



Social Services

Annual Report of the Director of Social Services

Quarter 1 and 2 (April 2021 to September 2021)



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Introduction

Welcome to the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services Report of the Director of Social Services. The Report covers the period April to September 2021. The Report is used to highlight the key areas of progress and improvements that the service has experienced and is 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. This Report provides a mid-year review of the activity undertaken to date. A key aspect of the report is showing how the six Quality Standards have been implemented in relation to well-being outcomes.

Director's Overview

The previous 18 months has been the most significantly challenging in our life time. We have not witnessed a public health crisis of this scale and ferocity in over a 100years. The consequences of the global health pandemic mean we need to innovate and evolve the way we work and deliver services.

Although there has been a lot of emphasis on recovery, the virus is very much still prevalent within our community and community transmission continues to rise at the end of Quarter 2, although hospitals have been less impacted than in previous waves there continues to be significant pressure in the community managing the delivery of services within the continuing pandemic.

The situation we face has been exacerbated by workforce shortages which is impacting on our ability to function. It is widely accepted that key areas of social service functions are facing systemic challenges in a system that is facing unprecedented levels of complexity and demand. This, combined with fundamental workforce shortages, has exposed an already fragile situation.

Sustainability of the domiciliary care sector is of great concern to us, and the need to address the ability to recruit and retain this much needed workforce has never been more urgent. Especially given the competitive nature of the labour market at present, particularly our experiences of competing with the hospitality and retail sector. Some of this is related to the impact of immigration controls across sectors post Brexit. It is within these capacity constraints, that we are reliant on the willingness of the existing workforce to provide additional capacity over the coming winter months to best mitigate this situation. We know that our existing workforce are exhausted, reflected in the growing number of staff taking early retirement; we are minded that the wellbeing of our workforce is paramount and continue to explore mechanisms of support across the system.

We are experiencing increased complexity and frailty in older people from reduced prevention, medical care, increased waiting lists and a greater level of community isolation. We are aware this is a national problem and requires a national solution, however the shortage of staff in a number of sectors is impacting on pressures within hospitals, together with the pent up demand suppressed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Children Services we are also having difficulty in recruiting and retaining social workers in sufficient numbers across the sector, particularly in frontline children services. A growing mental health crisis in young people and in family instability post pandemic is also impacting on increased demand. We again are reliant on the willingness of the existing workforce to provide additional capacity to support this demand whilst we look at ways to increase our capacity but again this is a national problem.

On a positive note, we had a Care Inspector Wales assurance check between the 17th and 21st May 2021 and a letter of their findings on the 11th June 2021, there was positive feedback about how we had continued to keep people who need care and support and carers who need

support, safe and promoted their well-being during the pandemic. They were also very positive about our Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy and our continued downward trend of the number of children who were looked after by the authority.

It is important to note that the vast majority of our services did not stop and continued to be delivered throughout the pandemic, where we had to stop services these were within buildings and for safety and social distancing reasons, however as restrictions have eased then we have cautiously and safely re-introduced these through robust risk assessments which protect both users and staff. We may not be able to provide the same services we did pre-pandemic due to our responsibility to keep people safe and to mitigate the risk of further spread of the virus, but it is important we continue to look at new ways of delivery where we can meet identified needs.

Finally, I have to say a heartfelt 'thank you' to all frontline staff, managers and senior managers who have worked tirelessly over the last 18 months, many of whom are exhausted but continue to deliver services to our community. The last 6 months have brought some new and existing pressures to deal with, but as always they tackle these problems put in front of them and continue to deliver to the best of their ability, once again 'Thanks You!'



Damien McCann
Director Social Services



Cllr John Mason
Executive Member Social
Services

Local Political Leadership, Governance and Accountability

The structure of the Social Services Directorate provides clear levels of management and accountability. As a whole, the Council has a clear governance and accountability framework in place which all directorates are signed up to. This framework identifies how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create a 'golden thread'. This framework is complied with by Social Services who also have additional monitoring requirements as part of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

The Social Services Directorate is subject to audit, inspection and review by the Care Inspectorate for Wales (CIW). On a quarterly basis the Director of Social Services and/or Heads of Adult and Children's Services meet with CIW to discuss achievements, performance and key challenges. 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. There is also a Safeguarding Scrutiny Committee which is a joint committee between the Social Services and Education and Learning Scrutiny Committees. Regular liaison meetings are held with the Directorate, the Executive Member and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

Blaenau Gwent 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. Some Social Services collaboration includes:

- Joint Partnership and Workforce Development Service with Caerphilly;
- South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS);
- South East Wales Emergency Duty Team;
- South East Wales Adult Placement Scheme;
- Gwent Frailty Programme Integrated Health and Social Care Teams;
- South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB);
- Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB);
- Gwent Mental Health & Learning Disabilities Partnership Team;
- South East Wales Improvement Collaboration -4C's (SEWIC);
- Gwent Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) Team;
- Greater Gwent Regional Partnership Board;
- Gwent Regional Collaborative (RCC) - Supporting People;
- Gwent wide agreement with National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to provide children's advocacy services; and
- Greater Gwent Workforce Development Board.

How People Are Shaping Our Services

The Social Services Directorate is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens and uses various engagement methodologies in order to understand if the service is making the intended outcomes or if amendments to service delivery need to be considered.

Throughout April to September 2021 a variety of engagement events have taken place from the following Teams:

- Flying Start
- Placement Team
- Fostering Team
- Supporting Change Team
- Families First

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.

From 1st April 2021 to 30th September 2021 four complaints were received:

- 2 x Children's Services - stage 1
- 1 x Children's Services - stage 2 (currently being investigated)
- 1 x Adult Services - stage 1

The numbers are very low in comparison with other local authorities. The Service proactively works with the complainant at an early stage to seek an immediate resolution to prevent the complaint from escalating and, as such, do not go through the complaints process. Social Services has received in excess of 30 initial complaints up to quarter 2 but with only 4 progressing to full investigation under the Social Services Regulations.

Departmental Priorities 2021/22

Departmental Priorities

- To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own well-being.
- 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.
- To develop a partnership approach to reducing and alleviating the impacts of poverty.
- To ensure effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience.
- Ensure long-term sustainability is at the forefront of our thinking and decision-making, enabling us to work better with people, communities and each other, looking to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.

Children's Services Priorities

- Enhance screening and IAA provision (Front door) – Children.
- Support and encourage a cultural change across Children's Services by ensuring that community members have a say in what matters to them.
- Implementation of the Prevention and Early Intervention Strategy.
- Implement the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2017-2020.
- Improve outcomes for Children Looked After.
- 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.
- Ensure that all children in Blaenau Gwent have the best start in life (Early years)

Adult Services Priorities

- Enhance screening and IAA Adult Services support at our front door - in line with recommendations within the SSWB (Wales) Act 2014.
- Support and encourage a cultural change across Adult 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 Adult Services core budget and grant programmes to ensure that expenditure comes within budget.
- Adult Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles.
- Support our local environment; the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and our duty as a Council and as an Adult Services Department

Quality Standard 1 - Local Authorities must work with people who need care and support and carers who need support to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve.

Children's Services Self-Assessment – During quarter 1 2021/22 the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) saw a significant increase in the numbers of referrals received across all partners. Analysis of the data over the past two years has been undertaken to understand the increase in the numbers pre and post pandemic. This information has been included within a report identifying the impact that this increase is having on the service. The overarching message was that the number of referrals during the height of the Pandemic was higher than the referral rates the previous year. The total number and average monthly referrals has increased by 7.7%. Despite this overarching message, the report did not include detail of outcomes achieved. Therefore, a more detailed report is in the process of being written and will be completed by the end of November 2021 to consider how best to respond to this demand in the longer term.

Funding for additional resources in the IAA Team has been agreed until March 2022 from the Social Services Sustainability Fund. The long term plan is to make these additional posts permanent using the monies saved by reducing the numbers of children looked after. The rise in workload is presenting a challenge along with securing longer term funding for the additional resources in the team.

Children's Services has received feedback from the CIW who undertook an assurance check in May 2021. The following comments were made in relation to the outcomes culture in Blaenau Gwent and how the voice of the child is heard: *'Senior managers with staff and partners have worked hard to embed strength based outcomes focused 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. The authority recognises the importance of gaining people's views to inform practice development and support service improvement. We saw evidence of mentoring groups and peer supervision to share and reflect on case issues and identify potential responses to learning. 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.'*

The mentors programme continues with regular 6 weekly meetings where live cases are discussed and feed-back from families and children is included. In addition, the service as a whole continues to deliver interventions based on an outcomes/strengths based approach which has the voices of children and families at the centre of care planning. To ensure this approach is cemented in practice, each team holds group supervisions to hold reflective discussions on cases. The mentor groups still continue to meet monthly to share good practice across the service.

Assessment and care planning activity continues to promote the active voice, choice and control philosophy of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Outcomes focused and strengths based approaches to practice continue to be modelled, and NYAS remains an active partner in ensuring that children and their families engage in a meaningful way.

Quality Standard 1 - Local Authorities must work with people who need care and support and carers who need support to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve.

Adult Services Self-Assessment –

In order to raise awareness of advocacy and increase demand into the service via the Gwent Access to Advocacy (GATA) helpline an awareness campaign was undertaken. However, the Covid-19 pandemic halted progress and made it difficult to establish the true need and demand for advocacy across Gwent. Advocacy providers and the GATA helpline have highlighted that referrals are now returning to pre-covid levels with a marked increase in parent advocacy relating to child protection cases. Data is still being collated, but an overall picture of advocacy provision within Gwent is now being developed. This will help to measure the success of the GATA pilot and inform an options paper for future advocacy commissioning, scheduled in early 2022.

In 2023 the Community Health Council will be replaced by a new 'Citizen Voice Body' which should provide the opportunity to co-ordinate the provision of advocacy support across the health board in order to strengthen the citizen's voice in relation to health and social care.

Quality Standard 2 - Local Authorities must work with people who need care and support and carers who need support and relevant partners to protect and promote people's physical and mental health and emotional well-being.

Children's Services Self-Assessment – The formal consultation with Blaenau Gwent foster carers has been finalised and the outcome shared internally with senior management team, the Placement Team and with foster carers. The response rate was just under 17% with a higher response from the kinship foster carers. The consultation showed that the highest satisfaction rate was achieved, with support from the link worker and Placement Team (10 out of 10 from generic foster carers) and a significant increase of satisfaction with training and learning opportunities available (8.85/9.35 out of 10). An Action Plan has been developed and will be implemented until the next formal consultation due in March 2022.

Further work has been undertaken to progress the evaluation of the disability service, planned for May 2022. A longitudinal study by Worcester University is also planned to follow up the journey through transition from 14 to 24 years old. Both pieces of research will have involvement and contribution of children, young adults and families.

Families First hold mandatory reflective practice sessions on a monthly basis. These sessions are facilitated by the Team Manager and Clinical Psychologist on an alternative basis whereby members of the Team are given the opportunity to bring cases to discuss, share ideas, reflect on what is working/isn't working/what is important to the family, and how best to support the family to achieve their identified outcomes. Families First paperwork is also being reviewed to become more strength based.

Supervision is used to help support workers reflect on their practice, to reinforce an outcomes based approach when discussing families, including the 'what matters question'. This is then reinforced during monthly reflective practice sessions.

Quality Standard 2 - Local Authorities must work with people who need care and support and carers who need support and relevant partners to protect and promote people's physical and mental health and emotional well-being.

Adult Services Self-Assessment – There continues to be ongoing strengthening links between the Community Resource Team (Gwent Frailty) and IAA team. This includes close working with GP colleagues to support pressures across the Health and Social Care sectors. Close work is also ongoing with other professionals such as WAST, Primary and Secondary care colleagues to deliver proportionate assessments at the front door. We have continued to develop a Hospital Hub at Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan to expedite safe discharge from hospital sites. Working with Gwent Local Authorities to support unnecessary hospital admissions to the acute sites by enhancing the support provided by the Gwent Home First Service. The hospital hub is focussing on a model of 'Discharge to Recover and Assess' whereby a patient undertakes an assessment at home as opposed to being assessed in hospital when it is deemed appropriate.

Integral to promoting independence and reducing dependency on traditional care agencies, is the further enhancement of the Care Management, IAA, Community Resource Team and preventative works streams. In order to meet anticipated health and social care demands over the winter period there has been an increase in the capacity of a number of projects including:

- Commissioning additional third sector support from the Age Cymru Hospital Discharge Team;
- Recruiting additional health care support workers to increase the assessments of those receiving double handed care packages with the aim of reducing these to single handed care with new state of the art equipment / beds etc.;
- Increased capacity of Pharmacy support to enable citizens to be independent with medication.
- Increased availability of Community Meals service to include a potential offer of tea parcels.
- Reviewing all current care packages as part of contingency planning;
- Increasing the capacity of the emergency care @ home / DASH service to respond to urgent care packages, including where there has been a rapid deterioration on a person's condition due to declining health, carer stress etc.;
- Scoping the potential to implement a night time response service in partnership with out of hours GP service, WAST, ABUHB and assistive technology providers; and
- Reviewing the dementia reablement service due to low numbers of referrals.

One Domiciliary Supported Living Service Provider has been placed under Provider Performance protocols and an Action Plan implemented; actions; monitoring; performance meetings and visits continuing to take place.

Meetings are held daily with ABUHB to discuss the escalating crisis across hospital sites. Where possible, to avoid lengthy in patient stays, owing to availability in care homes, assessments at hospital are being prioritised for social work assessments and the availability of domiciliary care packages.

Quality Standard 3 - Local Authorities must take appropriate steps to protect and safeguard people who need care and support and carers who need support from abuse and neglect or any other kinds of harm.

Children's Services Self-Assessment – The numbers of Children Looked After (CLA) continue to slowly but steadily decrease. Welsh Government has recognised the need to safely reduce the number of children coming into care and identified this as a priority area. In light of this, Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money was allocated to each local authority in Wales, via the Regional Partnership Boards in April 2019, to invest in and develop services to safely reduce the numbers of children coming into care.

It is important to recognise that the success of the CLA reduction strategy is dependent on a whole service approach. The robust preventative interventions delivered by Families First and Flying Start prevent needs from escalating into statutory services. The Information Advice and Assistance Team provides robust screening and initial assessment of all referrals ensuring the appropriate action is taken to meet needs. All of the Social Work Teams work exceptionally hard to keep families together and work with families using a strengths based approach. One of the key elements of the strategy is to promote workforce stability. However, operational teams are facing staffing shortages. It is accepted that this is a Wales wide position and there is no simple solution. The senior leadership team is addressing how best to respond to the staffing short-fall from multiple standpoints; a separate strategy has been devised to consider short, medium and longer-term solutions (and considering the opportunity to collaborate on a regional basis).

The new Corporate Parenting action plan for 2021/22 has been finalised and updates given in September 2021. The Corporate Parenting Board meets quarterly and each January the Social Services Scrutiny Committee receive a detailed report on progress of the Board, including an action plan and separate report for Education.

As part of the continuous improvement plan, work has been ongoing regarding the pathway for Part 5 investigations. In line with the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures, strategy discussions, in connection with a potential person in a position of trust, will be held by the safeguarding manager. The safeguarding manager will then assess if threshold has been met to proceed to a full strategy meeting. The chairing of these meetings will continue to be the responsibility of the service manager. The new pathway will be in place by 1st November 2021

Quality Standard 3 - Local Authorities must take appropriate steps to protect and safeguard people who need care and support and carers who need support from abuse and neglect or any other kinds of harm.

Adult Services Self-Assessment –

Members from the Safeguarding Team are being based within the IAA each week in order to further enhance the service at the front door.

A three-year Strategic Plan was published for The South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) and the Gwent-wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GwASB) have published a three-year Strategic Plan covering the period 2020/21 and 2022/23. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has caused significant disruption to all services and communities across the region. Despite this, Gwent Safeguarding Board and Blaenau Gwent Safeguarding team have worked diligently to ensure that essential services have remained operational to provide support to the most vulnerable adults.

We continue to plan for the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) legislation as a replacement for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) and are delivering training as part of the Regional consortium in addition to increasing capacity at a local level.

There has been since the end of quarter 1 a shortage of staff in particular within the domiciliary care sector, due to increased wages and competition from sectors such as retail and hospitality together with pent up demand suppressed during the COVID-19 pandemic which has created problems for service delivery. In order to manage the expected increases in demand over the winter period, a risk management tool is to be implemented to prioritise assessments and care packages. This will be undertaken in partnership with ABUHB and CIW.

Quality Standard 4 - Local Authorities must work with people who need care and support and carers who need support to learn, develop and participate in society.

Children's Services Self-Assessment – A Full review of all Legacy commissioned projects is underway. Financial management procedures are being used as the basis for the review, focusing on outcomes. No underspend has been identified at this point of the year which requires realigning, however, there has been notification from Welsh Government (WG) that the Children and Communities Grant (CCG) are to receive additional funds as part of the COVID recovery, therefore this process will be fully adopted to ensure the intended flexibility of the grant is honoured. The CCG board will agree services to be provided post April 2022 following the CCG Board in September 2021.

Findings from the Community Impact Assessment (CIA) have been reviewed in order to identify the needs and demands falling out of it and how they link to the community element of the CCG.

A significant proportion of the preventative services delivered in Children's Services are dependent on grant funding which is allocated on an annual basis. If this funding was removed it would be a significant risk to the department.

Funding assisted places continues to be the priority of the Child Development Fund this is to enable children in need to experience learning from an early age. Take up of the offer is very positive.

Quality Standard 4 - Local Authorities must work with people who need care and support and carers who need support to learn, develop and participate in society.

Adult Services Self-Assessment – Consultation has taken place with staff regarding the reconfiguration of preventative services including the Support Worker roles within IAA and CRT and the Community Connector roles. It is anticipated the new structure will be in place by April 2022. The new structure will be resilient and sustainable and not be reliant on grant funding. Within the new structure, a Senior Practitioner and Senior Therapist will be co-located within the IAA Team to be at the 'front door'.

Capacity at Augusta House has been safely increased to support up to four guests. Work is continuing to develop new Augusta Promoting Independence Pods at the site. This project has been delayed due to complications with planning approval and increasing development costs, but the project has now secured additional funding from Welsh Government and should be open by Spring 2022. As part of these plans, the respite offer to young adults, as part of the transition planning from Children's to Adult Services will be increased.

The development of the enhanced Day Activities / Community Options Team has progressed well despite the ongoing COVID 19 pressures. Both the Lake View and Bert Denning buildings have safely re-opened but with limited sessional access which will hopefully increase during quarter 3. The outreach service is growing well and is successfully supporting citizens to meet their outcomes both in their own home or in wider community settings.

Quality Standard 5 - Local Authorities must support local people who need care and support and carers who need support to safely develop and maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships.

Children's Services Self-Assessment – As at 30th September 2021 Blaenau Gwent had 6 children placed outside Wales. This is an increase of 2 children (those children being made subjects of interim care orders and placed in the care of a parent). The remaining cohort of children placed outside Wales remains unchanged with 2 children placed with relatives in long-standing kinship placements and 2 in residential provision. Out of the 6 children living outside of Wales this is the long term plan for 2 of them as they are living with extended family members. The 2 new admissions to the care system have been placed with their parent as a result of a crossover between private and public law and it is envisaged that they will need to be looked after for a very short period of time. Therefore, in real terms, we only have 2 children looked after living outside of Wales.

The information above highlights that, as a Local Authority, Blaenau-Gwent bases care planning and placement decisions on the provision that best meets the child's identity and support needs with priority given to promoting a child's upbringing within their family of origin if it is safe to do so. The two young people placed in residential provision outside Wales are involved in focused planning to support a return to Wales in the future (if that is what matters to them) at an appropriate time for them.

In July 2021 Foster Wales was launched at the ADSS Summer Festival supported by the deputy minister Julie Morgan. This is a collaboration across all of the 22 local authorities in Wales working together to increase the number of local authority foster carers with the intention of ensuring all children who need to become looked after can remain within their local communities in high quality foster placements. This will allow children to remain in their schools and have easy access to spend good quality time with their families.

Quality Standard 5 - Local Authorities must support local people who need care and support and carers who need support to safely develop and maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships.

Adult Services Self-Assessment – Work is currently ongoing with Age Cymru to consider options for remodelling the service to increase capacity to deliver a 7-day emergency response team, working alongside the Domiciliary Care Brokerage service. This will then assist in responding to the current pressures in the domiciliary care sector by providing low level support to domiciliary care agencies and the in house emergency care @ home team (DASH). The service will also support hospital discharges and provide low level prevention support post discharge, to help alleviate the current demands facing hospitals and support people to return home with the support they require.

A submission to Welsh Government is being prepared for the anticipated Covid Recovery Grant and Winter pressures funding. The WG Carers Grant has also been utilised and provides additional support for unpaid carers through the offer of additional Community Options Outreach sessions and sessions with the Shared Lives Service.

The service is carefully monitoring the core budget and, in particular, the new ways of supporting people owing to COVID restrictions and having to offer alternative models of day support, increased staffing levels and increased infection control processes. The use of agency staff is also being monitored due to high levels of staff absences.

The Carers Lead Officer and GP Engagement Support Officers continue to support unpaid carers; providing information, advice, assistance and on referral carers assessments. They maintain a presence in GP Surgeries and in Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan and carers are also supported with one to one sessions and appointments. Data shows:

- 55 Carers supported with information only
- 29 Carers supported with advice and assistance
- 84 Referrals received from GP Surgeries
- 128 x 1:1 - Carers support sessions/appointments
- 30 x MDT meetings attended

A number of additional models of support for unpaid carers has been identified including increased support via the Community Options Outreach Team and Shared Lives Service. A number of enhanced support opportunities are also being developed, via the COVID recovery grant, to support unpaid carers including:

- Increasing the capacity of the Carers Engagement team from November 2021;
- Increased third sector support for carers;
- Blocked booking of respite beds to support carers;
- Increased availability of respite at Augusta House; and
- Carers 'wellbeing sessions' and peer support events.

Quality Standard 6 - Local Authorities must work with and support people who need care and support and carers who need to support to achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

Children's Services Self-Assessment – The accommodation subgroup now meets every six months as all actions are on track. The team has met with Tai Calon to plan accommodation for care leavers every January. There is still a shortage of 1 bedroom flats. This has been considered for a number of years but there is no appetite from the Registered Social Landlord's (RSL's) to develop this provision as it limits tenancing options.

The team manager for the 14+ team is a regular attendee on the Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) and Accommodation task group. Actions from these groups are regularly monitored and reviewed. The CLA education coordinator has successfully completed the Trauma Informed Diploma to inform and improve practice for our CLA. A number of schools across Gwent have also completed this programme.

The Placement Team and Locality Teams undertake parallel planning to prevent drift and ensure children are moved onto their long-term provision as quickly as possible. Placement stability meetings take place for unstable placements and the learning from those meetings informs service and practice development.

Quality Standard 6 - Local Authorities must work with and support people who need care and support and carers who need to support to achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

Adult Services Self-Assessment – The Service has recently recruited a Housing Support Worker who will be based within the IAA Team providing support to people with housing needs. The Community Resource Team continues to operate a home visiting service so that patients are supported to undertake preventative assessments to avoid the need for health or social care services. A pilot is being scoped, with colleagues from Public Health Wales (PHW) and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB), on delivering early public health information to patients who are at high risk of requiring a hospital admission over the winter period. This will enable some people to stay well during winter and is based on a model of preventative support that has been successfully used in New Zealand to maximise independence in the older population.

The service is continuing to look at funding options in order to increase capacity and enhance Technology Enabled Care (TEC) provision via the Gwent TEC group. A SMART flat is in development, within a sheltered housing scheme, to demonstrate the range of TEC available to support people to continue to live independently within the community.

An increase of £828,401 has been received in our HSG allocation for 2021/22. These monies can now be used to commission services, as evidenced in the Commissioning Plan/Spend Plan, to meet the housing support needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent. The following services have been commissioned:

- Increase in the capacity of the current generic floating support service to meet both the current and future demand;
- Increase in the in-house housing first provision to support individuals with complex needs. Currently, the team are working with 5 individuals, and the introduction of the 9 units at Cosy Place, Brynmawr will enhance the scheme and allow the scheme to be delivered effectively;
- A Crisis Worker supporting people affected by domestic abuse has been recruited. The support worker will be able to provide timely support to people in a crisis and will also assist in reducing the current demand on the domestic abuse floating support service;
- There is a high demand for the mental health floating support service. The current service has been enhanced by commissioning a Senior Support Worker, a dedicated Benefits Support Worker and an Asset Coach providing strengths based housing related support which is person led; and
- An Assertive Outreach Service is now available offering support to people with substance misuse issues residing in temporary accommodation and HSG accommodation based schemes.

The service is in the process of commissioning the following service provisions:

- A young person's floating support service
- A Housing Support Worker co-located within Adult Social Services Information, Advice and Assistance Team

The Greenacre Site development has been further delayed until Winter 2021. Pre tenancy support is currently being delivered to the tenants who will be moving into the new supported living bungalow on site.

Regular contact is being maintained with all care homes throughout Blaenau Gwent. Information in relation to staff vaccinations and testing is continuing to be collated and provided to ABUHB for analysis. Information on occupancy and bed vacancies is gathered and shared weekly on a regional basis, this includes updates on Homes which may be closed because of a COVID incident. The service is working in partnership with ABUHB to develop an Infection Control Support Team (IPAC) to support care settings with appropriate advice and guidance to prevent outbreaks.

Work is being undertaken with commissioned providers to review when care homes are requiring the support of the WAST within care settings and to seek alternative and safe support to avoid conveyancing residents to hospitals.

Departmental Priorities Quarter 1 and 2 – How We Have Performed

Priority Title	Self-Assessment
To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own well-being.	Children's Services - Amber Adult Services - Green
To work with people to make sure they have a say in achieving what matters to them.	Children's Services – Amber Adult Services - Green
To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater.	Children's Services – Green Adult Services – Green
To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support.	Children's Services – Green Adult Services – Green
To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.	Children's Services – Green Adult Services – Green
To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm.	Children's Services – Amber Adult Services – Green
To develop a partnership approach to reducing and alleviating the impacts of poverty.	Children's Services - Green Adult Services – Green
To ensure effective forward financial planning arrangements are in place to support the Council's financial resilience.	Children's Services - Green Adult Services – Green
Ensure long-term sustainability is at the forefront of our thinking and decision-making, enabling us to work better with people, communities and each other, looking to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach.	Children's Services - Green Adult Services - Green

Children's Services Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator Description	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Annual Trend	Performance 2021/22		
					Q1	Q2	Quarterly Trend
Number of children on Child Protection Register	56	61	52	↓	61	68	↑
Rate of Children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 population	41	45	38	↓	45	50	↑
The percentage of re-registrations of children on local authority Child Protection Registers (CPR)	1.87%	6.1%	5.2%	↓	4.5%	7.5%	↑
The average length of time for all children who were on the CPR during the year	277	295	219	↓	237	252	↑
Number of children looked after	222	208	200	↓	195	190	↓
Rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 population	163	153	147	↓	143	140	↓
The percentage of looked after children who have had three or more placements during the year	8.11%	10.1%	9%	↓	9.2%	6.3%	↓
Proportion of children's services cases supported by preventative services	61.3%	54.6%	59.3%	↓	56.3%	55.2%	↑
Percentage of referrals signposted to preventative services (children)	N/A*	8.4%*	10.1%	↑	9.3%	7.7%	↑

- Reporting started in 2019/20 and routinely from quarter 2

Adult Services Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator Description	Outturn 2018/19	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Annual Trend	Performance 2021/22		
					Q1	Q2	Quarterly Trend
Rate of delayed transfer for social care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 and over	1.16	0.98	N/A*	-	-	-	-
Rate of older people in residential & nursing home care per 1,000 population aged 65 or over	14.11 (196)	14.64 (204)	11.70 (166)	↓	11.91 (169)	12.40 (176)	↑
The number of adults (aged 18+) receiving a service in the community who receive a direct payment	127	120	111	↓	112	117	↑
Percentage of referrals signposted to preventative services (adults)	7.1%	17.9%	17.6%	↔	10.7%	13.2%	↑
Proportion of adult services cases supported by preventative services (New)	29.6%	33.8%	31.9%	↓	37.0%	34.9%	↓
Percentage of adult protection enquiries completed within statutory timescales**	93.3%	95.3%	62.1%	↓	60.7%	47.5%	↓
Percentage of proportionate assessments that led to a more comprehensive assessment for care and support - adults	64.3%	14.4%	44.5%	↓	42.7%	45.6%	↓

* DToC figures are no longer reported by Social Services. March 2020 was the last time the figures were reported

** Percentage of adult protection enquiries completed within statutory timescales – Change in Process from Oct 20 and new forms developed to capture more realistic data.

Case Studies

14+ Team and Supporting Change Team

Miss B

Miss B lived at home with both parents until they separated in her early teenage years. The family then came to an arrangement for Miss B to live with mum on weekdays and with dad on weekends. The separation between parents was not amicable and Miss B struggled with witnessing arguments. Mum would often support financially and emotionally but there was no help from dad and this caused significant tensions between family members. The family had a care and support plan put in place as there was a significant risk of family breakdown due to parents struggling to manage the young person's behaviour.

The Supporting Change Team completed work around relationship building and understanding what matters to the family. This led to the development of a family plan of direct work while utilising tools to assess the parent's motivation to change in addition to completing direct work with the young person around wishes and feelings, emotional literacy, consequences and expectations.

Miss B remains at home with mum and their relationship has improved. Tensions in the family have reduced and the parents now have a better understanding of Miss B's emotional needs and can better respond to these.

Miss V

Miss V was presenting as both verbally and physically aggressive towards her mother and younger brother. She was struggling to manage her feelings, particularly anger and also had several instances where she had been involved with the police. Mother and step father found it difficult to manage this behaviour. The family were supported to prevent the risk of a family breakdown as well as Miss V receiving educational support. Intensive support sessions were completed with Miss V, mother, step-father and grandmother. These sessions explored escalation, de-escalating strategies, PACE, managing emotions, fight/flight responses, upstairs and downstairs brain. Referrals have been made to New Pathways and NYAS following disclosures and education issues.

Following this support, the family are now able to manage Miss V's behaviours more effectively as there is a better understanding of her emotions.

Provider Services

Miss R

Miss R is a 31-year-old who has both physical and mental learning difficulties and epilepsy, requiring full support to manage her personal care needs. She is unable to communicate verbally but can communicate if unhappy or in pain. Miss R lives at home with her mother and father with mother being the main carer. Miss R uses a wheelchair, mobilised by others, and likes to spend most of her time out and on the floor.

The COVID 19 pandemic resulted in a lockdown of Provider Services. Miss R used to attend using the sensory room every day and the hydrotherapy pool once a week. These provided her with physical relaxation, exercise and mental stimulation as Miss R is able to mobilise her body more fully and independently. Throughout the lockdowns Miss R struggled with stimulation which impacted negatively on her overall mental well-being. However, since services have started to open back up Miss R is again able to access the hydro pool once a week and has stimulation with being around others and being in a different environment. Miss R continues to live at home with her parents who are able to have a break from their caring role whilst Miss R utilises the services at the Bert Denning Centre.

Mr T

Mr T is a 51-year-old who has a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, epilepsy, is registered blind, has a mild form of asthma, eczema, anaemia, high blood pressure, a hernia, limited communication and has learning difficulties. Mr T lives at home with his mother and step-father.

Mr T's diagnosis of cerebral palsy and his age means that an exercise plan in the hydro pool is important to limit the tightening and shortening of his muscles, to maintain mobility and enable strengthening and relaxation of the muscles. Mr T's posture has deteriorated and the exercise plan also prevents his posture from deteriorating further.

Prior to the COVID 19 Pandemic, Mr T accessed the Bert Denning centre four days a week and once a week had access to the hydrotherapy pool. A referral was made to the Critical Care and Support Team for Mr T to continue to use the hydrotherapy pool twice a week to maintain his mobility and posture as well as having contact with others and enjoyment at the centre.

Managing Our Business - Workforce

This year remains an extraordinarily challenging period for the Social Care Sector. The workforce continues to deliver through resolve, dedication and commitment. Workforce Development, as a support service, strives to deliver whatever it can to enable the sector to fulfil that challenge skilfully and confidently. Blaenau Gwent has been actively maintaining delivery, within safe COVID 19 related guidance, including:

- Induction, registration and qualification of the registered workforce;
- Continued professional development for social workers;
- Preparation for the registration of the Adult Care Home workforce;
- Heightened focus on the Mental Capacity Act in practice whilst waiting for the Liberty Protection Safeguards codes of practice; and
- Facilitating an all-Wales response to training/refreshers for Appointed Officers (APSO).

Alongside continued sponsorship for managers to complete national programmes, Blaenau Gwent has also delivered local programmes:

- Managing an agile workforce;
- Supporting the workforce to access and use digital alternatives and new processes;
- Regulation and legal updates;
- Current essential skills such as management of the wellbeing of others and self; and
- Generic management skills.

The level of direct entry social work students requiring placements is lower than the authority commits to support. Blaenau Gwent has partnerships with four providers of the social work degree programme, and they continue to show a pattern of reduced attraction and recruitment. There are currently six unoccupied direct entry first year placements across Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly. In response the joint workforce development approach Blaenau Gwent continues to invest heavily in its Social Work Strategy and the internal sponsorship of employees to qualify as social workers. It remains the highest investor in Wales to maximise the Open University route to qualification.

Heightened focus and support have been awarded to newly qualified social workers, particularly those that qualified during 2020 and 2021. Workforce Development is engaged in numerous retention initiatives during this challenging period of sector retention and recruitment. A full programme of events has returned using a full range of learning options.

Activity to support the workforce respond to the digital transformation has included:

- Linking with Digital Communities Wales to provide both digital resources and learning opportunities;
- Supporting management to provide resources and the environment to enable staff to access digital learning; and
- Playing a leading role in an all-Wales local authority project securing a fit for purpose learner experience platform, with combined learning management, that will provide equal access to local authority employees and non-employees who provide a service to the community.

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.

Budget 2021/22 - Quarter 1 & 2 (April 2021 to September 2021)

Budget Area		Budget	Forecast	Variance	
		£	£	£	%
1	Commissioning & Social Work	3,727,710	3,546,738	180,972	4.85
2	Children Looked After	7,428,140	6,876,898	551,242	7.42
3	Family Support Services	188,600	199,603	(11,003)	-(5.83)
4	Youth Justice	232,920	228,118	4,802	2.06
5	Other Children's and Family Services	2,340,130	2,297,228	42,902	1.83
6	Older People Aged 65 and Over	6,672,430	6,260,780	411,650	6.17
7	Adults under 65 with Physical Disabilities	41,800	23,577	18,223	43.60
8	Adults under 65 with Learning Disabilities	3,306,890	3,165,832	141,058	4.27
9	Adults under 65 with Mental Health Needs	531,730	522,314	9,416	1.77
10	Other Adult Services	392,250	391,155	1,095	0.28
11	Community Care	15,373,320	15,291,024	82,296	0.54
12	Support Service & Management Costs	881,130	812,132	68,998	7.83
13	Corporate Recharges	5,212,400	5,210,027	2,373	0.05
Grand Total		46,329,450	44,825,426	1,504,024	

Social Services Corporate Risks

Risk Description	Quarter 2 Update (July – September 2021)	Status
<p>CRR 4 - Safeguarding - Failure to ensure adequate safeguarding arrangements are in place for vulnerable people in Blaenau Gwent</p>	<p><u>Quarter 1 Progress (April – June 2021)</u> Safeguarding referrals have continued to increase in the first quarter following the return to face to face teaching after the February half term in quarter 4 in 2020/2021. There has also been an increase in the number of referrals in adults safeguarding compared to this time last year. There were more cases of abuse within the persons own home than previous quarters which may be a result of the pandemic and lockdowns. We are currently working on a safeguarding training programme which can be implemented in quarter 2 of the business plan together with the updated Corporate Safeguarding policy. High referral rates from the police and police force policy is such that any call outs undertaken where children are present at the address will result in a safeguarding referral being made. We are currently working with the Police to try and address whether this is necessary. Training for staff on Domestic Abuse is 70% complete and the remaining 30% will need to be trained face to face due to difficulties with online training (e.g. without access to ICT) this has proved difficult due to COVID 19 restrictions.</p> <p><u>Quarter 2 Progress (July – September 2021)</u> Referrals have increased with the easing of lockdown but it remains to be seen whether these will materialise into cases where further action is needed. A programme has been put together for Safeguarding training which was to be implemented in Q2, this is delayed as queries have been raised by CLT around delivery and cost. Safeguarding Policy has been updated but as linked to the training programme has not been progressed via the political process to date. Q2 has seen increased pressures within health and social services relating to employees taking annual leave after a difficult period during the pandemic, increase in numbers of staff self-isolating, staff off sick and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, particularly in the domiciliary care and residential sector. This will be the subject of a separate risk on the Corporate Risk Register but it is highly likely that these pressures could have a direct effect on safeguarding arrangements and this risk will need to be kept under close review as we move into Q3.</p>	<p>High</p>

Risk Description	Quarter 2 Update (July – September 2021)	Status
<p>CRR20 - There is a risk that increasingly complex needs and demand for services provided by Social Services and Education, in particular for Looked After Children, will put further significant pressure on the Council's budget.</p>	<p><u>Quarter 1 Progress (April – June 2021)</u></p> <p>There continues to be an increase in referrals in the first quarter following the return to face to face teaching after the February half term in quarter 4 in 2020/2021. We have started to implement the revised Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 to 2025 following its agreement by Executive. We are also working with Education to implement the new ALN reforms. The numbers of children looked after continues to fall during the first quarter of 2021/22, with the number now standing at 195 from 200 at the end of quarter 4. This remains a high risk given the gradual reduction of COVID-19 restrictions and the possibility of more children at risk coming to light over the coming months.</p> <p><u>Quarter 2 Progress (July – September 2021)</u></p> <p>Number of children looked after continues to reduce (187 as at 21/09/21) however there is a risk that the rise in referrals may result in more children coming into care. In adult services, cases are more complex and needs of the older population are at a higher level than anticipated as early intervention and preventative work has not been possible due to the pandemic. Discussions are ongoing in respect of a future collaboration with Caerphilly for the provision of legal services in respect of children's services in particular. It is anticipated that this will reduce the budget for legal services which is high in particular in respect of children's services due to currently being outsourced due to a lack of capacity within the Council's legal services.</p>	<p>High</p>

Risk Description	Quarter 2 Update (July – September 2021)	Status
<p>New Corporate Risk (links to SS10/12) - There is a risk that identified staffing pressures in social services will result in an inability to deliver services particularly in provider services and domiciliary care.</p>	<p>This risk is to reflect the acute pressures in the Health and Social Care System due to a “perfect storm” of multiple contributing factors. Increases in hospital numbers for heart attacks and strokes, increases in mental health issues and an increase in the deconditioning and frailty of our older population due to the period of inactivity as a result of the pandemic. This is alongside a workforce who are exhausted, staff who have COVID-19 due to opening up or been ‘pinged’ and self-isolating, Staff who are exhausted and are off sick which when coupled with the fact we are unable to recruit particularly to the domiciliary care sector and residential sector nor retain existing staff (many leaving for easier jobs in the hospitality or retail sectors and more money) and shortages of staff in hospitals and within the community e.g. nurses, occupational therapists, district nurses, rapid nurses. The Council is struggling to deliver existing packages because of shortages of staff and will struggle to deliver new package to new people coming into the system. Although BG has not currently had any hours returned to us, we are aware many of our neighbouring authorities have and it would seem to only be a matter of time before this occurs. The Gwent Strategic Co-ordination Group (GSCG) chaired by Chief Superintendent Tom Harding has been convened as a result of the blue light services concerns about the problems they were experiencing (i.e. the hour’s ambulances were stuck outside hospitals and therefore unable to answer calls and police having to transport people to hospital). A Tactical Co-ordination Group (TCG) Chaired by Chief Executive Paul Matthews (Monmouthshire CBC) has been convened by the GSCG. The remit is to pull together representatives from all parts of the system and determine a set of interventions that will help (in the short term) to alleviate pressure and commence a more detailed piece of work to look at all system components and re-imagine / re-design how we can work more effectively so that this situation does not continue to re-present on a cyclical basis.</p>	<p>Critical</p>

Glossary

ABUHB – Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

ACRF – Annual Council Reporting Framework

ADSS - Association of Directors of Social Services

BG – Blaenau Gwent

CCG – Children & Communities Grant

CIW – Care Inspectorate for Wales

CLA – Children looked After

CRT – Community Resource Team

DoLS – Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards

GATA – Gwent Access to Advocacy

GP – General Practitioner

GWASB – Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board

HSG – Housing Support Grant

IAA – Information, Advice and Assistance

ICF – Integrated Care Fund

LA – Local Authority

LPS - Liberty Protection Safeguards

NYAS – National Youth Advocacy Service

PHW – Public Health Wales

Quarter 1 – April to June

Quarter 2 – July to September

Quarter 3 – October to December

Quarter 4 – January to March

RCC – Regional Collaborative Committee

RISCA - Regulation and Inspection Social Care Act

SEWAS – South East Wales Adoption Service

SEWIC – South East Wales Improvement Collaboration

SEWSCB – South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board

SGO - Special Guardianship Order

SLA – Service Level Agreement

SPACE - Single Point of Access for Children’s Emotional Well-being and Mental Health

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

TESSA - therapeutic educational support services in adoption

The ‘Act’ or SSWB Act – Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014

WAST – Welsh Ambulance Service Trust

WG – Welsh Government

Contact Details

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