



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Performance Evaluation Report 2014–15

Blaenau Gwent County
Borough Council Social Services

October 2015

This report sets out the key areas of progress and areas for improvement in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services for the year 2014–15

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014 - 2015

Local Authority: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council

This report sets out CSSIW's evaluation of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's performance in delivering its social services functions.

1. Summary

- 1.1. Blaenau Gwent social services has seen a period of stability during 2014-15. The previous year saw significant changes at both corporate and departmental level which led to restructuring within the council and social services. In last year's performance evaluation it was noted that despite the change agenda, social services managed a consistent performance.
- 1.2. The council has continued to make progress with development of its social services department in 2014-15. This has built on the previous year's foundations.
- 1.3. In children's services this included continuity from the previously restructured services. The council maintained good performance as in the previous year. Social services was proactive in seeking improvement, and an action plan was developed and implemented in relation to areas for improvement found in our inspection of looked after children 2013-2014.
- 1.4. Restructuring of adult services took place during 2014-15 in line with children's services, to provide a locality based approach to support and advice. This reflects prevention and integration agendas, and places the council in a strong position in readiness for the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWB Act).
- 1.5. In 2013-14, areas for corporate improvement had been identified by the Wales Audit Office, necessitating the provision of external support and input to drive improvement in governance arrangements, and to secure a robust and consistent approach to budgeting and planning within the council. The council worked closely with the support team and regulators during this period and there had been significant progress in achieving this.
- 1.6. The annual report of the director of social services provides a comprehensive picture of the current status of social services in Blaenau Gwent. This sets out progress on the previous year's priorities and achievements and areas for development in the year ahead. This

includes progressing collaborative arrangements with health and third sector providers, and seeking alternative resources to support change and development within a constrained financial environment.

- 1.7. The director has considered and outlined arrangements to support the provision of services in the medium of Welsh or other language of need. This includes methods to support the implementation of More Than Just Words - strategic framework for Welsh language services in health, social services and social care.

2. Response to last year's areas for improvement

Identified improvement last year	Progress in 2014-15
The council should develop formal systems to identify projected needs for learning disability services to inform commissioning	A project had been implemented to identify future trends. Quality review processes commenced in the previous year had been rolled out within adult services.
The council should develop systems for monitoring effectiveness of additional resource to support hospital discharge	Progress has been made. Quarterly reporting and monitoring of delayed transfers of care is in place.
The council should devise a formal plan to measure progress of the eight priorities set out in the procurement strategy	An action/delivery plan had been develop to monitor progress against these priorities.
The council should publicise carers' information packs with staff to ensure this is readily provided	A carers support officer had been appointed to drive forward services for carers in September 2014.
The council should strengthen care planning within adult services to ensure an outcome based approach	The council is participating in the pilot for national outcome framework for adults led by Social Services Improvement Agency.
The council should ensure that mechanisms are in place to monitor the quality of outcomes and evidence outcomes in children's services	Progress has been made. The corporate parenting group has reconvened and regular meetings are scheduled. This group monitors outcomes for looked after children.
The council should monitor caseloads to ensure that staff numbers and skills reflect people's needs	Progress has been made. Monthly monitoring and reporting systems are in place with exception reports provided to scrutiny. A scoping exercise to review the workforce identified high number of support workers who are very experienced and that work allocation

	reflects this. Supervision is in place to support staff in this role.
The council should contribute to taking forward actions arising from the recent review of the Gwent-wide adult safeguarding board (GWASB)	Some progress made. The board have appointed a manager to press forward with the actions.
The council should develop an overarching framework for review which contributes to the ongoing development and planning of service provision	The director notes this is partially achieved. A performance structure for the council has been developed and further progress with social service contribution to this is anticipated in 2015-16.

3. Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

- 3.1. Site visits and inspections provide CSSIW with an opportunity to speak with people who receive services, their families and staff who manage and work in the services. During 2014/15, site visits were made to:
- The adult safeguarding team.
- 3.2. CSSIW also met with senior officers of the council throughout the year to review social services performance, and discuss progress with the areas for improvement identified in last year's performance evaluation.
- 3.3. During the year, CSSIW also undertook inspections of regulated services run by the council and by independent operators. This included reviews of the in-house fostering service. Details on these are contained in published reports and available on CSSIW's website.

4. Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

- 4.1. A number of specific areas for improvement have been identified in the body of this report. The council's progress in relation to these will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year. Specific areas for follow up will include:
- Visit to the older people's 'hub'
 - Visit to children's services (duty and referral team and locality team)
 - Meet with young carers
 - Meet with community connectors.

5. CSSIW inspection and review plan for 2015 -16

- National review of domiciliary care
- National review of services for people with learning disabilities
- National review of care planning for looked after children.

6. The extent to which the experiences and outcomes for people who need care and support are improving their wellbeing

Adults

Overview

- 6.1. The council continued to develop services to reflect the strategy 'Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent' which was identified as a goal for 2014-2015 within the director for social services' 2013-14 annual report. The strategy had been updated since the previous year to reflect current population statistics, outlining the continued growth of the aging population, as well as the complexity of needs of people potentially requiring advice and support from social services. This was related to the impact of legislative change, and an action plan for social services has been developed in order to support service development to reflect this.
- 6.2. Services have been developed to reflect local needs and to continue to support the agenda for change in relation to the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act. This included:
 - The development of two 'hubs' for adult social care in the east and west of the borough. The teams include a skill mix aimed to support a broad range of needs, including older people, with mental health social workers to support people with dementia care needs. The teams are co-located with the community resource team and health partners to enhance communication and joint working. CSSIW intends visiting the service in 2015-16 to gain an overview of the success of this.
 - Increased provision of short term support for reablement and prevention of admission to hospital
 - Participating in the national pilot of outcome measures for older people.
- 6.3. While it is early to measure success of new structures, the council has demonstrated that there is improved opportunity to ensure that people already in receipt of a service are provided with the appropriate support. This is evidenced by performance indicators which demonstrate

improvements in the numbers of reviews that are undertaken. These increased from 78% in 2013-14 to 80% in 2014-15 which is on a par with the national average.

- 6.4. The number of people supported in the community provides a picture which is reflected in the statistics within the review of Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent. The number of older people supported in the community has gradually increased from the previous year (87% in 2014-15 from 83% in 2012-13) this is representative of similar authorities and echoed across Wales. There is also evidence of a rise in to the number of people between the ages of 18 and 65, supported in the community rather than residential care. This represents an on year rise since 2012-2013 of 96% to 99% in 2014-15. This indicates success of reablement and independence strategies.
- 6.5. There is a continued commitment to collaboration with partners in order to improve access to services, support independence, and develop and explore new ways of working to improve timely access to support and advice. For example, in mental health and learning disability services, there has been progress with the Gwent-wide strategy with partners learning from the pilot of a new approach to mental health services in Caerphilly. This 'systems thinking approach' is also being applied in the pilot service for people with learning disabilities which is being undertaken in Blaenau Gwent. The partnership board has structures and arrangements in place in order to evaluate and learn from these pilot projects.
- 6.6. Blaenau Gwent social services is a member of the regional adult safeguarding board and in the last year a manager has been secured to implement the actions in response to the external review of the board's functions in 2013-14. Progress in relation to this was reported to be 'improved' in terms of reshaping the sub groups within this. The board will need to consider how this is further developed in relation to new powers and regulations in the future.
- 6.7. CSSIW undertook a site visit to the safeguarding service in 2014-15. This provided a positive picture in terms of cross working within the department, including the interface with commissioning and contracts monitoring team, communication with the supporting people team, as well as opportunities to contribute to the development of the preventative agenda. Areas to develop the service further were identified and performance indicators show that the percentage of adult protection where risk has been managed had decreased from the previous year from 98% to 93%. Recent feedback from the head of service indicated that developments had been made in response to the finding of the visit. This includes increasing capacity within the team to improve opportunity for quality review and learning. The council should

monitor progress with this.

- 6.8. The council retains some in-house services including a home care (domiciliary care) service which is being reconfigured in response to local needs, to contribute to the reablement provision in the borough and an extra care housing scheme for older people. Services which are commissioned to provide care by the council, and which are regulated by CSSIW (including domiciliary care agencies and care homes) varied in the quality of services provided. Where there were concerns raised by the regulator and through the council's own quality monitoring, there was prompt action by the commissioning team to seek improvement from the service provider. This included the council's own services.

Key National Priorities (adults)

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.9. The council has a commitment to continued development of early intervention and preventative services. This includes local arrangements and working with partners within health, social care and third sector to develop existing services and explore new methods of support. This includes:
- Frailty model - the regional model for prevention of hospital admission and early discharge has been reviewed independently and is seen to be providing a positive contribution to services. This includes remodelling the community resource team to include additional social work staff to support the team, including out of hours working to facilitate early discharge from hospital
 - The introduction of four 'step up step down' beds within extra care services and a care home
 - Reconfiguring the in-house home care service to support the reablement service.
- 6.10. Additional funding has been sought to provide community connector posts to develop local networks of information, to support people to be more independent. A formal evaluation of the success of this role is to be carried out on a regional basis, although locally positive examples have been presented as case studies.
- 6.11. There is evidence to support the success of these strategies, for example there has been a decrease in delayed transfers of care due to social care reasons, from six people per 1,000 population in 2013-14 to four in 2014-15. In addition, there has been a decrease in the number

of people over the age of 65 supported in the community, from 128 per 1,000 population in 2013-14 to 121 in 2014-15. This continues a decreasing trend from the previous three years. This is also visible in the numbers of older people the council supports in care homes which as decreased for the fourth year from 22 per 1,000 in 2013-14, to 19 in 2014-15.

- 6.12. In addition the council is continuing to explore alternative options to support people to be independent, including social enterprise (the community options café) and shared learning with other local authorities. For example use of systems thinking approaches used in learning disability services and consideration of a local pilot of flexible provision of services within people's own homes.

Integration of health and social care services for older people with complex needs

- 6.13. The council has continued to develop relationships with health partners in order to develop new models of care and enhance existing structures. This included additional social care staff sought to develop the frailty team and the implementation of two health and social care hubs. The hubs provide co-location of health and social care staff. In our meetings with the social services senior management team, the commitment is clear to progress to further integration with health. The addition of further reablement resources e.g. step up and step down beds and additional home care staff also contributes to the shared agenda with health. The council should consider working with health partners to establish a pathway for the future development of integration.

Areas of progress

- Continued progression with strategies to support independence and prevention
- Moving forward the Gwent-wide strategy for mental health and learning disability
- Progression with collaboration/integration with health partners.

Areas for improvement

- The council should consider working with health partners to establish a pathway for the future development of integration
- Continued monitoring of quality and outcomes within the adult safeguarding team.

Children and young people

Overview

- 6.14. Children's services had been restructured in 2012-13 providing locality based services, and a further review of provision was reported to have demonstrated successful working arrangements for the re-configured teams. Access to children's services is provided through a single referral point which provides information advice and support for children. This includes a direct link with preventative services and signposting to relevant support and mechanisms for early intervention.
- 6.15. The council has maintained strong performance in children's services. Referrals on which a decision was made within one working day remained at the level of the previous year at 100%, with 95% of initial assessments completed within the required timescales compared to the national average of 76%. Of those referrals that progressed for assessment, 58% were seen by a social worker; this represents a decrease from the previous year where 63% of assessments were carried out by a social worker. This is lower than other comparable local authorities and the national average of 73%. However, this does not appear to have had a demonstrable effect in terms of re-referral to services. The re-referral rate has remained stable at 13% and is considerably below similar authorities. During our engagement meetings with social services, the head of service has been clear that experienced workers are supervised in undertaking assessment roles and reported on via exemption reporting to scrutiny. The council should monitor this and consider this alongside outcome measures in the future.
- 6.16. Regional safeguarding arrangements are well established with the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board. This includes an accessible website and opportunities for shared learning regionally. On a local level the council did not maintain its previous year's performance in all aspects of child protection last year. This year, performance remained strong in relation to initial child protection conferences at 100%, core group meetings had decreased to 96% and child protection reviews held within statutory timescales were 93%, a decrease from the previous year's 97%. This was in the context of increased workload within child protection. Timescales for child protection reviews were below comparable authorities, and the national average and the council should monitor this in order to maintain previous performance.
- 6.17. In 2014-15 the Wales Audit Office undertook a review of local authority arrangements to support safeguarding of children which found that governance, accountability and management arrangements for

overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children have some weaknesses which the council is addressing. CSSIW will follow progress of this through our engagement meetings.

Key national priorities

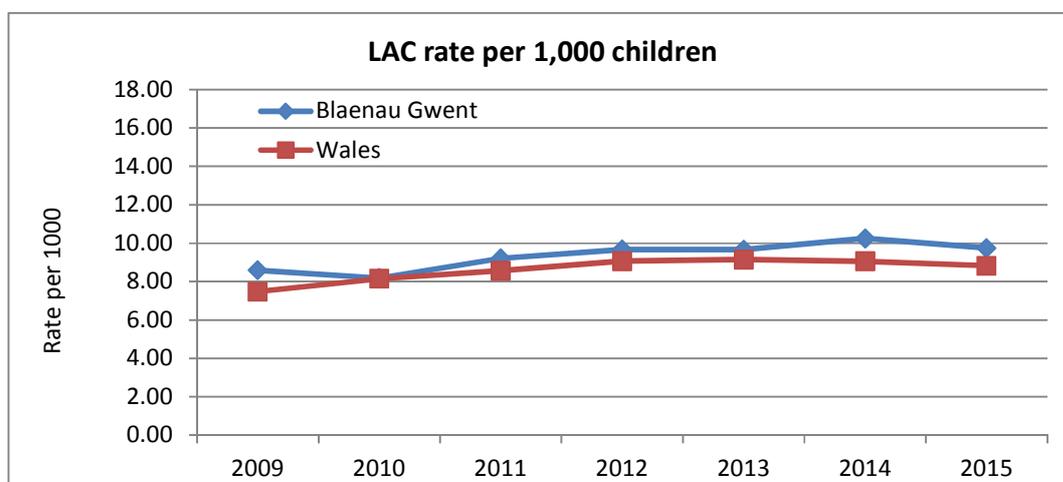
Preventative and early intervention services

6.18. The council continues to actively pursue a model of prevention and support. In children's services the council has built on the changes in team structures put in place in 2013-14. This includes continued development of the Team Around the Family with the inclusion of Flying Start services which have moved within social services management along with early year's childcare and play team and Families First. It is envisaged this will further enhance communication and support the children's services in its prevention and early intervention strategies. Additional funding was obtained to extend Flying Start services and the council advised that this had been successful in increasing provision within the borough. Performance data indicates this approach may be having an impact with the number of referrals reducing from 1,194 in 2013-14 to 1,071 in 2014-15 and re-referrals remaining stable.

6.19. CSSIW's regulatory inspection of Flying Start services in the borough gave a positive picture of the services provided.

Looked after children (LAC)

6.20. There has been a decrease in the rate of looked after children per 1000 population reducing from 10.25 in 2013-14, to 9.75 in 2014-15, although this remains above the Wales average of 8.82. Numbers of looked after children have remained at similar levels for the last six years.



Numbers of LAC as at 31 March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Blaenau Gwent	127	119	132	137	136	143	136

- 6.21. The council maintained good performance in relation to its support for looked after children. This included 100% of first placements of looked after children with a care plan in place and 98% of reviews carried out within timescales. In addition the authority has maintained its performance in relation to statutory visits to looked after children; these remained steady from the previous year at 89% carried out within timescales, higher than the performance of comparable authorities and slightly above the national average of 88%.
- 6.22. The authority has maintained consistent performance in terms of longer term planning and support for looked after children. This includes educational support with 100% of children and young people having a personal education plan in place, pathway plans for children leaving care where required, and allocated personal advisors. While the support mechanisms are in place there has been a dip in educational achievement at Key Stages 2 and 3 with achievement of core subject indicators falling from 50% to 33% and 37% respectively. This is below the Welsh average and that of comparable authorities. In actual terms this represents a small number of children (six out of nine failing to achieve core indicators at Key Stage 2 and five out of eight at Key Stage 3) but the council should explore the reasons and contributing factors to this.
- 6.23. Blaenau Gwent hosts the South East Wales Regional Adoption Service. This now encompasses the five Gwent authorities with the addition of Newport and Caerphilly. This was a development from a previous 'tri-partite' arrangement. While our engagement meetings established there had been challenges in terms of staff adjusting to the new ways of working, this had been a positive arrangement. In terms of securing permanency the council reports successful adoptions exceeding its target.
- 6.24. The council continues to explore methods to recruit foster carers to increase the range of support opportunities for children. The council is participating in the national 'Confidence in care' initiative, a five year project to strengthen support to foster carers and to put in place a training programme to support fosters carers in their role.
CSSIW's regulatory inspection of the local authority's fostering services focussed on quality of life. Feedback from young people and foster carers provided a positive picture of the support provided. This included

links to advocacy services. A copy of this report is available on the CSSIW website.

Areas of progress

- Move to a regional adoption service
- Successful recruitment and support for foster carers.

Areas for improvement

- Timescales for child protection reviews were below comparable authorities and the national average, and the council should interrogate contributory factors to this
- Explore and monitor educational achievement for looked after children.

7. The extent to which leadership, governance and direction for the council is promoting improvement in outcomes and wellbeing for people who need care and support

- 7.1. The management team within social services remains unchanged from the previous year. This includes the director, heads of service and the tier below at service manager level. This has provided a stable base from which ongoing change and development of services can be built.
- 7.2. Within children's services new structures were reported to be embedded, and stability in the workforce and decreased sickness has enabled performance to be maintained, despite recent increased workload pressures. This is due to increased complexity of children requiring care and support. The council should ensure it continues monitoring referral rates and impact on staff and resources.
- 7.3. Restructuring adult services also has potential to impact on staff and, as with children's services, close monitoring of this will be required to ensure that pressures are not impacting on the workforce and subsequently on the services provided. While the council has a commitment to protecting frontline services, there is inevitably potential for a 'knock on effect' of corporate changes on the workforce. For example during CSSIW's site visit to the safeguarding team, there were concerns about some of the support and aligned services like commissioning and administrative services being moved centrally. At mid year point there had been a rise in staff sickness in adult services; the council had previously undertaken significant work to reduce staff sickness and absence. The head of service confirmed that this was

monitored closely within social services and across the council as a whole.

- 7.4. The director reports that social services has delivered savings targets set out for the year, achieving an overall underspend along with identifying savings for 2015-16. This has been achieved by reshaping existing services and management of resources to support savings. For example the appointment of a member of staff to work closely with health partners to determine whether continuing healthcare arrangements are required, rather than social service provision, is reported to have led to improved timescales for decision making and resulted in savings for the local authority.
- 7.5. At a corporate level, areas for improvement were identified by the Wales Audit Office in 2013-14. This necessitated the provision of external support and input to drive improvement in governance arrangements, and to secure a robust and consistent approach to budgeting and planning within the council. In 2014-15 the council made significant progress in achieving the improvements required to provide a more stable structure and governance arrangements. This included a 'transformation project' which along with other departments has necessitated input from key social services personnel. Structures for performance monitoring have been developed and are now part of corporate governance arrangements, which includes oversight of social services. The director reports that these will continue to be developed and fully implemented during 2015-16. CSSIW will follow up the progress of this through our engagement meetings with social services.
- 7.6. Scrutiny arrangements continue to be developed and strengthened, for example the health, social care and wellbeing scrutiny committee has undertaken sessions to update members in relation to the SSWB Act. Increased debate and discussion with officers has been observed during meetings attended by CSSIW. This is viewed by regulators to have continued to improve from the previous year.
- 7.7. Work has continued in order to develop the corporate parenting group and its role is recognised as being crucial in order for the council to maintain its statutory responsibilities in relation to children. In 2014-15 this included a review of the corporate safeguarding policy. The joint social services and education scrutiny meetings take place on a quarterly basis.
- 7.8. The council works proactively with partners and continues to consider and develop relationships to strengthen commissioning arrangements within adult and children's services. This includes involvement in a broad range of projects and initiatives, working with health, regional social service departments and third sector organisations. For example

in adult services, the council is working with regional partners from health and social services to implement change to reflect the joint strategy for mental health and learning disability, 'Together for Mental Health'. Blaenau Gwent has commenced a pilot for the model of care in learning disability services. The joint workforce development team in partnership with Caerphilly social services is a further example of good partnership initiatives. The councils are exploring how this initiative could be rolled out further regionally. In children's services there are good working relationships with advocacy services and these have been used to commission feedback from children and young people regarding the service they receive.

Areas of progress

- Progressing the regional mental health and learning disability strategy
- Development of a structure for performance monitoring.

Areas for improvement

- The council should monitor workloads to identify workload pressures and gaps in resources.