

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE – 18<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2021**

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

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**PRESENT: COUNCILLOR S.C. THOMAS (CHAIR)**

Councillors: D. Bevan  
G.A. Davies  
P. Edwards  
K. Hayden  
S. Healy (substitute for Cllr Rowson)  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
M. Moore  
G. Paulsen  
T. Smith  
B. Summers

**AND:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Adult Services  
Communications & Policy Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

**ALSO:** Sue Radford, Service Manager,  
South East Wales Adoption Service

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<b>No. 1</b>	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
<b>No. 2</b>	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>  Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G. Collier, K. Rowson and T. Sharrem.	

	Head of Children's Services	
<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>Councillor Wayne Hodgins declared an interest in the meeting as some of his clients may also be service users of the Social Services Directorate.</p>	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET - 7<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2021</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2021 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to update Members on the work and decisions taken over the last 6 months by the Regional Partnership Board, developed under statutory guidance Part 9 of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB Act) since the last report presented to Social Services Scrutiny Committee on the 22nd April 2021.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Social Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein and explained that the Regional Partnership Board was an advisory body and was expected to provide direction to any areas of integrated working across health and social care.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding the development of a children's residential home at Windmill Farm in Newport the Corporate Director of Social Services</p>	

confirmed that funding for the children's residential home would be provided by the Integrated Care Fund capital together with the ICF revenue funding stream to deliver the proposed integrated model across Gwent. The Member commented that it was pleasing to note that the long term objective was to get care closer to home.

A Member enquired regarding blockages in hospitals and raised concerns that people had passed away as they had been unable to access the required treatment and care. The Director of Social Services said that in relation to health and the ambulance service they now had an additional 40 military staff which covered the area across South Wales, to drive the ambulances, which freed up additional paramedics. This had been implemented approximately 3-4 weeks ago and would hopefully have an impact on being able to attend more incidents. Over the past 8-9 weeks they had been looking at measures to improve the situation and had been working with WAST regarding social workers in their call centre to give advice on whether a person needed to go into hospital or be supported at home with domiciliary care provision.

The Head of Adult Services reassured Members what they were doing from a social care perspective to ensure they could discharge as many patients as safely as possible out of hospital. They met regularly with senior managers in the Health Board and held discussions to escalate any patient that had been prevented from being discharged from hospital to look at solutions to discharge them. They had increased capacity to carry out assessments by offering additional overtime, weekend and evening work to social care and social services staff.

A Member raised concerns regarding staff shortages at the Grange Hospital. The Director of Social Services advised Members that he had requested a Members Briefing Session with the Health Board which would give Members an opportunity to ask appropriate questions. The Health Board had agreed to hold a session during February 2022 after winter pressures had eased.

With regard to recruitment of Social Care workers, a Member enquired if the Council's pay structure was comparable to other authorities. The Director of Social

Services said that across the board the pay structure was similar, however, some posts were slightly different in the delivery of services across the Gwent region. Recruitment was a national issue with staff in social care being paid the real living wage of £9.50 an hour to look after the most vulnerable people in the community. People could earn more money working in the retail or hospitality sectors with less responsibility.

The Chair agreed with the Director's comments and felt that more should be done for low paid Social Care workers.

A Member commented that staff had worked extremely hard throughout the pandemic and the Authority needed to be mindful of their well-being in the long term. He felt that in these unprecedented times the Authority needed to do everything it could to alleviate staff shortages and was pleased to note that the Directorate was looking at developing a number of initiatives to try to alleviate some of the pressures in the system.

The Head of Adult Services reassured Members that in relation to staff well-being and overtime, there were a number of part time workers who had been willing to pick up full time contracts for the winter period, particularly over the Christmas period, and had been guaranteed full time work until March 2022. This helped with sustainability of staff and also offered incentive to those staff who wanted to pick up extra work.

In relation to staff shortages a Member requested clarity on the Welsh Government guidance for self-isolation. The Director of Social Services explained that many staff, particularly on the frontline, work with vulnerable people and would not be allowed to undertake that work if they had Covid-19 symptom's or were living with someone who had symptoms. They could be redirected to work within the office, but this was not always possible and in some circumstances staff had to remain off work until the 10 day isolation period had passed.

The Head of Adult Services advised Members that new Welsh Government guidance relating specifically to NHS, Health and Social Care staff, and in particular Care Homes, would be forwarded to Members for their information.

The Chair referred to paragraphs 2.20 and 2.21 of the report regarding looking at a set of short term interventions to alleviate immediate pressures and longer term re-design how the system can work more effectively to reduce cyclical pressures. The Director of Social Services reassured Members that both issues would be high on the agenda for the next meeting of the Regional Partnership Board where they would consider options. The difficulty would be how to increase salaries and he felt this needed to be done on a national basis, if it was done on a local or regional basis this could have a huge impact on other local authorities.

In relation to recruitment a Member said that in recent months there had been a number of advertisements and job opportunities and enquired if there was an increase in the number of people taking up Social Care as a form of employment. The Director of Social Services said that unfortunately there was little increase. He explained that the Local Authority, the Health Board and private sectors were all recruiting from the same group of people who could choose the best paying employer and this was the reason for the issue to be addressed nationally.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Committee scrutinised the report and the decisions of the Regional Partnership Board be supported.

No. 7

**NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT  
2020/21**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Children's Services which was presented to report on the performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) and the National Adoption Service (NAS) for 2020/21.

The Service Manager, South East Wales Adoption Service spoke to the report and highlighted the three main areas contained within the report:-

- Recruitment
- Placing Children
- Adoption Support

In response to a Member's question regarding Life Journey Work, the Service Manager (SEWAS) explained that every child who was adopted had Life Journey Work, it comes in various forms and goes with them so their adopters would have an understanding of the history of the child, in a child centred way, and it contained all the information about the child's birth family.

With regard to recruitment for placements a Member enquired if the format for advertising could be widened, such as localised engagement i.e. a roadshow, when COVID restrictions allow. The Service Manager said that other regions had invested £6,000 in billboard advertising locally and had gained little response from that investment. A Marketing Officer was now in post and looked closely at where to invest money to get the best response and that was through social media platforms. She advised Members that recruitment for this year had doubled and they were above target for their recruitment goals.

The Member felt that with the Blaenau Gwent demographics people liked face to face interaction to ask poignant questions. The Service Manager advised that they also hold information events for the public to attend.

The Director of Social Services added that they had moved to a more digital platform for advertising with some success. With the pandemic restrictions they had been unable to hold some public events such as roadshows at supermarkets and when COVID restrictions ease they could consider revisiting this locally as it may work better for Blaenau Gwent than other areas across Gwent.

A Member said it was pleasing to note that recruitment had doubled this year and enquired if any marketing data was available for Members to compare what type of advertising had the most impact. The Service Manager confirmed that information was available and would forward it to Members for their information.

The Chair said that potentially they could also look to do some advertising in the locality hubs where people visited regularly.

	<p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the information be accepted as reported.</p>	
<p><b>No. 8</b></p>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 20<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2022</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Chair informed Members of some changes to the Forward Work Programme for the next meeting in January 2022 for the Committee to consider.</p> <p>The Future Model of Assistive Technology/Telecare Provision report be moved to the next cycle, the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy and the Integrated Care Funding report be moved to the scrutiny meeting in March and the Proposals for delivery of Legal Services for Children’s Services be added to the next meeting in January 2022.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing, that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2022 be amended and the following reports be presented:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposals for delivery of Legal Services for Children’s Services</li> <li>• Corporate Parenting Progress Report</li> <li>• Director of Social Services Quarter 1 &amp; 2 update</li> <li>• Social Workers Pay and Incentives</li> </ul>	