

Committee: **People Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **6th September 2022**

Report Subject: **Proposal to explore and develop a Business case for Children’s residential provision in Blaenau Gwent**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Hayden Trollope, Executive Member People and Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Interim Corporate Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
	May 22	25.08.22			06.09.22	14.09.22		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek support to develop a business case to provide local authority children’s residential provision in Blaenau Gwent in collaboration with a neighbouring Authority.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 In its Programme for Government, Welsh Ministers have made a commitment to *‘eliminate private profit from the care of looked after children by the end of the Senedd term’*. This is a top priority commitment for this Government and one which requires a range of partners and expertise to deliver.

2.2 To implement this commitment a Programme Board has been established and is chaired by the Chief Social Care Officer for Wales, the All Wales Heads of Childrens Services are represented on this Board.

2.3 The Programme Board agrees that children and young people need services, care and support that enable them to grow and develop, flourish and thrive. Usually, this will mean they need to be close to their families and communities. This will be a key feature of the Programme, finding ways in which children and young people can more often be accommodated and cared for closer to home.

2.4 Too often children are placed out of county or out of country, at great expense, removing them further from their families and social networks. There is a strong commitment from Government to changing the shape of the placement market in Wales and to redefine how we care for children in Wales.

- 2.5 Blaenau Gwent is heavily dependent on private providers to meet the needs of our children who require residential care. In order to change this position, the Gwent Heads of Children's Services agreed some years ago that Newport and Caerphilly local authorities would increase their residential provision in order to accommodate the needs of the other 3 Gwent Authorities. The rationale for this was Newport and Caerphilly have long standing experience and expertise in providing quality residential care for children with complex needs. Despite those two authorities increasing their residential provision over recent years, their own Local Authority demand has increased resulting in minimal provision being offered to the other Gwent Authorities. Blaenau Gwent currently has one child placed in a residential home in Newport. The other 11 children in residential care are placed with private providers.
- 2.6 In light of the lack of available resource and in line with Welsh Governments commitment to '*eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after*' as a local authority we now have to think differently about how we provide residential care for our children.
- 2.7 To support us in our thinking Welsh Government has developed a new **Health and Social Care Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund** that focuses on, amongst other things, supporting the rebalancing of the social care market.
- 2.8 This Capital Fund can be used to invest in local authority residential homes to ensure they are able to meet individuals more complex needs closer to home. The capital fund can be accessed via the Regional Partnership Board. The Regional Partnership Board has been asked to develop a 5-10 yr. strategic investment plan alongside the Area Plan which is due for publication by April 2023.
- 2.9 This capital fund will give the local authority the financial resource to purchase an appropriate property within Blaenau Gwent with the purpose of changing it to provide, safe, high-quality care for our children without the need to be removed from their local schools, social networks and above all provide much better opportunities for them to maintain quality time with their families.
- 2.10 As Blaenau Gwent Social Services department do not have the expertise or capacity to manage their own children's residential provision, we would need to explore our neighbouring authorities supporting us in this role and managing the provision on our behalf.
- 2.11 Blaenau Gwent has a strong collaborative history working with our neighbouring authorities
- 2.12 If any collaboration is agreed, it will take approximately 18 months – 2 yrs to make the bid for capital funding, identify and purchase the property in Blaenau Gwent and undertake alterations to ensure it complies with the

Care Inspectorate Wales Regulations to be registered as a children's home.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 **Option 1**

The Scrutiny Committee recommend that the Executive Committee agree to the development of a business case to deliver local authority residential placements for children looked after; and to enter into a collaborative arrangement with a neighbouring authority for them to provide the management, staffing and oversight required to provide quality residential care for our children looked after. This will reduce our reliance on private childcare providers, provide care closer to home for our children looked after and remove the profit element included within the current charges made by private providers.

3.2 **Option 2**

To not recommend to the Executive Committee to the development of a business case to create local authority residential placements for children looked after or agree to the collaborative arrangement but continue to use private residential providers with of Blaenau Gwent children having to be placed outside the borough.

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

If option 1 is agreed, it will contribute to the following corporate priorities

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities;
- To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm.

5. ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

5.1 During 2019/20 and 2020/21 the Council has incurred costs in excess of £2m per annum (£2.5M & £2M respectively) on residential placements for Children Looked After. Costs have been reducing as a result of lower numbers of children requiring residential provision however the local authority will always need to provide residential care for some children.

5.2 The average cost of a child being looked after in residential care over the past 2 years is outlined in Figure 1. The average costs of providing *local authority* residential care is very similar to the average costs that Blaenau Gwent pays for *private care*. However, what is different is the quality of care provided and the fact that that care will be provided closer to home which will improve outcomes for children.

Figure 1

	Average Private Cost Per week	Average Local Authority Cost Per week
2019/2020	£4,694	-
2020/2021	£4,199	£4,600

5.3 It is estimated that the running costs of the facility will include:-

- Staff costs – paid via an SLA to neighbouring authority for providing the day to day care, running and management oversight of the home which is required from the Care Inspectorate Wales.
- Premises costs – building maintenance, cleaning, insurance etc.
- Supplies & Services

5.4 Current assumptions are that the costs per child would be similar to current costs being incurred and therefore the revenue costs for running the children’s home can be met from the Council’s existing residential budget (the revenue costs of operating the children’s home replacing the costs of some out of county residential placements).

5.5 The current plan is to source a home in Blaenau Gwent that can accommodate 4 children.

5.6 We would initially look to place new children who require residential care in this new home alongside identifying which children currently in residential care we could move closer to home.

5.7 If option 1 is agreed this will not necessarily result in cost savings but it will result in more effective use of resources. Children will be living in Blaenau Gwent and the costs of facilitating family time and social work travelling time will undoubtedly be reduced.

5.8 The capital costs for the purchase and alteration to the home to ensure it meets regulations would be met by the capital grant available from the Health and Social Care Integration and Rebalancing Capital Fund. We are expecting to bid for £750K capital.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

The numbers of children in residential care have varied significantly over the years ranging from **6** children in 2013 to an all -time high of **18** in May 2019. The council agreed to the establishment of the My Support Team in June 2019. This team had the specific remit to work with children in residential care to move them onto foster care, plus, work with children

who are at risk of going into residential care. The work of this team alongside the child care team as seen a reduction of children in residential care reducing to **12** as at end of March 2022. However we will always need residential provision for a number of children with complex needs.

6.2 ***Expected outcome for the public***

The impact of having Blaenau Gwent residential provision will improve outcomes for children looked after. This means more and better quality family time, maintaining their school placement and peer relationships.

6.3 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***

The CIW undertook an inspection of local authority and private residential provision. The outcome was that local authority residential provision was much better quality than private with great stability of the workforce and improved outcomes for children. A child in a local authority home shared that this was the first time she had felt safe.

6.4 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

Blaenau Gwent has never had its own children's residential provision so need to rely on the expertise of another local authority to provide the day to day care and management oversight at this time. However, over time we will gain this expertise by working with a neighbouring authority which could result in us taking over responsibility for the day to day running of the home in the longer term

6.5 ***Preventative focus***

Preventing children from being placed outside of Blaenau Gwent who need care is a positive outcome in itself and will prevent the breakdown of important relationships

6.6 ***Collaboration / partnership working***

Working with a neighbouring authority is a positive and necessary collaboration to ensure this plan is realised

6.6 ***Integration (across service areas)***

6.7 ***EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***

Looked after children often have many of the protected characteristics from the Equality Act 2010. The proposal in this report will not have a negative impact on any of these groups but will certainly impact positively on many of them.

7. ***Monitoring Arrangements***

If this report is approved an action will be added to our Child Looked after Reduction strategy which is reported in within the directorate business plans.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

N/A