtually and increased its frequency to monthly to ensure safeguarding data is regularly monitored and so that partner agencies could share intelligence on emerging safeguarding issues in the region. The board led on raising awareness of the need to report safeguarding concerns across the region and lobbied Welsh Government to take a national approach to this.

Our Early Year's Child Care and Play Team have played a crucial role during the pandemic. They have worked closely with colleagues in education to ensure school/child care provision was available for keyworker staff and the most vulnerable children in the borough with three of our Flying Start children's hubs remaining open for these children throughout the pandemic. The team have also provided significant support to child care providers during this period which has played a large part in 64% of providers remaining open throughout the period.

Some staff were redeployed during this time to ensure priority services continued to be delivered. Examples of this are: the redeployment of staff to the Supporting Change Team to support those children on the 'edge of care', as this is one of our highest priorities and seen as an even higher risk during the COVID-19 crisis; and staff being redeployed into adult domiciliary care.

All CLA have continued to be seen in line with statutory requirements. When these visits have been undertaken face to face the necessary risk assessments have been done and protective PPE measures undertaken. We have kept in contact with some of our children virtually using WhatsApp which has worked very well for all involved. All of our CLA who live in Blaenau Gwent have been offered education placements throughout the pandemic. This has been a crucial resource and supported placement stability. We also ensure that each child had access to IT equipment to make sure they could access on line learning and our education coordinators have offered individual support to those children with additional needs.

Many residents in care homes, particularly those who are living with dementia, have required additional support during periods of isolation, both in their own homes and when living in a care setting. This support has been coordinated by our social care teams and funded by the Welsh Government Hardship Grant.

The Community Meals service is currently providing meals to an average of 122 people per day, an increase of 30% since April 2020. The service is continuing to develop and, for the first time ever, our staff provided community meals on Christmas Day to those who were unable to have family support due to the pandemic.

Our Community Options Service continues to provide a wide range of day activities to vulnerable citizens aged 18 and over. As at 1st February 2020, 185 people were attending Community Options (day services) on one or more day a week. As the pandemic continued, we realised that some vulnerable adults and their families needed additional support and required access to daily sessions at both Bert Denning Centre and Lake View. We have been able to gradually and safely open both these buildings for restricted attendance and sessional support. Subsequently, our Community Options programme of support has developed further as the pandemic has progressed and a blended 3 level model of service developed:

- **Level 1 – Specialist support at Bert Denning** for those who require critical support who have complex health needs including hydrotherapy session within the pool as part of a therapy programme.
- **Level 2 – Critical outreach activities** that support citizens to achieve their outcomes either within their own home or community around their home including accompanied walks in line with social distancing and lock down regulations.
- **Level 3 – Virtual support** including regular telephone contact and sessional digital support and virtual 'teams' sessions.

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

Work has continued to review and develop our services that deliver long term care, albeit within the context of working within COVID 19 restrictions. We have supported the most vulnerable people within our communities, many of whom have been isolating or shielding as well as supporting people who were shielding and living within regulated settings where they had been unable to see families or friends.

At the outset of the pandemic, day services and respite care facilities had to be closed to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable people, maintain social distancing and ensure resources were concentrated on caring for people in their own homes and care homes. However, we have managed to have the respite facility available in case of an emergency to prevent carer breakdown. This lack of availability of care home and emergency respite support has been challenging with all 15 of our Care Homes being closed to new admissions due to COVID out breaks at some stage. The redeployment of staff to provide cover when staff became sick or to provide more support due to staff isolation has been successful.

There has been a reduction in the care families require from domiciliary care agencies, principally driven by family members providing care while they are off work and the fear that domiciliary care staff may transmit the virus into their home's. It is felt that demand will increase as more people return to work.

Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly have established a framework of accredited and approved registered domiciliary care providers to deliver Support at Home Services for both Adults and Children. The tender was for new business only, so that existing care packages remained with the same provider thereby providing a continuity of care. The ultimate aim was to strengthen the domiciliary care market place by effectively recruiting to the local workforce sector and growing market supply.

Throughout the past 12 months we have continued to develop our Emergency Care @ Home service (DASH). This provides emergency support to avoid hospital admissions and also supports rapid discharge. During 2020/21 we secured £148,162 additional one off funding to support this provision, including supporting additional capacity across the private sector.

A partnership approach to both the revision of the Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century Strategy and the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Place Based Care Strategy is due to commence in May 2021 with a view to publishing the revised Strategy from April 2022.

Despite the Early Years Integration Transformation Pilot needing to be delivered in a different way due to the pandemic, we have still managed to successfully roll out the early transformation programme with the pilot having gone live in Cwm in September 2020 and good results being received.

The Children and Communities Grant (CCG) steering group has continued to ensure the 7 preventative programmes continued to deliver services. The 7 programmes which include flying start and families first moved to a hybrid approach of face to face and virtual service delivery, maximising virtual platforms and reaching significant numbers of children and families with support and advice during lockdown.

Just prior to the pandemic, Children's Services were given ICF grant money to deliver: Family Group Conferencing; enhance support for Special Guardians; provide support to the supporting change team to include psychological support; and enhance the Young Person's Mediation Service. All of this was delivered in 2020/21.

The work of My Support Team (MyST) and our 14 plus Team has led to a decrease in the numbers in residential care with children moving to foster care and in some cases returned home to parents.

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

Throughout the pandemic the placement team has continued to support foster carers. Face to face visits have been undertaken when necessary to support vulnerable placements but a lot of support has occurred by keeping in touch via phone or WhatsApp. Regular update letters have been sent to foster carers and a regular newsletter sent out offering advice on how to manage various aspects of care during the pandemic. Foster carers have been consulted twice via questionnaires during the pandemic and the feedback has been very positive about the level of support received from the department. Fostering assessments have continued to be undertaken and foster panels have continued to meet virtually.

My Support Team (MyST) has continued to provide direct interventions to young people during lockdown, including 24 hours on call and managing risky complex situations and young people. MyST has provided 22 practice consultations to staff, 2 ongoing consultations related to children currently in residential care with very complex needs and 25 consultation sessions for foster carers.

Virtual adoption assessments have continued throughout the pandemic with final home visits being made face to face. Adoption training has moved to virtual delivery and feedback from adopters has been positive. Children have continued to be placed with adoptive parents following well-structured guidance developed by the National Adoption Service.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, our staff have continued to work in partnership with our Housing Providers and technology developers so that we can ensure that we promote technologies as much as possible. Our dementia smart flat is currently 'under construction'. This will showcase home automation, a dementia sensory room and equipment, linked to the cooker, which can detect if there is someone near the cooker, food boiling over, switch the cooker off or alarm the monitoring centre. This initiative has been previously reported and is funded via Integrated Care Funding (ICF capital monies).

During 2020/21, we have continued to have good partnership and working arrangements between our Registered Social Landlord 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. Our Supporting People Team have supported our commissioned Housing Support providers to move to COVID secure ways of working. This has included working with the Housing Team to ensure support is provided to the homeless population and those requiring emergency accommodation by providing digital support as opposed to face to face contact. This has also meant providing support to those staff working in supported accommodation (housing projects, domestic abuse and homelessness). Despite the pressures that the staff have faced, we have remained actively involved in the development of new housing developments. The construction of additional respite units at Augusta Respite Centre have unfortunately been delayed due to COVID but we are assured that the project should be concluded by January 2022.

The creation of 10 young person flats in (Ty Parc) Tredegar is going well with 17 clients to date. Unfortunately, 1 bedroom flats are still in short supply and discussions are on-going with colleagues in Housing Strategy Team regarding the need to access and/or development more 1 bedroom flats for our care leavers. This is being fed into the Corporate Housing Strategy so it becomes a strategic consideration when bringing forward new development.

The 'Move On' panel has been a massive success with quite a lot of young people accessing and doing well in secured accommodation. A focus on preparing our children for independent living will be possible with an extension to Beaufort Road being created specifically for this focus.

How We Do What We Do

Our Workforce and How We Support their Professional Roles

The past year has been an extraordinarily challenging period for the Social Care Sector. An unimaginable experience for the workforce which they were able to deal with through resolve, dedication and commitment.

Workforce Development, as a support service, needed to contribute to the emergency response in whatever way the sector needed.

The year focused on

- maintaining the provision of essential care skills for the army of volunteers, redeployed staff, and new staff.
- utilising every method possible to enable the successful qualification of student social workers and registered care workers.
- being informed enough to know what the sector needed right then and how.
- being informed enough to help prevent what the sector definitely didn't need.

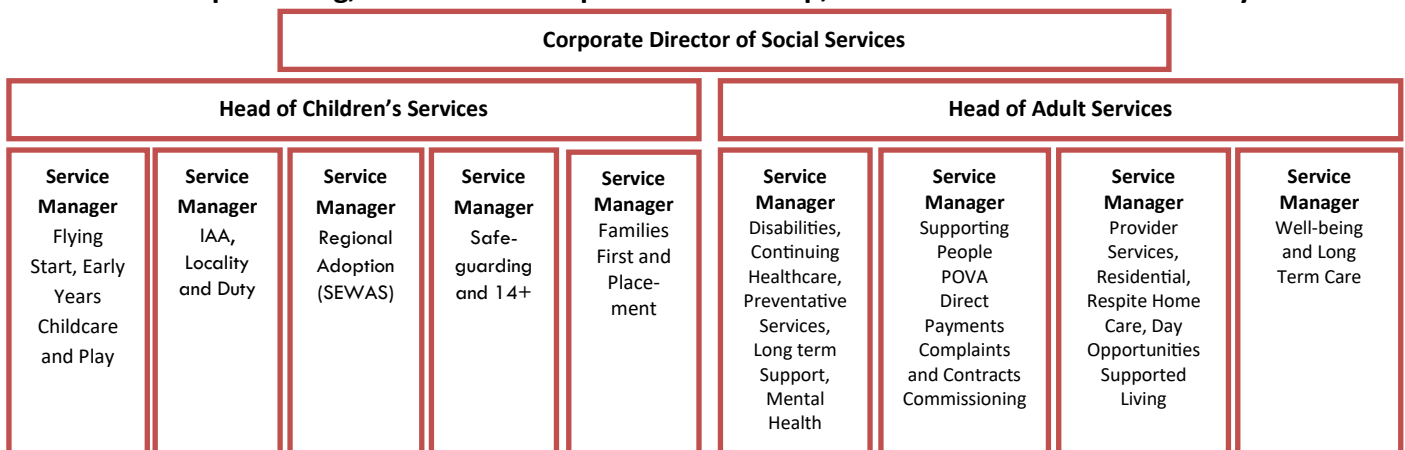
Innovative ways of delivering traditional classroom-based training were maximised. Early reaction to the need for a different model enabled the delivery of a robust digital based offering. Risk assessments, planning, and creative thinking led to a carefully measured return to the classroom for those skills just not suited to a full digital approach.

The changed preferences of the workforce have made a lasting impression on future delivery models for workforce development, models that better suit the workforce and the employer.

It was expected that end of year figures may reflect a downward trend for provision of learning. It is now known that the increase in digital alternatives balanced out the impact of cancellations and the lower participant ratio that had to be practiced. The speedy provision of easy to access essential learning far outweighed the importance of any data collection for example locally produced essential care YouTube videos had over 9,000 views. Any reportable figures do not reflect the true picture and probably only represent 50% or less of the supportive learning that actually occurred.

Benefits continue to be realised for and by the workforce through the scale of opportunity possible due to the joint workforce development service model hosted by Blaenau Gwent in partnership with Caerphilly.

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



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 2020/21 has been the Coronavirus outbreak across partner agencies and the effect on services. Secondly, the continuation of the Transformational Offer beyond 2021, in response to the Welsh Government's new long term plan for health and social care 'A Healthier Wales'. Thirdly, the reallocation of underspend for 2019/20 and the continuation of the Integrated Care Revenue and Capital Funds. Finally, it had considered the Integrated Winter Plan for 2020/21.

'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 2020/21 was £46.30m. This is an increase from last year by £0.899m. At the end of 2020/21 Social Services had an underspend of £1,120,905 and this is due to vacant posts, Support for Families & Vulnerable Children's, 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 2021/22 budget, Council agreed a number of savings proposals totalling £0.155m. For 2020/21 the department achieved £643,000 of savings.

The allocated budget and outturn for 2020/21 is provided in the table below:

Service Area	Budget	Outturn	Variance (Adverse)/
Children's Services	£13,247,000	£13,193,465	54,335
Adult Services	£26,118,120	£25,781,618	1,306,792
Business Management / Staff Support	£5,986,050	£5,821,682	164,368
Other Social Services Related Costs		£400,000	(£400,000)
Total	£45,351,970	£44,231,065	£1,120,905

The budget for 2021/22 is provided in the table below and includes Financial Efficiency Project savings of £0.155m.

Social Services Budget 2021/22		£
1	Commissioning & Social Work	3,562,250
2	Children Looked After	7,313,340
3	Family Support Services	188,600
4	Youth Justice	232,920
5	Other Children's and Family Services	2,315,910
6	Older People Aged 65 and Over	6,076,370

Social Services Budget 2020/21		£
7	Adults under 65 with Physical Disabilities	41,800
8	Adults under 65 with Learning Disabilities	3,659,130
9	Adults under 65 with Mental Health Needs	596,130
10	Other Adult Services	367,890
11	Community Care	15,659,600
12	Support Service & Management Costs	1,024,130
13	Corporate Recharges	5,212,400
Grand Total		46,250,470

Conclusion

The Social Services Directorate has responded to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past 12 months, continuing to deliver services, albeit in a different way, to ensure that our most vulnerable residents and children continue to get the care and support they require.

Collaborative work with partners and as a region has ensured a consistent approach has been taken to delivering services during the outbreak, in line with Welsh Government and Public Health Wales guidance, ensuring minimised harm of COVID-19 and keeping people as safe as possible from contracting this virus whilst continuing to deliver services.

Learning from this pandemic along with the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 will shape and influence future design of services going forward.

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 2020/21. 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/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=1157&Year=0&LLL=0>

Council Corporate Plan – https://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/fileadmin/documents/Council/Policies_Strategies_Plans/Corporate_Plan_2018-22.pdf

Blaenau Gwent Council Budget Monitoring - <http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=1148&Year=0&LLL=0>

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.uk/en/Home.aspx>

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.

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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.

