

**COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT**

**REPORT TO:** **THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**SUBJECT:** **SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 21<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY, 2021**

**REPORT OF:** **DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER**

---

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

Councillors: K. Rowson  
D. Bevan  
G.A. Davies  
P. Edwards  
K. Hayden  
W. Hodgins  
J. Holt  
M. Moore  
G. Paulsen  
T. Smith  
B. Summers

**AND:** Corporate Director of Social Services  
Head of Children's Services  
Service Manager Children's Services  
Manager, Community Options  
Project Manager, Adult Services  
Communications & Policy Officer  
Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<b><u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u></b>  It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<b><u>APOLOGIES</u></b>  There were no apologies for absence reported.	

<b>No. 3</b>	<p><b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></b></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<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 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 were submitted, whereupon:-</p> <p><b><u>INTEGRATED CARE FUND (ICF) UPDATE 2019/20</u></b></p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding the Integrated Care Fund (ICF), the Director of Social Services said that the Regional Partnership Board had received a letter from the Welsh Government confirming the continuation of funding for next year and even though the funding would be slightly lower than expected, the Director felt comfortable continuing to deliver services on that basis.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<b>No. 5</b>	<p><b><u>CORPORATE PARENTING PROGRESS REPORT 2020-21</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Service Manager, Children's Services which was presented to inform Members of the progress made by Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) throughout 2020 to improve outcomes and services for our Children Looked After (CLA).</p> <p>The Service Manager Children's Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein and informed Members that the action plan had been developed in February 2020, prior to the Covid pandemic, and some other measures had been put in place which may have superseded some of the actions because of priorities.</p> <p>In relation to Key priority 2, the Chair enquired if the Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings had been held</p>	

on a quarterly basis throughout the pandemic. The Head of Children's Services confirmed that the MACE meetings had continued as they were part of the safeguarding structures in place within Gwent. The Directorate had taken safeguarding responsibilities very seriously, particularly through the pandemic, as children were not being seen as regularly as they would have been through the Education system. Existing structures and systems continued to be in place.

A Member enquired regarding support for young carers. The Head of Children's Services said this report focused on Children Looked After, but informed the Member that the Authority regarded young carers as vulnerable learners and all had been offered places in school hubs throughout the Covid pandemic. The Families First Team had responsibility for providing services to young carers and they had been actively involved in making contact with that cohort. Where necessary, face to face visits had been undertaken to ensure that cohort of children were supported. Effort had also been made to bring this cohort of children together, virtually as a group, so they could provide peer support to one another.

In response to a Member's question regarding providing laptops to Children Looked After, the Service Manager said an audit had been carried out with parents, guardians and carers of Children Looked After to establish if laptops or Wi-Fi connections were needed. During March and April 2020 laptops had been bought for each child in the household that needed one so they were ready to go online with their schools. The Team worked closely with schools and social workers to ensure that these children could do online learning.

A Member referred to Key priority 3, Action 3 – Promote "Children Looked After Friendly Schools" and felt that the wording on this action point should be changed. The Service Manager said the Children Looked After friendly schools was a policy document, however, the word promote could be changed to - ensure that schools are adhering to the policy. The Head of Children's Services explained there was a duty on schools to ensure they meet the needs of Children Looked After. Action Point 3 referred to a Blaenau Gwent guide, that had been created on what

is best practice, for all schools supporting Children Looked After. The guide had been adopted and was being tested in a pilot area in Blaenau Gwent with the expectation that the guide would be rolled out to all schools in Blaenau Gwent. The aim was to ensure that schools adopt all the areas in the guidance in order to achieve 'best practice' status to make sure that a robust structure was in place and to have a resource that schools could refer to ensure they were doing the best for all Children Looked After.

A Member enquired regarding gathering all the information from different departments and partner organisations in a timely manner to give an accurate measurement of all the information. He also enquired if a further report would be presented to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. The Head of Children's Services said the Corporate Parenting Board met four times a year and was the vehicle to ensure that all the information was brought together via partner engagement. Task and finish groups were also a driving force in relation to engaging partners. With regard to the education performance information that was missing, the Welsh Government had not requested information on learners this year, it would need to be established what information would be required to be reported on going forward. Corporate Parenting information was reported annually to the Scrutiny Committee in January and when that information was available it would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee at that time.

A Member commented that it was a positive report and commended the staff for all their hard work over the last 12 months and enquired if students attending college were included in the provision of ICT equipment. The Service Manager confirmed that the ICT provision included students attending colleges and one student attending university.

The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that progress made throughout 2020 and the work of the Local Authority and its partners to improve outcomes for our children looked after as part of our corporate parenting responsibilities be acknowledged.

**No. 6**

**COMMUNITY MEALS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Adult Services which was presented to inform on the transition of the Community Meals (CM) service and progress made since transition from the Community Services Directorate to the Social Services Directorate.

The Director of Social Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein.

A Member requested clarity on the actual numbers of drivers and vans. The Director of Social Services clarified that two drivers went out at the same time in one van and subsequently the fixed term post had reduced and three drivers had been allowed to finish. Through redeployment, an additional driver had been used to support the service going forward.

A Member commented that with the significant 36% increased demand for the service was there capacity in the service to take it to where the Directorate needed it to be to offset any budget pressures. The Director of Social Services said the vision was to develop a model to make it work within the Community Options Service, whereby people with learning disabilities or mental health issues would go out with the drivers and learn new skills in terms of delivering the meals. In order to continually develop the model and service there was a need to understand the underlying cost to deliver the service to look at employing additional staff if demand for the service increased further. A full budget report would be presented to the Scrutiny Committee when the information became available.

In response to a Member's question regarding hot and frozen meals, the Director of Social Services said the service provided both hot and frozen meals, often hot meals during the week and frozen meals at the weekends. Potentially an additional service such as sandwiches could be introduced in the future.

A Member enquired if hospitals had been approached to promote this service to patients being discharged. The Director of Social Services said the service was currently in the process of rebranding and marketing, however, the

---

pandemic had slowed this process down, but social workers were promoting the delivery of an in-house service. When patients were discharged from hospital they were offered community meals rather than obtaining meals from the private sector.

A Member felt that rebranding was a good idea to make it more commercial and could encourage those people who could afford to pay to take up the service and raise revenue. The Director of Social Services said there was a need to be competitive with the private sector, but at this point in time the focus was to identify the full costs to run the service and look at opportunities to develop the service going forward and be much more commercially aware of the market to be successful.

In relation to resilient budget monitoring a Member enquired if the use of electric vehicles had been explored with the Community Services Directorate. The Director of Social Services confirmed that discussions had taken place and would be further explored when the opportunity arose to change the vehicles, but this would depend on costs as the service was in deficit.

A Member commented that it was good to see the increase in the service and referred to capacity to deliver meals at a reasonable time and at an increased level to balance the budget. The Director of Social Services said that once there was a balanced budget they could then look to further increase the number of meals delivered and potentially employ additional staff and increase the number of delivery vehicles so that meals could be delivered at a reasonable time. The aim was to first balance the budget then try to increase the uptake of meals again to get to a surplus. With the possibility of the number of meals decreasing following Covid, the Director said that at this point in time the service was managing with the existing staff and workload. Seasonal reductions would be monitored and planned into the budget to continue to run the service and if possible to expand the service going forward.

A Member referred to care home complexes spread around the borough and enquired if engagement with residents of the complexes could be undertaken to encourage groups of people to buy into the service as a

---

	<p>number of meals could be delivered to one central location. Consideration could also be given to discounts on the number of meals ordered. The Director of Social Services said that options for developing the service were being explored such as a sandwich service that people may want in addition to the meal they received.</p> <p>In response to a Member's question regarding operating the service as a business in its own right, the Director of Social Services said that consideration had been given to move the service to a social firm model at some point in the future but the service was running at a deficit at the moment and it could be a couple of years before the service was in a comfortable position to go down this route.</p> <p>A Member referred to the cash flow forecast and enquired regarding the central costs figure. The Director of Social Services explained that it was difficult to become a commercial organisation with these central costs which included legal services, accountancy, financial and organisational development services. Moving to a different type of model such as a social model or to get a third sector organisation to run it as a business then that could provide the opportunity to reduce those central costs in particular.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that Members scrutinise the report and evaluate the recommendations for the long term forward planning of the service (section 6.4).</p>	
<b>No. 7</b>	<p><b><u>USE OF CONSULTANTS</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to provide Members with the information requested, relating to expenditure incurred during 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 on the use of consultants to support, supplement and complement the work of Officers across the Council.</p> <p>The Director of Social Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained therein, which included the advantages of engaging consultants for short periods of time which could be an effective use of Council's resources.</p>	

	<p>A Member commented that it was good to see that consultants were only used where required and not just for the sake of it, he felt that the Council should look to its own staff before engaging consultants. With regard to consultants for complaints he felt these figures should not be included in the Appendix as they were required by the Welsh Government.</p> <p>With regard to Stage two complaints a Member enquired if these could be carried out via a partnership approach with other local authorities. The Director of Social Services said this had been done on occasion but the difficulty was that Stage two complaints could be a considerable amount of work and when approached sometimes other local authorities were unable to undertake the work due to capacity issues at the time.</p> <p>With regard to complaints against the Directorate a Member commented that it was essential to investigate complaints properly to achieve a suitable outcome for the complainant and the Directorate as the complaint could end in a lengthy court case where the costs to the Authority could be greater than the costs of the initial use of consultants. The expert advice provided by consultants in areas such as Adoption was invaluable and he felt that legal advice provided in most cases was money well spent to protect the Authority.</p> <p>The Chair echoed these comments and said that it was a transparent report with the consultant fees deemed to be necessary.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely the use of consultants be noted.</p>	
<b>No. 8</b>	<p><b><u>FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME – 11<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2021</u></b></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Chair of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>The Chair advised of a proposed change to the agenda items, and after a brief discussion;</p>	



	<p>The Committee AGREED that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the report on Living Independently in the 21st Century Strategy be postponed and a report on the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy be presented to the meeting on the 11th March, 2021.</p>	
--	--	--