

T: 01495 355100 Ext./Est: 5100

E: leeann.turner@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Contact:/Cysylltwch â: Democratic Services



THIS IS A MEETING WHICH THE PUBLIC ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND

15th July 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee will be held in virtually via Microsoft Teams - if you would like to attend this meeting live via Microsoft Teams please contact committee.services@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk on Thursday, 22nd July, 2021 at 10.00 am.

Please note that a pre and post meeting will be held 30 minutes prior to the start and following the conclusion of the meeting for members of the committee.

Yours faithfully

Michelle Morris
Managing Director

AGENDA

Pages

1. SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION

You are welcome to use Welsh at the meeting, a minimum notice period of 3 working days is required

We welcome correspondence in the medium of Welsh or English. / Croesawn ohebiaith trwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg.

should you wish to do so. A simultaneous translation will be provided if requested.

2. **APOLOGIES**

To receive.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION**

To consider any declarations of interests and dispensations made.

4. **TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

To consider.

5. **SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MINUTES**

5 - 14

To receive the Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee held on 22nd April, 2021.

(Please note the Minutes are submitted for points of accuracy only)

6. **PROPOSED SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22**

15 - 22

To receive the report.

7. **CARE INSPECTORATE WALES (CIW) ASSURANCE CHECK 2021: BLAENAU GWENT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL SOCIAL SERVICES**

23 - 34

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

8. **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES 2019/20**

35 - 62

To consider the report of the Corporate Director Social Services.

9. **UPDATE ON STRATEGY TO SAFELY REDUCE THE NUMBERS OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER**

63 - 70

To consider the report of the Head of Children's Services.

To: Councillor S. Thomas (Chair)
Councillor K. Rowson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor D. Bevan
Councillor G. Collier
Councillor G. A. Davies
Councillor G. L. Davies
Councillor P. Edwards
Councillor K. Hayden
Councillor W. Hodgins
Councillor J. Holt
Councillor M. Moore
Councillor G. Paulsen
Councillor T. Sharrem
Councillor B. Summers
Councillor T. Smith

All other Members (for information)
Manager Director
Chief Officers

This page is intentionally left blank

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

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

SUBJECT: SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 22ND APRIL, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR K. ROWSON (IN THE CHAIR)

Councillors: D. Bevan
 M. Cook (substituting for Cllr Paulsen)
 G.A. Davies
 P. Edwards
 K. Hayden
 J. Hill (substituting for Cllr Moore)
 W. Hodgins
 J. Holt
 T. Smith
 B. Summers

AND: Corporate Director of Social Services
 Head of Adult Services
 Service Manager Development & Commissioning
 Scrutiny & Democratic Officer / Advisor

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

<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>SOCIAL SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the Social Services Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 17th March, 2021 were submitted.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED that the Minutes be accepted as a true record of proceedings.</p>	
<p>No. 5</p>	<p><u>LIVING INDEPENDENTLY IN THE 21ST CENTURY STRATEGY – ANNUAL PROGRESS UPDATE 2020/21</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Adult Services which was presented to provide an overview for Members on the ‘Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21st Century’ Strategy.</p> <p>The Head of Adult Services spoke to the report and gave a detailed overview of each of the 8 priority areas as part of the overarching approach to service development.</p> <p><u>Priority 1 - Long term care</u></p> <p>A Member enquired regarding what areas of good practice could be taken forward post Covid and also referred to the drop in numbers of residents in Care Homes. The Head of Adult Services said that across all 8 priorities there were a number of areas of good practice, specifically in relation to Care Homes they were working closely with ABUHB to develop enhanced infection control processes and taken the learning from that to actually develop a new service moving forward, so that Care Home providers have a robust and easy access to infection control leads, etc. In relation to the reduced numbers of residents in Care Homes, it was too early to say if this was due to confidence and whether this trend would change, people may have decided to stay in their own home because Care Homes had been particularly affected by the pandemic or they may be thinking differently regarding their future care needs.</p>	

<p>A Member enquired of the number of COVID related deaths in care homes. The Officer responded that this information could be provided, but with a note of caution, owing to some people who may not have contracted the infection in the care home, but within the hospital setting.</p> <p>With some Care Homes currently undersubscribed, a Member enquired what impact would the opening of a new Care Home have on the existing provision going forward. The Head of Adult Services explained that Care Homes were regulated by CIW and anyone could open one, the new Care Home in Tredegar had opened early in the pandemic and had already developed that provision pre-pandemic, she explained that some of the residents could be from Caerphilly, Rhymney Valley and Powys and not just from Blaenau Gwent.</p> <p>A Member commented that the report showed that the Social Services Directorate had reacted swiftly and professionally during the pandemic, engaged with a number of partners and continued to deliver a high level of quality services that affect vulnerable members of society. He thanked all members of staff in the Directorate for their good work and felt the report provided reassurances to both Councillors and the general public who may have relatives in our care settings. All Members of the Scrutiny Committee supported these comments and felt that Social Services staff across the board had performed extremely well during a very challenging year.</p> <p>With the reduced number of people going into Care Homes a Member enquired how people were managing in their own homes. The Head of Adult Services said that one of the main drivers of Living Independently in the 21st Century Strategy was to reduce the number of people going into traditional Care Home settings. Over the last 15 years there had been a steady decline of the numbers of people who needed to go into Care Homes, however, the Service was managing a much higher proportion of very complex people in the community. With robust Reablement and Domiciliary type services in place this enabled people to be supported in the community with the right support around them.</p> <p><u>Priority 2 - Reablement/Enabling services</u></p>	<p>Head of Adult Services</p>
--	-------------------------------

A Member enquired regarding befriending services co-ordinated with the voluntary sector. The Head of Adult Services said that the Directorate had not focused on new services, however, within other parts of the Council work was being undertaken with GAVO to actually enhance the befriending and shopping services. There were a number of work streams looking at the recovery of the Council moving forward and one was around Community and the provision of befriending and volunteering services was very much a part of that work.

A Member raised concerns regarding people with underlying health conditions who had been shielding for a year and were a little afraid going back out into the community and enquired if any work had been undertaken with the local Stroke group or Dementia group to enquire when it was possible for them to safely get people back into the community and re-engage with their group. The Head of Adult Services said that a number of groups had restarted, some were still virtual, Wales was still in Tier 4 and a number of Third Sector organisations were waiting for the next Welsh Government announcement to start more face to face groups. The Community Connectors were speaking with those providers regularly and with falling infection rates and the next Tier level announcement, as soon as it was safe to do so they would resume group work. When known, the Officer would circulate the information on when these groups could re-start face to face meetings to Members for their information.

Head of
Adult
Services

With regard to virtual groups, a Member enquired if a blended approach would continue in the future as some people may find it easier to access online groups due to their health issues. The Head of Adult Services confirmed they were looking to take forward a blended approach and had been working with Peoples First, a Third Sector group who had received substantial Welsh Government funding for digital devices who support people with learning disabilities. As part of the preventative workstream, Social Services staff had helped set up the devices in people's own homes.

A Member enquired regarding luncheon clubs and when they could re-open, the Head of Adult Services said it would be on a case by case basis, and the operator of the

luncheon club would need to check the relevant Welsh Government guidance and put a risk assessment in place to ensure they can re-open safely. The Civil Contingencies Team have been supporting a number of groups around ensuring that the relevant protocols are put in place. The Corporate Director of Social Services added that at the moment the Regulations did not allow groups to meet indoors and a Welsh Government announcement was awaited, once that was in place the Civil Contingencies Team would support groups with their risk assessments to allow them to re-open and operate again in a safe way.

Priority 3 - Day Opportunities/Community Options

With regard to Community Options, a Member enquired if a future model of provision could include a loneliness prevention programme. The Head of Adult Services informed Members that discussions were taking place with the five Gwent local authorities on what the models could look like across the whole of Gwent. The Regional Partnership Board was facilitating a workshop next week via Teams on this issue.

Priority 4 - Assistive Technology

Members raised no issues in relation to Assistive Technology.

Priority 5 - Direct Payments

Members raised no issues in relation to Direct Payments.

Priority 6 - Accommodation

A Member enquired if there was any evidence that supported the view that people moving into Older People Bungalows saved on financial costs of future care needs and if this evidence could be used in the Housing Strategy moving forward. The Head of Adult Services said that a needs analysis was undertaken across Gwent by a number of housing providers that showed the benefits of living in future proofed accommodation. Under the Regional Partnership Board structure, the Health, Housing and Social Care Partnership Board undertook work across the Gwent area regarding the future housing needs of older people and

a number of reports had come back to Housing and Health Departments around the preferred models of housing moving forward.

A Member enquired what influence the Authority had on housing providers to build future proofed accommodation for older people within their developments. The Head of Adult Services explained that the Supporting People Team Manager was involved in all of those negotiations and promoted future needs for elderly people, she worked closely with the Planning Department in relation to the Local Development Plan and when any development was being proposed the Planning Department would contact Social Services for their input.

In response to a Member's question regarding the impact of Covid on communal living in housing complexes, the Head of Adult Services said she had not taken part in any discussions around the design of housing complexes, but gave an example of learning from Covid such as having a separate entrance and exit in the development and the same for pharmacies attached to Well-being centres to future proof these developments in case of further outbreaks of the pandemic and hoped that these designs and learning from Covid would be built into future design processes.

Priority 7 – Carers

In relation to the number of unpaid carers identified in Blaenau Gwent, the Head of Adult Services said those figures were featured within the Gwent Carers Strategy, however, there were a number of carers who did not identify themselves as carers and it was those carers, both adult and young carers that the Service needed to reach to provide support. Part of the rationale behind undertaking the Carers Engagement scheme with GP's was to research and identify those unpaid carers who were not identifying themselves as carers.

With regard to identifying young carers in schools, this would sit within the Children's Services Department, who had a specific officer responsible for young carers who would link into all schools in the borough. As part of the Estyn process schools had a duty to identify their young

	<p>carers to provide them with support. Within the Regional Partnership Board sat the Carers Board who had a specific action plan for all partners across health, social care and the third sector which was around supporting young carers and young carers in schools. There were a number of school programmes operating such as the Carers Trust who gave talks to whole classes and also provided support to individual carers.</p> <p>The Corporate Director of Social Services commented that the South East Wales Young Carers Schools Project, was trying to get schools to identify young carers in schools and provide them with appropriate support, the programme was being run across Gwent and a number of Blaenau Gwent schools had already taken up the programme. In a bid to promote the scheme further, he said that as some Members were also school Governors they could liaise with their Headteachers to consider taking up the scheme run by South East Wales Carers Trust.</p> <p><u>Priority 8 - Domiciliary Care</u></p> <p>Members raised no issues in relation to Domiciliary Care.</p> <p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 1; namely that the evidence provided to support progress in the 8 priority areas, be endorsed, albeit within the context of the unique 12-month period of the 2020/21 COVID pandemic, and for the Directorate to continue to provide progress updates on an annual basis to the Scrutiny Committee as outlined in this report.</p> <p>Councillors Derrick Bevan and Bob Summers left the meeting at this juncture.</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP UPDATE</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to update Members on the work and decisions taken over the last 5 months by the Regional Partnership Board.</p>	

	<p>The Corporate Director of Social Services spoke to the report and gave a detailed update in relation to the Regional Partnership Board.</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>	
<p>No. 7</p>	<p><u>SUPPORT AT HOME SERVICES TENDER AND MARKET PERFORMANCE FOR COMMISSIONED SERVICES WITH INDEPENDENT PROVIDERS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Director of Social Services which was presented to provide Scrutiny Members with Contracts and Commissioning information relating to care and support for Blaenau Gwent citizens within their own homes.</p> <p>The Head of Adult Services spoke to the report and highlighted the main points contained within the report.</p> <p>A Member enquired how the quality and standard of care given by the private sector was monitored. The Service Manager Development & Commissioning explained this had been a challenge throughout the pandemic, however, through district nurses, telephone calls and the call monitoring service which was an electronic system whereby carers log in to the system, where the length of calls could be monitored, if there were any complaints or issues this could provide an early trigger warning. There was a twice weekly two-way communication flow with providers to ensure the service was alerted to any concerns, etc. and there was the monitoring information to validate some of those calls. There were also copies of reports from providers and their own quality assurance checks. Any reported issues such as PPE non-compliance or two carers travelling together in the front of a car would be investigated and escalated to the service provider.</p> <p>With regard to spot checks, the RI would carry out spot check visits on their own staff and produce daily reports. If a particular area had a number of carers breaching regulations it could ultimately result in an investigation and potentially disciplinary action. A lot of information had been disseminated to the Domiciliary Care agencies, making</p>	

sure that they were following protocols. Working closely with Environmental Health colleagues had resulted in a good source of information coming into the Commissioning Team to be able to respond to issues at an early stage.

A Member raised concerns with the high turnover of staff for some independent providers, with some clients having new carers on a regular basis. The Service Manager said that continuity of care was vital and was one of the reasons why they had introduced a new tender and not commissioned existing packages as there were concerns around recruitment and growth, providers needed to demonstrate they could recruit a workforce as it was important that service users had continuity. In the past there had been concerns with the high turnover of staff with providers and after consultation and engagement improvements had been made and as part of the new contractual arrangements providers needed to confirm they could recruit a pool of dedicated carers.

The Member felt that this area should be Regulated by the Welsh Government and should make the role of carer more appealing with an increase in salary for the important role they undertake in the community.

A Member enquired if consideration should be given to bring this service back in-house. The Head of Adult Services said there was a new white paper out currently in relation to social care and sustainability in the market position was part of that work. She felt that it was beneficial to have a mixed economy with both internal and external services to promote diversity across the sector. The cost of bringing this service in-house, at this level, would be extortionate and would require a significant Welsh Government investment in funding for Social Services.

The Corporate Director of Social Services commented that 18 months ago an external provider who was providing 23% of Domiciliary Care provision had gone into liquidation and a new provider had to be sought to deliver that care. At that time, consideration had been given to bring the service in-house, however, the cost had been an additional £2m to the sum already being paid to the provider, and this would be an ongoing cost. He also felt that a mixed market needed to be in place to give the right balance between in-house

<p>and external providers. Work had been undertaken to try to expand those numbers of providers to ensure sustainability going forward so that no one provider would be responsible for delivering a huge amount of care provision.</p>	
---	--

<p>The Committee AGREED to recommend that the report be accepted and endorse Option 2; namely that the report be accepted as provided.</p>	
--	--

Agenda Item 6

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd July 2021**

Report Subject: **Proposed Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme 2021-22**

Portfolio Holder: **Councillor John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Councillor Steve Thomas, Chair of Social Services Scrutiny Committee**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
May 2021	27.5.21	12.07.21			22.07.21	Executive FWP – 16.06.21	Council FWP – 29.7.21	

1. **Purpose of the Report**
 - 1.1 To present the Social Services Scrutiny Work Programme for 2021-22 (Appendix 1) and to seek approval from Committee.
2. **Scope and Background**
 - 2.1 The Scrutiny Work Programmes are key aspects of the Council's planning and governance arrangements and support the requirements of the Constitution.
 - 2.2 The topics set out in the Forward Work Programme link to the strategic work of the Council as identified by the Council's Corporate Plan, agreed by the Council on 23rd July 2020, corporate documents and supporting business plans.
 - 2.3 The Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programmes are also aligned to the Governance and Audit Committee, Executive Committee and Council Forward Work Programmes.
 - 2.4 The Work Programme is a fluid document and there is flexibility to allow for regular review between the Chair and the Committee.
 - 2.5 The Work Programmes have been discussed with Chairs and Vice-Chairs of individual committees, prior to presentation to the respective scrutiny committees for consideration and approval.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
 - 3.1 The work programmes have been endorsed by the relevant departments of the Council.

3.2 **Option 1**

To agree the Forward Work Programme for the Social Services Scrutiny Committee.

Option 2

To suggest any amendments prior to agreeing the Forward Work Programme.

Draft Social Services Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programme

Date	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council Meeting
Thursday 22nd July 2021	CIW Findings – Assurance visit	Performance Monitoring To consider the CIW findings following the assurance check during May 2021.	Damien McCann <i>Invitee: CIW</i>	Executive
	Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy Monitoring	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of progress in relation to the strategy 2020-25.	Tanya Evans	Executive
	Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/20	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the Director of Social Services Annual report 2019/20.	Damien McCann	Council 29 th July 2021

Date	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council Meeting
Thursday 7 th October 2021	Children's and Community Grant	Budget Monitoring Provide update on the CCG	Tanya Evans	Executive – 10.11.21
	Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2020/21	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the Director of Social Services Annual report 2020/21.	Damien McCann	Council
	Director of Social Services Quarter 1 and 2 update	Performance Monitoring Members to receive the quarterly update of the Director of Social Services Annual report.	Damien McCann	Executive – 10.11.21
	Developing a BG MYST Team	Performance Monitoring Provide update on the development of a BG MYST Team	Tanya Evans	Executive – 10.11.21
	Recovery - Community	Performance Monitoring To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support the community recovery and renewal activity from the pandemic and to monitor progress.	Michelle Church / Ceri Bird	Executive – 10.11.21

Date	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council Meeting
Thursday 18 th November 2021	Regional Partnership Board	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the decisions taken by the Regional Partnership Board	Damien McCann	Executive – 15.12.21
	National Adoption Service Annual Report	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed about National and Regional progress of Adoption services	Tanya Evans	Executive Information – 15.12.21
	Future model of assistive technology / telecare provision	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of proposals to provide an enhanced telecare / assistive technology offer to promote independence and meet personal outcomes	Alyson Hoskins	Executive – 15.12.21
INFORMATION ITEM				
	Independent Reviewing Officer Report	Information For Members Information Pack	Tanya Evans	

Date	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council Meeting
Thursday 20 th January 2022	Corporate Parenting Progress Report	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the progress made against the Corporate Parenting Action Plan	Tanya Evans	Executive Information - 02.03.21
	Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy Monitoring	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of progress in relation to the strategy 2020-25.	Tanya Evans	Executive – 02.03.21
	Integrated Care Fund (ICF) update	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the progress made in relation to ongoing sustainability of grant funded(ICF) services	Alyson Hoskins	Executive – 02.03.21

Date	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council Meeting
Thursday 3 rd March 2022	My Support Team	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the progress of the team in returning children from residential placements	Tanya Evans	Executive Information – 27.04.21
	Implementation of Liberty Protection Safeguard legislation	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the progress of implementation of the new legislative framework from April 22	Alyson Hoskins	Executive – 27.04.21

Date	Scrutiny Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer	Executive / Council Meeting
Thursday 7 th April 2022	Regional Partnership Board	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the decisions taken by the Regional Partnership Board	Damien McCann	Executive – 27.04.21
	Living Independently in the 21 st Century Strategy	Performance Monitoring Members to be informed of the progress made against the priorities within the strategy	Alyson Hoskins	Executive information – 27.04.21
	Recovery - Community	Performance Monitoring To ensure that Members are aware of arrangements to support the community recovery and renewal activity from the pandemic and to monitor progress.	Michelle Church / Ceri Bird	Executive 27.04.21

Member Briefing Sessions – Social Services Scrutiny Committee			
Date	Topic	Purpose	Lead Officer
Quarterly	Directorate Briefings	A closely focused directorate update session to provide information and detail on service areas in order to raise the interest and enthusiasm of members. This also provides a legitimate avenue to raise local issues outside of the scrutiny process.	All

Agenda Item 7

Date signed off by Monitoring Officer:

Date signed off by Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd July 2021**
Report Subject: **Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance Check 2021: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member for Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
23.6.21	17.6.21	13.07.21			22.07.21			

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance check summary as identified in their letter dated the 11th June 2021 (Appendix 1). The purpose of the assurance check was to review how well the local authority's social services continue to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being. This letter summarises the findings of CIW assurance check on 17 May to 21 May 2021.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 In March 2020, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) suspended its routine programme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable local authorities and providers to focus fully on responding to the challenging circumstances. A revised programme with local authorities recommenced in September to provide assurance about how people are being safeguarded and well-being promoted during the pandemic. We considered safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services, the safety of services they access and the safety and well-being of people who work in services.
- 2.2 We focused our key lines of enquiry within the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and have recorded our judgements and findings aligned to these: People - Voice and Control, Prevention, Partnerships and Integration, Well-being.
- 2.3 CIW asked the following two questions:
1. How well is the local authority discharging its statutory functions to keep people who need care and support and carers who need support, safe and promote their well-being during the pandemic?

2. What is the local authority doing to prevent the need for children to come into care; and are children returning home to their families quickly enough where safe to do so?

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 The Report has been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team.

3.2 **Option 1**

Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the CIW Assurance letter and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

3.3 **Option 2**

Accept the report and letter from CIW as provided.

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

4.1 The CIW Local Authority Assurance Check letter links to the following key priorities in the Corporate Plan:

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

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 *Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)*

There are no impacts from this CIW Assurance letter on the directorate's budget.

5.2 *Risk including Mitigating Actions*

Social Services maintain a directorate risk register which is aligned to both service level and corporate risk. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business planning process and included within the performance reporting of the director of Social Services.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 The CIW letter of Assurance is included within Appendix 1.

6.2 Headline updates include: **People - voice and control – We asked:** How well is the local authority ensuring people, carers and practitioners are having their voices heard, making informed choices, and maintaining control over their lives.

6.3 The letter states 'People we spoke with told us how the local authority had

maintained safe contact with them throughout the pandemic. Where needed, direct safe face-to-face contact has continued, subject to a COVID risk assessment. Many people spoke of staff going above and beyond; including where required 7 day a week contact aimed at managing risk to successfully maintaining children at home or supporting adults to remain within the community.'

- 6.4 It also highlighted how 'Senior managers with staff and partners have worked hard to embed strength based outcomes focussed practice. The authority's commitment to strength based outcome focused practice was evident in the files reviewed and staff spoke of how this underpinned their work in both adult and children's services.'
- 6.5 It goes on to say 'Evidence showed people's views were sought and their voices heard. Information gathering to represent people's circumstances was also informed by intelligence from a number of relevant partner agencies, notably during early stages of intervention.'
- 6.6 Further, 'Most practitioners who responded to our survey felt supported by colleagues and managers and regarded their workload as manageable. During the Assurance Check we found staff morale to be good and most practitioners were positive about their experience of working for the local authority. We heard how training opportunities had continued with a number of digital platforms used to enable staff and partners to access on-line training. Newly qualified staff told us they are supported in their first years of practice by regular supervision and mentoring arrangements. The recruitment and retention of staff is a recognised business critical priority. We found the local authority have adopted a proactive 'grow your own approach' through the secondment of staff to undertake their social work qualification.'
- 6.7 In relation to the second question asked by CIW, then the following was highlighted 'The local authority has successfully implemented its safe Children Looked After (CLA) strategy, leading to positive outcomes for children within the care system. Working with partners to deliver integrated responsive care, the number of looked after young people has not only stabilised, it is also continuing to decrease.' Also 'Staff spoke of the significance of the Support Change Team and My Support Team (MyST) who work intensively with families to prevent young people entering the care system, The Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Team have been vital in supporting the placements of Special Guardianship arrangements as an alternative to care supporting those families to prevent family breakdown and the return of children into the care system. The authority has been proactive in the revocation of a number of care orders into SGO's ensuring the best outcomes are achieved for young people.'
- 6.8 Two areas were identified requiring improvement, firstly '...we were not confident IRO's consulted with all children prior to their reviews and mid-point review. We found practice to be inconsistent particularly in relation to younger children. The local authority must ensure IRO's actively support

younger children to express their wishes and feelings and contribute towards the review process.’ Secondly, they raised concerns about WCCIS, ‘All staff and managers reported negatively about the constant issues with accessing and uploading information onto the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). Staff told us of many instances of how they had lost information or been unable to access the system, often having to download work outside working hours to ensure people’s information was recorded on the system. Senior managers were aware of these issues and are continually taking appropriate action to try to resolve the issues.’

- 6.9 **Prevention - We asked:** To what extent is the local authority successful in promoting prevention and reducing need for increased or formal support from statutory agencies?
- 6.10 CIW stated ‘Prevention is an integral part of the local authorities business. Within children’s services we found the commitment to developing Early Help and Prevention services following our inspection of Children’s Services in 2018. This approach is now fully evident across both children’s and adult services. We found a positive integrated approach to a culture of prevention through joint working, supportive infrastructures and aligned delivery systems between social and health care.’
- 6.11 They further identified how ‘From the front door Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) operating as business as usual during the pandemic, allowing people to access appropriate support including reablement provision. To the development of Critical Outreach Teams as alternative to respite and day activities, the authority has strived to promote independence and support people who require care and support.’
- 6.12 They were also pleased to see how ‘Staff awareness and practice to establish whether people have mental capacity to make specific decisions and where necessary to make best interest decisions on their behalf was reflected in records and the sample of assessments seen were of a good quality.’
- 6.13 **Partnership and Integration: We asked:** To what extent is the local authority able to assure itself opportunities for partnership working are positively exploited to maximise person centred planning and ensure integrated service delivery and service sustainability?
- 6.14 It was highlighted how ‘Strong partnership arrangements and a whole-council response has ensured the provision of support to the most vulnerable adults and children in Blaenau Gwent throughout the pandemic. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the service and have maintained a firm focus on doing the best for delivering services to adults and children who are in need of care and support, despite the disruption and financial strain caused by the continuing pandemic. Leaders and senior managers continue to keep under review new ways of working due to the pandemic, evaluating impact and/or lessons learnt in order to improve future delivery of services.’

- 6.15 They identified how ‘We heard and saw positive examples of a multi-agency approach to risk management and of practitioners, and managers working together during the pandemic to share information/intelligence to ensure they meet the needs and manage the risk of people with the most complex needs. Providers told us about the good communication and positive meetings with local authority commissioners during the pandemic, with contract-monitoring staff maintaining daily welfare calls with independent providers.’
- 6.16 Feedback from partners also showed how ‘Providers of commissioned services told us of the support offered by the local authority in navigating the vast amount of information and guidance related to their service introducing new ways of safe COVID working. Working in partnership with Public Health Wales, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) and Environmental Health the prompt distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) and recently coordinating the roll out of Lateral Flow Devices.’
- 6.17 They also considered some of the good internal working ‘Communication between the authority’s education directorate and children’s services has been assisted through CLA education coordinator and mentors having access to WCCIS, allowing prompt action to any emerging issues for children who are most vulnerable.’
- 6.18 In addition, ‘We heard from partners how the Safeguarding Team worked well with people from across the sector. We found evidence of good collaboration between social services, the police, and the third sector working directly with people to meet their safety outcomes. We found positive examples of multi-agency approach to risk management and of practitioners, identifying and monitoring vulnerable children and adults at risk.’
- 6.19 They found ‘Strategically, the authority and its partners had responded to the pandemic through working together to support a shared approach. For example, adapting policy and procedures with health colleagues to support the safe discharge from hospital.’
- 6.20 **Well-being: We asked:** To what extent is the local authority promoting well-being, ensuring people maintain their safety and achieve positive outcomes that matter to them?
- 6.21 CIW identified how ‘Within both adult and children’s services we found safeguarding concerns were responded to promptly in line with statutory requirements. Review of case records and discussion with practitioners provided assurance of a timely and proportionate response to both adult and children’s safeguarding concerns. Strategy discussions and meetings were timely and well-supported by partner agencies; which led to effective enquiries.’
- 6.22 They were also complementary about ‘The Corporate Parenting board is an

active advocate of young people's needs. There is strong involvement and interest from council members and leaders, who often meet directly with young people and show real interest in their lives. They recognised the specific needs of the young people in their care and strive to do their best for them.'

- 6.23 In addition, they also indicated 'Young people who had left care spoke positively about the support they had received from their personal advisors. All felt the commitment of their personal advisors had helped them feel value and supported them in their transition into adulthood. The authority has undertaken some considerable work with housing and housing providers to improve the priority and availability of accommodation for care leavers and this was reflected in the circumstances of the young people we interviewed.'
- 6.5 *Expected outcome for the public*
The report and letter provides the public with the opportunity to view progress of the Directorate and ensure accountability.
- 6.6 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*
The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 looks to build and strengthen on existing arrangements by involving service users, carers and other key partners where possible in helping shape and influence future design of services.
- 6.7 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*
The Report and letter enables the department to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the department is currently and where it needs to be in the future.
- 6.8 *Preventative focus*
The work undertaken by the department looks to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. Having an active rather than re active approach to service planning can also help with planning resources and not spending as much on services in the future.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 The performance of the department is monitored via the business planning process and reported through the democratic process via various reporting mechanisms including the ACRF, the Finance and Performance Report, the Assessment of Performance and various performance monitoring reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 – Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance Check 2021: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services

Damien McCann
Corporate Director of Social Services
Anvil Court
Church Street
Abertillery
NP13 6DB

damien.mccann@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Dyddiad/Date: 11 June 2021

Dear Director,

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Assurance Check 2021: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services

This letter summarises the findings of our assurance check on 17 May to 21 May 2021. The purpose of the assurance check was to review how well the local authority's social services continue to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being.

Overview

In March 2020, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) suspended its routine programme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable local authorities and providers to focus fully on responding to the challenging circumstances. A revised programme with local authorities recommenced in September to provide assurance about how people are being safeguarded and well-being promoted during the pandemic. We considered safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services, the safety of services they access and the safety and well-being of people who work in services.

We focused our key lines of enquiry within the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and have recorded our judgements and findings aligned to these: People - Voice and Control, Prevention, Partnerships and Integration, Well-being.

We asked:

1. How well is the local authority discharging its statutory functions to keep people who need care and support and carers who need support, safe and promote their well-being during the pandemic?
2. What is the local authority doing to prevent the need for children to come into care; and are children returning home to their families quickly enough where safe to do so?

Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru (AGC)
Swyddfa Llywodraeth Cymru
Sarn Mynach
Cyffordd Llandudno
LL31 9RZ
www.arolygiaethgofal.cymru

☎ 0300 790 0126
✉ CIW@gov.wales

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)
Welsh Government Office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ
www.careinspectorate.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Summary of findings and priorities for improvement:

People - voice and control – We asked: How well is the local authority ensuring people, carers and practitioners are having their voices heard, making informed choices, and maintaining control over their lives. While also balancing the recommendations and requirements made by Public Health Wales and Welsh Government to limit the spread of COVID-19?

People we spoke with told us how the local authority had maintained safe contact with them throughout the pandemic. Where needed, direct safe face-to-face contact has continued, subject to a COVID risk assessment. Many people spoke of staff going above and beyond; including where required 7 day a week contact aimed at managing risk to successfully maintaining children at home or supporting adults to remain within the community. We saw examples of both services working together, for example Flying Start support workers redeployed to support with home care duties, to maintain services to those in need of care and support within the community.

Senior managers with staff and partners have worked hard to embed strength based outcomes focussed practice. The authority's commitment to strength based outcome focused practice was evident in the files reviewed and staff spoke of how this underpinned their work in both adult and children's services. The authority recognise the importance of gaining people's views to inform practice development and support service improvement. We saw evidence of mentoring groups and peer supervision to share and reflect on case issues and identify potential responses to learning.

Evidence showed people's views were sought and their voices heard. Information gathering to represent people's circumstances was also informed by intelligence from a number of relevant partner agencies, notably during early stages of intervention.

There is evidence of routine monitoring and challenge by child protection conference chairs and independent reviewing officers (IRO), although this is stronger in some areas of practice than others. When it works well, this provides important checks and balances to decisions about children's welfare. However we were not confident IRO's consulted with all children prior to their reviews and mid-point review. We found practice to be inconsistent particularly in relation to younger children. The local authority must ensure IRO's actively support younger children to express their wishes and feelings and contribute towards the review process.

The local authority has successfully implemented its safe Children Looked After (CLA) strategy, leading to positive outcomes for children within the care system. Working with partners to deliver integrated responsive care, the number of looked after young people has not only stabilised, it is also continuing to decrease. The CLA strategy is continuously supported by senior managers who regularly scrutinise practice to ensure everything has been done to prevent young people entering into care, and those who are in care can be exited as soon as possible if appropriate. Staff spoke of the significance of the Support Change Team and My Support Team (MyST) who work intensively with families to prevent young people entering the care system, The Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Team have been vital in supporting the placements of Special Guardianship arrangements as an alternative to care supporting those families to prevent family breakdown and the return of children into the care system. The authority have been proactive in the revocation of a

number of care orders into SGO's ensuring the best outcomes are achieved for young people.

Most practitioners who responded to our survey felt supported by colleagues and managers and regarded their workload as manageable. During the Assurance Check we found staff morale to be good and most practitioners were positive about their experience of working for the local authority. We heard how training opportunities had continued with a number of digital platforms used to enable staff and partners to access on-line training. Newly qualified staff told us they are supported in their first years of practice by regular supervision and mentoring arrangements. The recruitment and retention of staff is a recognised business critical priority. We found the local authority have adopted a proactive 'grow your own approach' through the secondment of staff to undertake their social work qualification.

All staff and managers reported negatively about the constant issues with accessing and uploading information onto the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). Staff told us of many instances of how they had lost information or been unable to access the system, often having to download work outside working hours to ensure people's information was recorded on the system. Senior managers were aware of these issues and are continually taking appropriate action to try to resolve the issues.

Prevention - We asked: To what extent is the local authority successful in promoting prevention and reducing need for increased or formal support from statutory agencies?

Prevention is an integral part of the local authorities business. Within children's services we found the commitment to developing Early Help and Prevention services following our inspection of Children's Services in 2018. This approach is now fully evident across both children's and adult services. We found a positive integrated approach to a culture of prevention through joint working, supportive infrastructures and aligned delivery systems between social and health care.

In children services we saw how the ethos of working has shifted towards outcome focused, strength based practice. Within files we found a greater emphasis on work being undertaken with families encouraging them to find their own solutions to achieve outcomes. The development of a number of prevention and early intervention services enabling an early response to those referrals not meeting the criteria for statutory intervention has been a significant development. Within files we found many examples of edge of care services such as Families First providing intensive support and managing risk through delivering interventions with young people and their families to prevent escalation of need. There has been significant progress in not only social work practice but how the service itself is supported; including the development of documentation which are outcome focused and require the family to be fully involved in completion.

Overall, in adult services we found an outcome-based approach was embedded in practice, this supported coproduction and identification of personal outcomes. We saw and heard of how various professionals within the adult integrated teams worked collaboratively to support people's well-being and safety. From the front door Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) operating as business as usual during the pandemic, allowing people to access appropriate support including reablement provision. To the development of Critical

Outreach Teams as alternative to respite and day activities, the authority has strived to promote independence and support people who require care and support.

We found how learning from the development of a 7-day hub service for both acute and community hospitals plus community referrals in response to the pandemic has improved areas of practice. Such as case management and administrative processes, enhanced performance data and streamlined assessment forms to better support the practice of staff. Providers and staff told us of the positive work undertaken by the Community Resource Team (CRT). We saw evidence within files of people accessing the relevant and appropriate rehabilitative opportunities both in the community and within care homes. With the service providing reablement support to those recovering from the impact of COVID to supporting with end of life care.

Staff awareness and practice to establish whether people have mental capacity to make specific decisions and where necessary to make best interest decisions on their behalf was reflected in records and the sample of assessments seen were of a good quality.

Partnership and Integration: We asked: To what extent is the local authority able to assure itself opportunities for partnership working are positively exploited to maximise person centred planning and ensure integrated service delivery and service sustainability?

Strong partnership arrangements and a whole-council response has ensured the provision of support to the most vulnerable adults and children in Blaenau Gwent throughout the pandemic. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the service and have maintained a firm focus on doing the best for delivering services to adults and children who are in need of care and support, despite the disruption and financial strain caused by the continuing pandemic. Leaders and senior managers continue to keep under review new ways of working due to the pandemic, evaluating impact and/or lessons learnt in order to improve future delivery of services.

We heard and saw positive examples of a multi-agency approach to risk management and of practitioners, and managers working together during the pandemic to share information/intelligence to ensure they meet the needs and manage the risk of people with the most complex needs. Providers told us about the good communication and positive meetings with local authority commissioners during the pandemic, with contract-monitoring staff maintaining daily welfare calls with independent providers.

We saw within files and through speaking with people the opportunities for partnership working with health colleagues being effective and successfully promoted to produce positive outcomes for people. Integrated services and posts have provided the foundations for joint working across health and social care. We found practitioners from different sectors and services working effectively together, with CRT staff deployed to Community Hospitals working alongside health staff to ensure safe and timely discharges of people. This is significant as effective partnership working contributes to strength based, person-centred plans and maximises potential for increased independence of people within the local authority.

Providers of commissioned services told us of the support offered by the local authority in navigating the vast amount of information and guidance related to their service introducing new ways of safe COVID working. Working in partnership with Public Health Wales, Aneurin

Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) and Environmental Health the prompt distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) and recently coordinating the roll out of Lateral Flow Devices.

Communication between the authority's education directorate and children's services has been assisted through CLA education coordinator and mentors having access to WCCIS, allowing prompt action to any emerging issues for children who are most vulnerable.

We heard from partners how the Safeguarding Team worked well with people from across the sector. We found evidence of good collaboration between social services, the police, and the third sector working directly with people to meet their safety outcomes. We found positive examples of multi-agency approach to risk management and of practitioners, identifying and monitoring vulnerable children and adults at risk. However, staff spoke of some agencies struggling with balancing risk management with family outcomes. The local authority is aware of the need to further work with partner agencies to ensure a strength based approach is instilled and better understood.

Strategically, the authority and its partners had responded to the pandemic through working together to support a shared approach. For example, adapting policy and procedures with health colleagues to support the safe discharge from hospital. The Regional Partnership Board, despite a pause in its activity during the initial stages of the pandemic, has continued to be influential in shaping health and social care services within the local authority.

Well-being: We asked: To what extent is the local authority promoting well-being, ensuring people maintain their safety and achieve positive outcomes that matter to them?

Within both adult and children's services we found safeguarding concerns were responded to promptly in line with statutory requirements. Review of case records and discussion with practitioners provided assurance of a timely and proportionate response to both adult and children's safeguarding concerns. Strategy discussions and meetings were timely and well-supported by partner agencies; which led to effective enquiries.

We found the voices and wishes of people at risk were embedded within the safeguarding documentation and in most of the cases we saw evidence of good information gathering, liaison with other professionals and analysis and determination clearly recorded. We identified good analysis of risk, decision making, protection plans in place, and appropriate action taken when necessary.

The Corporate Parenting board is an active advocate of young people's needs. There is strong involvement and interest from council members and leaders, who often meet directly with young people and show real interest in their lives. They recognise the specific needs of the young people in their care and strive to do their best for them.

Young people who had left care spoke positively about the support they had received from their personal advisors. All felt the commitment of their personal advisors had helped them feel value and supported them in their transition into adulthood. The authority has undertaken some considerable work with housing and housing providers to improve the priority and availability of accommodation for care leavers and this was reflected in the circumstances of the young people we interviewed.

Methods

- we reviewed documentation supplied in advance of our visit
- we spoke with carers and people who were receiving or had received care and support including young people who had left care
- we reviewed 25 files
- we held ten case tracking interviews with staff
- we administered a survey to people who had experience of care and support, providers, third sector organisations, staff, police, and healthcare professionals
- we attended a Resource and Complex Needs Panel
- we met with representatives from police, education department, health, and the third sector

Next Steps

We have identified strengths and areas for priority improvement and we will review the progress of these areas through our performance evaluation review meetings with the heads of service and director. We expect the areas of improvement we have identified to be included in the local authority's improvement plans. We would like to extend our thanks to all those who helped with the arrangements for this assurance check and to those people and staff who spoke with us.

Please see our Privacy Notice at <https://careinspectorate.wales/how-we-use-your-information>

Yours sincerely,



Lou Bushell-Bauers

Head of Local Authority Inspection

Care Inspectorate Wales

Agenda Item 8

Executive Committee and Council only

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer: N/A

Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer: N/A

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**

Date of meeting: **22nd July 2021**

Report Subject: **Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/20**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member for Social Services**

Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
22.6.21	08.07.21	12.07.21			22.07.21		29.07.21	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is present the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/2020 (Appendix 1).

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Director of Social Services to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Social Services and produce an Annual Report which forms part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework.
- 2.2 Owing to the pressures that Social Services were under to respond to the emergency Covid pandemic the Welsh Government agreed to postpone the development of the Annual Report 2019/20. It has subsequently been agreed by Welsh Government that the outstanding 2019/20 report be developed and approved as well as a separate report for 2020/21. The Council have agreed to present the 2019/20 report in July and the 2021 Report in September / October.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Report has been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team.

3.2 Option 1

Members are asked to scrutinise the information detailed within the Director of Social Services 2019/20 report and contribute to the continuous assessment of effectiveness by making appropriate recommendations to the Executive Committee.

3.3 Option 2

Accept the report as provided.

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

4.1 It is a statutory responsibility of the Director of Social Services to assess the effectiveness of the delivery of Social Services and produce an Annual Report. The Annual Report contributes and forms part of the Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF).

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

The Director's Report identifies pressures and budgetary implications from April 2019 to March 2020.

5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Social Services maintain a directorate risk register which is aligned to both service level and corporate risk. The risk register is reviewed as part of the business planning process and included within the performance reporting of the director of Social Services.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 Performance information is included within Appendix 1.

6.2 Headline updates include:

6.3 Children's

Supporting families with high quality, flexible and affordable childcare continues, supporting economic regeneration, reducing pressures on family income and helping parents to participate in work, reducing a family's risk of poverty. It also supports the well-being of children through positive and rich childhood experiences. The Childcare Offer is now fully rolled out across both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen by the Blaenau Gwent team.

The safeguarding of children, families and vulnerable adults remains a priority moving forward for the Directorate. We have strengthened our response to children's safeguarding referrals by placing a police resource within our Children's Information, Advice and Assistance service to better inform our decision making and unsure decisions are taken in a timely manner.

The 3 years Safe Reduction of Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy has been in place for over 2 years now and is supported by a clear action plan which is reviewed on a quarterly basis as part of the business planning process. The development of a Supporting Change Team who work with children and families on the 'edge of care' has evidenced that preventing problems escalating can reduce the number of children becoming looked after. We continue to see a steady reduction in the numbers of CLA during

the year. An independent review of the strategy was commenced during the year to ensure it can be reshaped for the coming years.

We have been also supporting the above strategy through the use of Integrated Care Funding (ICF) with a Family Conference service, the development of a special guardianship team, the enhancing of the current Supporting Change team and the development of a Young Person's Mediation service aimed at age 14 plus.

6.4 Adults

In Adult Services the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) team and Community Resource team have continued to work together to provide an enhanced 'front door' for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent for referrals for both health and social care provision. The IAA outreach pilots at both Nevill Hall Hospital and Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan continues to work well, contributing to the very low numbers of delayed transfers of care being experienced by Blaenau Gwent residents. Our performance on delayed transfers of care was again excellent with our rate at 0.98 for 2019/20 which again puts us in the top quartile of performing authorities across Wales.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) recognised the considerable investment officers have made to address the fragile domiciliary care market and how we are procuring a sustainable model jointly with Caerphilly to provide greater choice and options for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent. They also identified how service users attending Cwm Coch described social workers as very supportive and accessible. They also identified how the IAA Service with partners had embraced the 'what matters' conversations, evidencing the MIND workers interface with the Police, Women's Aid and Cwm Coch hospital as well as the emotional support via telephone, signposting to relevant services and cascading information within the team they provide.

The General Practitioner Engagement service for carers delivered by South East Wales Carers Trust who support all GP surgeries reached the final of the South Wales Argus Health and Care Awards and were recognised for the excellent work they undertaking for carers. During carers week, we put a number of raising awareness events and activities for carers across Blaenau Gwent.

We also led the development of a Regional adult advocacy commissioning strategy and helpline which set out a clear direction of travel for advocacy services in the region over the next 5 years.

6.5 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Reporting provides the public with the opportunity to view progress of the Directorate and ensure accountability.

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

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 looks to build and strengthen on existing arrangements by involving service users, carers and other key partners where possible in helping shape and influence future design of services.

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

The Report enables the department to plan for the future as spend, risk and performance is continuously reported on and provides a baseline of where the department is currently and where it needs to be in the future.

6.8 ***Preventative focus***

The work undertaken by the department looks to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention. Having an active rather than re active approach to service planning can also help with planning resources and not spending as much on services in the future.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The performance of the department is monitored via the business planning process and reported through the democratic process via various reporting mechanisms including the ACRF, the Finance and Performance Report, the Assessment of Performance and various performance monitoring reports.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 –Report of the Director of Social Services 2019/20

Social Services Annual Report 2019/20



Contents

Introduction	1
Director’s Summary of Performance	3
How People are Shaping our Services	6
Promoting and Improving the Well-being of Those We Help	8
• Quality Standard 1	10
• Quality Standard 2	11
• Quality Standard 3	12
• Quality Standard 4	13
• Quality Standard 5	14
• Quality Standard 6	15
How We Do What We Do	
• Our Workforce and How We Support their Professional Roles	16
• Our Partnership Working, Political and Corporate Leadership, Governance and Accountability	16
• Audit and Inspection	17
• Collaboration	18
• ‘More than just Words’	19
• Our Financial Resources and How We Plan for the Future	19
Conclusion	20
Accessing Further Information and Key Documents	21
• Useful Documents	
• Useful Websites	
• Providing Feedback	

Introduction

Welcome to the Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services Annual Report 2019/20. Over the past few years the Department has been developing this annual report to highlight the key areas of improvements and challenges that have been faced.

This report has been 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. A key aspect of the report is showing how the six Quality Standards have been implemented in relation to well-being outcomes.

This report provides a strategic overview of the work undertaken throughout 2019/20 and what plans are in place to move forward. Further supporting information can be found from page 21 of the report.

The report includes evidence of where Social Services have worked collaboratively with partners.

Experiences and learning from service users has been considered as part of the development of the report. Service users have been engaged through a number of forums such as the Carers Group, 50+ Forum and Young Carers Group. Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) findings, Wales Audit Office (WAO) findings, case studies, complaints and compliments and quarterly reporting have all been considered as part of the development of this report and evidence from these has been used to inform future learning.

The annual report is used to demonstrate accountability to citizens and service users. As part of this process, the report will be presented to full Council for ratification before it is published on the Council's website and will then be sent to Welsh Ministers. The report will be available on line bilingually and will be shared with partner agencies in order to share good practice, learning and experiences.

COVID – 19 The Council's Response

In March 2020, a decision was made by the UK Government to put the UK into lockdown in order to try and curb the spread of the global pandemic COVID 19. As part of this, the Council had to act quickly and had to consider alternative methods of service delivery, ensuring that the most vulnerable in society were supported.

Since lockdown began the Council has shifted its sole focus to the emergency response. This has resulted in delivery of only critical services with other available resources being redeployed to support the response. There has been a particular focus on Adult Social Services, supporting some of the most vulnerable in our community. Welsh Government therefore removed the normal timetable for submission of the Directors Annual Report due the COVID-19 pandemic and are now requested the 2019/20 report is submitted by September 2021.



Director's Summary of Performance

As the Corporate Director of Social Services in Blaenau Gwent, I am pleased to present the annual report for 2019/20 which is a requirement of the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (the Act). The report is being submitted later than normal due to Welsh Government waiving the need for submission of the report during the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.

We always seek feedback from service users, carers, families and partner organisations, and together with complaints and compliments and the Act questionnaires are all important learning and development opportunities for the Directorate. However due to the COVID-19 pandemic which began in March 2020 the results were not analysed as staff were redeployed to assist deliver frontline services across the Council. We continue to view complaints and compliments as a great opportunity for the Directorate to improve the services and the service user experience moving forward (See Chapter on How People are shaping our Service).

Under the Act we have continued to invest in the knowledge and learning of our Care Management staff through attendance at Outcomes Training and collaborative working with Social Care Wales to identify best practice and showcase examples where we have supported citizens to achieve their outcomes some examples can be viewed on Social Care Wales website.

The safeguarding of children, families and vulnerable adults remains a priority moving forward for the Directorate. We have strengthened our response to children's safeguarding referrals by placing a police resource within our Children's Information, Advice and Assistance service to better inform our decision making and unsure decisions are taken in a timely manner.

The 3 years Safe Reduction of Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy has been in place for over 2 years now and is supported by a clear action plan which is reviewed on a quarterly basis as part of the business planning process. The development of a Supporting Change Team who work with children and families on the 'edge of care' has evidenced that preventing problems escalating can reduce the number of children becoming looked after. We continue to see a steady reduction in the numbers of CLA during the year. An independent review of the strategy was commenced during the year to ensure it can be reshaped for the coming years.

We have been also supporting the above strategy through the use of Integrated Care Funding (ICF) with a Family Conference service, the development of a special guardianship team, the enhancing of the current Supporting Change team and the development of a Young Person's Mediation service aimed at age 14 plus.

The South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS) has now increased capacity in the service to deliver more direct work, birth parent support, sibling contact and improving adoption support plans. The Adoption Service has produced a Life Journey handbook to ensure timely and good quality information is included to support the child. Blaenau Gwent had 14 children who were adopted in 2019/20 compared to 8 children who were adopted in 2018/19. Performance overall of SEWAS continues to be very good.

Supporting families with high quality, flexible and affordable childcare continues, supporting economic regeneration, reducing pressures on family income and helping parents to participate in work, reducing a family's risk of poverty. It also supports the well-being of children through positive and rich childhood experiences. The Childcare Offer is now fully rolled out across both Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen by the Blaenau Gwent team.

On a regional basis the Directors of Social Services are committed to looking at collaborative opportunities across Social Services and Health, using the Transformation fund from 'A Healthier Wales' and the Integrated Care Capital and Revenue Funding.

In Adult Services the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) team and Community Resource team have continued to work together to provide an enhanced 'front door' for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent for referrals for both health and social care provision. The IAA outreach pilots at both Nevill Hall Hospital and Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan continues to work well, contributing to the very low numbers of delayed transfers of care being experienced by Blaenau Gwent residents. Our performance on delayed transfers of care was again excellent with our rate at 0.98 for 2019/20 which again puts us in the top quartile of performing authorities across Wales.

The General Practitioner Engagement service for carers delivered by South East Wales Carers Trust who support all GP surgeries reached the final of the South Wales Argus Health and Care Awards and were recognised for the excellent work they undertaking for carers. During carers week, we put a number of raising awareness events and activities for carers across Blaenau Gwent.

We also led the development of a Regional adult advocacy commissioning strategy and helpline which set out a clear direction of travel for advocacy services in the region over the next 5 years.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) recognised the considerable investment officers have made to address the fragile domiciliary care market and how we are procuring a sustainable model jointly with Caerphilly to provide greater choice and options for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent. They also identified how service users attending Cwm Coch described social workers as very supportive and accessible. They also identified how the IAA Service with partners had embraced the 'what matters' conversations, evidencing the MIND workers interface with the Police, Women's Aid and Cwm Coch hospital as well as the emotional support via telephone, signposting to relevant services and cascading information within the team they provide.

Blaenau Gwent Council, along with many other Local Authorities in Wales continue to face serious financial problems and Social Services, like all Council Services, have had to make cuts to ensure the authority delivers a balanced budget for 2019/20. The sustained pressure within Children's Services due to the number of CLA has had a detrimental effect on the budget situation but the Services has achieved a small under spend of £75K in 2019/20. The Directorate received an additional £0.769 million added to the Services base budget to cover these pressures within 2019/20 and the considerable work done through the implementation of the Safe Reduction of CLA strategy, has resulted in a small underspend at end of March 2020. On the other hand, Adult Services have managed to underspend by £182K resulting in an overall underspend for the Directorate of £347K.

The challenge for 2020/21 will be to continue to manage demand and to do more with less. We will undertake a number of reviews within some of the services we deliver internally. We will continue to look to explore further opportunities for collaboration where it will improve the well-being of the citizens of Blaenau Gwent and it is right to do so.

Hopefully, this report will help you to understand how we support and safeguard children, young people, citizens, carers and their families within Blaenau Gwent and how we will continue to strive to improve our services.

Damien McCann

Corporate Director of
Social Services



Cllr John Mason

Executive Member
Social Services



How People are shaping our Services

As part of the Act, people who use care and support services are invited to complete an annual survey in relation to the provision of care and support. Again at the end of this financial year, Adults and Carers were sent questionnaires, however due to the COVID outbreak and available resources being redeployed to support the emergency response, analysis of any returned questionnaires was put on hold whilst services were redirected to support the most vulnerable within our community. Welsh Government were also involved heavily in the COVID 19 response and stated that they did not require for the questionnaire analysis to be provided from any local authority.

The Social Services Directorate is committed to providing high quality services to its citizens and prior to the COVID outbreak multiple methods of engagement were implemented throughout the year in order to achieve this, some examples are detailed below.

Consultation

- As part of the Early Years Transformation Programme pilot a consultation has been undertaken with both families and professionals to consider the existing model and to understand what matters to them.



Engagement

- Involvement with children and families occurs on a daily basis and is recoded as part of care planning.

Complaints and Compliments

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.

Examples of complaints received in Children's Services this year were :-

- Unhappy with a delay in visits from social services;
- Lack of information provided;
- Conflicting advice given;
- Unhappy with the length of time social services took to respond to concerns raised; and
- Unhappy with being passed around departments and having to repeat the information.

In Adult Services examples of complaints were:-

- Unhappy with lack of communication from social services; and
- Unhappy with services being offered but not implemented.

In order to continue to improve services, the outcomes of complaint investigations and learning from them are undertaken to prevent the situation from occurring again. During 2019/20 examples of learning identified and actioned include:

Adults

- Staff were reminded to be clear about their roles and responsibilities when communicating with individuals and their families;
- Staff were reminded that communication should be undertaken on agreed actions/plans with individuals and/or their families so as not to raise expectations ; and
- Staff were reminded to update case records to reflect discussions that have taken place with individuals and/or their families .

Children

- Staff were reminded of the need to engage in clear communication with families and the need to be open and honest with them in regard to the departments limitations of support and expectation on families to work together in the best interests of their children.; and
- Continue to monitor case allocations and to undertake dip sample audits to further inform the local authority of current practice.



Promoting and Improving the Well-being of Those We Help

Priorities

In March 2018, Council approved the Blaenau Gwent Corporate Plan 2018/22. The Corporate Plan is the Council's roadmap setting out the vision, values and priorities of the Council. One key priority within the Plan is, 'Social Services'. The business plans within Social Services are aligned directly to the Corporate Plan to ensure that the priorities can be implemented over the next four years. The priorities are shown below and the Quality Standards demonstrate where improvement has been made, challenges have been addressed and where outcomes have been achieved. The Corporate Plan priorities have been written to cover the four year period 2018/22, therefore, the above mentioned priority areas are likely to remain in place until 2022, however, an annual review of the priorities and supporting action will be undertaken to ensure priorities remain fit for purpose.

Corporate Plan Social Services Priorities 2018/22 are:

- **To improve accessibility, provision of information and advice to enable people to support their own wellbeing;**
- **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 promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities;**
- **To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm; and**
- **To develop a partnership approach to reducing and alleviating the impacts of Poverty.**

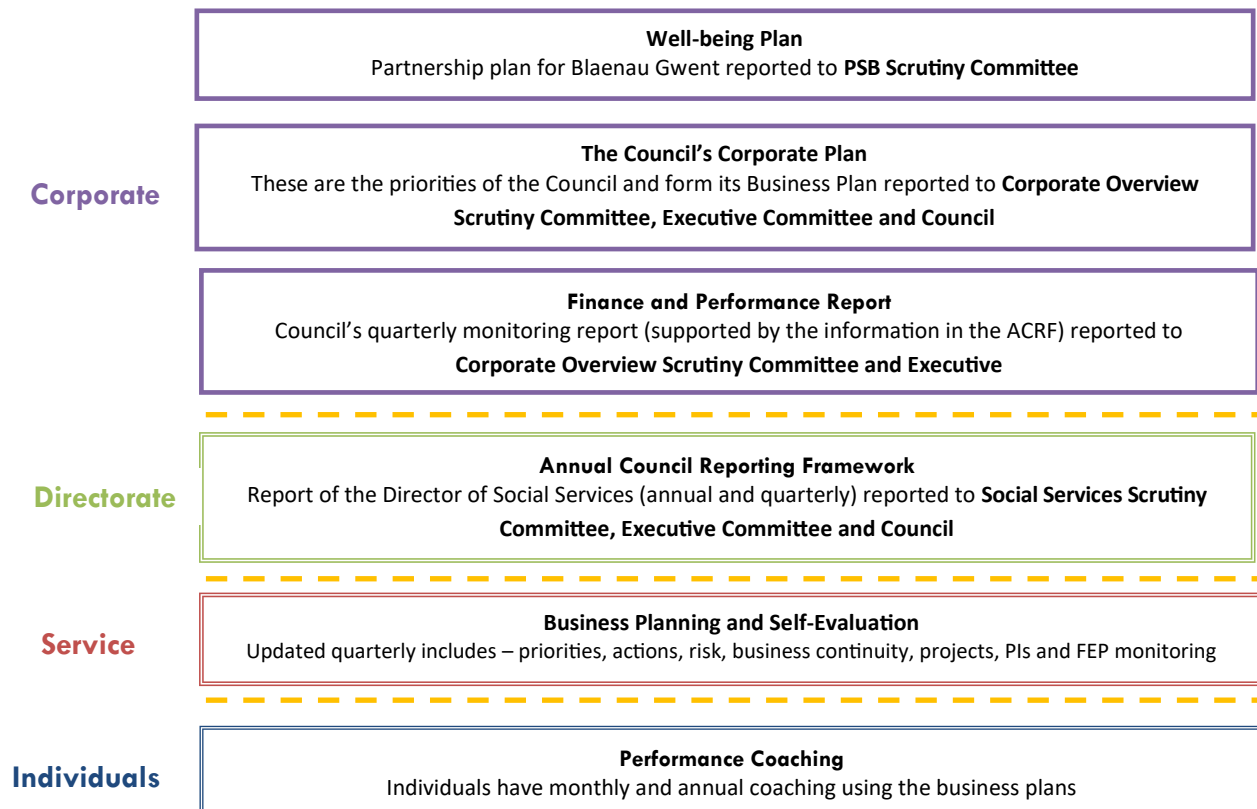
Children's Services Priorities 2019/20

<i>Priority Title</i>	<i>BRAG</i>
• Enhance screening and IAA provision (children and adults)	
• Support and encourage a cultural change across Children's services by ensuring that community members have a say in what matters to them	
• Preventative services target the most vulnerable families in Blaenau Gwent who do not meet the criteria for a care and support plan	
• Implement the Safe Reduction of Looked After Children Strategy 2017	
• Improve outcomes for Looked After Children	
• To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements	
• All teams to ensure the children and young people of Blaenau Gwent are safeguarded	
• Manage the Children's Services budget to ensure expenditure comes within budget	
• Children's Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles	

<i>Priority Title</i>	<i>BRAG</i>
• Enhance screening and IAA Adult Services support at our front door	
• Support and encourage a cultural change across Adults services by ensuring that citizens have a say in what matters to them	
• Ensure that preventative support is available to citizens - promoting personal independence and reducing dependencies	
• Ensure that we provide / commission modern, high quality care and support provision that meet both current and future well-being needs of our citizens	
• To develop alternative models of support that promotes independence and supports well-being outcomes	
• Ensure that vulnerable adults are safeguarded	
• Develop and maximise opportunities for partnership working across Welsh Government Flexibilities Grants and Welfare reform related programmes	
• Manage the Adults Service core budget and grant programmes to ensure that expenditure comes within budget	
• Adult Services contributes to meeting the Sustainable Development Principles	

The framework below shows how reporting and monitoring works throughout the Council to create a 'golden thread'.

Planning Framework



Progress of the Quality Standards

During a comprehensive assessment of performance at the end of 2019/20, the following achievements and challenges were identified as part of the Council's Performance Management Framework.

Working with people to define and co-produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve

A police resource is now in place in the Information, Advice and Assistance Team which strengthens our multi-agency response to safeguarding referrals being dealt with within the timescales required under the All Wales Child Protection Procedures.

Over the course of Carers week, awareness raising events and activities took place in venues across the borough along with an information and advice session for Carers of people with learning disabilities. These were all delivered and supported by the Carers Lead Officer, General Practice Engagement Officers and the Voluntary Sector such as Carers Trust Service / Age Cymru.

The numbers of referrals managed by the Adults Services IAA Team continues to increase as the intake model approach continues to be embedded; and the percentage of proportionate assessments that led to a more comprehensive assessment for the care and support of adults was 13% at year-end 2019/20, an improvement from last year when the figure was 64.2%. However, the percentage of proportionate assessments that led to a more comprehensive assessment for the care and support of children was 11.6% at year end, a decline from last year when the figure was 7.4%.

The work of Compassionate Communities and the Integrated Well-being Network continues to evolve linking Placed Based Care, Prevention and well-being Principles together. The General Practitioner (GP) Engagement Service continues to support all GP surgeries and the service reached the finals of the South Wales Argus Health and Care awards and, although they did not win, it is recognition of the excellent work being undertaken.

The IAA outreach pilots at both Nevill Hall Hospital and Ysbyty Aneurin Bevan continues to work well, contributing to the very low numbers of delayed transfers of care being experienced by Blaenau Gwent residents. As a result of the pilots adult services are completing a system review to determine how citizens experiences can improve throughout the whole of adult services.

The IAA Team and Community Resource Team continue to work together to provide an enhanced 'Front Door' for Blaenau Gwent citizens, utilising an intake approach to preventative services. This preventative approach to the screening of referrals to both health and social care systems has been developed via the new Single Point of Access (SPA) pilot project in the team

The Safeguarding / Children Looked After (CLA) education team are developing a framework for CLA child friendly schools, which will include a good practice guide and self-evaluation tool for schools. A task and finish group has been established during which it was agreed the child's voice should help inform these documents.

An internal case audit was devised in 2019 and the theme was 'The Voice of the Child'. A total of 18 cases were randomly chosen and each case audit was completed by either a Team Manager and/or Senior Practitioner, and Independent Reviewing Officer.

As part of the Early Years Transformation Programme pilot a consultation has been undertaken with both families and professionals to consider the existing model and to understand what matters to them.

Working with people and partners to protect and promote people's physical and mental health and emotional well-being

Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money has been allocated to support children at risk of becoming looked after, in care or, who are adopted. This includes a regional approach to a Family Group Conference service; Development of a Special Guardianship Team; Enhancement of the Supporting Change Team to build on the work already being done to prevent children entering the care system; and delivery of a Young Person's Mediation Service aimed at ages 14 years and above.

The Family Group Conference Service is now fully established. We have a clear procedure in place and are targeting families earlier at the point of Child Protection Registration in order to get the extended family on board and involved in the children's plans as early as possible.

Through co-productive working across the five Gwent local authorities and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, a regional adult advocacy commissioning strategy has been published and a new advocacy helpline has been launched. The commissioning strategy sets out a clear direction of travel for the development of advocacy services in the region over the next five years.

The SPACE Well-being programme is working co productively with partners such as Health, Education, Police, Probation, Youth Offending Service and 3rd sector providers to ensure that the mental health needs of children and young people are assessed early with the right agency taking the lead on providing the most appropriate interventions.

The 'hosting' arrangements that have been developed along with Torfaen County Borough Council in respect of the childcare offer show true collaborative working. Blaenau Gwent Early Years Childcare and Play Team have also assisted Newport, Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff in the setup of their Childcare Offer Projects. The Childcare Offer is now fully rolled out and exploration of why some parents did not access the offer has commenced.

The children and families partnership commissioned independent support to develop a regional approach to managing complex cases which need a multiagency approach and a procedure for addressing disputes between agencies when care planning and funding issues arise. This regional approach comprises of a panel attended by all Gwent Heads of Service alongside health and education colleagues who have the authority to agree to release funding. As part of this work, the terms of reference for the local complex needs panels have been re drafted to get a common approach across Gwent.

A Whole Person, Whole System Mental Health Crisis Support Board is in place following a number of Action Learning Sets being developed to provide a timely, person-centred, effective and efficient 24/7 response for those in crisis and their carers across the whole care system in Gwent. A number of task and finish groups have been set up to develop parts of the system to respond:-

- Shared lives – as at January 2020 five arrangements had been completed within Newport which is the pilot area.
- Ty Llys – well-being house – a small sub group has been created
- The second stage of the lottery application has been completed by the Mental Health consortium for the crisis house.
- T&F group for the Crisis Assessment Service Unit (CASU) has completed a piece of work on the benefits and measures of developing this service – all outcomes are to be measured from the CASU launch taking place in the Spring and are drafted into three categories. (i) Benefits to service users, (ii) benefits for staff and (iii) benefits for Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. Local Authorities have reviewed the bed modelling, identifying 13 beds for a potential centralised assessment unit. A Service User engagement event is planned for Spring.

The Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy has started to evidence how it is preventing problems faced by children and families escalating to a point which requires children becoming looked after or their names going onto the child protection register. Good evidence of this is the work undertaken by the Supporting Change Team and a full evaluation, which involved consultation with children and families, showed evidence that the team is making a real difference. An independent evaluation is underway which will serve to shape a new 10 year strategy from 2020.

The number of Children Looked After (CLA) has reduced , however there has been an increase in the numbers of children on the child protection register. The numbers of children looked after are now 208 compared to 222 in March 2018. For year end 2019/20 there was 61 children on the Child Protection Register compared to 56 last year.

Partnership work continues with the Police under the Early Action Together programme which supports improvement to the timeliness of undertaking the Child Protection process and in ensuring that information is collated and considered in all decision making.

Performance analysis also shows that 100 of 103 initial Child Protection Conferences were held within 15 days with 97.1% being within the statutory timescale and the average length of time a child in Blaenau Gwent remained on the local authority child protection register was 295 days, an increase from last year when the figure was 277.27.

Education Directorate and Social Services are key partners in the Gwent Early Action Together Programme and continue to work collectively to strengthen safeguarding arrangements which has included the embedding of the Operation Encompass initiative which provides an early alert to schools before the start of the school day of any child that is subject to, or witness to, police-attended incidents of domestic abuse.

The Blaenau Gwent Corporate Parenting Board is made up of elected members, Local Authority officers and representation from partner agencies to ensure that the best possible advice, care and safeguarding of our children is ensured across the 7 areas. Attendance and contributions of all members of the board is monitored to ensure involvement.

A Step Down procedure has been communicated with all staff and is working well, enabling staff from Children's Social Care, Early Help Services and a range of other partners to support child/family intervention and plan as they move from requiring statutory, safeguarding and specialist support to targeted and universal services and interventions.

New All Wales Safeguarding Guidance and procedures for both children and adults have been launched and the app is available for practitioners.

All Legal time requirements are being met and the legal support and advice for vulnerable children and adults are being delivered in a professional and timely manner.

The percentage of adult protection enquiries completed within the statutory timescale of seven working days was 98% during 2019/20. This has increased from 2018/19 when the figure was 93.3%. The Early Intervention and Prevention Strategy has been formally signed off by council in March 2019 and is now being embedded in day to day practice.

At the end of academic year 2018-2019 153 children of statutory school age were looked after by Blaenau Gwent.

Consistency of schooling continues to be considered as part of the matching process when a looked after child moves placement 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.

Outcomes for children looked after are continually reviewed and the following outcomes were determined at the end of 2018/19 academic year:

- Key stage 2 results were considerably higher when compared with the previous year but lower at the end of key stage 3;
- A total of 16 children looked after completed their statutory studies with 9 achieving recognised qualifications; and
- There has been a decrease in the incidents of exclusions, however, an increase in the number of days lost to exclusions.

Collaborative work continues in respect of the Children Looked After Friendly Schools initiative. The protocol has been developed in draft and will be piloted in one cluster group, where feedback will then be obtained and the protocol revised accordingly .

The Food and Fun Programme was delivered in participating schools this summer, led by school staff with support from the council for catering and cleaning. The school-based programme provided healthy meals, food and nutrition education and physical activity to children in a fun social environment. Around 160 pupils and families took part with the ethos being centred around activities based around fitness, healthy eating and appreciating the environment.

Supporting families with high quality, flexible and affordable childcare continues, supporting economic regeneration, reducing pressures on family income and helping parents to participate in work, reducing a family's risk of poverty. It also supports the well-being of children through positive and rich childhood experiences.

We are minimising the need for individuals to spend unnecessary time in hospital beds by placing the person at the centre of the discussion, as an expert of their own experiences and will continue to put them at the heart of the whole system approach

A child sufficiency assessment has been carried out at which time we consulted with parents on period poverty.

The rate of Delayed Transfers of Care for 2019/20 was 0.98 which is an improvement from 2017/18 when the outturn was 1.16.

Following the Joint Thematic Review of Community Mental Health Teams in Wales, in partnership with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board in May 2020, we developed an improvement plan with actions to address areas of improvement identified by CIW/HIW.

Progress against this plan will be monitored by health and social care partners quarterly along with other general governance although primarily governance responsibility will be with the Mental Health and the Learning Disability Delivery Group.

Supporting people to develop safely and to maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships

Welsh Government investment monies have been used to improve service provision within the South East Wales Adoption Services (SEWAS). There is now increased capacity in the service to deliver more direct work, birth parent support, sibling contact and improving adoption support plans. The Adoption Service has produced a Life Journey handbook/guide for Social Workers to ensure timely and good quality information is included to support the child. Blaenau Gwent had 14 children who were adopted in 2019/20 compared to 8 children who were adopted in 2018/19.

There has been a decrease in the number of foster carers - 77 Foster Carers in March 2020 (54 Generic Carers and 23 Kinship Carers) in comparison to 80 Foster Carers in March 2019 (58 Generic Carers and 22 Kinship Carers). Placement sufficiency and the difficulty in recruiting foster carers locally despite recruitment campaigns is an area raised as a concern by Care Inspectorate Wales.

A (5 LA's) hospital discharge service (Home First) has been developed, to be funded by the Transformation Fund. Exploration into further expansion of this to other parts of the Health and Social care system is underway.

As part of improving the quality of assessments and ensuring that they demonstrate a full consideration of need and a clear record of analysis of the child's needs and wellbeing outcomes, training has been delivered to staff in relation to the use of historical information being used when assessing risk. In addition a new calendar of weekly training is being delivered to refresh staff awareness on all aspects of assessment and care planning.

A review of the use of contracts of expectations has been undertaken to ensure that children's safety is never compromised. A new procedure has been written, signed off and shared with teams and is now in operation.

Assessment and planning involves active participation of families in the co-production of care and support plans and following the delivery of outcomes training to all statutory staff this is now evidenced in the case recordings. An audit tool to focus on consultation and participation of children and families has been developed.

Care Inspectorate Wales annual performance review acknowledged the work being undertaken to promote the Welsh language and the lead Blaenau Gwent played in developing a five year regional advocacy commissioning strategy. They recognised the work undertaken as a result of the inspection report and how children looked after had steadied and is now slowly declining.

Commitment from the joint MyST team with Monmouthshire to return children from residential care to live closer to home is ongoing. The MyST provides a multi-disciplinary intensive therapeutic fostering service for Children Looked After. The Team continues to work intensively with children currently in residential care with the aim of bringing them back to live closer to Blaenau Gwent and be placed with foster carers or family members. The Team also works with those children in care who present with complex needs and are at risk of going into residential care, to prevent this from happening.

Working with and supporting people to achieve greater economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) recognised the considerable investment officers have made to address the fragile domiciliary care market and how we are currently procuring a sustainable model jointly with Caerphilly to provide greater choice and options for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent. They identified how service users attending Cwm Coch described social workers as very supportive and accessible and how the Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) Service had embraced the 'what matters' conversations, evidencing the MIND workers interface with the Police, Women's Aid and Cwm Coch hospital as well as the emotional support via telephone, signposting to relevant services.

The Floating Support Service offers housing-related support to people who are at risk of homelessness. CIW however, identified the need of more mental health supportive housing and floating support to provide for the needs of people with mental health problems. Welsh Government Youth Grant will provide an additional £160,000 for mental well-being and homelessness support.

During 2019 / 20 we have continued to develop the support we give to patients in both our Community and Acute hospital settings though the development of an outreach team who are working within Nevill Hall Hospital 'in reaching' into patients on floor 4 of the hospital. The outcomes of this project are due to be analysed early 2020 with a view to extending the model across other areas of the hospital. The project has been further enhanced during the Winter months due to the Local Authority securing additional funding from Welsh Government to support Winter pressures. This has enabled us to increase our capacity to undertake assessments at the local hospitals through additional weekend working.

Our Community Options Service continues to provide a wide range of day activities to citizens across the ages from 18 to 90 years of age. During 2019/20 we completed the remodelling of our Lake View facility in Nantyglo resulting in the closure of our Quiet Minds provision with some citizens being supported in Lake View and a number of citizens transferring to Ash Parc – where we provide support for citizens living with Dementia, and others successfully accessing community or third sector networks.

Our partnership with Growing Space (third sector Mental Health group) was strengthened further in July 2019 resulting in an increase in community based learning opportunities for those attending our Community Options Green Shoots project. Growing Space are providing opportunities for citizens to gain experience in retail by working in the furniture recycling shop in Brynmawr, building confidence in meeting new people. Citizens are also participating in the furniture upcycling workshop, and maintaining and developing the gardens in Tredegar House, Newport. The participants have grown in confidence and become motivated in delivering the Growing Space programme.

Good partnership and working arrangements have continued between our RSL partners including Tai Calon, colleagues in Housing Strategy, the Supporting People Team and the Community Resource Team (CRT) ensuring that key partners are involved when allocating properties to citizens who have complex needs and mobility issues.

The Care Leavers Move on Panel has continued to support care leavers that are ready to move into their own accommodation and a large number of care leavers aged 17+ were offered accommodation throughout 2019/20 Each care leaver was presented to the panel of housing providers who then then offered suitable accommodation that suited their needs. This along with the training opportunities to progress care leavers economic status supports care leavers future independence.

How We Do What We Do

Our Workforce and How We Support their Professional Roles

The Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly Workforce Development Service continue to evidence innovation, success and contribution. The Service continues to lead, on behalf of Gwent, the management of the Social Care Wales Workforce Development Grant, worth over £2 million pounds. The Grant enables investment in training for those who work with the most vulnerable in society. The service also continues to provide leadership for a number of networks and committees, including the All Wales Training Network, the Social Work Degree Programme Management Committee, the vocational route to the Social Services Practitioner Award, and the Consolidation of Practice Programme Management Committee.

All those working in the care sector had free access to learning and development. The opportunities were delivered through the partnership with Caerphilly and during 2019/20 this provided 13,248 places, nearly 60% of the provision in Gwent with only 40% of the grant.

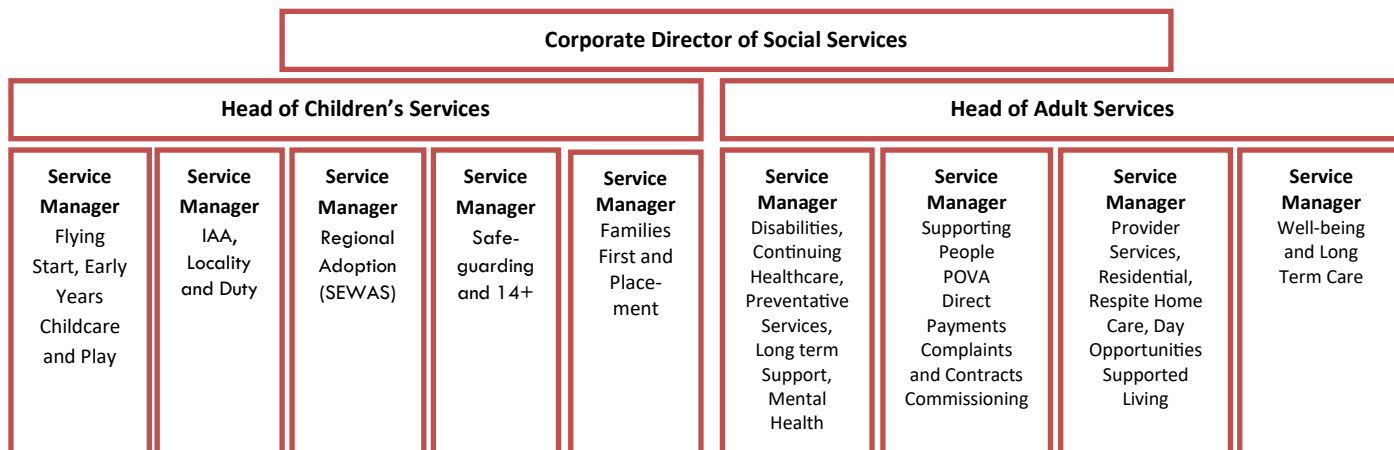
Management support for a Social Worker Strategy continues to deliver a high percentage investment for the Social Services Practitioner Award. As a direct consequence the authority has a guaranteed pool of potential internal social work student applicants. The investment continues through the whole degree and the strategy delivered five internal newly qualified social workers for Blaenau Gwent during 2019/20. There is robust support for newly qualified social workers and 100% passed their mandatory Consolidation of Practice award.

The joint model also delivered over 60% of the achievements in Gwent for front line care worker essential qualifications, the qualifications that are now required for registration.

During late February and March learning for the sector had to speedily transform to a digital model in response to impact of the pandemic. Easy to access YouTube videos were produced to support the army of redeployed staff and volunteers.

Our Partnership Working, Political and Corporate Leadership, Governance and Accountability

All Council Directorates have been required to undertake a review of their service with a view for service efficiency and cost savings. From April 2019, the Social Services review was completed and provides clear levels of management and accountability as shown below:



The Corporate Director of Social Services is a member of the Council’s Corporate Leadership Team, whereby all Council Directors meet on a weekly basis to consider and make strategic and operational decisions (although some decisions need to be considered by Scrutiny and then ratified by Executive or Council).

The Directorate has one Executive Member who has Portfolio responsibility for Social Services as a whole. The Directorate is scrutinised by the Social Services Scrutiny Committee and safeguarding information is reported to the Joint Social Services and Education and Learning Scrutiny Committee. Regular liaison meetings are held with the Directorate, the Executive Member and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Committee.

As a whole, the Council has a clear governance and accountability framework and Performance Management Framework in place which all directorates are signed up to. These frameworks are complied with by Social Services who also have additional monitoring requirements as part of the Act.

The Social Services Directorate is subject to audit, inspection and review by the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). On a quarterly basis Social Services Senior Managers meet with CIW for liaison meetings. CIW also undertake an annual review and evaluation of the Directorate’s performance.

Audit and Inspection Progress

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Children’s Services

In 2018 CIW reported on their inspection undertaken on Children’s Social Services in Blaenau Gwent. Despite the overall summary being positive, the CIW made recommendations for improvement which have been monitored as part of the corporate business planning process. The progress position of these recommended proposals for improvement, is as follows:-

Number of Recommended Proposals for improvement	Completed	On Track for Delivery	Ongoing Recommendations
7	4	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise and Implement a number of key policies, procedures and strategies’ • Develop an overarching quality assurance framework to enable coordinated audit and monitoring activity to regularly challenge and support operational multi-agency practice. • Improve the quality of assessments to demonstrate a full consideration of need and a clear record of analysis of the child's need and wellbeing outcomes.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Fostering Services

In 2018 CIW reported on their inspection of the Fostering Service in Blaenau Gwent. Despite the overall summary being positive the CIW made recommendations for improvement which have been monitored as part of the corporate business planning process. The progress position of these recommended proposals for improvement, is as follows:-

Number of Recommended Proposals for improvement	Completed	On Track for Delivery	Ongoing Recommendations
15	14	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Action should be taken to increase the breadth of experience of fostering panel members'

Collaboration

Blaenau Gwent Council supports partnership and collaborative working and the Social Services Department 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. In addition, Social Services fully participates in the sharing of knowledge, good practice and information, which can result in improved services.

Regional Partnership Boards

The Social Services and Well-being Act sets out a statutory requirement for the development of Regional Partnership Boards. The Boards have been established on current local health board footprints. The Gwent Board includes ABUHB and Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen local authorities. The Executive member in each local authority, with responsibility for health and social care, sits on the Regional Partnership Board. It is an advisory body which provides oversight and direction for areas of integrated working across health and social care. The main priorities of the Board for 2019/20 has been the Transformational Offer, supporting a 'seamless system' of care, support and well-being in Gwent, the Integrated Care Revenue and Capital Fund, the Integrated Winter Plan for 2019/20 and finally, the Bevan Commission and Social Care Wales work to help develop future models of services across the Boards area.



'Mwy na geiriau/ More than just words

As a department we continue to monitor compliance with our responsibilities within More Than Just Words and the Active Offer. We continue to ensure that when citizens contact both our Adult and Children Services Departments, that they are offered the opportunity to communicate in the language of their choice. Our assessment tools within our Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) system specifically asks the question "Do you require this conversation / assessment to be carried out in Welsh?" The form is then attached to the person's referral.

Our commissioned providers work in partnership with us to promote the Welsh Language and this is reflected in our contracts and service level agreements.

Our Financial Resources and How We Plan For the Future

The total budget allocation for Social Services for 2019/20 was £44.91m. This is an increase from last year by £0.769m. At the end of 2019/20 Social Services had an underspend of £347,000 and this is due to ICF, Transformation and Winter Pressures Grant Funding.

The provision of regular financial forecasting reports in line with the budget monitoring and reporting framework has enabled the Social Services Senior Management Team to make informed decisions on service delivery.

In setting the 2020/21 budget, Council agreed a number of savings proposals totalling £0.643m. For 2019/20 the department achieved £591,000 of savings.

The allocated budget and outturn for 2019/20 is provided in the table below:

Service Area	Budget	Outturn	Variance (Adverse)/ Favourable
Children's Services	£12,960,360	£12,884,866	75,494
Adult Services	£25,963,430	£25,781,618	181,812
Business Management / Staff Support	£5,991,480	£5,899,102	92,378
Other Social Services Related Costs		2,680	(2,680)
Total	£44,915,270	£44,568,267	347,003

The budget for 2020/21 is provided in the table below and includes a grant of £0.047m that was transferred into the Revenue Support Grant, and Financial Efficiency Project savings of £0.643m.

Social Services Budget 2020/21		£
1	Commissioning & Social Work	3,562,580
2	Children Looked After	6,951,460
3	Family Support Services	188,603
4	Youth Justice	232,922
5	Other Children's and Family Services	2,312,235
6	Older People Aged 65 and Over	6,062,020

Social Services Budget 2020/21		£
7	Adults under 65 with Physical Disabilities	41,800
8	Adults under 65 with Learning Disabilities	3,687,900
9	Adults under 65 with Mental Health Needs	596,710
10	Other Adult Services	357,910
11	Community Care	15,371,780
12	Support Service & Management Costs	1,023,280
13	Corporate Recharges	4,962,770
Grand Total		45,351,970

Conclusion

Throughout 2019/20 there has been substantial progress in the implementation of the Social Services priorities but it is recognised that there is still further work to do to fully implement the aims and objectives.

The Social Services function remains high on the Council agenda, with a strategic priorities for Social Services identified within the Corporate Plan. The Council is looking to address the areas that will have a long term benefit, ensuring that the needs of people of all ages and future generations are at the centre of service design and delivery.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 was a response to the Welsh Government review of Social Services in 2010 (Sustainable Social Services) which recognised that without radical change to the way we worked, services would become unaffordable in the near future as a result of demographic pressures and the changing expectations of the public at a time of financial austerity.

The Act looks to build and strengthen on existing arrangements by involving service users, carers and other key partners, where possible, in helping to shape and influence future design of services. This is supported by the Directorate who look to promote a preventative approach to practice through early identification and intervention.

It is recognised that in the current financial climate there is a need to work smarter and in partnership and the report provides examples of where this is working effectively.

This Annual Report of the Director of Social Services provides a snapshot of service activity undertaken throughout 2019/20. Further supporting information can be found below:



Accessing Further Information and Key Documents

Useful Documents

Reports to Social Services Scrutiny Committee – http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SSS

Council Corporate Plan – http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/images/att8386.pdf

Blaenau Gwent Council Budget Monitoring - http://democracy.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/aksblaenau_gwent/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=JBM

Social Services Website – <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/en/resident/health-wellbeing-social-care/>

Workforce Development - <http://socialservicesblaenau-gwent.caerphilly.gov.uk/>

Useful Websites

Social Care Wales - <https://socialcare.wales>

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) - <https://careinspectorate.wales/>

Data Cymru - www.data.cymru

Dewis Wales - <https://www.dewis.wales>

Gwent Safeguarding - <https://www.gwentsafeguarding.org>

Public Service Board - <http://www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk/council/partnerships/partnership-working/>

South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board - www.sewsc.org.uk

Providing Feedback

Social Services welcomes feedback on the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services. Your views are important to us. Please contact us if you would like to give feedback on the plan or if you require this document in a different format e.g. large print, Braille, audio version, etc.

Fersiwn Gymraeg

Yn unol â Chynllun Iaith Gymraeg y Cyngor, bydd fersiwn Gymraeg o Adroddiad Blynyddol y Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol ar gael ar wefan y Cyngor.

Write to us:

Director of Social Services

Anvil Court

Church Street, Abertillery, NP13 1DB

Call us: (01495) 355 006

Email us: info@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Visit our website: www.blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

The Social Services Directorate is satisfied that the information given in this annual report is accurate based on the information available at the time of publication.

This annual report has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment screening.



This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 9

Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee: **Social Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting: **22nd July 2021**
Report Subject: **Update on Strategy to Safely Reduce the Numbers of Children Looked After**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Head of Children's Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
8.7.21	08.07.21	12.07.21			22.07.21			

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to update the Social Services Scrutiny Committee on the progress made in relation to the implementation of the Safe Reduction of Children Looked After Strategy 2020 – 2025.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1 The end of 2015 saw a significant increase in the numbers of children looked after. The numbers continued to increase at a steady rate peaking at an all-time high of 237 in July 2018.
- 2.2 Blaenau Gwent recognised the need to develop a “Safe Reduction in Children Looked After (CLA) Strategy” which was implemented in 2017.
- 2.3 The Strategy has three clear objectives which are: -
1. To support families to stay together;
 2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care;
 3. To provide affordable high quality placements.
- 2.4 Each of the objectives has a number of actions aligned to them and these actions are embedded in our business planning process which is reported on quarterly basis.
- 2.5 The initial 3year strategy came to an end in 2020 and was replaced with another updated 5-year strategy with the same 3 objectives highlighted above.
- 2.6 Since the implementation of the strategy the Local Authority has seen a very slow but steady decrease in the numbers of children becoming looked after. More detailed analysis of this can be found under the performance section 6.1 of this report.
- 2.7 Welsh Government has also recognised the need to safely reduce the number of children coming into care and has identified this as a priority area. In light of this Integrated Care Fund (ICF) grant money was allocated to each local authority in

Wales via the Regional Partnership Boards in April 2019 to invest in, and develop services to safely reduce the numbers of children coming into care.

2.8 The following services were developed in March 2019 as a result of this ICF grant funding

- Family Group Conference / Meeting service
- Support to Special Guardians
- Enhance resources in our Supporting Change Team
- Enhance the Young Person's Mediation Service

2.9 These additional services alongside the existing teams have contributed to the slow but steady progress made in reducing the numbers of children looked after within Blaenau Gwent.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

- Consider the information contained within the report and accept the report

Option 2

- Consider the information contained within the report and provide comment on any amendment or recommendations

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

4.1 The implementation of the Safe Reduction of Children looked After Strategy supports the following priorities for social services under the corporate plan

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To work with our partners including Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated responsive care and support;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities.

4.2 The Safe Reduction CLA Strategy provides evidence that the Local Authority is delivering the requirements under the Social Service and Wellbeing Act in relation to the following areas

- ***Voice and control*** – putting the individual and their needs, at the centre of their care, and giving them a voice in, and control over reaching the outcomes that help them achieve well-being.
- ***Prevention and early intervention*** – increasing preventative services within the community to minimise the escalation of critical need.
- ***Well-being*** – supporting people to achieve their own well-being and measuring the success of care and support.
- ***Co-production*** – encouraging individuals to become more involved in the design and delivery of services.

5. Implications Against Each Option

5.1 *Impact on Budget*

Figure 1

	Budget 20/21	Outturn 20/21	Favourable/ (adverse)
Children's residential placements	2,592,186	2,041,704	550,482
Foster Parent Payments In house	1,622,690	1,681,623	(58,942)
Independent Fostering Agencies	1,714,930	1,719,750	(4,820)

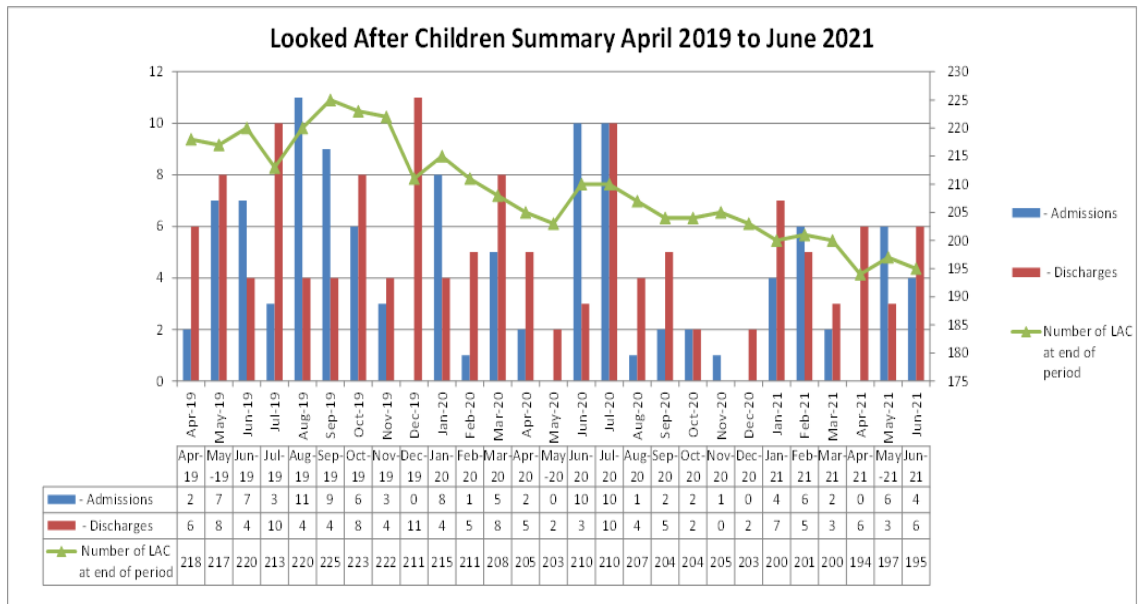
5.2 Figure 1 shows a significant underspend in our children residential budget at the end of 20/21 This is a result of the hard work of the 14 plus Team and the My Support Team in reducing the numbers of children in residential care and working to prevent children entering residential care.

5.3 *Human Resources*

Maintaining a stable workforce is key to achieving the objectives of the safe Reduction of CLA Strategy. Just prior to COVID 19 Children's Services had 10 social work vacancies across the various teams. This had a significant impact on the workload on the Teams. A combination of Blaenau Gwent staff finishing their secondments on the Degree in Social Work Course and appointing 3rd year SW degree students who had their final year placement in Blaenau Gwent, has resulted in nearly all these vacancies being filled. **However**, we have a number of vacancies again across the 4 locality Social work Teams in particular which is causing a pressure point.

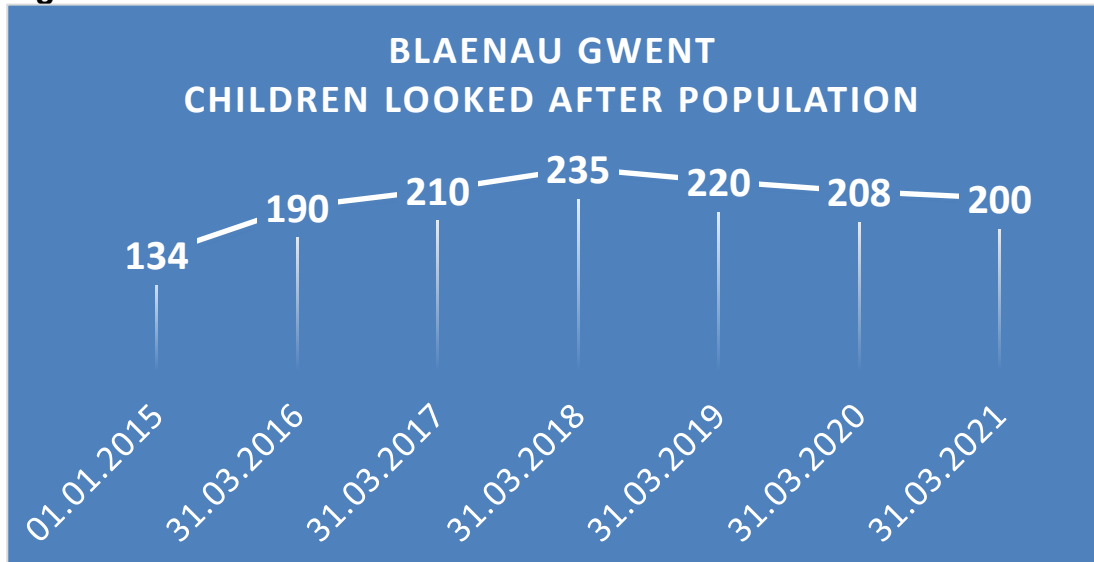
6. Supporting Evidence

6.1 Figure 2



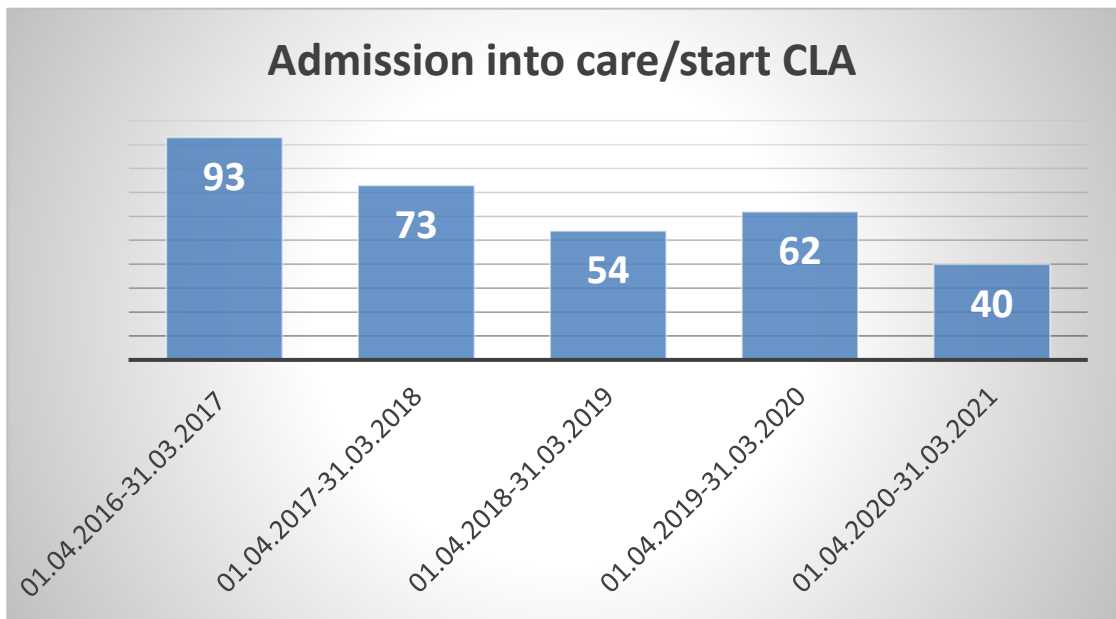
6.2 Figure 2 demonstrates the continued slow but steady decline in the numbers of children looked after in Blaenau Gwent

6.3 Figure 3



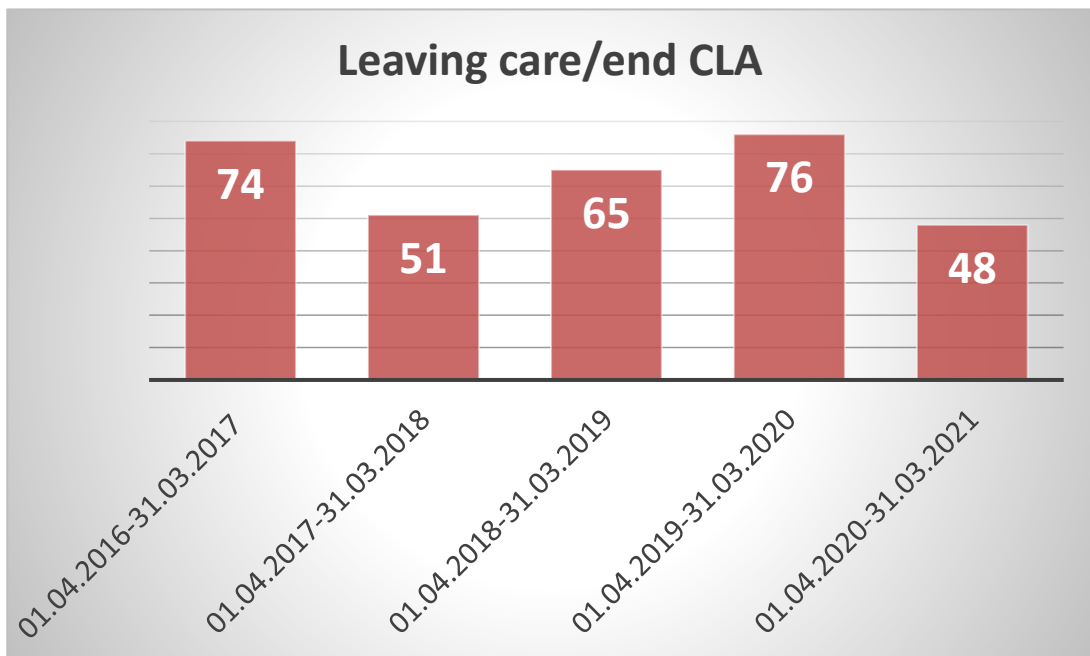
6.4 Figure 3 shows the total numbers of children looked after each year from 2015 – 2021. The 1st CLA reduction strategy was implemented in 2017 and took approximately 12 months before the positive effects were seen by the numbers of children looked after beginning to decrease.

6.5 **Figure 4**



6.6 Figure 4 shows the numbers of children entering care from 2017 to 2021. We would always want to see a decrease year on year of the children coming into care. This has happened over the past 5 years except 19/20 when we saw a slight increase in numbers compared to the previous year.

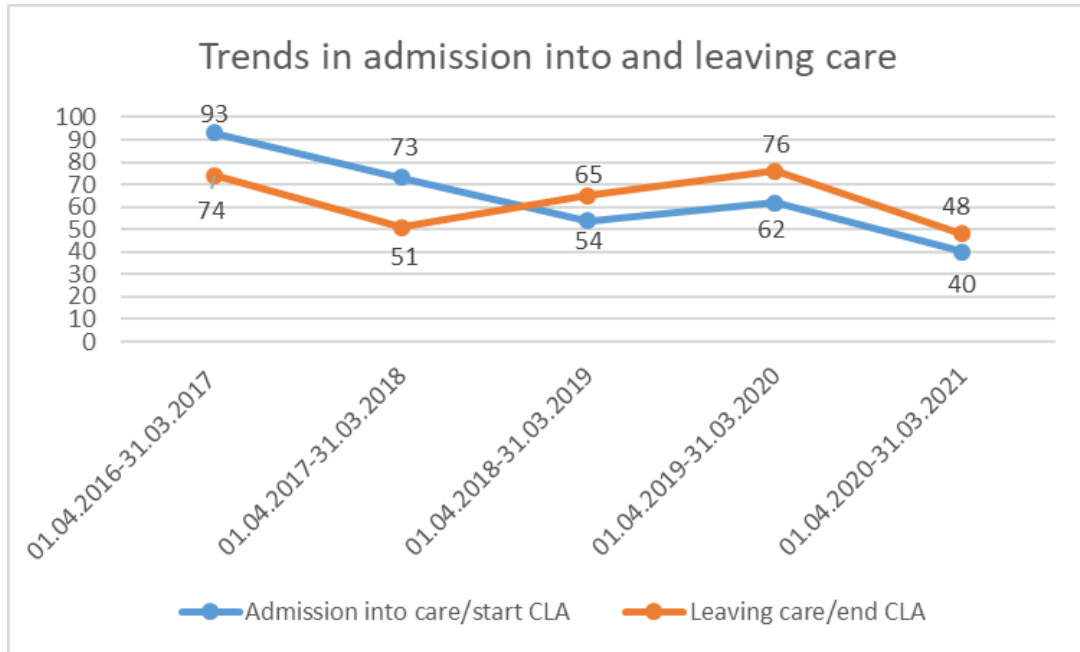
6.7 **Figure 5**



6.8 Figure 5 shows the number so children leaving care. Ideally we would want to see the numbers of children leaving care increase each year. This was the trend from 2017 – 2020, however the numbers leaving care reduced during the pandemic. This could have been for a number of reasons including staff having to prioritise RED rated cases during the pandemic and so they would not have

been focused on returning cases to court to revoke care orders, plus plans to rehabilitate children home to parents would have slowed down due to the periods of lockdown and government restrictions.

6.9 **Figure 6**



6.10 Figure 6 clearly shows the correlation between admissions into and discharges out of care. The positive tipping point came in 2018 /19 which was the second year into the initial 3 year CLA reduction strategy. This saw the change in more children leaving care than entering care. This is a trend that we will strive to maintain over the next 5 years.

6.11 It is important to recognise that the success of the CLA reduction strategy is dependent on a whole service approach. The robust preventative interventions delivered by Families First and Flying start prevent needs from escalating into statutory services. The Information Advice and Assistance Team provides robust screening and initial assessment of all referrals ensuring the appropriate action is taken to meet needs. All of the Social Work Teams work exceptionally hard to keep families together and work with families using a strengths based approach.

6.12 *Expected outcome for the public*

The successful implementation of the safe CLA reduction strategy will lead to more positive outcomes for children on a number of levels. It will prevent children coming into care in the first place due to the work under the strategy. For those children who do come into care they will have more local placement choices enabling them to maintain attendance at their local school and contact with family and friends

- 6.13 *Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)*
There is extensive involvement with the children and families we work with and individual feed-back was offered as follows:
- 6.14 *Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)*
The refreshed 5 yr strategy is longer than the initial 3 yr strategy in recognition of the significant work required to continue and maintain the downward trend in numbers of children looked after.
- 6.15 *Preventative focus*
A large part of the safe CLA reduction strategy has a preventative focus
- 6.16 *Collaboration / partnership working*
A number of the actions under the safe CLA reduction strategy rely on partnership working. Senior managers and staff have good working relationships with our partners which will support us in achieving the actions. The refreshed 5 yr strategy focuses heavily on improving our partners understanding of the 3 objectives that sit under this strategy and the part they need to play to achieve its success.
- 6.17 *EqIA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)*
The safe reduction of children becoming looked after involves supporting and engaging with children and families covered by protected characteristics from the Equality Act 2010. It has not been identified that this strategy will have a negative impact on those with protected characteristics

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

- 7.1 *State how the work will be monitored e.g. through scrutiny or directorate performance management arrangements*
The actions aligned to the 3 objectives under the strategy are incorporated under the children's services business plans. Progress on actions is reported quarterly and contributes to the Directors Annual report

Background Documents /Electronic Links

N/A

This page is intentionally left blank