

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: JOINT EDUCATION & LEARNING AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SAFEGUARDING) – 21ST JANUARY, 2022

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR H. TROLLOPE (CHAIR)

Councillors D. Bevan
M. Cook
G.A. Davies
M. Day
L. Elias
P. Edwards
J. Hill
J. Holt
K. Hayden
S. Healy
W. Hodgins
J.C. Morgan
G. Paulsen
K. Rowson
T. Smith
S. Thomas

**WITH: Corporate Director of Social Services
Corporate Director of Education
Strategic Education Improvement Manager
Service Manager
Adults Service Manager
Safeguarding in Education Manager
Press and Publicity Officer
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer**

**AND: Education Co-opted Member
Mr. T. Baxter**

--	--

ITEM	SUBJECT
No. 1	<p data-bbox="352 284 935 322"><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></p> <p data-bbox="352 371 1490 450">It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.</p>
No. 2	<p data-bbox="352 501 579 539"><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p data-bbox="352 589 1054 624">Apologies for absence were received from</p> <p data-bbox="352 674 1034 965"> Councillor T. Sharrem Councillor D. Wilkshire Councillor G.L. Davies Councillor C. Meredith Councillor B. Summers Head of School Improvement & Inclusion Head of Children’s Services </p>
No. 3	<p data-bbox="352 1016 1318 1055"><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p data-bbox="352 1104 1430 1140">There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>
No. 4	<p data-bbox="352 1189 1390 1267"><u>JOINT EDUCATION & LEARNING AND SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (SAFEGUARDING)</u></p> <p data-bbox="352 1317 1490 1440">The Minutes of the Joint Education & Learning and Social Services Scrutiny Committee (Safeguarding) Meeting held on 14th July, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p data-bbox="352 1489 1490 1568">The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>
No. 5	<p data-bbox="352 2002 959 2040"><u>ACTION SHEET – 14TH JULY, 2021</u></p>

The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Joint Education & Learning and Social Services Scrutiny Committee (Safeguarding) held on 14th July, 2021 was submitted and the following points were raised:-

Anti-Bullying Quality Mark

A Member was disappointed that only one school had the Anti-Bullying Quality Mark and asked the reason why only one school had received the Anti-Bullying Quality Mark.

The Corporate Director Education referred to the explanation provided and noted that only one school had received the Anti-Bullying Mark, however, there was a number of schools who addressed bullying via the Rights Respecting Schools agenda. It was added that this initiative encompassed a number of matters which included the wellbeing of pupils, counselling support services as well as bullying.

The Member requested that a briefing note be provided on schools which were taking part in the Rights Respecting Schools agenda and wider programmes in relation to wellbeing and counselling work.

The Committee AGREED that the Corporate Director Education provide a briefing note on the wider work being taken forward across all schools in relation to Rights Respecting Schools Assessments.

Operation Encompass

A Member welcomed that the relevant information had been made available to schools in relation to incidents of domestic abuse. However, the Member stated that it was also important that other incidents which occurred in and around the schools were also reported. There was a great deal of information shared on social media in terms of anti-social behaviour and gatherings and if these affected young people in schools the respective schools should be informed in order to support learners. The Member was concerned that there was very little information being given to schools by the Police on incidents other than domestic abuse.

The Corporate Director Education noted the concerns raised and advised that information was provided to schools by 8.00 a.m. to support affected learners.

	<p>The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing that the action sheet be noted.</p>
No. 6	<p><u>CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.</p> <p>The Corporate Director Social Services advised that the report outlined the concept of Contextual Safeguarding and the approach being taken across Gwent and Wales. The Corporate Director added that the report had been requested at a previous meeting and thereupon gave a detailed overview of the key points as detailed in the report.</p> <p><i>A Member referred to point 2.6 in the report – “as an example, overcrowding at home means the young person spends a lot of time out in public spaces. When in those places, the young person is experiencing robbery and violence. These violent incidents impact the behaviour of this young person, and many others in school. The inability of the school to respond effectively further normalises violence amongst peer groups at the school. These peer groups have more influence over the young person’s behaviour than their parents – and impacts the capacity of the parents to safeguard their child from the harm they experience in (and the pull of) public and peer spaces. We must not forget to consider online environments too. These might be related, for example gangs using social media to track or groom young people, but they will have an influence on children and young people. Every situation and context is different but whatever the issues and problems, contextual safeguarding aims to help provide an approach to help keep children and young people safe”. The Member felt that this paragraph had been poorly worded as schools were a safe haven for some children and young people as teachers are trained to identify problems and therefore felt that this paragraph did not reflect the good work of schools in these instances.</i></p> <p>The Corporate Director Social Services advised that the wording was not a criticism of schools. The report was written based on the processes used in London Boroughs and larger cities. There are no examples in Wales and concurred that teachers are trained to look</p>

out for vulnerable learners. The Corporate Director stated that Wales would operate differently to schools in London who had tested this concept.

The Corporate Director Social Services agreed to look at the wording of the paragraph.

In response to a question raised in relation to the success of contextual safeguarding, it was advised that Bedfordshire University had tested the methods in London Boroughs which had proved to be very positive. However, the Corporate Director added that the issues in and around London would be more challenging than those in Blaenau Gwent, however the concept had supported children in these challenging environments positively and made them safe.

An Officer gave an example of how contextual safeguarding was embedded in processes in Blaenau Gwent and the positive work undertaken with Community Safety.

Further discussions ensued around the concept of contextual safeguarding and training to be undertaken. The Corporate Director Education added that if these methods were fully utilised in schools it would mean a great deal of additional training for teaching and Social Services. The Corporate Director felt that the work with colleagues in Community Safety placed Blaenau Gwent in a good position and the model could be adopted to fit Blaenau Gwent. It was felt that with it being a smaller Borough it would be less complex, although it would have a significant impact in terms of training across social services and education.

A Member welcomed the groups and clubs available for young people, however it was noted that there was nothing available for children who did not want to participate in youth groups or sporting clubs, therefore the Member felt that these children were being overlooked.

The Corporate Director Social Services advised that the Youth Service provision supported children and young people that did not engage in youth groups or sports clubs. The Corporate Director Education added that the Youth Service had a presence on streets in and around town centres where the children and young people were

gathering. The detached youth team was partly funded by Police to address the aforementioned issues and at present work was being undertaken to recruit additional resource and a restructure of working hours. The hours the team worked was largely evenings and weekends to improve their reach and support young people in the community.

In terms of the next steps for Blaenau Gwent, the Corporate Director Social Services advised that work would continue with Welsh Government and the Safeguarding Board and it was hoped that the Authority could recruit the much needed social workers.

The Chair welcomed this approach and suggested that dialogue be undertaken with the Assembly Member for Blaenau Gwent to gain his support.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).

No. 7 **SAFEGUARDING PERFORMANCE INFORMATION FOR
SOCIAL SERVICES AND EDUCATION –
1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2021**

Consideration was given to the joint report of the Service Manager, Children's Services and Strategic Education Improvement Manager.

It was informed that the report provided safeguarding performance information and analysis from Children's Social Services and Education from 1st April, 2021 to the 30th September, 2021. The information enabled members to identify safeguarding trends and areas within the Authority that required further development to improve safeguarding practices in order to meet the safeguarding needs of children and young people within Blaenau Gwent.

The Service Manager outlined the referrals into Social Services and noted that there was an increase, however these were being monitored on a monthly basis and advised that similar issues had been observed in neighbouring authorities. The Officer further outlined the key points in relation to child protection.

At this juncture the Chair invited questions from Members.

A Member asked if there were a high number of referrals received from the Police that had to be re-referred back to the Police as not a matter for Social Services.

It was reported that no referrals were returned back to the Police, if a referral did not meet the threshold for statutory social services support, there were a number of initiatives in BG around preventative services, mainly Families First, and a package of support would be offered to families from the lower tier support services, with parental consent. The Officer stated that there was work ongoing with Education and Families First support workers, looking at a model that had been put in place with social workers in schools, to evaluate if the model was working, which prevents unnecessary referrals coming into the IAA Service.

Corporate Director Education left the meeting at this juncture.

Councillor J. Holt left the meeting at this juncture.

A discussion ensued around social workers and it was advised that the turnover of Social Care staff in Blaenau Gwent was no different to that nationally or in neighbouring authorities. There was a large turnover of staff and in these instances it could be difficult for the family to build longstanding relationships. It was added that the Authority attempted to ensure that there was little disruption when social workers left the Authority and cases needed to be reallocated.

The Safeguarding in Education Manager gave an overview of the education information related to April 2021 to July 2021. It was stated that the findings reported were during the pandemic, therefore it was not possible to make comparisons as there had been disruption to schools. The Officer further outlined Numbers of restrictive physical interventions Numbers of bullying incidents reported which have led to exclusions Quality Assurance Meetings, Estyn Judgements, Operation Encompass, Compliance Reporting, elected home education. In relation to elected home learning, the Officer pointed out that there are appropriate processes in place to monitor elective home education with formal visits held to check on the suitability of education. However, whilst the number of EHE pupils overall had increased this was similar to the rest of Wales and it was felt that this was due to the pandemic. In conclusion, a further overview was provided in relation to DBS Escalations and VAWDASV.

The Chair invited questions from Members at this point.

A Member asked that a briefing note be provided on the timeliness of information being provided for school's transfers inside Blaenau Gwent and for pupils coming from outside Blaenau Gwent.

The Committee AGREED that the Strategic Education Improvement Manager provide a briefing note in relation to the timeliness of information provided when pupils transfer between schools inside and outside Blaenau Gwent.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager also agreed to speak to colleagues to ascertain how to facilitate the information from Police in relation to any anti-social behaviour incidents in school areas. The Committee AGREED that a briefing note be provided on processes which could be put in place.

A Member raised concerns around home education and felt that there should be more checks in place. The Member stated that due to the pandemic examination results had been based on teacher assessments and if young people are being taught at home they are not being assessed by teachers which would affect their results.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager noted that elected home education was a national challenge. exacerbated by the pandemic, and noted the various arrangements that are in place to manage this and suggested that further feedback be received from the relevant officer around the wider concerns as an action point for the next meeting.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

The Corporate Director Social Services advised that from a safeguarding perspective the Authority had raised these concerns with Welsh Government for a number of years. In some instances, the child was unknown to the Authority as there was not a need to inform the local school. Therefore, in terms of safeguarding no one was monitoring the child. It was felt that there was a need for a formal register and more calls during the year to monitor children's welfare and the Board had recommended this to Welsh Government but there had been no progress on the request. The Corporate Director felt that there was a clear reluctance politically to make those children safe in their environment.

A Member noted that both the Corporate Director Social Services and the former Corporate Director Education had pushed this issue with Welsh Government and asked if a reason was known as to why parents chose to home education their children. The Strategic Education Improvement Manager added that there had been an increase in home learning since the pandemic. The Member

appreciated the concerns and felt that discussions should be undertaken with these families to address their concerns.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).

No. 8

ADULT SAFEGUARDING REPORT
1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

The Adults Services Manager advised that the report provided Safeguarding Performance information related to Adult Services from 1st April, 2021 to the 30th September, 2021. The report also identified Safeguarding areas within the Authority which required further development to improve safeguarding practice and procedures for Adult Services. The Officer referred Members to the performance data and provided an overview of the current position as detailed in the report.

A discussion ensued in relation to data presented for care homes and it was informed that care homes had been severely affected by the pandemic as the residents were most vulnerable. The visiting regime was managed by the individual care home and different ways were introduced allow loved ones to speak to relatives. There had been a great deal of work undertaken around care homes and reported all around the Country how they had been affected by the pandemic.

A Member referred to the alleged abuse data reported and asked if cameras could be placed in care homes to monitor these issues. The Officer advised that there was a great deal of legislation and governance around the installation of cameras. A number of homes had installed CCTV at the entrance, although there were reports of cameras being placed in rooms it was a complex issue to take forward. All matters of abuse or theft were fully investigated.

Another Member asked if the safeguarding processes were in place in sheltered accommodation. The Corporate Director Social Services advised that not all sheltered accommodation was managed on a full time basis, therefore there was less protection on these complexes. If anyone was aware of issues within housing complexes it was important they are reported in order for the matter to be investigated

as there were processes in place to be pursued by social workers who would visit the individual.

The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).

No. 9

SAFEGUARDING - VULNERABLE LEARNERS

Consideration was given to the report of the Safeguarding in Education Manager and the Strategic Education Improvement Manager.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager spoke to the report which detailed strategies being used to safeguard vulnerable learners with Education colleagues and relevant officers in the Social Services Department. The Strategic Education Improvement Manager referred Members to the relevant performance data and highlighted key points as outlined in report.

A discussion ensued around free school meal direct payments and it was asked if a briefing note could be presented on the uptake of free school meals across all schools to ascertain where parents who were entitled had not taken up the support. It was paramount that all parents are encouraged to access the support available.

The Strategic Education Improvement Manager added that there was promotional work undertaken around free school meals and grants to help with school uniforms.

The Committee AGREED that a briefing note be prepared for consideration on Free School Meals take up.

The Committee AGREED, subject to the foregoing that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted (Option 1).
