

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

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

**SUBJECT:** **SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY**  
**COMMITTEE – 17<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2019**

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

---

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

Councillors: K. Rowson  
D. Bevan  
G.A. Davies  
P. Edwards  
L. Elias  
K. Hayden  
J. Millard  
M. Moore  
G. Paulsen  
T. Sharrem  
T. Smith

**AND:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Children's Services  
Head of Adult Services  
Service Manager, Children's Services  
Service Manager, SEW Adoption Service  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>ACTION</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. Day and J. Holt.	
<b>No. 3</b>	<b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b>	

	There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.	
<b>No. 4</b>	<p><b><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2019 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>ACTION SHEET – 2<sup>ND</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2019</u></b></p> <p>The action sheet arising from the meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2019 was submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the action sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 6</b>	<p><b><u>EXECUTIVE DECISION SHEET FOR THE SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the Executive Decision Sheet.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Executive Decision Sheet be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 7</b>	<p><b><u>WELSH GOVERNMENT CHILDCARE OFFER – BLAENAU GWENT AND TORFAEN</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Children's Services.</p> <p>The Service Manager, Children's Services presented the report which updated Members on the continued roll out of the Welsh Government's Childcare Offer in Blaenau Gwent and the first year of roll out in Torfaen County Borough Council.</p> <p>Members commended the report and felt that the Authority helped working families with childcare support and gave 3 to 4 year old pre-school children a good start.</p> <p>A Member enquired why information on parents who had</p>	

increased their working hours was not presented at a local level. The Service Manager, Children's Services said that the extra hours parents worked could be provided at a local level and parents who worked 10 or 12 hours could be informed that they would be eligible for the Childcare Offer if they increased their hours to 16.

A Member commented that more detail on grants was needed and work with the third sector should be recognised and felt that a reporting mechanism should be included in the report in relation to people going back into work. The Service Manager, Children's Services explained that the Welsh Government did not collect that information, however, a survey could be undertaken to ascertain how many people re-entered the job market as a consequence of the Childcare Offer. The Member responded that this information could be provided by Communities for Work. The Officer clarified that those numbers of people returning to work may not be as a result of the Childcare Offer.

In response to a Member's question regarding Flying Start and the Childcare Offer, the Service Manager, Children's Services clarified that Flying Start was only available in some areas and to the most vulnerable families in the community with children under 2 years of age. The Childcare Offer applied to working parents with 3 or 4 year olds. The Member enquired when the Flying Start scheme would be extended to include other areas with vulnerable parents who experienced issues around childcare. The Officer explained that Flying Start numbers were capped by Welsh Government and only 1/3 of the Borough's 0/3 year olds were included in the Flying Start scheme. The Early Years services were complex and difficult for parents to navigate and it was hoped that the Pathfinder programme would make it clearer for parents.

The Chair suggested that the Executive Member for Social Services write to the Welsh Government to express the concerns raised.

The Committee AGREED this course of action.

A Member enquired regarding who would be eligible for the Childcare Offer. The Service Manager, Children's

	<p>Services said that the Early Years Team had been working closely with Job Centre Plus regarding eligibility and were trying to market the Offer to reach as many people as possible, a video had been prepared for parents with a step by step guide on how to apply. To maximise marketing, letters and postcards would also be sent to parents advising them of the Offer.</p> <p>The Committee FURTHER AGREED, subject to the foregoing, to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that Members recommendation to Executive to improve the delivery of the Childcare Offer to both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen residents be accepted.</p>	
<b>No. 8</b>	<p><b><u>REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services.</p> <p>The Director of Social Services presented the report which updated Members on the work and decisions taken over the last 6 months by the Regional Partnership Board, developed under statutory guidance Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB Act).</p> <p>A Member referred to delays in patients returning home from hospital. The Head of Adult Services said Homefirst provided rapid turnaround and operated in A&amp;E departments. Working collaboratively provided accelerated assessment to safely discharge people from hospital with clear pathways for residents which made a significant difference, however, in terms of discharge from hospitals the five local authorities operated in different ways. The Authority was operating a pilot project on behalf of other local authorities which placed dedicated staff on hospital wards to directly action any reasons for delay. Staff had reported that this pilot project was successful.</p> <p>Another Member raised concerns regarding vacancies in nursing homes and felt that some patient's families felt pressurised into choosing a nursing home quickly. The Head of Adult Services said that there was a number of Care Homes with vacancies, Officers from the Department contacted Care Homes directly for weekly updates which</p>	

---

identified vacancies within their Care Home and Social Workers based in hospital wards could help with this information. The Health Board had a clear discharge policy that families identify three Care Home placements, one must have a vacancy and expected families to be proactive in identifying these placements.

The Head of Adult Services agreed to speak with the Member outside of the meeting regarding individual cases.

The Corporate Director of Social Services commented that the Living Independently Strategy had been the Authority's ethos for many years. The best route for patients was to return home, however, long term decisions would need to be made in terms of Care Home placements.

Councillor Jonathan Millard left the meeting at this juncture.

The Head of Adult Services advised Members of the current data in relation to Care Home vacancies i.e. 12 vacancies in Care Homes across the Borough, 21 vacancies in dementia homes and 7 in EMI nursing homes.

In response to a Member enquiry regarding the new Grange Hospital, the Director of Social Services said that some discussion had taken place but there was a lack of information available regarding what services would be provided at the hospital but colleagues from the Regional Partnership Board felt that information on services at the new facility would be forthcoming. There was concern regarding travel links to the new hospital, i.e. people may need to take up to three buses to attend the hospital but this would be a concern across Gwent.

The Member said that he had received correspondence regarding the travel links to the hospital which had indicated improvements to Cwmbran Railway Station but the Member had concerns as this was a different line.

In relation to Mental Health services a Member commented that he welcomed the progress made with the Iceberg model.

---

	<p>With regard to Transformation funding the Director of Social Services said that the Department was looking at different models and Blaenau Gwent was at the forefront and had the ability to implement them. Some funding was only confirmed at a late stage which made it difficult to implement some of the large schemes within the timescale and these concerns had been fed back to the Welsh Government. As with many projects there was some slippage and the Department had put in some slippage bids.</p> <p>Another Member commented that he welcomed the investment for the new hospital, however, some parts of the Borough were semi rural and it was imperative that good transport links to the new hospital from Blaenau Gwent and neighbouring authorities were implemented.</p> <p>In response to a Member's enquiry regarding recruitment issues, the Director said that in some instances staff were seconded into posts but this had an impact on the service they left. Some staff were reluctant to leave existing posts for a short term funded post and most people wanted a permanent role even those in temporary positions.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that the decisions of the Regional Partnership Board be supported.</p>	
<b>No. 9</b>	<p><b><u>INTEGRATED CARE FUND UPDATE 2019</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Adult Services.</p> <p>The Head of Adult Services presented the report which provided an overview for Members on the current allocation of funding for projects monitored by Adult Services and funded via the Welsh Government Integrated Care Fund (ICF) as at September 2019.</p> <p>A Member enquired regarding the impact for citizens if funding was withdrawn. The Head of Adult Services said that if funding was removed the integrated care bed facility, which allowed patients to leave hospital quickly, would be withdrawn and would lead to delays in people leaving hospital while their homes were being adapted. A</p>	

	<p>Compassionate Communities Members briefing session was being arranged to look at how to better support people and GP's so that people were not socially isolated. If funding was withdrawn this would impact on the progress made and preventative services would cease.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1, namely that the evidence provided to support the way in which available ICF grant funding is being accessed to support the strategic priorities of the Council, and the service to continue to provide progress updates to the Scrutiny Committee in 2020/21 as outlined in the report be endorsed.</p>	
<b>No. 10</b>	<p><b><u>NATIONAL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services and the Service Manager SEWAS.</p> <p>The Service Manager SEWAS presented the report on the performance of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) and the National Adoption Service (NAS) for 2018/19.</p> <p>In relation to demand for adoptive placements and adopter recruitment a Member commented that the recruitment campaign was extremely good and felt that roundabouts and advertising boards could be utilised for recruitment purposes more effectively.</p> <p>The Head of Children's Services said that 70 children were placed with adoptive parents and confirmed that the number of adopters had fallen.</p> <p>A Member enquired regarding the delay with children receiving their life journey materials. The Service Manager SEWAS said that a new Co-ordinator had been appointed to help improve the timescales for receipt of the life journey materials with Welsh Government investment funding used to improve performance going forward.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be</p>	

	<p>accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the information as reported be accepted.</p> <p>Councillor Greg Paulsen left the meeting at this juncture.</p>	
No. 11	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 28<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2019</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Chair requested a report on Community Meals Service be included in the Forward Work Programme. The Director of Social Services said that discussions were taking place with the Environment Department to look at a model to increase the number of community meals and would present a report to this Committee at a later date.</p> <p>The Chair raised concerns regarding the Annual National Performance Information contained in the Information Pack and requested that a joint scrutiny meeting be held to consider the item.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED this course of action.</p> <p>The Committee FURTHER AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme for the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 be approved.</p>	