

**CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR  
OF SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING**

**2020/2021**

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## INTRODUCTION

I would like to start my Annual Report for 2020/21 by paying tribute to all of the staff in the County Borough who have played a part in delivering Social Services, whether they be employees of the Council or staff employed by our Independent or third sector partners. Staff have shown great flexibility in changing roles and responding to the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

As everyone will be aware the emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic brought with it unprecedented challenges for public services throughout Wales and it has been no different for Social Services in Caerphilly.

Inevitably in responding to the crisis, the Directorate has had to look at the way it delivers services and deploys its resources very differently. Some services have had to be paused, staff redeployed into new areas of work and resources redirected to deal with priorities that often emerged overnight.

I fully acknowledge that some of these changes have and continue to have an impact on the people who receive our services and their carers. Whilst we continue to put services back in place it is important that we take any opportunities to learn lessons and modernise services to make sure they are sustainable through what are going to be a very challenging few years for everyone involved with social care.

Staff have had to work very closely alongside our partners in the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, Education, Housing, the independent sector and the third sector.

As would be expected given the nature of the virus staff have had to contend with rapidly emerging and changing guidance often at very short notice. Guidelines around issues such as testing, visiting, use of personal protective equipment (PPE) to name just a few have meant staff have had to change the way they work with just a few hours' notice. Guidance continues to emerge and change as we come out of the pandemic and has a significant impact on how we will "open services back up" to our service users.

Hopefully, as I write this report, we are beginning to see us all moving towards a recovery pathway and whilst this is obviously welcomed, there is little doubt that the impact in terms of the way we deliver services will be felt for years to come. There has been significant learning from the pandemic, both positive and negative and as we move forward we will need to be mindful of alternative ways of delivering services required as people come to terms with the outcome of the pandemic.

As a result the 2020/21 Director's Annual Report looks different to reports published in previous years. This year's report primarily focuses on how the Directorate responded to the pandemic to ensure critical frontline service delivery was able to be maintained to support our most vulnerable children and adults. However, you will also see reference to the progress made on some of our other key priorities and it's a great credit to the staff involved that these priorities have been progressed at the same time as responding to the challenges of the pandemic.

It is also important to note that National performance reporting was suspended for the year because a new National Performance Framework is scheduled to be implemented by Welsh Government.

In summary, the 2020/21 Annual Report serves to highlight the key areas that the Directorate has had to respond to during the pandemic as well as identifying actions that had previously been agreed to be implemented during the year and new priorities to focus on as we move forward.

Dave Street  
Corporate Director  
Social Services & Housing

## **Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic 2020/21:**

### **Workforce**

As a result of the initial lockdown guidance, day centres had to be closed and day centre staff were redeployed to care homes for older people or supported living homes. This was partly as a result of the fact that the majority of people attending day services were in the shielding category but was also part of our contingency plan should we lose high numbers of staff to the pandemic in key front line services. Early redeployment enabled those staff to understand the service area and build relationships with people.

Staff were also redeployed to Track /Trace /Protect and the Buddy Scheme if they were unable to undertake their normal duties.

Support for staff has been vital during this period. The Council has invested in IT to enable staff to work from home, actively encouraged staff to work flexibly and on a weekly basis sends information to staff regarding wellbeing support services available to them.

### **Supporting the Independent Sector**

One of the early initial issues that emerged was in terms of the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Early on supplies of PPE were fragmented and there were some difficult periods in terms of sourcing supplies of adequate volume and quality. I would like to thank staff in the authority's Procurement team in helping us through difficult times. It was a great relief that after the initial challenges, the supply has remained strong and to give an illustration of the scale of the task, the authority has now issued just over 10 million items of PPE across the sector.

At the start of the pandemic, the Directorate took the decision to pay all independent sector providers two months in advance as a contingency payment should there be any issues with the financial payment systems. For domiciliary care providers this was paid on planned activity.

As already stated, throughout the pandemic the commitment of staff from within the Directorate and from our independent and third sector partners has been exceptional.

Staff from our Contract and Commissioning Team have proactively called providers on a weekly basis to offer support in terms of ensuring they understand the regularly changing guidance issued by Public Health Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales and Welsh Government. They have worked with the Health Board to produce weekly situation reports, assisting homes where required to recruit agency staff and sharing good practices.

We have worked hard with the sector and the Health Board to implement the testing regime across closed settings, providing staff to deliver and collect the swabs to ensure we continue to protect staff, vulnerable residents and where appropriate, children.

Both residents and staff in all Older People's Care Homes in the Borough, who have consented to the vaccination, have received both their first and doses.

We have worked with the Health Board to identify and vaccinate all front line care staff in line with the JVCI guidance in relation to Priority Group 1, to enable them to continue providing vital services to vulnerable people.

### **Service Resilience**

Like the majority of Welsh Councils. Caerphilly CBC is hugely reliant on our independent sector partners. At the present time we commission around 70% of our residential care and domiciliary care services from the independent sector with the remaining 30% being provided by the authority itself.

Like all businesses across the private sector, independent social care providers have faced significant financial pressures during the pandemic. As well as additional staffing costs, homes have been impacted significantly by a reduction in the number of residents being admitted to homes with a significant loss of income.

To assist providers with these challenges Welsh Government have made payments from a "Hardship Fund" of £50 per place per week in care homes and an extra £1 per hour for domiciliary care providers. Whilst this funding will continue for the remainder of this financial year, it is of concern that there is no clarity about 2021/22.

It is unclear at this point with regard to the impact the pandemic will have on demand for certain services. We are aware that a number of people who have

been supported in the community, as opposed to going to day centres, have expressed a wish that this continues in the future. Likewise, we are unable to predict future demand for residential and nursing care. This position will need to be monitored carefully but there will clearly be opportunities to reshape our services to meet likely future demand. Obviously, any reshaping proposals will be brought before Scrutiny as part of the decision making process.

### **Care Homes**

As was the case across the whole of United Kingdom care homes in the County Borough were significantly impacted by the spread of coronavirus. One of the key issues faced was the inability of people living in care homes to see their loved ones. As a Council we worked very closely with colleagues in our own Environmental Health Department and Public Health Wales to undertake risk assessments to ensure safe visiting. The Authority invested in IT equipment for care homes to allow video calling to take place. We were also successful in obtaining a supply of visitor pods for a small number of homes to allow visiting where suitable spaces for indoor visiting was not possible.

Despite these efforts I would fully acknowledge how difficult a period this has been for people living in our care homes and their immediate families. Once again I would like to place on record my gratitude to all of the staff, who tirelessly worked to minimise the impact of this loss of contact.

### **Social Work Services**

The pandemic required us to rethink how our social work services were delivered. Working with colleagues across the Gwent region, the five Local Authorities agreed Regional Operational Guidance for both Children's and Adult Services.

In Children's Services, all referrals were prioritised on the basis of safeguarding concerns and investigations, children on the Child Protection Register, Children Looked After and children at immediate 'risk of care'. All cases were risk rated using a Red/Amber/Green (RAG) system authorised by Team Managers and these decisions have been routinely reviewed by Service Managers.

Within Adult Services, priorities were safeguarding concerns and investigations, carer breakdown and adults at immediate risk.

Across the whole Service, prior to any visits, we have adopted a triage approach to contacting families and service users to check if anyone in the household has Covid or is self-isolating, planning how to manage the visit and ensuring we observe Public Health advice in relation to social distancing and PPE.

Where feasible, virtual meetings / discussions have taken place and within Children's Services, all Court attendances were virtual using telephone or video conference with some contested hearings having to be postponed. Public Law work is now back on track using virtual methods. All adult court cases have been virtual in respect of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and applications for Deputyship.

It was noticeable in Children's Services that referrals dipped for first 2-3 weeks of the initial lockdown but quickly returned to normal (year on year) levels. We also saw a spike in referrals in September, when schools started to return and are expecting to see the same again as restrictions begin to ease.

It is important to acknowledge that during the various lockdowns, the Directorate has been able to maintain Family Time (contact) between children in care and their parents. This has, at times, had to be restricted to children under 2 year olds and any child subject of court order but all families are having some form of contact. Wherever possible we support contact outdoors and where not, we provide it indoors ensuring social distancing and PPE as appropriate.

### **Support to Carers**

At the start of the pandemic, the Directorate made a decision to keep two respite properties open, one for adults and one for children with the primary purpose of supporting carers to prevent crisis situations. Latterly we have re-opened the second adult respite property to meet increasing demand. All respite services have been able to offer bespoke solutions to crises.

The children's respite service worked closely with Trinity Fields Hub to provide support to families with children with the most complex needs. Significant positive feedback has been received in respect of the positive impact this had on families.



The adult respite properties have worked with the Social Work Teams to identify those people at highest risk of carer breakdown to support them with overnight respite, again excellent feedback has been received.

The Carers Team made proactive calls to everyone on their mailing list to check they were ok, regularly communicated with them promoting their services and put lots of activities on line. They offered small grants and engaged with third sector organisations regarding other services available to give a couple of examples. Specific activities were developed for young carers such as outdoor team building, assisting with provision of access to IT and carried out on line sessions such as 'meet and munch'.

We have commenced provision of community sessional opportunities for individuals who previously attended day centres. We are currently providing 620 hours per week sessional support for 138 individuals. Feedback has been very good in relation to these new opportunities which we plan to continue to provide going forward.

### **Hospital Discharge**

Very early on in the pandemic, it was clear that there was going to be a need to create capacity in hospitals across Gwent to cope with an influx of people with Covid-19. To facilitate this, significant numbers of people needed to be discharged from hospital into community settings. As the pandemic progressed, the position was made much more difficult by the fact that many of the residential and nursing homes in the region were unable to take admissions as they had existing residents or staff who had tested positive.

Subsequently, we have developed a Service Operating Procedure and Discharge Passport with the Health Board to enable people to be safely discharged from hospital and admitted to a care home.

These challenges placed huge pressure on domiciliary care services. Both the in-house provision and our independent sector colleagues responded magnificently to the challenge and we continue to discharge large numbers of people from hospital with re-ablement or care packages. We have increased our commissioning of domiciliary care by 11%.

Through the pandemic we have focused on supporting people at home to prevent unnecessary admissions to hospital. Emergency Care at Home (EC@H)

staff have worked with the rapid responses nurses and doctors in the CRT to provide 'hospital at home' facilities.

## **Priorities for 2020/21:**

In the 2019/20 my Directors Annual Report a number of priorities were identified to be completed during 2020/21. Naturally, progress in some of these areas has been hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic but progress made during the year against each one is detailed below:

- **Work with the Health Board to enable staff to have different conversations with people to better understand their desired outcomes**

Training was initially delayed due to Covid but dates have been scheduled for Health and Social Care staff for 2021.

- **Expand the Home First ethos to include Prince Charles Hospital in Merthyr Tydfil**

An Occupational Therapist was seconded to the front door of the hospital to prevent unnecessary admissions funded by winter pressures money. This worked well and good links have been established with PCH prevent project

- **Secure funding to expand Home First to cover the new Grange University Hospital**

Additional funding was secured from the Transformation Grant and the service was up and running to coordinate with opening of the hospital. Feedback from the Health Board has been excellent in relation to the impact of the service

- **Implement the nationally agreed 4 pathways in respect of Discharge to Assess to improve outcomes for individuals**

Work has commenced nationally and the pathways have expanded to 5 with Pathway Zero focussing on community support and prevention of unnecessary admissions. Outcome measures and data are currently being collated for benchmarking

- **Expand the My Support Team (MYST) service into Newport to complete the regional development**

The MyST service started to develop in Newport during the autumn of 2020 and became fully operational in January 2021

- **Embed the new All Wales Safeguarding Procedures**

Staff training was rolled out following the launch of the new Procedures and existing policies and procedures systematically reviewed and updated to reflect the necessary changes. Caerphilly Safeguarding Leads continue to engage with the ongoing national working group.

- **Introduce a Safeguarding Self Assessment Tool for Service areas**

This directly links to the Wales Audit Office Review of Corporate Safeguarding arrangements and the tool was developed and implemented at the end of 2019. Covid impacted on capacity for all service areas to complete the self audit during 2020 but plans are in place to recommence by the end of 2021.

- **Embed a Family Meeting Service within the Intensive Support Team to help families identify solutions to issues that they may be facing and reduce the numbers of children coming into care.**

Utilising Grant funding, three Family Meeting Co-ordinators have been recruited to cover the three main geographical areas of the Borough. Covid had a direct impact on the effectiveness of this service during the first half of 2020/21 but progress is now back on track with referrals increasing and positive outcomes being reported.

- **To promote and develop volunteering opportunities for people within their communities.**

This work is ongoing and links to Caerphilly Cares

- **Develop the mental health project arm of South East Wales Shared Lives Scheme and expand the pilot area from Newport to Caerphilly**

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board have confirmed permanent funding to expand the scheme which is a really positive development. The service has been recognised by the World Health Organisation with a case study used as good practice which has featured on webinars and ITV Wales News

- **Promote membership of My Mates (a friendship support group) for people with a learning disability to develop personal relationships and friendships**

My Mates has continued to provide a virtual service during the pandemic and excellent feedback has been received.

- **Develop the Mill Road flats for independent living for adults with a disability**

Progress was delayed with regard to the build during the pandemic due to the lack of availability of building material and a colony of crested newts.

- **Contribute to the development of regional plans for shared residential provision for young people in crisis**

Newport are leading on the development of integrated Health and Social Care accommodation for children in crisis. The development, known as Windmill Farm, is progressing well and it is anticipated that it will become operational late 2021.

## **Looking forward: priorities for 2021/22**

In addition to the priorities set for 2020/21, the Directorate has identified the following key priorities to be progressed during 2021/22:

- **Develop a Council wide Learning Management System (LMS) to record safeguarding training attendance and completion**
- **Continuation of the secondment scheme for staff to undertake the Social Work Degree.**
- **Implement the learning points from the CIW Assurance Check**
- **Modernisation of day services**
- **Progress the establishment of two new purpose built respite houses**
- **Plan for the potential ending of Integrated Care funding**

## **Conclusion**

The emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic has and continues to pose unprecedented challenges for the Social Services Directorate within Caerphilly County Borough Council. It is to the great credit of all our staff, together with our partners in the independent and third sectors that we have been able to respond as effectively as we have. The next few months are going to be unquestionably challenging as we have to balance continuing to respond to the pandemic with the focus on recovery and learning the lessons from the pandemic.