



Social Services

Annual Report of the Director of Social Services

Quarter 1 and 2 (April 2022 to September 2022)



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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 2022. 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 first 2 quarters of 22/23 has seen a great deal of change for the Council and the Social Services Directorate. The council has a new political administration which in turn has led to a change in the executive member for social services. Councillor Trollope is now our Executive Member bringing his previous years of being executive member of social services with him. We have seen a change in the way scrutiny committees have been designed. Social Services now report to the PEOPLE scrutiny committee to which our Education Directorate also report. Time is being taken to develop a new corporate plan to set the vision and priorities to take us through to 2027.

The change has also extended to the senior leadership of the Social Services Directorate. With myself Tanya Evans taking up the role of Interim Director and Alison Ramshaw stepping up as Interim Head of Children's services. Inevitably this change has caused some ripples due to the back filling arrangements but this has not impacted on service delivery. As a Directorate we have reviewed our Directorate priorities alongside the priorities for both children's and adult services. It is no surprise to see that both areas have very similar priorities in relation to safeguarding, workforce, the preventative agenda and the sustainability of services. With budget pressures looming due to meeting the cost of dealing with the pandemic and the starting of a cost of living crisis we anticipate some difficult time ahead.

The social services workforce has been working as hard as ever in the first 2 quarters of this year and have much to be proud of in relation to what has been achieved. Some of the achievements include

- Successful staff recruitment to areas we have been struggling to recruit to for some time
- The adult services new IAA structure went live in April 22 and is no longer reliant on grant funding
- Cwrt Mytton our residential home for people with dementia has been able to open back up to visitors following the pandemic and have held numerous successful events which have been shared on social media
- The Commissioning Team have continued to support the external sector by passporting the numerous grants received from Welsh Government
- We have opened our new SMART flat and progressing the use of technology to support people in Blaenau Gwent to remain independent and living at home for as long as possible.
- Community Meals take up is increasing including our 'tea time trays'
- We have maintained a strong outcomes based approach to the way in which we deliver practice ensuring we hear about "What Matters" to the people we serve balancing their rights and responsibilities
- Augusta House respite provision has been extended to include Children
- The 14 plus Team won a social care accolade for building brighter futures for children and families
- The child care and play sufficiency assessments have successfully been completed with 5-year action plan in place
- We have seen the launch of our own BG MyST which works intensively with children with complex needs to prevent them entering residential care and working with those in residential care to support their return to foster care or their families.
- The joint Youth Offending Services we have with Caerphilly had a positive inspection

- Our Children Looked After numbers continue to remain stable
- We have successfully placed 6 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children under the National Transfer Scheme

There are many challenges to be faced in Qtr. 3 and 4 of 22/23. We are starting to see a significant rise in the cost of living. If this continues it will naturally have a bigger impact on the people of Blaenau Gwent where deprivation levels are already extremely high. We will also be informed of the budget settlement we will receive from Welsh Government which will no doubt lead to prioritising and re prioritising of the services we deliver. That said we have much to deliver before the end of the financial year which includes

- The opening of the Augusta House reablement PODS which will give people with learning difficulties the opportunity to develop their independence skills in a purpose built supported environment
- We will be using new electric vehicles for Community Meals and home care to support the climate crisis agenda
- We will be Increasing our step up / down (CARIAD beds) including purpose built bariatric facility
- Review of our Community Resource Team structure
- Implementation of the new operating model for the children locality teams
- Looking to purchase our first residential home for children looked after
- Roll out of new flying start areas



**Tanya
Evans**
Interim
Corporate
Director of
Social
Services



**Haydn
Trollope**
Cabinet
Member for
People and
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 Cabinet Member who has portfolio responsibility for Social Services as a whole. The Directorate is scrutinised by the People Scrutiny Committee. Regular liaison meetings are held with the Directorate, the Cabinet 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 2022 a variety of engagement events have taken place and include the following

- Summer of Fun activities
- National Play Day
- Men's Health Week
- Child Safety Week
- Summer Platinum Jubilee events in Cwrt Mytton
- A Gwent regional stakeholder consultation
- National Children's Day - promoting the importance of a healthy childhood and the rights of a child
- National Smile Month

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 2022 to 30th September 2022 we have received no official complaints. Social Services complaints are dealt with 'informally' where possible as per Welsh Government guidance



Departmental Priorities 2022/23

Departmental Priorities

- To recruit and retain an appropriately skilled and qualified workforce to deliver quality services
- 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 have 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.

Children's Services Priorities

- Ensure all children are safeguarded
- Ensure we have an appropriately skilled, motivated and supported workforce with clear career development pathways in place that support our service delivery
- Ensure all teams deliver an outcomes based approach to practice and service delivery
- Ensure that we provide / commission modern, flexible, cost effective high quality support services that meet both current and future well-being needs of children
- Ensure that preventative support is available for children and their families, that promote early intervention and prevents needs from escalating.
- Manage the Children's Services budget to ensure expenditure comes within budget
- Ensure the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 – 2025 actions are regularly monitored and reviewed
- Ensure outcomes for children looked after continue to improve through the implementation of the Corporate Parenting action plan
- Review the way in which children's services operates and decide if a change is necessary in order to manage demand and workload.
- Children's Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles

Adult Services Priorities

- Ensure all adults are safeguarded
- Ensure we have an appropriately skilled, motivated and supported workforce with clear career development pathways in place that support our service delivery
- Ensure all teams deliver an outcomes based approach to practice and service delivery
- Ensure that we provide / commission modern, flexible, cost effective high quality support services that meet both current and future well-being needs of vulnerable adults and their unpaid family carers
- Ensure that preventative support is available for adults and their unpaid carers, that promote and maintain personal independence
- Budget
- Undertake a review of the current model of Community Options
- Adult Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles

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 2022/23 referrals into the Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service continue to rise. IAA Service continues to approach referrals in an outcomes manner by establishing what matters to the customer.

A meeting has been arranged to discuss how the Family Information Service (FIS) can link into IAA and Families First Community Engagement Officers can support FIS and vice versa. Families First workers will also be linked to the flying start hubs. Flying Start has rolled out into Rassau as phase 1 of the roll out, phase 2 will happen after April 2023.

Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales, will undertake an inspection of Blaenau Gwent's Local Government Education Services later in the year. As part of this a number of areas, linked to education and supporting the work of children and young people will also be inspected and this will include Safeguarding Flying Start, Early Years and Play Service.

By end of the period, an Induction Programme was developed and advertised for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) as part of the 2021 and 2022 cohorts. The first sessions started in June 2022 and will continue on a weekly basis. Feedback from the sessions revealed that the cohort of newly qualified social workers found the sessions extremely beneficial and that they felt much more prepared to carry out their roles confidently.

An offer of advocacy has been made to all new Children Looked After and those children on the child protection register. Capacity issues being experienced within the Locality Teams had an impact on the timeliness of referrals, however they have now all been done. As appropriate, cases have been presented to the Complex Needs Panel in order to access the relevant resources required and to ensure a multi-agency input in managing and progressing care plans.

Attendance at mentor's meetings which promote the outcome approach to practice has continued to be good with representation across all service areas. Live cases are discussed and feedback from families and children are included. Monthly reflective practice sessions continue in each of the service areas and refresher training is available to all staff through Workforce Development. New staff have attended training sessions on Collaborative Communication and accessed other learning opportunities available in order to support outcome focused practice, and deliver interventions based on an outcomes/strengths based approach, which has the voices of children and families at the centre of care planning.

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 –

As in Children's Services, new staff into Adult Services have attended training sessions on What Matters and Balancing Rights and Responsibilities. and accessed other learning opportunities available, in order to support outcome focused practice, and deliver interventions based on an outcomes/strengths based approach. Adult Service staff have been undertaking this training collaboratively with colleagues from Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) as part of the project facilitated by Social Care Wales (SCW) and there has been a strong emphasis on assessments within our acute and community settings. This work is due to be evaluated by SCW in the Autumn of 2022 and a report produced in relation to good practice.

A new structure for the IAA Team was introduced in April 2022 and performance measure reported during 2022/23 quarters 1 and 2 are already indicating that 77% of new referrals are managed at the front door and 1 in 3 of our referrals being signposted to alternative preventative services. Within IAA a competency framework has been developed for all staff and a 'buddy' system is also in place for staff to further promote learning and development i.e. experienced social care staff supporting newer staff to the team. A full evaluation of the new front door / IAA service will be completed once it has been in operation for 12 months

Across Adult Services we continue to provide opportunities for wider case discussion and problem solving. We have weekly 'fish bowl' meetings which focus on presentation of complex cases, peer support, quality assurance and general opportunities for creative problem solving and case discussions.

Development of additional support for our unpaid family carers remain a priority and we are currently reviewing our capacity and outcomes to provide preventative support to people as part of both our GP engagement service (a partnership arrangement with Care Collective and ABUHB) and our in house support worker model. Outcomes of the review will be analysed in quarter 3.

We continue to offer advocacy support to our most vulnerable adults via our Gwent Advocacy Service.

Despite the ongoing COVID 19 pressures across our Provider Services we are re-establishing our engagement activities at Augusta House, Cwrt Mytton, Community Option and within Home Care, ensuring that outcomes are meeting care and support plans.

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 – Work has taken place to ensure that mandatory safeguarding training for foster carers is being delivered on a face-to-face basis rather than virtually. The training needs of foster carers continue to be monitored and promoted during annual reviews, appraisals and supervision sessions, however, due to Covid, there is a backlog of carers who are outstanding the safeguarding training, and this will continue to be monitored throughout the year. Foster Carers are also receiving Circle of Security training and early feedback is that they have found the parenting programme to be very beneficial and are adapting their parenting styles accordingly.

In April 2022, Blaenau Gwent established its own MyST (My Support Team) to provide greater capacity within the service. Since this time, staff from MyST have been attending News and Networking events and meeting Mentors in order to embed the service fully within Blaenau Gwent. Positively, the service is now working with children, under each of the operational teams, suggesting that the service is being utilised by all. A programme of training/reflective sessions for foster carers is being developed which will be delivered by the MyST which is due to commence January 2023. In respect of attendance at previous sessions, there has been some progress made and, from January 2023, an incentive will be offered to foster carers for completing the requirements of the training to increase motivation and compliance.

The MyST service continue to work with a number of young people in residential care on a 'step-down' basis as well as working with a number of young people who are at risk of entering residential care on a preventative basis. In order to improve the service offer discussions have taken place between the MyST and Placement Team in order to work collaboratively and have joint marketing going forward. Challenges remain regarding the availability of step down accommodation whether this is suitable foster care accommodation or the availability of semi-independent accommodation.

It has proven to be extremely difficult to recruit foster carers and interest in fostering at this current time is very low, despite efforts to increase awareness via social media and recruitment activity. There has been one new foster carer approval within the quarter, but unfortunately, there has also been two resignations resulting in an overall decrease in the number of foster carers. This has been despite the close working relationship with the Foster Wales Manager and the promotion of the Foster Wales brand. Unfortunately, within the period, demand for foster placements has increased and there has been a greater reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements (IFA). By the end of September 2022, there were 26 children placed in IFA placements (an increase of eight since December 2021). It should be noted that the increase in IFAs has mostly been due to place asylum seeking children. We currently have 11 children placed in residential care.

A Worcester University Evaluation of the Disability Service has been undertaken. The Evaluation evidences good use of the disability index and the disability Facebook page and these services continue to be offered within the team. Work is underway in respect of supporting Provider Services, such as the Youth Service, to support young people. This includes the establishment of a sports session and the continuation of the Carers Support Group. The Disability Team now have access to a residential respite provision and within this period, four young people have been accessing this provision. Within the next quarter further communication will take place to understand the strategy for respite services. The work in respect of transition has been very successful with bi-monthly meetings taking place to discuss young people coming up to transition and these are open to both the Disability and the 14+ Teams.

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 – In partnership with our Gwent LA partners and ABUHB we have commenced a review of older person's community based services including potential for reviewing our current Gwent Frailty model and ensuring we meet the required standards of the Welsh Government Six Goals for Emergency and Unscheduled Care.

Initial meetings have been held with staff to discuss a review in relation to reablement and DASH. The Home Care Manager has been working closely with the Reablement Service within ABUHB with the outcome of having a more cohesive and sustainable service to meet the outcomes of vulnerable adults / A report on the future modernisation plans for the two services will be developed in quarter 3.

During quarter 2 we have commenced a review of our Community Resource Team and in partnership with our colleagues in ABUHB, we are developing additional capacity to support those people living with dementia who require early intervention reablement support and also those people who are living with sensory loss. We are currently reviewing the job functions of the manager of the Community Resource Team to reflect the modernisation agenda and the revised post will be advertised at the end of the summer.

An Assistive Technology Project Group has been established with representatives from Commissioning, Community Care and Provider Services in order to drive forward the assistive technology agenda. This includes consolidating all of the different workstreams and projects. The group is meeting on a bi-monthly basis. The Project Group is also working with care homes and supported living schemes to test some innovative equipment which has been provided by the Regional Assistive Technology Team. This includes the HUGS, Koms and Magic Tables. Feedback on all items has been extremely positive and case studies are being developed to share the positive outcomes this assistive technology has had on people's lives.

Our Better Care / Single Handed care project continues to promote people's independence and reduce their reliance on staff for manual handling and personal care tasks. The Better Care Team have developed a comprehensive training and support package for all staff across the Blaenau Gwent Health and Social Care community who provide frontline care and the Local Authority has utilised equipment purchased as part of the Welsh Government Promoting Independence Grant to provide the latest equipment (beds / hoists/ standing aids) to support the ethos of single handed care. The team are currently working with a registered social landlord to finalise the development of our latest step up / down facility which will provide much needed temporary assessment accommodation for people who require bariatric equipment.

Stability and sustainability of our domiciliary care and care home market is a significant priority for our teams both due to the impact of COVID 19, early indications of the impact of the rise in fuel and utility costs and severe staffing pressures. Many providers including our own in house services, are reporting high levels of staff vacancies which are impacting on their ability to provide support. Our commissioning team has continued to work with Providers in relation to the introduction to the real living wage and also by scoping the potential support that can be given to our domiciliary care workers to increase wages to compensate them for the increased costs of fuel. The rapidly increasing fuel prices caused concern amongst the domiciliary care market. To address this the Council acted swiftly and provided additional funding to staff to support the increase in fuel costs during quarter 2

In recognition of their work and commitment throughout the pandemic, Welsh Government awarded £1,498 to all eligible care workers. During quarter 2 our Commissioning Team has distributed £2million of Welsh Government funding to our frontline carers.

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 –

All staff are trained in Collaborative Communication with all new staff entered onto training as part of their induction. Team managers are currently reviewing staff team training and ensuring safeguarding is a priority.

'What Matters' meetings have been implemented and used regularly in practice with multi-agency participation and high scrutiny of the Child Protection plans.

The South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) is supporting the review and implementation of the National Adoption Service 2025 plan in respect of building capacity for access to records, and ensuring that Welsh Government investment monies promote multi agency work. 'Understanding the Child' Days are taking place for all children referred to the service from 18 months old, and transitions continue to follow the good practice guides to ensure all care plans are outcome based. Support workers are in the process of being recruited to support delivery of the objective in respect of trauma nurture timelines and adoption support check ins.

The Supporting Change Team has been working collaboratively with the Youth Service to run a small trauma informed, activity based group for some of the most hard to reach young people open to the team. More recently the team has just concluded a group work project working in partnership the youth service and alongside a targeted group of young girls looking at raising aspirations/self-esteem and self-worth. The project has been very well evaluated and the team are looking into how they can run a second project in the new year.

During this period, a Circle of Security Parenting Programme has been delivered to a small number of parents with young children, in collaboration with the Psychologist and Support Worker. Additionally, Circle of Security has been delivered to a cohort of foster carers, helping to stabilise children in care preventing a risk of breakdown in placement.

There continues to be a slow but steady reduction of Children Looked After, as while new children come into care we are also progressing with discharging Care Orders for children living at home or with kinship carers.

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 –

The Department recognises the importance of a robust and sustainable Safeguarding Team to ensure we not only meet our legislative requirements, but that we are able to protect our most vulnerable citizens. A new Adults safeguarding team structure has been agreed and a new Safeguarding Manager has been appointed and is due to start in post in early quarter 3.

During quarter 1 and 2 we have continued to see increasing demands place on the Health and Social Care system including at our community and acute hospital sites. We have been working with our Gwent Local Authority colleagues and ABUHB staff to revise current models of support to enable patients who are ready for discharge to either safely return back to their own homes or move to alternative accommodation on a temporary basis whilst waiting for support to enable them to return home. We are using current partnership RIF grant funding to develop a menu of support services including increased step up / down beds, additional care home capacity and additional capacity within our assessment teams to address both the current demand as well as the anticipated pressures for winter 2022/23.

We continue to be a key partner of the Gwent Safeguarding Strategic Board and relevant operational sub groups. As a partner of the Gwent Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard board (DOLS) we are working to prepare for the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards legislation (LPS) and during quarter 2 we have contributed to the consultation on the long-awaited codes of practice. As a partnership we have submitted a Welsh Government regional (Gwent) bid to support our capacity for the development of Liberty Protection Safeguards in order to provide important rights and protections for people who lack the mental capacity to agree to care, support or treatment arrangements, where these arrangements amount to a deprivation of liberty. In addition to this we are currently scoping the development of a senior practitioner post to lead on the development of LPS as well as leading on the oversight of the Continuing Care and Mental Capacity functions.

Following the restructure of our Service Manager portfolios across Adult Service at the end of 2021/22, we now have specific Service Managers aligned to our individual Provider teams. These managers are able to provide specific oversight in relation to the quality of support we are providing, our compliance with relevant mandatory policies and our requirements within the relevant regulatory legislation.

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 –

All grants are being monitored effectively and we maximise what grants are available to bring extra revenue and capital into the area.

At the end of academic year 2021-2022, 142 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent local authority. The majority of children who are looked after by Blaenau Gwent continue to be educated within Blaenau Gwent and attend mainstream schools. A small proportion of our children looked after attend more specialist education settings. Of the 142 children of statutory school age who remained looked after at the end of the school year 2021-2022, there were slightly more children of secondary school age than primary. The overall figure is a decrease when compared with the previous academic year when 154 children of statutory school age were looked after at the end of the year. Almost all learners achieved recognised qualifications at the end of their statutory school studies in 2021-2022 with the majority now engaged in post 16 educational and/ or training opportunities.

During academic year 2021-2022 54% of Personal Education Plans for newly accommodated children were initiated within statutory timescales. A total of 11 plans were not initiated within 10 days. Eight were as a result of delay in the CLA education team being notified at the point that the children became looked after. Three were as a result of the learners being Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children who were not in school at the point of becoming looked after.

A small proportion of children looked after experienced a change of school during the course of the year. This is an increase when compared with the previous year. Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a child looked after moves placement and transport is provided where necessary to ensure stability of schooling. When a child does have to move school, processes are in place to ensure that delays in admissions are avoided, wherever possible.

During 2021-2022, incidents of exclusions issued in respect of children looked after have increased. The number of individual children looked after who have received fixed term exclusions during the year has also increased, as has the total number of days lost to exclusions when compared with the previous year. The primary reason why exclusions are issued continues to be for persistent disruptive behaviour. The majority of exclusions continue to be issued in respect of secondary aged pupils. The number of exclusions being issued for primary aged children remains low.

The Welsh Government has continued to provide funding for a set number of children to participate in the Letterbox Club each year. The Letterbox Club encourages reading for pleasure and learning at home. It helps to improve the educational outlook for children who are looked after. Parcels have continued to be distributed to our children on a monthly basis between October and May with an additional festive parcel provided in December. A total of 36 Blaenau Gwent children looked after between the ages of 5 to 13 have received parcels throughout the year.

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 –

Post COVID 19 we have during quarter 1 and 2 now been able to re-open our work-based services within our Community Options and Day Activities teams. Students have now returned to placements within our catering enterprise in partnership with Vison 21 and we are also scoping the further development of a Community Café which will be opened in late 2022 as part of our employment and training opportunities for people with a Learning Disability or living with poor mental health.

Our community meals and tea tray options offer continue to grow and we are working in partnership with learners from Abertillery Learning Community to re-brand the service as part of the implementation of our new electric delivery vans in late 2022.

A cultural change is needed to consider assistive technology as a solution that enables people to achieve their outcomes and live independently. This in turn will help to prevent or delay costly health and social care interventions. To promote this opportunity, we are working with our key partners of Tai Calon, ABUHB and Community Housing Cymru to develop a SMART technology flat in a sheltered scheme in Six Bells Abertillery. The development of the smart flat will assist with this solution by further promoting assistive technology to professionals, individuals and their families/carers. The flat is due to open in late 2022.

Provider managers have commenced engagement with Coleg Gwent (Ebbw Vale Campus) Health and Social Care students and will be offering work based placements to approximately 15 students during the 2022/23 academic year. This will enable our tenants / residents to engage with the students and in addition we are planning for students from the Hair and Beauty courses to provide sessions at our Care Homes.

Augusta House has requested registration from our regulator Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) to provide respite support to young children in addition to Adults and if agreed, following additional support and training for our staff, we will begin offering respite sessions to children in early quarter 3.

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 –

The teams continue to practice in an outcome focused way where we identify family options early in the intervention process, which we prioritise if children have to be admitted into the care of the Local Authority. However, there are situations when appropriate placements are not available locally leading to access to Independent Fostering Agency placements and residential care for young children. Supervision is used consistently to review the plans of Children Looked After (CLA) and consider opportunities for discharging the Care Orders. Poor placement availability is influencing the planning for CLA leading to an increase in use of Independent Fostering Agency's and residential care. Regular review of care planning for these children is a priority and for those with a high level of needs referrals to MyST are considered and prioritised.

The adoption service continues to promote sibling contact and also one off birth parent meetings are increasing, with 9 being held since the implementation of the Good Practice Guide.

Step-down from residential care to foster care is largely dependent on the availability of step-down foster placements. With the demand on placements and the difficulties with recruitment of foster carers it has not been possible to reduce the population of young people in residential care further.

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's Services Self-Assessment –

Covid restrictions have often impacted greatly on our vulnerable adults and we are prioritising support to those who have been lonely and isolated including their carers. Pre-covid family support across our Provider teams has been re-established with families now able to visit their loved ones in a safe way. We have a planned launch of our new social media for Cwrt Mytton to coincide with the relaxation of the Welsh Government care home visiting guidance which will enable us to safely restart community events and visits at the home. The home has a range of events planned for 2022/23 to incorporate a number of national and local celebrations such as summer parties for the Platinum Jubilee.

The Age Cymru floating support services was piloted in 2021/22 and was a success. This service has now continued and has been reconfigured to provide not only floating support, but also a dedicated benefits worker.

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 –

During 2019/20 and 2020/21, the Council 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. To address these high costs, in September 2022 it was agreed to proceed with 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 in order 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 and remove the profit element included within the current charges made by private providers. The development of our own children's home will take place over two stages. The first stage will include the acquisition of a suitable property. The grant of 1.2 million has recently been approved, and the process that will need to be followed are progressing such as working with CIW to ensure the home meets the regulatory requirements, following the 'change of use' processes and completing the refurbishment. The second stage will be the refurbishment and a second grant application to meet the costs of this has been submitted.

SEWAS are working with the National Adoption service central team and other regions to ensure marketing is targeted to increase the number of adopters for more complex children. We have been able to provide in house adopters for a number of siblings during quarters 1 and 2 in a timelier manner. At present, the number of children waiting for placements is decreasing as is the rate of referrals from prospective adopters. This could be linked to the cost of living crisis and will need to be monitored more closely moving forward.

During the period, the Placement Team prioritised matching meetings for placements outside of the framework, and consistently delivered monthly foster carer supervisions where this level of involvement has been required with annual appraisals also being maintained.

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 –

Ty Parc Homelessness Hostel – It has been approved for the existing contract with the current service provider is to be extended for a further 12 months to enable a review to be undertaken on the future services needed to be commissioned which will meet the needs of people who are homeless in Blaenau Gwent. A Gwent regional stakeholder consultation event has been held to inform the future commissioning of Housing Support Grant services and future commissioning priorities will be based on the feedback received.

Initial meetings have been held with TEC Cymru regarding the digital switchover and the possibility of a regional approach to this. TEC Cymru are in discussion with the regional RIF Team about this and will also be willing to help develop a business case for Blaenau Gwent in relation to the impact of the switchover. An exercise is currently being undertaken to determine how many analogue units will need to be updated to digital units on a town by town basis within the borough. This will help to inform the total funding required for the switchover to take place in Blaenau Gwent. It is expected for the financial implications to be significant which is due to take place in 2025. It will be critical that, as a service, we fully understand these implications, so we are able to continue to provide a service that meets the needs of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent.

CARIAD (Collaborative Assessment Reducing Interventions, Admissions and Delayed transfers of care) bariatric flat is due to be completed in September 2022 and will now form part of the Blaenau Gwent CARIAD offer from quarter 3. The coordination and monitoring will be facilitated by our Community Resource Team as part of the review of the functions and to ensure that we have a reablement and promote independence for our most vulnerable people.

As outlined in standard 4 above – our Community Options team are continuing to develop learning and employment opportunities for our vulnerable adults.

Since Covid, Support Providers have been providing a hybrid model of support where support is provided either face to face or virtually. The HSG Contract Monitoring Officers have now returned to onsite visits to monitor the effectiveness of this model to ensure appropriate housing related support is meeting the assessed needs. Three reviews have been undertaken to date whereby both staff and service users are spoken to in order to understand the success of the hybrid model and if it is working better to meet people's needs.

Departmental Priorities Quarter 1 and 2 – How We Have Performed

Priority Title	Self-Assessment
Ensure all children / adults are safeguarded	Children's Services - Green
	Adult Services - Green
Ensure we have an appropriately skilled, motivated and supported workforce with clear career development pathways in place that support our service delivery	Children's Services – Green
	Adult Services - Green
Ensure all teams deliver an outcomes based approach to practice and service delivery	Children's Services – Green
	Adult Services - Green
Ensure that we provide / commission modern, flexible, cost effective high quality support services that meet both current and future well-being needs of children / vulnerable adults and their unpaid family carers	Children's Services – Green
	Adult Services - Green
Ensure that preventative support is available for children and their families, that promote early intervention and prevents needs from escalating.	Children's Services – Green
Ensure that preventative support is available for adults and their unpaid carers, that promote and maintain personal independence	Adult Services – Green
Manage the Children's Services / Adults Services budget to ensure expenditure comes within budget	Children's Services – Amber
	Adult Services – Amber
Ensure the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 – 2025 actions are regularly monitored and reviewed	Children's Services – Green
Undertake a review of the current model of Community Options	Adult Services – Green
Ensure outcomes for children looked after continue to improve through the implementation of the Corporate Parenting action plan	Children's Services – Green
Review the way in which children's services operates and decide if a change is necessary in order to manage demand and workload.	Children's Services – Green
Children's Services / Adults Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles	Children's Services – Green
	Adult Services – Green

Children's Services Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator Description	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Outturn 2021/22	Annual Trend	Performance 2022/23		
					Q1	Q2	Quarterly Trend
Number of children on Child Protection Register	61	52	64	↓	77	67	↑
Rate of Children on the Child Protection Register per 10,000 population	45	38	47	↓	57	49	↑
The percentage of re-registrations of children on local authority Child Protection Registers (CPR)	6.1%	5.2%	7.6%	↓	6.5%	2.6%	↑
The average length of time for all children who were on the CPR during the year	295	219	285	↓	271	251	↑
Number of Children Looked After	208	200	198	↑	198	200	↓
Rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population	153	147	145	↑	145	147	↓
The percentage of Children Looked After who have had three or more placements during the year	11.1%	9%	7.1%	↑	9.1%	13%	↓
Proportion of children's services cases supported by preventative services	54.6%	59.3%	53.7%	↑	53.9%	58.8%	↑
Percentage of referrals signposted to preventative services (children)	15%	10.1%	9.4%	↓	12.1%	15.1%	↑

Adult Services Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator Description	Outturn 2019/20	Outturn 2020/21	Outturn 2021/22	Annual Trend	Performance 2022/23		
					Q1	Q2	Quarterly Trend
Rate of delayed transfer for social care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 and over	0.98	N/A*	N/A*		N/A	N/A	
Rate of older people in residential & nursing home care per 1,000 population aged 65 or over	14.64 (204)	11.70 (166)	12.20 (173)	↓	12.06 (171)	11.29 (160)	↑
The number of adults (aged 18+) receiving a service in the community who receive a direct payment	120	111	110	↔	107	111	↑
Percentage of referrals signposted to preventative services (adults)	17.9%	17.6%	11.7%	↓	15.6%	31.3%	↑
Proportion of adult services cases supported by preventative services (New)	33.8%	31.9%	37.4%	↑	35.1%	37.4%	↑
Percentage of adult protection enquiries completed within statutory timescales	95.3%	62.1%	67.9%	↑	66.7%	67.0%	↔
Percentage of proportionate assessments that led to a more comprehensive assessment for care and support - adults	14.4%	44.5%	52.3%	↓	46.2%	30.1%	↑

Case Studies

Mum had previously fled a domestic abuse relationship and her mental health had suffered considerably. Mum has depression and social anxiety disorder/social phobia and believed this was a direct result of her past relationship. Mum's anxiety meant she was extremely worried about leaving the house and engaging in groups, socialising or even going to the shop. Mum wanted to go back to work, unfortunately her mental health difficulties caused considerable barriers in achieving this. Mum is also a previous 'child looked after'.

Family Support Workers have supported Mum for the last two years. Initially she attended Elklan programme which is a speech and language course and Baby Massage at a Flying Start Hub. Mum was very anxious before attending the sessions. The Family Support Worker met with Mum before each programme session started to support her engagement. The structure of the session was explained, and the delivery room explored to ensure Mum felt confident in attending. Mum was initially extremely nervous, therefore the Family Support Worker sat with Mum throughout the session, ensuring she felt at ease and comfortable. Support continued each week and Mum completed both Elklan and Massage programmes. Mum then completed numerous groups and accredited courses, serving to continue to build her confidence and qualification portfolio.

Groups and accreditations completed by Mum:

- Elklan and baby massage
- Confidence building
- Messy Play and Elklan
- Swimming and Elklan
- Confidence building
- Incredible Years
- Tiny Talkers
- Accredited Parenting
- Accredited Elklan Lets Talk with Under 5's
- Accredited Introduction to Teaching Assistant
- Accredited Introduction to Play



Not only has Mum completed numerous courses/groups with Flying Start (which she highly recommends to other parents), she has expressed how the groups have been transformative for her. Mum has come such a long way since first engaging with Flying Start. She appears more confident, will engage in conversations with other parents, appears relaxed in groups and has made the considerable achievements.

Up to date comment from Mum: *"I completed some courses with the Flying Start Team. Due to suffering with social anxiety the girls put me at ease, and I really enjoyed going to these courses with other people I didn't know. The girls give me the strength, ambition and willpower to attend college to study Access to Higher Education in Humanities. I have now been offered two places for University in Social Work and Psychology with Developmental Disorders. Without Flying Start I would have never had the courage to do this before and without their help and support I wouldn't be where I am now and of achieved so much"*

Case Studies

Mr C has a diagnosis of mixed dementia and COPD and has been a long standing patient at Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan after recurring infections which lead to delirium. Mr C was reported to have been found wandering on the ward throughout the night by staff on numerous occasions during his time at the hospital. Mr C wished to return home to his property which is directly next door to his eldest daughter who would provide support daily with meals, cleaning and shopping. Mr C reported what mattered to him was that he could return home and go for his daily walk along the back pathway behind the property with his great grandchildren after school. A multi-disciplinary team meeting was held on the ward with Mr C and family, as Mr C was medically fit for discharge. Family were concerned if Mr C was to leave the property at night if he was suffering with delirium, although it was not certain it would happen again they felt this was a risk to him returning home as the house is situated near a main road.



WHAT WE INSTALLED It was agreed a door sensor and care assist could be installed at the property; the daughter would then be able to operate the care assist from her property as it was directly next door. This would then monitor the front door during the night time and alert the daughter if the door was opened. It was agreed the door sensor was to be set active from 21:00 to 07:00. A discharge date was set and the assistive technology support worker and installer agreed to meet with daughter at the property the day of discharge. The Assistive technology support worker and installer met the daughter at the property to fit and demonstrate safe use of the equipment as Mr C was returning home later that day

HOW HAS THIS HELPED This case study demonstrates how the use of assistive technology supported a hospital discharge allowing Mr C to return home in a timely manner and also allowed Mr C to remain able to go for his daily walk without depriving him of his liberty and reducing the risk of carer stress, as the daughter also cares for grand children and family members visiting throughout the day.



How We Do What We Do - Our Workforce and How We Support their Professional Roles

A full programme of learning is once again available and based on needs analysis. All statutory, legislative, and registration linked requirements are planned and accounted for. There is provision of developmental opportunities for the workforce and offers that support resilience and well-being. Whilst some barriers to learning may have lessened i.e. pandemic related, the challenges for the workforce to fully embrace learning opportunities remain higher than ever. The crisis in recruitment to the sector forces harsh choices that inevitably impact on workforce capacity available for development above that of meeting the essentials. The first half of the year continued its support for the registration of residential workers ahead of October.

Local Welsh language champions are meeting to contribute to action plans and promote the wide resources and opportunities available as part of 'More Than Just Words'. A regional group for implementing the Welsh Government's Strategy includes a newly revised policy working towards a bilingual health and social care service with five-year plan.

Various initiatives within the organisation are in place to support improving digital confidence and access to digital learning. The authority underpins its approach with the recognition of barriers that exist for parts of the social care workforce.

- Classroom activities using digital devices enabling facilitator and peer support
- Provision of equipment to settings enabling group-based participation in digital learning
- Promotion of digital learning opportunities
- All Wales project on securing an organisational level, fit for purpose, future proof, platform that will meet the needs of the whole sector, communities and volunteers. Funding bid for and secured from the WG Digital Transformation fund 2022/23.
- Using the power of social media to engage and communicate with the sector
- Supporting the design of unbranded resources to enable Wales wide sharing across partners.
- Using blended approaches and in some situations introducing a choice of digital and face to face.
- Positively, the engagement from the workforce with new ways of learning is exceptional and they continue to reward the community with their ongoing resilience and determination.

Additional funding from Social Care Wales has enabled the authority to continue its investment in its 'grow your own' recruitment strategy, particularly for the current hard to recruit roles.

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 2022/23 - Quarter 1 & 2 (April 2022 to September 2022)

Budget Area		Budget	Forecast	Variance	
		£	£	£	%
1	Commissioning & Social Work	3,939,340	4,074,375	(135,035)	(3.43)
2	Children Looked After	7,501,660	8,062,920	(561,260)	(7.48)
3	Family Support Services	192,370	198,478	(6,108)	(3.18)
4	Youth Justice	237,580	250,930	(13,350)	(5.62)
5	Other Children's and Family Services	2,417,850	2,386,886	30,964	1.28
6	Older People Aged 65 and Over	7,154,970	7,090,061	64,909	0.91
7	Adults under 65 with Physical Disabilities	18,290	18,210	80	0.44
8	Adults under 65 with Learning Disabilities	3,684,090	3,755,969	(71,879)	(1.95)
9	Adults under 65 with Mental Health Needs	571,660	582,873	(11,213)	(1.96)
10	Other Adult Services	463,570	502,482	(38,912)	(8.39)
11	Community Care	17,338,860	17,002,627	336,233	1.94
12	Support Service & Management Costs	934,170	910,567	23,603	2.53
13	Corporate Recharges	5,487,140	5,487,135	5	0.00
Grand Total		49,941,550	50,323,512	(381,962)	

Social Services Corporate Risks

Risk Description	Quarter 1 & 2 Update (April – September 2022)	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 2022)</u></p> <p>Vacancy rates are improving which was anticipated. Staff turnover is still an issue; this has affected the number of experienced staff in post. There is a robust induction programme for newly qualified staff and for staff that started during COVID. Induction programme covers basic training on all aspects of social work tasks.</p> <p><u>Quarter 2 Progress (July – September 2022)</u></p> <p>Risk reviewed 16/08/22 by Director of Social Services no change to score.</p> <p>Structural review of Adult Safeguarding team has been completed following resignation of current safeguarding manager. Job Description has been reviewed and advert for new safeguarding manager has gone live. Departmental Management Team is also reviewing the current composition of the service and it is proposed that a new post of senior practitioner (safeguarding) will be established following report to Senior Leadership Team. Work is being scoped to enhance the current links between Adult Safeguarding team and our internal Organisational Department because of recent safeguarding concerns relating to outcomes of professional strategy meetings. An elected member Adult Services Safeguarding briefing has been arranged for quarter 3. Numbers of safeguarding referrals received during quarter 2 have increased from quarter 1 at 157 compared to 139 of which 88 proceeded to an enquiry compared to 57 in previous quarter.</p>	<p>High</p>

Risk Description	Quarter 1 & 2 Update (April – September 2022)	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 2022)</u></p> <p>Children Looked After children numbers have remained around the same levels; residential placement numbers are down slightly. Outturn showing small underspend for Quarter 1 which is positive. To remain at current score.</p> <p><u>Quarter 2 Progress (July – September 2022)</u></p> <p>Change in residential numbers means that there is a forecast overspend. Collaboration for legal services commenced in April 2022. This is a transition year. Rise in referrals into IAA, increase in numbers from the national transfer scheme.</p>	High
Risk Description	Quarter 1 & 2 Update (April – September 2022)	Status
<p>CRR27- 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><u>Quarter 1 Progress (April – June 2022)</u></p> <p>Staffing levels in Supported living bungalows and Cwrt Mytton remain one of the highest internal pressures with senior managers looking to mitigate those pressures on a daily basis. Staffing pressures in Supported Living Team mean the implementation of a number of measures to relieve pressure on this service including offer for overtime, potential implementation of business critical operations only for community options / day services to release staff to support SL team. Both services have a high level of agency support. At present there have been no external domiciliary care providers handing back packages of care. Workforce development plan being finalised which should assist in mitigating the risks.</p> <p><u>Quarter 2 Progress (July – September 2022)</u></p> <p>Risk reviewed 16/08/22 by Director of Social Services. Risk to be escalated back to the CRR and risk score increased to Critical.</p>	Critical

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

If you require any further information or have any feedback you wish to share, please:

Write to us:

Director of Social Services
Annual Council Reporting Framework
Social Services Department
Anvil Court
Church Street
Abertillery
NP13 1DB

Call us:

(01495) 311 556

Email us:

info@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Visit our Website:

www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

