

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT:** **SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 3<sup>RD</sup> JULY, 2019**

**REPORT OF:** **DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT OFFICER**

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

Councillors K. Rowson  
D. Bevan  
G. A. Davies  
M. Day  
P. Edwards  
L. Elias  
K. Hayden  
J. Holt  
J. Millard  
J.P. Morgan  
T. Smith

**WITH:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Children's Services  
Head of Adult Services  
Head of Governance & Partnerships / Advisor

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

<p><b>No. 3</b></p>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p><b>No. 4</b></p>	<p><b><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p><b>No. 5</b></p>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET</u></b></p> <p>The Action Sheet arising from the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2019 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Action Sheet be noted.</p>	
<p><b>No. 6</b></p>	<p><b><u>PROPOSED SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee which was presented for Members approval of the Social Services Scrutiny Work Programme for 2019/20.</p> <p>The Chair spoke to the report and informed Members that it was a fluid document and items could be added when necessary.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding accommodation for care leavers, the Corporate Director of Social Services said that a retrospective report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and Option 1 the Forward Work Programme 2019/20 for the Social Services Scrutiny Committee be approved.</p>	

No. 7

**PROGRESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SAFE  
REDUCTION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Children's Services which was presented to update Members on the progress made in relation to the implementation of the Safe Reduction of Looked After Children Strategy 2017-20.

The Head of Children's Services spoke to the report and presented a detailed presentation of what had been achieved so far under the Strategy to Safely Reduce the number of Children Looked After. The Objectives under the CLA Strategy were:-

- **Objective 1**  
To support families to stay together
- **Objective 2**  
To manage risk confidently and provide support at the 'edge of care'
- **Objective 3**  
To provide affordable high quality placements

In response to a Member's question regarding the age range of adopted children, the Head of Children's Services said that the age of children who were adopted varied from new born babies to older children of 6 or 7, some of these children had complex needs and a number of sibling groups had been placed for adoption this year.

The Committee discussed children who were being looked after by grandparents. Many of these placements were made under special guardianship arrangements; this would give grandparents more control over the day to day care of these children. Children's Services were in the process of setting up a new team to support Special Guardians. This was being funded by ICG grant money.

With regard to kinship carers the Head of Children's Services said that they were paid the same allowances as foster carers and went through the same assessment process as general foster carers. A very gradual reduction in the number of Children

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Looked After was reported.

In response to a Member's enquiry regarding Flying Start, the Head of Children's Services said that the Authority was one of the top performing authorities in Wales and continued robust delivery of the four core elements of Flying Start e.g. enhanced Health visiting, parenting, free child care, and speech and language support, but all of these elements were only offered to children and families in Flying Start areas of Blaenau Gwent.

A Member referred to children with emotional and mental health issues and the delay in CAMHS appointments. The Head of Children's Services said that CAMHS were looking to alter the way in which they deliver services to provide support at an earlier point to stop needs from escalating. The Health Board called this the Iceberg Model. In relation to Attachment Theory Training, delivered by ABUHB Psychology and funded by the Integrated Care Fund (ICF), this continued to be rolled out across Children's Services and was intended to make Social Workers aware about impact poor attachments can have on children and their carers.

In response to a Member's question regarding timelines around adoption, the Head of Children's Services said that a report would be included on the Forward Work Programme and would be presented to Committee in January 2020. Timelines for assessment to become an adopter were approximately 8 months at this time.

A Member enquired regarding the lack of suitable accommodation for 'move-on' applicants. The Head of Children's Services said that the Authority was working with the Housing Solution Team and Tai Calon to create extra flexibility with the 'move-on' panel. Successful applicants would be placed at the top of the Gold band. A Supported Lodgings Co-ordinator post was being created via Supporting People funding and a review of young persons accommodation at Ty Parc had commenced.

### **What we still have to Progress**

A Member referred to the Early Action Together Programme and the Head of Children's Services explained that this was being piloted in Blaenau Gwent and would be evaluated after 6 months

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to prove if the concept worked. Funding had been secured for 12 months. The Head of Service also mentioned the work that was occurring under the flexible funding grant, in particular the Children and Communities Grant (CCG) that sits under the flexibilities grant. Work was being done to establish if there was duplication of service delivery and establishing if efficiencies could be made.

A Member commented that he welcomed the new ICF grant money and enquired regarding the £960,655 overspend. The Corporate Director of Social Services said that Children's Services had originally been overspent by £1.4m this had been reduced to £960,655 through a number of factors such as grant funding and the work of the Supporting Change Team to reduce the numbers of children coming into care.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the information contained within the report and presentation be accepted.

No. 8

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2018/19**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Social Services which was presented to provide Members with the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2018/19.

The Director of Social Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein which included that at the end of the year a comprehensive self-evaluation of performance was undertaken to inform the Annual Report.

Members requested clarity on the financial aspect within the report. The Corporate Director of Social Services clarified that there had been an overspend in Children's Services, however, there had been an underspend in Adults Services as demand for the service had reduced in the last quarter. The underspend in Adults Services and a reduction in management costs and support services had contributed to off set the overspend in Children's Services.

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New ICF grant money had been received; however, the caveat was that all grant funding was due to end in 2021. The Director commented that the challenge of dealing with grants was that some were yearly and others were fixed term until 2021 and this was impacting on the sustainability of the services long term.

The Chair raised concerns that one service was supporting another and requested further clarification on the issue. The Director clarified that in 2018/19 grant funding of £357,000 had been used to off set some of the cost pressures in Children's Services for 18/19. For 19/20 a Welsh Government grant of £750,000 had been received and set against the 2019/20 estimated overspend for Children's Services. In addition the Integrated Care Fund (ICF) had been accessed to further enhance the support provided for Children Looked After and a total of £1m had been brought into the service across Gwent.

The Chair commented that in effect the overspend of 18/19 had been reduced by the Welsh Government allocation for Children's Services and that furthermore the additional funding for 2019/20 had impacted on the estimated 2019/20 overspend. The Director said that any increased demand for Adults Services would be difficult to predict as it was often specific to the needs of the vulnerable people we support. He also stated that the preventative support delivered to vulnerable adults was in the main currently funded by the Integrated Care Fund and that this presented a concern due to the lack of clarity from Welsh Government of the future delivery of the ICF programme.

A Member referred to the ICF and the preventative work it supported and requested information on the number of older people who were going into residential homes. The Head of Adult Services said that this information was reported to scrutiny on an annual basis as part of the progress update on the key elements in the Living Independently Strategy. The scheduling of this report would be in the Scrutiny forward work plan.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and Option1 be endorsed; namely that Members considered the detail contained in the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2018/19 and recommend approval at Council.

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**No. 9**

**TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Consideration was given to the commencement times of future Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meetings.

The Committee AGREED that future Social Services Scrutiny Committee meetings be held on a Thursday at 10.00 a.m.

The Chair informed the Committee that due to a clash of Scrutiny meetings the next Social Services Scrutiny Committee would be held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September at 10.30 a.m.