



## **Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012/2013**

**Local Authority Name: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**This report sets out the key areas of progress for the year 2012/13 in Blaenau Gwent Social Services Department and areas for future improvement**

### **Summary**

Blaenau Gwent Social Services has continued to perform well throughout 2012/13. Considerable work was undertaken to pursue integration with Caerphilly County Borough Council's social services department and, although this did not come to fruition, both parties have maintained commitment to working in partnership in specific service areas. While integration failed to progress, the directors of both social service departments provided input into a review of collaborative working which resulted in the publication of key lessons learned and positive suggestions and advice for agencies working in partnership.

The council has continued to maintain and pursue new avenues of partnership working with other local authorities, the health service and third sector.

The director of social services' annual report presents a clear, balanced and comprehensive view of services provided. This includes reflection on progress in relation to the priority areas identified for the year for both adult and children's services. The report sets out future direction with measurable goals based on previous progress and Welsh Government strategy/policy. The report recognises the ongoing financial constraints and impact of welfare reform.

### **Adults**

The council has reviewed and built on previous achievements and work has been undertaken to modernise services. This has included continued review of in-house provision, commissioning arrangements and collaboration with other local authorities in the South East region to explore and develop streamlined processes for commissioning services.

Collaboration has been pursued across the regional authorities, with the health board and third sector in a number of areas including the development of the frailty model for older people, mental health and learning disability services and safeguarding.

## **Children**

Restructuring of children's services has been reviewed and the service has continued to perform well. Additional changes have been undertaken in response to government policy and the commitment to a collaborative approach to services across the region. Monitoring of the impact of this will be key to ensuring the ongoing high standard of performance in children's services.

### **CSSIW has identified the following potential risks**

- Significant budgetary pressures and shortfalls. Sustaining, maintaining and developing services in what is a challenging financial environment for the council, particularly in relation to adult social care.
- Impact of implementing new regional collaboration arrangements at a local level, ensuring effective governance and control.
- Potential opportunities and risks resulting from the impact of senior management team changes.

### **Response to last year's areas of development**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council made positive progress against the areas for development identified last year.

This included:

- Progress with collaboration with health and other local authorities within the region.
- Improved performance in care management teams in adult services.
- Review of methods of monitoring quality in commissioned services and collaboration with health in review of services.
- Improved uptake of direct payments with a clear agenda to continue to drive this forward into the next year.
- Monitoring of caseloads in adult services.

The lack of uptake of carers assessments has been explored by the council and requires further consideration to improve carer engagement.

### **Good practice identified**

CSSIW has identified the following areas of good practice:

- Continued commitment to exploring areas for working collaboratively with a broad range of partners, for example community resource team within the broader Gwent Frailty model.

- Sharing the learning from the collaboration project with Caerphilly County Borough Council.

### **Visits and inspections undertaken during the year**

In addition to ongoing engagement meetings and regulatory inspections carried out CSSIW, undertook the following work in Blaenau Gwent:

- Attendance at integration meetings.
- Attendance at provider forums regarding integration.
- Attendance at scrutiny meetings.

### **Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year**

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.

- Review of the joint workforce development team with Caerphilly County Borough Council.
- Examine mechanisms for engagement and support of carers.
- Commissioning and arrangements for quality review of out of county placements for people with a learning disability.
- National thematic review of commissioning of social care for older people.
- National thematic inspection of looked after children.
- Work with the Wales Audit Office to begin a review into the effectiveness of the Gwent Frailty project.

## **PERFORMANCE**

### **Shaping services:**

#### **Adults**

The council has a strategy in place for the long-term direction of services for adults (Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century) which was reviewed and revised in November 2012. The document presents a future vision for services in line with Welsh Government strategy and policy and is based on a local needs assessment. This is also reflected in the council's single integrated plan which overarches the services across the council and is produced jointly with local partners from the public and voluntary sector.

The long-term strategy for adults includes a commitment to support and promote independence within the community alongside the need to provide services to increasing numbers of people with complex needs. The review recognises the financial implications and challenges to meet the rising demand for social services and proposes strategies to maintain quality services and make best use of resources. This includes working with a broad range of

partners including other local authority social services, health boards, the third sector and commissioned service providers.

This vision and social service's response to changing needs is reflected in the priorities for improvement in the director's report and in supporting evidence of progress provided.

Reconfiguring of the in-house provision included the remaining care home for older people to accommodate people with mental health needs and continued restructuring of domiciliary care services. CSSIW's inspections of these services identified positive outcomes for the people using the services. Plans to develop further extra care provision have been put on hold.

Evidence of supporting people's independence is seen in performance indicators which demonstrate an increased uptake of direct payments. There is a decrease in people supported in the community. The supporting evidence provided with the director's report indicates that this may be due to people achieving goals independently. Further analysis of these statistics would be beneficial to establish and review the outcomes for people living independently.

2012 saw a number of stakeholder consultation events relating to social services integration with Caerphilly County Borough Council. CSSIW attended an event for providers of commissioned services. This was well attended and constructive relationships were observed between providers and commissioners. Public consultation events were also undertaken in the development of the single integrated plan.

The ongoing development and commitment to working in partnership is demonstrated in a range of adult services. For example 2012/13 has seen the authority working with the Aneurin Bevan Health board in mental health and learning disability services, and both health and local authorities working in this partnership will want to ensure that ongoing review and learning is undertaken and shared.

The authority continues to work with the health board to provide the community resource team which has had additional resources in order to respond to demand. This service is part of the wider Gwent Frailty project which, it is anticipated, will be evaluated in 2014 jointly by regulators.

Blaenau Gwent social services is included within the regional adult placement service, Shared Lives, which is hosted by Caerphilly County Borough Council. A recent CSSIW inspection of this service received positive feedback from a small sample of service users about their experience of the service.

## **Children**

Strategic direction and vision for children's services is set out in a Children and Young Peoples Plan which is due for review in 2014. This is based on a local needs assessment and its key messages, as with adult services, are reflected

in the Single Integrated Plan for Blaenau Gwent developed by the local service board partners.

Restructuring of children's services commenced in 2011 and this was reviewed in 2012/13. In the main, the internal review highlighted positive feedback from staff and professionals with evidence of positive outcomes for young people. Performance data indicates that numbers of children on the child protection register has decreased along with re-referrals to the service suggesting positive impact on the service.

The council has continued to maintain close working relationships, and working in partnership, with other local authority social service departments, health and third sector organisations. Since December 2012 the council has been part of the project board developing a South East Wales integrated family support service which should be implemented mid 2013.

The council continues to host and lead the adoption services for Blaenau Gwent and two neighbouring authorities and this is planned to develop further to include two additional authorities. This is a positive step towards the development of the national adoption board with regional hubs.

### **Areas of progress**

- Implementation of the joint workforce development team.
- The review and refocusing strategic direction of the Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to reflect changing local needs.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Consider methods to assess effectiveness of mechanisms to support independence in the community.

### **Getting help:**

The council has a range of strategies to communicate with the public regarding services available and how to access them. It reports continued success with its contact centre.

Both electronic and more traditional information in leaflet form is available to the public. The local authority website is clear and easily navigated, and provides links to a range of additional websites/references pertinent to a wide range of potential service user queries. Traffic to the website is monitored and visits to the social care pages have notably increased since the previous year.

A joint Carer's Information and Consultation strategy has been developed in partnership with four other local authorities, health boards and the voluntary sector. This provides a high level action plan to improve services for carers.

## **Adults**

The director's report identifies that the overall number of referrals to social services has remained relatively stable and this is also demonstrated in performance indicators. There is recognition in the report of the likely increase in demand for services with changing demographics and an increase in people requiring more complex care.

Adult services have improved their performance in relation to care plan reviews for people in receipt of services. The council will need to consider strategies to drive this upward trend to meet their own target. This has been identified as remaining a priority and discussed in engagement meetings.

The contact centre also receives referrals for the joint reablement and community resource team, and the annual statistical report indicates significant number of referrals pass through this point.

The rate of delayed transfers of care for social care reasons has increased. Whilst this remains within the upper quartile of performance across Wales, the council has analysed potential causes for this and indicates that collation of statistics has changed. The council has good working relationships at "ground" level and meets weekly with health partners to review each person whose transfer is delayed.

Whilst 100% of carers of adult service users were offered a carers assessment, the number of people who subsequently take up the opportunity of having an assessment has decreased. However, of those people that had an assessment the number who were provided with a service has increased. This has been subject to discussion in engagement meetings and the council recognises that this is an area for improvement. Whilst there is a carers forum, the council is considering methods to improve engagement.

## **Children**

The director reports that children's services has seen a rise in referrals and initial assessments. However, the overall number of children receiving a service remains static. The council has maintained a high level of performance in its response to referrals. Initial and core assessments are completed within timescales and the council exceeds its internal targets and the national average. The number of re-referrals has decreased fractionally (within the council's target and well below the Welsh average) and this would suggest that the assessment process is robust.

The numbers of children in need who are allocated a qualified social worker has decreased and, while the number of children who are actually seen remains within national averages, the council will need to monitor the decision making process and outcomes for these individuals.

There remains a strong focus on permanence planning and the performance indicators show 100% of children had a plan for permanence at their second review.

Services to young carers remain consistent with a 100% being offered an assessment. There was an increase in those carers who subsequently received a service although the overall number remained very low (11 young carers identified and 10 receiving a service). Young carers are now supported by a voluntary organisation and a report from the last quarter shows an increase in uptake of this service. This is due to increased publicity and raising awareness with key partners.

### **Areas of progress**

- Improved performance in adult reviews.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Continue to explore methods for engaging with carers.

### **The services provided:**

#### **Adults**

The council has continued its focus on developing services to maintain people within the community. This has included additional resource for the community resource team (an additional 10 support workers). This remains a predominantly health led service with a focus on those people with complex needs. As a result, the council recognises that lower numbers of people leave the service able to be independent (17%). Review of the focus and function of services to monitor successful reablement to achieve independent living in line with the council's living independently strategy should be considered.

The number of people living in care homes has remained stable although the numbers of people with complex needs and requiring dementia care provision has increased. Last year CSSIW identified the need to improve the systems for monitoring commissioned services and the council has reviewed its system for contracts monitoring to include health partners. This approach includes in-house provision. Where there have been issues with quality and care provision, the council has challenged this, working with providers to improve the quality of services.

Collaborative working has included the adult placement service, Shared Lives, which is hosted by Caerphilly County Borough Council. A recent inspection of this service highlighted positive outcomes for people.

A high number of service users with a learning disability are placed out of the county and the annual commissioning report highlights the need to ensure that these placements are monitored effectively and people using services are safeguarded. The report outlines options to take this forward into 2013/14.

The modernisation of the domiciliary care service has continued and includes reconfiguring in-house provision and use of commissioned services from the independent sector. Inspection of in-house provision was positive and, in general, independent sector provision also performed well at inspection. Where there were deficits in service the contracts/commissioning team has secured improvement.

Quality assurance processes are in place to obtain direct feedback from service users and carers via surveys, engagement with service users, and questionnaires.

## **Children**

Development of children's services has continued to provide a broader range of services and choice.

Referrals for assessment have increased although the numbers of looked after children remain static within Blaenau Gwent. The reconfiguration of services commenced in 2011. This has been reviewed and there was positive feedback from allied professionals regarding the function of the two child and family support teams. Additional areas for development were identified going forward, notably the inclusion of the integrated services, Families First/Flying Start within the social services remit. Flying Start provision in Blaenau Gwent is at the second highest level in Wales and additional funding has been sought to further develop the services.

Fostering services have continued to successfully recruit additional foster families to the in-house service, reducing the number of children placed in independent fostering arrangements and providing more local arrangements. CSSIW's inspection of fostering services identified areas for improvement around documentary processes. The outcomes for children and young people were viewed as positive.

Feedback is sought directly from young people in receipt of services and from carers. An external review of looked after children's services was commissioned in 2012/13 from the National Youth Advocacy Scheme (NYAS) to seek the views of children/young people and their experiences of being looked after. A range of areas for improvement were highlighted from this and an action plan put in place to include these was developed with NYAS and young people.

### **Areas of progress**

- Seeking constructive feedback to enhance services.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Develop methods for ensuring quality for out of county placements for people with a learning disability.



## **Effect on people's lives:**

### **Adults**

There has continued to be an increase in the uptake of direct payments. This enhances the choice for individuals in decisions about how and where they receive care. Outcomes for people in receipt of direct payments are reviewed through care management.

In relation to commissioned services, the contracts and commissioning team has identified areas for improved joint working with the health board to monitor and drive up the quality of services. Where services are failing to provide the quality expected, a process for performance management is in place. Processes for escalating concerns where continued failure to improve is identified have resulted in embargos on placements. Additional work has been undertaken to examine the thresholds for performance management. CSSIW's regulatory inspectors have noted a strong approach is taken with failing services.

Mechanisms are in place for protecting vulnerable adults with clear processes for referral – the council had an increase in safeguarding referrals in 2012/13 and those reported as a risk having been managed. Wider education/information regarding adult protection has been provided to local communities and an ongoing training programme for internal staff and external providers has continued.

The Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board was established during the year, hosted and chaired by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This identified key actions to improve safeguarding arrangements for adults. Tasks/actions are devolved to sub-groups to gain greater consistency across the five local authorities involved and a broad range of partner organisations are represented on the board.

CSSIW's regulatory inspections have indicated good outcomes for people using Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's in-house services and in the majority of commissioned services. Where there have been failings, the contracts and commissioning team has taken action to seek improvements and have worked with CSSIW and other partners to implement the Escalating Concerns procedure.

### **Children**

The council is proactive in seeking feedback and commissioned an independent review of looked after children's services by the NYAS. The report into experiences of being looked sought the views of half the children and young people looked after by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's children's services. This report provided positive feedback regarding the outcomes for young people in receipt of a service and highlighted some areas where improvements could be made; the majority of these were around communication, information sharing and planning in conjunction with young

people. A task group is examining these areas and progress on responding to these will be monitored through our engagement meetings.

The total number of children on the child protection register has decreased, as it had last year. The council continues to maintain good results in terms of performance indicators for key areas of safeguarding. Timescales for initial core group meetings remain above the Welsh average although internal targets have not been met.

The council has participated in the development of the regional safeguarding children's board arrangements, encompassing the five regional authorities, health, education and voluntary agencies safeguarding arrangements. Governance arrangements and measuring the effectiveness and impact on services, both locally and regionally, will be an important indicator of the success of this arrangement.

Social services has worked closely with education to provide training and awareness of safeguarding with school staff. The recent Estyn inspection raised concerns around the awareness of corporate governance arrangements for middle management within education. The director took positive steps, working with the new senior management team within education to ensure that this was rectified within the overall action plan. The assistant director for children's services continues to work directly with education to take forward the action plan.

CSSIW's inspection of the council's fostering services found that the service was generally operating well.

### **Areas of progress**

- Reviewing thresholds and strengthening performance review of commissioned services.

### **Area for improvement**

- Continue to drive and sustain improvements in safeguarding arrangements with education partners.

## **CAPACITY**

### **Delivering Social Services:**

The council is trying to manage within a challenging financial climate. It has prioritised and protected the budgets for social services and education. The systems for monitoring the department's budgets provided early identification in 2012 of financial pressures in social services. This resulted in a task and finish group convened in the first quarter, and reporting in the autumn, to identify key areas of pressure and develop actions in response. An independent review of adult services was commissioned to review and analyse cost pressures, and

made a range of recommendations. Details were provided to scrutiny with proposals and options for going forward.

The collaboration with Caerphilly County Borough Council in workforce development provides a planned and structured approach to training and development of staff based on service needs. CSSIW will conduct site visits to review this service in 2013/14.

## **Adults**

Adult services exceeded its budget and continues to be an area of significant financial pressure. The draft medium-term financial strategy for the council takes account of pressures from demographic change. There will continue to be a need to review how services will continue to be delivered or remodelled.

The director's report and supporting evidence identifies a range of strategies to address the financial deficits the council is facing. These include collaborative working, review of commissioning strategies, brokerage systems with the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative, continued exploration of new ways of working (extra care developments and frailty) and the reconfiguration of services.

Monitoring the use of complex care in the community has led to "invest to save" monies being secured. Social services will need to continue to work closely with health partners to discuss funding arrangements and the impact of complex packages of care in the community on resources.

The workforce remains stable and work has been undertaken to investigate and improve the staff sickness and absence rates, resulting in a 13% improvement in attendance. The subsequent monitoring of this will provide additional assurance of the positive shift and whether this has been sustained, as well as its overall effect on the workforce.

## **Children**

Shared management arrangements for children's services with Caerphilly County Borough Council during the autumn did not detract from the ongoing development and review of services within Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council.

The sustained positive performance following the restructure of the children's service team provides assurance of the strength of the arrangements within this service area.

A focus on preventative strategies supported by new structures, inclusion of the integrated services team (Families First, Flying Start and early years child care) within the directorates responsibilities and collaborative working should enhance the resilience and long-term development of children's services.

## **Areas of progress**

- Further development of preventative strategies within children's services.
- Review of staff sickness, actions taken in response and subsequent improvement in attendance.

## **Areas for improvement**

- Continued close monitoring of finances, along with opportunities for collaboration.

## **Providing direction:**

There is corporate support for social services; the corporate improvement plan is clear in its commitment to providing strong social services and promoting wellbeing. Leadership within social services has been stable with a strong senior management team in place throughout 2012/13. Whilst considerable resource at senior management level was placed in the collaboration agenda with Caerphilly County Borough Council's social services, there is no evidence that this affected the day-to-day performance of social services and the subsequent impact on lives of people receiving services.

The director's reports recognises the challenges for 2013/14 and outlines the priorities for the department to continue the programme to evolve and develop services in the light of changing local needs, Government strategy/policy, impact of welfare reform and local financial constraints.

Early 2013/14 has seen additional challenges in the departure of the assistant director for children's and adult services. Interim arrangements were secured internally.

The social services department has a range of processes and systems in place to provide clear governance arrangements and the director provides clear oversight of this reporting at corporate level on a quarterly basis.

The council engages with regulators in three monthly meetings and this includes the director of social services.

CSSIW attended a scrutiny meeting where there was evidence of some challenge. Work with regulators has included the development of scrutiny within the council. The director reports that social services topics are included in development programmes for members of the council.

## **Adults**

Key areas identified by the director include the ongoing focus on improving care management/review to meet targets (although performance demonstrates some continued improvement), continued focus on collaborative working and the pursuit of strategies to enable people to live independently. Strategies to provide pathways and information to raise people's awareness of resources

within their own communities should be considered. This would enable people to seek support from alternative sources and drive forward the agenda set out in the councils living independently strategy. The review of the social care information system may provide an opportunity to develop this further.

A review of safeguarding arrangements for adults is prioritised and opportunities for collaboration through the Gwent wide board may support this.

## **Children**

The end of the year saw the departure of the assistant director for children's services. Acting arrangements were put in place to cover the vacancy and recruitment to this position commenced.

The director's report outlines ongoing development of the areas for which the foundations have been set over the last year.

The implementation of a regional adoption service will present an opportunity to develop on a wider level the work already commenced within the current tripartite arrangements. However, the service will need to maintain its current high standard of services whilst absorbing the demands of two larger local authorities into its systems. The council will also need to manage the considerable challenge presented by family justice reforms with revised timescales for permanency.

## **Areas of progress**

- Strong and responsive leadership.

## **Areas of improvement**

- Continue to develop and strengthen scrutiny arrangements.