

# Changing Lives



**Director of Social Services Annual  
Report 2021/22**



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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **‘Changing Lives’**

This is the Fifth Social Services Annual Report prepared under the new requirements of both the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the Regulation and Inspection for Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. The report covers the period April 2021 to March 2022.

This is my first report as Chief Officer for Social Care & Housing, having taken up post in an interim capacity in March 2022 following the retirement of the former, long standing Chief Officer. It would be remiss, not to acknowledge the hard work and efforts of my predecessor, and the vigour within which he led the service, particularly throughout the pandemic.

This report provides a summary of our current position, future developments, and aspirations, and some of the key challenges and risks that require ongoing focus. We work in an ever-changing landscape and these risks and challenges are dynamic and impact on day to day functioning of services as we aim to provide a wholly responsive range of services to our communities.

Last year (21/22) saw the implementation of the new performance data framework which aligns with the Social Services & Wellbeing Act (SSWB Act). In terms of data, last year we started at zero, so this coming year will be the first year that we will have comparable data.

We have a renewed focus within the service area on performance and have developed a Performance Management Framework within Children & Family Services that enables key management information to be readily available and inform service delivery and development. This is being rolled out to incorporate the wider service area and will feed into directorate and corporate priorities and planning.

The past two years have been challenging for the Health and Social Care sector and it is likely that the impact of the pandemic will be long lasting and will present a continued challenge. I am immensely proud of our workforce; their commitment and dedication in the face of adversity is commendable. They continue to respond and react to the pandemic on a daily basis, as we all learn to “live” with COVID. Their ability to keep focussed on the people we support is impressive and they have continued to make a real difference to people’s lives. The workforce, whilst fluctuating and being depleted on occasion, has been adaptable and innovative and has endeavoured to deliver high quality services.

Whilst acknowledging the hard work and efforts of the workforce across the sector, I also acknowledge the resilience and efforts of the local communities throughout such challenging and unprecedented times.

There are continued challenges across the entire expanse of Social Care and Health. The continued exit from pandemic will present challenges, as will the emerging cost of living crisis. As a directorate and as a Local Authority, and in collaboration with our

partner agencies, we will aim to tackle these challenges in order to ensure that we continue to deliver and further develop, effective services that meet the needs of our citizens whilst promoting safety, community resilience and independence.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J O'Brien', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Jason O'Brien**  
**Acting Chief Officer Social Care and Housing**  
**September 2022**

## **2. DIRECTORS SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE**

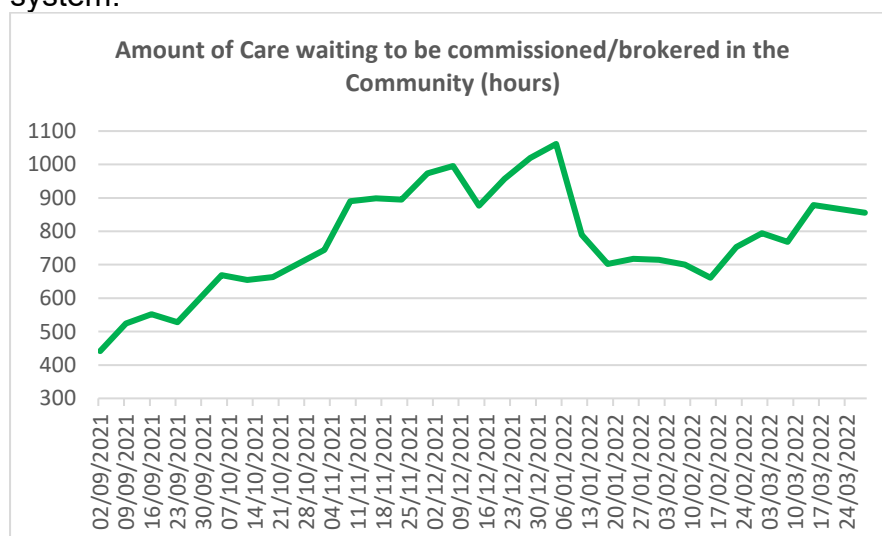
The Social Care & Housing Directorate has responded quickly and efficiently to the overwhelming demands of the Covid pandemic over the last two years. Despite the challenges and consequent changes to the way within which we have had to work and respond, services have been delivered to a high standard. That said, some aspects of our performance will have been impacted by extra demand, coupled with covid associated staff sickness across the sector. This has caused us to re-deploy staff on occasions to ease pressures in certain parts of the system and to ensure that core services continue to be delivered.

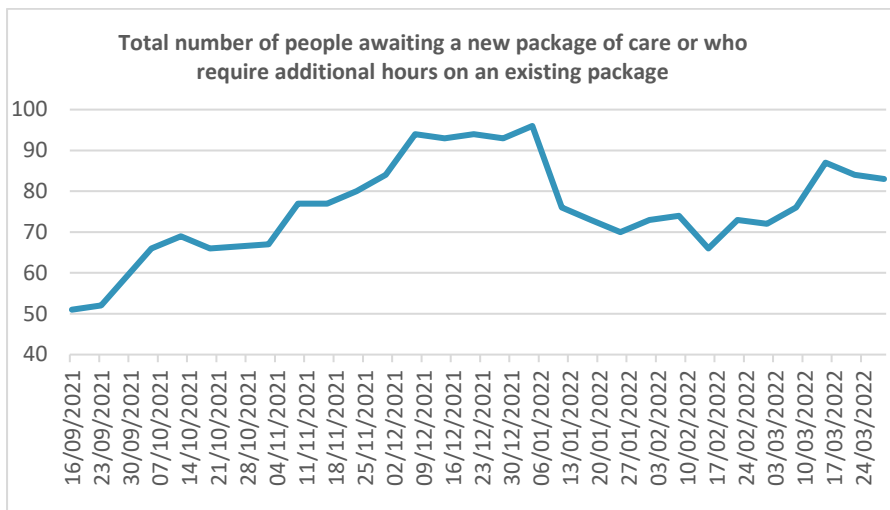
There continues to be a widespread understanding of the pressures being faced by the Health and Social Care system, including the independent care sector. The ability to recruit and retain social care workers has reached a crisis point. It is a challenge we faced throughout 2021/22 and continues, despite national, regional, and local strategies to attract people into social care careers. We are focused on mitigating the risks with robust contingency planning but despite best efforts across the whole of the sector, there remains a real shortage of care and support hours in the community. We recognise the whole system is impacted and we continue to work regionally and nationally to develop ways in which we can effectively recruit in house and support our providers to run sustainable, quality services and recruit and retain their staff.

In a changing and dynamic environment, the social care directorate has reviewed its internal performance measures in order to ensure that we continue to use the right data and information to inform and lead service delivery.

A key pressure for us within adult social care, has and continues to be related to the availability of care hours. This remains a regional and national issue and one which is dominant in ongoing planning.

The table below illustrates the number of care hours waiting to be commissioned in the community. The majority of these hours are being provided by our in-house short-term teams but need to be provided longer term from the independent providers so that care packages can flow, and where suitable, be de-escalated, across the whole system.





The directorate has demonstrated a commitment to transforming and modernising the way in which we commission and provide support. We have, despite the ongoing pressures from the pandemic and the legacy increases in demand and complexity, opened our Community Hub Ty Glas Y Dorlan which evidences and strengthens partnership working with our colleagues in the health sector and represents a different approach to the provision of respite, enabling individuals to live and function whilst promoting a greater level of independence.

Ty Glas yr Dorlan is an all-adult short stay accommodation, providing service users with their own “front door” for the duration of their stay, aiming to provide a personalised and independent experience. There is onsite domiciliary care support that is designed to flex up and down to meet the needs of the individual, and support achievement of personal goals and outcomes.

We continue to host the Gwent Transformation Team and the Regional Partnership Team and work strategically with our neighbouring Councils to strengthen our approaches to service development and to seek opportunities to collaborate across Gwent.

The well-established flexible patch-based working in Adult Services continues to have a number of strengths. The teams know their communities and the people, carers, other professionals, and partners within them. This enables them to respond quickly and have timely ‘what matters’ conversations, providing information, advice and assistance and intervening where required to identify need at the earliest opportunity. This way of working was initially borne out of the need to think more creatively and to manage demand more effectively. We have built on the skills and working practice over the past five years, and we have seen a positive impact on staff morale as they work more closely with the community. We will continually review and develop our approaches to ensure that we have the best systems in place to manage demand and ensure that we are able allocate resource where it is required. We will also ensure that our relationship with our colleagues in the Communities directorate is productive to ensure the right level of help and support is provided and that statutory services are provided to those with the greatest level of need.

Children and Family Services have experienced and risen to significant challenge due to the ongoing impact of the national pandemic with demand and complexity increasing. The division has adapted practice on a strength based and risk assessed basis for children and families within Torfaen. The division has worked regionally to share good practice, learn, challenge, and ensure a consistency of practice. There have been a range of regional projects developed across the Gwent region in order to ensure effective use of resource, economy of scale and consistency of approach.

The division has had a continued focus on managing demand placed upon the service both at the front door and throughout, to the point where children require being looked after. The division has undertaken significant pieces of work and training aimed at changing practice so that practitioners feel safe in using professional judgement and making decisions associated with a balanced risk whilst recognising the strengths within families and communities.

The implementation of the Multi Agency Support and Safeguarding Hub (MASSH) in 2019, and its continued development has been effective in providing consistent and defensible decision-making processes. The MASSH is a continually developing and evolving hub.

The Youth Offending Service (YOS) has piloted a specific resource / worker to work in conjunction with the MASSH and provide preventative services for children, young people and families who are referred to the MASSH but meet the criteria for YOS preventative interventions. The YOS has continued to reduce the number of young people who enter the criminal justice system via their preventative focusses with there being 27 children and young people entering the criminal justice system on 2021/22 compared to 37 the year before.

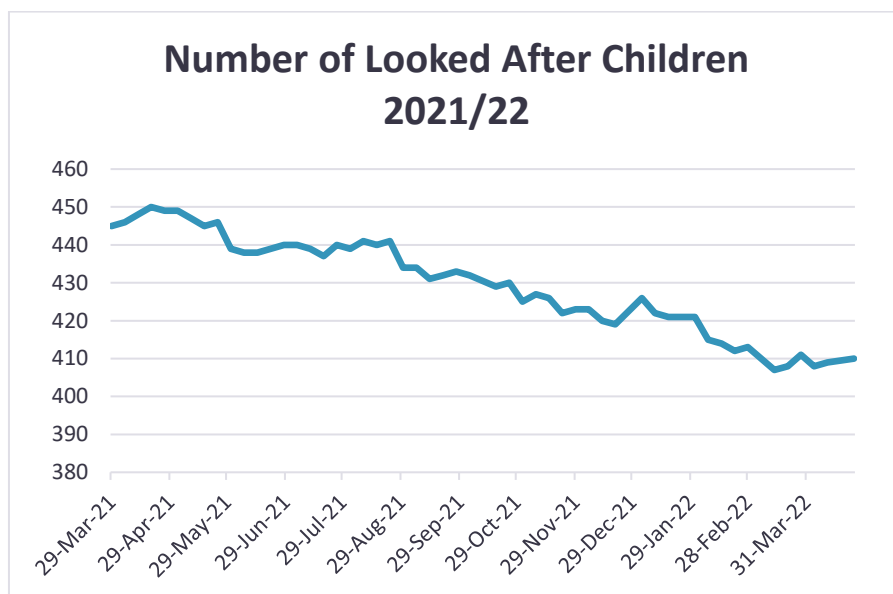
We continued to work with children with complex, high-level needs, who require specialist services from experienced providers. These complex care packages have continued to substantially impact on the social care budget. We have worked and continue to work to maximise efficiencies in this area. The Continuing Care Lead for Torfaen Children and Family Services, based within the Children with Disabilities Team, has continued to review and, where required, challenge multi-agency responses to the most complex of cases.

Over the past 18 months, considerable work has taken place to review and develop a threshold of need within the Children and Family Service to further promote consistent decision making across the division. This has been developed and approved to be utilised to inform a strengths-based practice framework. This has, in turn been developed and rolled out across the division with all social work staff and relevant partner agencies trained on an incremental basis depending on function and interaction with children and families.

We have continued to focus on our children looked after population in order to ensure that we only “look after” children where it is absolutely necessary. Whilst we continue to prioritise our safeguarding responsibilities, we recognise that we have too many children who are looked after. The efforts to change practice and ensure safe strength-based decision making informs all parts of the system has seen an increased number of children exit the care system in recent years with there having

been 57 Care Orders discharged in 2021/22 comparable to 10 order discharges in 2019/20 and 11 order discharges in 2020/21.

As a result of the continued developments made within children and family services, for the first time in seven years, we have experienced a net reduction of our children looked after population, ending the year with 407 children looked after from a starting point of 446 (and a previous high of 474).



Due to the continued financial challenges facing the public sector in Wales, we, along with other organisations continue to operate in a manner that corresponds to corporate responsibility for a balanced budget during 2021/22. The Council, recognising the vital role we play in protecting vulnerable people, was able to provide relative protection to frontline Social Care and Education budgets, in line with Welsh Government guidance and corporate plan priorities. This still left a requirement for savings across Social Care and Housing whilst facing unprecedented demand and complexity for our services.

A major area of budget pressure relates to the fees we pay to our providers, as their costs increase. We undertook a detailed refresh of the fees we pay in respect of residential and nursing care with partners. All fees for 2022/23 were updated to reflect Welsh Government's pledge that all registered frontline Social Care Workers should be paid the real living wage. This is a national issue, and, like other public services, we are still working with Welsh Government and providers to better understand and mitigate the financial consequences, as we want to ensure all front-line staff, who provide care to our most vulnerable residents, are paid appropriately. This continues to have a direct impact on the sustainability of some care provider organisations, who are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit staff, train and retain that expertise. Going forward we will focus on a detailed fee review of domiciliary care providers in partnership with the Gwent region.

### **Key Highlights**

- We have strengthened partnership working through expansion of the MASSH (Multi Agency Support & Safeguarding Hub) enabling us to strengthen our ability



to ensure that children and families receive the right support at the right time, preventing escalation into and through the system.

- The whole service review of the Family Placement Team has concluded, and a business case developed. Recommendations, which were subsequently approved from the review will ensure that Torfaen Foster Carers continue to receive a high level of support, thus increasing placement stability for our Children Looked After and further improving the usage of in-house foster placements.
- We have continued to prioritise the Children Looked After population, through projects such as the strength-based practice model and the accelerated order discharge application process, this has ensured that:
  - for the first time in seven years there has been a net reduction of Children Looked After,
  - more young people are able to remain safely in their own homes.
  - we have reduced usage and overall spend for residential placements in line with individual planning for children.
  - more children are being rehabilitated back home.
- We have embedded a renewed approach to performance management which has developed a greater level of meaningful insight and accountability as it relates to performance.
- We have opened the Adult Services Community Hub that is Ty Glas Y Dorlan; an innovative approach to offering high class accommodation, whilst focusing on enabling people to achieve greater levels of independence.
- We have provided support to our third sector colleagues; forging new and stronger relationships, building on partnerships forged through the pandemic to tackle unprecedented challenge and demand now and into the future.
- The temporary accommodation team worked with third sector partners and landlords to ensure that every person, rough sleeping in Torfaen, was offered safe accommodation.
- We have supported and advised all providers on the rapid change in guidance regarding the national response to the pandemic
- We implemented PPE deliveries to support care homes very quickly – implementing Brexit planned delivery routes. We have supported social care providers with the delivery of over 22.5m items of PPE since the start of the pandemic.

### **Broad Challenges in 2022/23**

The service has identified challenges and solutions and actions to mitigate these for 2022/23:

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solution/ Action</b>
1.	Social Care Recovery – having the resources and capacity to support people, staff, providers, and the communities of Torfaen to recover	Continue to support commissioned services through Covid outbreaks.

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solution/ Action</b>
	and mitigate the medium to longer impact of the CoVID Pandemic.	Continue to engage in national, regional, and local workstreams / projects developing Recovery plans
2.	Increasing complexity of cases being referred within the system results in the need for significant input and commitment from staff. Complex cases often result in high-cost placements where improved outcomes are not always achieved.	Development of a Multi-Agency Approach. Drive forward partnership working to maximise outcomes for individuals. Examine alternative options to providing care.
3.	Fragility of the Social Care Market and the impact of any exit from the market by social care providers on our ability to commission the care that people need.	Linked to above plan and develop a sustainable provider market that is focused on enablement, outcomes for people. Move away from commissioning based on time and task to commissioning outcomes Build on the positive relationships that have developed over the pandemic with our partners to work towards a sustainable market that enables people to live the way they chose to live. Engage in National, Regional and Local workstreams to drive forward improvements nationally, regionally, and locally.
4.	Uncertainties around short Term Grant Funding	Work with Welsh Government and other funding bodies to enable grant income to be received on a timely basis so that services can be planned in order to maximise income received and achieve outcomes for the most vulnerable. Identify priority areas of investment if grant monies become available.
5.	Ensuring we can recruit and retain staff across the service area and commissioned services, giving us the capacity to deliver our services. Wellbeing	Engagement with HR and the OD team to identify appropriate strategies to combat the issues. Engage with regional workforce development board. Continue to work with colleagues in Human Resources in order to review the Torfaen offer to social work staff.

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solution/ Action</b>
		<p>Work with Social Care Wales and regional colleagues in order to ensure a continued through flow of social work staff.</p> <p>Review the secondment / sponsorship opportunities for unqualified staff who wish to become qualified.</p> <p>Consider the merits of recruitment of social work staff from overseas.</p> <p>Use agency social work staff where required and where available.</p> <p>We will develop the findings and processes established by the specialist recruitment officer.</p>
6.	The cost-of-living crisis will increase demands on services across the whole of Social Care Housing & Commissioning with anticipated impacts on providers financial stability and the numbers of adults, children and families experiencing increased poverty.	Work collaboratively across the council to mitigate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis to the most vulnerable people in Torfaen

This has been an exceptionally challenging year within which to manage and deliver public services, but as we look to the future, we will draw on positives from this time and build on the strengths and resilience of our staff and communities. I hope that what you read in this report matches your views and experience of social care delivery within Torfaen.

I am confident that we will continue to develop and deliver high quality services, in collaboration with partner agencies and other directorates within the Council and that we will continue to develop our understanding of our citizens changing needs.

Whilst focussing on the delivery of our statutory responsibilities and ensuring that our citizens are safeguarded and achieve best possible outcomes, we will also focus on enhancing community resilience and creating greater levels of independence so that our citizens can control and live the life they want to live.

### **3. HOW ARE PEOPLE SHAPING OUR SERVICES?**

We use a variety of sources which includes.

- Day to day feedback,
- Complaints and compliments,
- Questionnaires,
- We also gather stories and real-life examples which form part of this report and tell the story from the individuals perspective.

In March 2020, in line with Welsh Governments Covid legislation and guidance we suspended our buildings-based Day Opportunities and introduced new ways of delivery. Throughout 2021/22 we recognised that covid recovery provided an opportunity to reflect, learn, do things differently and do better things. We built back better by coproducing a new offer with people who use services, their supporters, our staff, and partners by transforming part of the system. We had the opportunity to pause and review Day Opportunities and to work with users and carers to establish “what a good day looks like”. We listened to service users and carers to inform service provision and community support options. Community engagement and co-production is key to achieving successful and sustainable change. We recognise that some people with limited communication will need an advocate that is suitably trained to aid effective engagement.

We continued to improve the mechanisms we use to engage with service users, carers, families, and providers. We worked well with all stakeholders to establish positive relationships and develop co-produced solutions, for example the use of talking mats for those with limited communication. This has given us a better understanding of customer need, stimulated more creative and open-minded responses, and has highlighted the importance of developing positive relationships built on trust. Consultation and engagement with all service users is undertaken through our assessment, care planning and transition planning processes alongside focussed engagement on service development.

With covid restrictions still being in place throughout parts of 2021, we continued to contact carers over the telephone and via video calling. Ongoing contact made a huge difference to carers and had a positive impact on their wellbeing. The service did not “close its doors” and has continued to adapt its means of communication in line with service user needs.

The local dementia group continued to meet at Pontypool Park, and this was of great value to carers.

As restrictions lifted throughout the year, groups restarted slowly indoors. For carers who were still nervous about covid and in particular being in an enclosed space with others, telephone and zoom contact was maintained and hybrid methods of meeting and communication have been continually developed.

A range of activities for both adult and young carers was offered for Carers Week 2021, for adults. Volunteers including carers, planted 400 flowers in a dedicated garden to all unpaid carers at Cwmbran Boating Lake. The garden was featured in the South Wales Argus as well as on the Local Nature Partnership website. local Councillors, unpaid carers and staff were involved in planting the wildflower plugs.



*"The garden is a really nice gesture and I hope people will enjoy it and appreciate it."*

*A Carer*

We had a significant social media presence where we used the arena to dispel carer myths.



The social media reach was high and there were lots of positive comments from carers on the posts.

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) and the Gwent Regional Partnership Team gathered, in advance of Carer's week, 38 Carers week pledges and these were shared online throughout the week along with information about carers. These posts were shared via Twitter, Facebook and ABUHB Intranet throughout carers week.

We created an adult carers logo, and these were printed onto newly designed banners that were displayed throughout the authority, along with information on how carers can contact us for support.

We ran an event at Ty Glas Y Dorlan in Cwmbran, which provided carers with a tour of the new building, as well as there being 15 organisations available to provide information.



We introduced the new dedicated carers Facebook page, which was advertised on the day.

We arranged a fish & chips lunch at Pontypool Active Learning Centre for the dementia group and supported the Cwmbran Carers bowling group, for carers and those they care for to have an event.

With restrictions being lifted by the end of the year, we organised a trip to the pantomime and 240 carers attend, which was a mixture of young and adult carers.

As there were restrictions in place for part of the year, we were unable to run events as we did in previous years. We used the funding to run another grants scheme where carers could apply for essential items and items to support individual breaks. The grant scheme was again a huge success and we have received feedback from carers saying what a difference the grant made to them.

Material changes were made to Housing funding streams in 2021/22. Because of the time invested we have been able to revise practice guidance, and fully implement into practice, the new guidance in respect of the Housing Support Grant (HSG). The Housing Support Programme Strategy and delivery plan were approved by cabinet in March 2022. Progression of the 2021/22 delivery plan is continuing with projects being implemented and monitored. Contracts have been retendered and implementation of the new contractual arrangements continued.

Work has continued with Year three of the Gwent Homelessness Strategy. However, work on the plan has been impacted by the pandemic. Further requirements from Welsh Government have added to the local authority requirements to draft further plans incorporating the effects of COVID 19 on homelessness. The net effect is that two separate plans will be drawn up and the COVID 19 plan will feed into the main plan.

Meeting the needs of our customers in Children and Families service is largely focused through meeting the statutory duties which legislation places upon us through the Children Act 1989 and the Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

In our Children and Family Services there is an emphasis on families being able to utilise their strengths to help themselves or receive the right support to do so. Practitioners have experienced change in work processes and practices and embraced engagement with families in achieving outcomes that meet their children's needs. Similarly, families have experienced and embraced such change. Consultation and engagement are generally undertaken through individual assessment, care planning and pathway planning duties. This invites the views of children, young people, and families to be considered alongside the professional views. This is collated through the data which informs our performance indicators, we can recognise the demand and use this to inform business planning.

Care experienced young people are members of our Corporate Parenting Board. This enables service user challenge and scrutiny with an overall aim of impacting on and shaping service delivery.

In respect of Young Carers (Aged 5 to 16) & Young Adult Carers (Aged 16 to 25) a great deal of activity has been ongoing throughout 2020/21.



- Torfaen Leisure Trust – Gym and Fitness Classes
- Go Kart Project
- Young Carers Forum
- Young Carers ID Card Scheme
- Half Term Activities
  - Cooking school
  - Alpaca Days
  - Young Carers Family Forum
  - Activity Days
  - Bowling
  - Under 10's Disco

Young Carers Groups are well established with opportunities for groups to meet in partnership with Torfaen Youth Service and Play Service in the respect of younger age groups. Young carers have access to information and support, as well as access to a wide variety of activities such as sports, pool, cooking and arts and crafts activities. All the activities facilitated by trained and experienced young carers staff and youth workers, helps young carers develop friendship groups, support networks.

Our Family Focus Service and Rapid Response Service undertakes feedback on the service with each family with the parents and the children (dependent on their age and understanding).

“I can't imagine social workers get much credit for the job that they do but I would like to thank you and all your team for everything you have ever done for xxxx and for me. I know that you have a job to do but honestly I will never forget how much you have helped me and my family through some tough times.”

*Family Member*

We recognised that some people are unable to give their opinions on services, or their thoughts on how services can improve. We commission, as a region, specialist advocacy services for adults and children to ensure that people who find it difficult are still able to have their voices heard.

Our Commissioning Unit has continued to work across the region and were key participants of our COVID response and recovery planning. They provided an invaluable communication link in sharing guidance as it changed and impacted on in house and commissioned service delivery. They supported providers and acted as a valuable resource in sourcing staff, equipment, and services when care homes were in crisis.

They have provided, in addition to their current duties, support to the Group Manager responsible for the implementation and administration of the £735 Social Care Recognition payments, administration of the hardship fund payments, rolling out of the Lateral Flow Testing devices and the distribution of PPE. They continued to be key

partners in the weekly Care Home Incident Meetings working closely with PHW and Environmental Health colleagues.

Into 2022/23 and beyond we will continue to support the national, regional, and local Social Care COVID 19 recovery plans to mitigate the effect and aid recovery from the pandemic by our most vulnerable citizens.

We will build on the relationships that we have strengthened with all our partners, across the Council's directorates and with our service users to ensure that services are delivered in a way in which is enabling, safe and positive for all the citizens of Torfaen.

Our Commissioning Unit will continue to be an essential member of The Gwent Health Social Care and Wellbeing Partnership, Commissioning Task and Finish Group and will utilise the Population Needs Assessment (PNA), which is central to promoting wellbeing, supporting people at the earliest opportunity to maintain their independence and to help people to use their own strengths and assets to better help themselves.

Our work continues to be directed through our strategic partnerships; for example, Children and Young People Partnership, Regional Safeguarding Board, Mental Health and Learning Disability Partnership, Dementia Board, and the Carers Strategic Board.

#### **4. PROMOTING AND IMPROVING THE WELLBEING OF THOSE WE HELP**

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

Since the introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act, we have promoted people's wellbeing by asking them "What matters to you". We have been actively encouraging all service users to shape and control the services they want to receive whilst ensuring safeguarding responsibilities are administered. Adult Services has provided all staff with "Collaborative Conversations" training. We want service users to feel empowered to achieve their own wellbeing outcomes and independence.

We have built on our positive relationships with the Health Board through enhanced working with district nurses, Community Resource Team, and the hospitals, resulting in better communication and improved outcomes for people. Over the last year, we have continued to support the Home First project with our neighbouring local authorities to provide rapid assessment to patients at the emergency front door departments 7 days a week.

In 2021/22, we continued to further develop outcome-focused care plans and contracts, rather than concentrating efforts on monitoring tasks and processes. This is not always easy, and we do not have the ability to meet all public expectations or all user and carer choices. We have and continue to be realistic about what can be achieved within the resources available as we have a broad range of duties and competing demands. Our philosophy has continued to be 'Home First', and resources are channelled at services that enable people to live within their own homes/communities safely and independently for as long as possible

Torfaen Community Connectors have continued to work with people who are lonely, socially isolated, and lacking in confidence or who may have lost touch with their networks and/or community.



The Community Connectors supported Mental Health Awareness week with two socially distanced litter picks in the North and South of the borough. This allowed them

to interact with the community on an informal basis and share and promote the role and the team.

They have actively supported the new all-purpose social care resource Ty Glas Y Dorlan, attending an open day and planning activities and events for residents and the community moving forward

The connectors utilised Social Care Recovery Fund monies to support communities. The team have been hugely successful and were able to provide funding to start up four projects that will last for 12 months and could reach 2,000 people.

- A series of “befriending” trips to places of interest for people to meet and discuss the day and their experience, e.g., Big Pit, Cardiff Museum etc.
- Mindfulness and mental wellbeing, including Yoga, creative Art, and activity packs for mental wellbeing.
- Two cinema groups; one in the North and one in the South of the borough, enabling lonely and isolated people to attend the cinema with others and then meet to discuss the film.
- Engaging conversations in the community, a series of 12 talks by a variety of people and organisations. These projects are working well alongside the existing groups the Community Connectors facilitate.



In 2021/22, we have made enormous strides in our development of a strategic response and community model for long / short-term care beds. We have opened our innovative Ty Glas Y Dorlan Community Hub, utilising over £3m funds from the Social Housing Grant and Integrated Care Fund to support our community strategy. Ty Glas y Dorlan is a short stay community facility where guests have their own flat for the duration of their stay. Whilst focussing on the needs of the service user, the provision aims to promote strengths and create greater levels of independence whilst providing a high-quality package of needs led support.



As reported in previous years the uptake of direct payments continues to be limited. Feedback from service users and staff has highlighted the bureaucracy associated with self-managing direct payments has acted as a deterrent for several people affecting the numbers. A Regional Direct Payment Project, led by Torfaen has been established to look at options appraisal to develop and design the service to overcome the barriers to encourage the appropriate take up of direct payments.

We recognise that access to appropriate information and advice is key to supporting people to be as independent as possible.

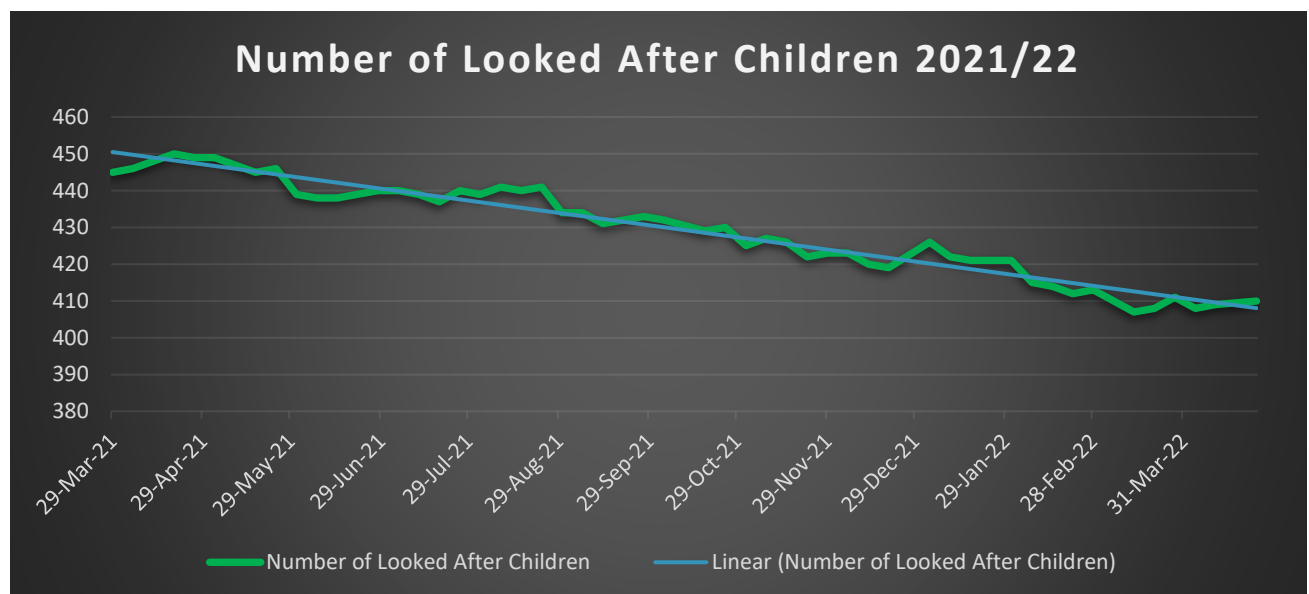
We have strengthened partnership working through the expansion of the MASSH (Multi Agency Support & Safeguarding Hub), enabling us to strengthen our ability to ensure that children and families receive the right support at the right time preventing escalation into and through the system.

We have developed the strength-based practice model within children and family services which has included a review of paperwork and decision-making processes and have rolled out a significant strength-based training programme for all staff within the service. This will continue to be a rolling programme for all staff who join the division and there is refresher training and a full mentoring programme in place. As of

31st December 2021, 161 out of 182 members of staff have fully completed the training programme.

The service has reviewed cases where a child is subject of a care order and placed with parents, with a clear plan (where suitable) being devised to apply to discharge such orders. In tandem with this the service has piloted an accelerated order discharge process with the judiciary and CAFCASS and has been instrumental in discharging a number of care orders. This continues to be a priority; to ensure that children do not enter and do not remain in the looked after system unnecessarily.

Overall, the service has been successful in safely reducing the looked after population throughout 2021/22 from 446 at the start of the year to 407 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022



The Family Focus service has continued to provide therapeutic intensive strength-based interventions to support families, providing support, assistance, and maintenance prior to and within the Court Care Planning process to ensure families can be maintained and children and families are supported appropriately. We have enhanced our Family Focus Service and increased capacity for its use within the pre-court planning process. We have continued to receive positive feedback for this service from parents and young people.

Into 2022/23 and beyond, the Community connectors have transferred from Social Care into the Communities Directorate. This will enable a more targeted preventative and community focussed level of activity within the functions and continue to work alongside, and in collaboration with adult social care.

We will continue to participate in the Community Based Resource working group. We will continue to improve our information on the Torfaen Website, so it becomes the 'go to' place for people who want information, guidance and advice about services that are available to them in order for them to make informed decisions.

We will take forward the Wales Audit Office recommendations for Direct Payments and will work, on a regional basis, towards breaking down the barriers identified with the uptake of Direct Payments in Torfaen.

Adult Services will also work alongside commissioners and providers to continue to understand the changing needs of the community and design domiciliary and community support options that are sustainable and meet the needs of our citizens.

We will continue to work in collaboration with people and carers to develop and review care and support plans. We will be creative, innovative and scope new opportunities.

We will continue to inform and empower people to make positive choices to find their own solutions within their communities to develop community resilience and reduce reliance on statutory services.

We will raise awareness and recognise the value of both formal and informal support networks, so people and partners can achieve common goals and improved outcomes.

We will work alongside our colleagues in the Communities directorate to ensure that the right level of support is provided at the right time.

**B. Working with people and partners to protect and promote peoples physical and mental health and wellbeing.**

The pandemic provided the perfect opportunity to build on our strong partnerships with all our partners; both internal and external.

In 2021/22 Social Care continued to operate with regard to national, regional, local, and Public Health Wales Covid-19 advice, protocols, guidance, and Standard Operating Procedures. Partners across the region worked tirelessly to keep up to date with all guidance and protocols that were shared during the year.

The experience within Social Care and Housing was testament to how we were able to respond to the pandemic and unpredictable change.

A senior manager within Adult Services took the lead in co-ordinating Torfaen's response to the ever-changing guidance and leading on the administration of resources made available for Social Care providers in both Adult Services and Children and Family Services. All the information was shared with our providers on a timely basis and the Commissioning Team took the lead on supporting and co-ordinating our commissioned services.

Adult Services continue to lead on the distribution of PPE for the Gwent region, utilising the existing Gwent Wide Integrated Community Equipment Service (GWICES). The Cefndy-Medequip depot was used as a delivery point from Welsh Government supplies, and we utilised existing logistical arrangements and fleet to redistribute to the five local authority hubs throughout the region. PPE was distributed to all our commissioned social care providers. As a region, local authorities worked together to

procure PPE to enable the limited supplies available to be shared with the independent sector.

Regional partnership work on the Gwent Mental Health 'Whole Person, Whole System Crisis and Acute Care Model' has continued throughout 2021/22 with the components of the model being developed. A community of practice has been established to bring partners and stakeholders together to ensure that what matters to citizens in Gwent is reflected in the design of a new model, and service users and carers' voice is central.

The Gwent Mental Health Crisis Care Concordat Delivery group, led by a senior manager from Torfaen, has continued to oversee the regional implementation plan and to work on creative solutions to challenges presented. The conveyance pilot has provided an alternative solution to an emergency response ambulance, to ensure people experiencing a mental health crisis are provided with appropriate transport to convey them to a health-based place of safety in a timely and dignified manner. Consideration is being given to identifying sustainable ongoing funding to move from a pilot to an established service offer. Torfaen has contributed to the Welsh Government Mental Health Access Review and Conveyance review and await the findings and recommendations.

The implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) has been out for public consultation along with the Code of Practice (CoP) and the regulations that overarch the amended Mental Capacity Act (MCA) that was delayed by UK government until April 2022. The delay was due in part to the health and social care system needing to focus on the response to Covid 19 and subsequent recovery planning. Public consultation ended on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022, however, the UK and Welsh government has yet to set an implementation date where the amended MCA comes into force. In preparation for this new legislation, which replaces the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), we have created a lead practitioner role to support our regional and local implementation. We have a renewed focus on raising awareness, knowledge and understanding of the Mental Capacity Act, which is essential in implementing LPS. A Gwent wide consortium, consisting of the five local authorities and ABUHB, is developing a joint approach to the implementation and the construction of training and developing proformas to ensure there is consistency across the region to meet the legal intricacies and volume of demands that will be generated by the amendments to MCA.

Throughout the pandemic we have continued to support the Dementia Friendly Community agenda, providing virtual learning sessions. Sessions have been completed with Coleg Gwent Health and Social Care students, creating over 100 Dementia Friends and we have also been supporting Occupational Therapy students, schools, council staff and community support organisations such as Sporting Memories Torfaen and the Parkinson's support group Cwmbran.

We have been working in partnership through the Regional Integration Fund to develop technology solutions aimed at helping people live healthier and more independent lives such as the Reminiscence Interactive Therapy Activities (RITA), interactive pets and a device called HUG which aims to improve the mental wellbeing of people with advanced dementia. We have also distributed interactive pets to care homes, which have been welcomed.



The RITA units have been distributed through hospital wards and care homes. We received positive feedback and the HUGS are currently in pilot.

**Get There Together project**



Mentro gyda'n gilydd

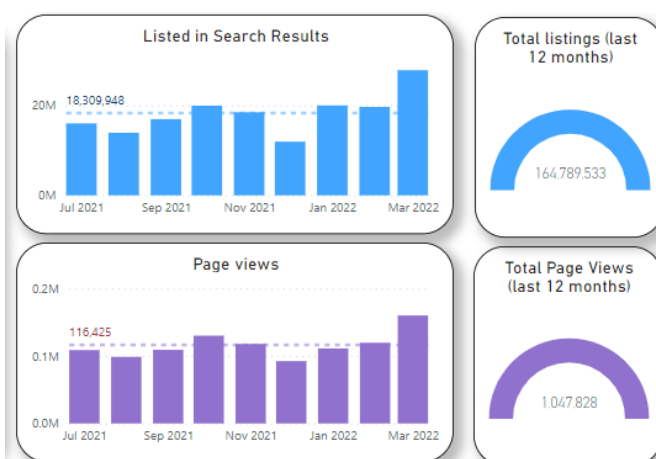


Get there together

A resource to support the people of Wales access their communities.

The 'Get There Together' national project was developed to support people through changes at community venues during the pandemic, through short video clips held on the Dewis Cymru website. The project is now looking to support the Covid19 recovery agenda, and video clips have been developed to welcome people back to venues and improve social inclusion. As part of the national group, we are also working with a technology company who are piloting an app as part of this project, so people can make their own content and clips which are more bespoke to their own needs. Carers and family members can make videos to support their loved ones, with reminders and helpful information when they are out and about shopping or at the GP, for example. These clips can be held in a calendar on the app, allowing people to plan their day with video clips and helpful prompts.

Data Cymru tracks page views for the project, and we have had over 1 million views in the last 12 months across the whole project.



Data Cymru

As part of Dementia Action Week 2022 we developed a programme of social media materials to highlight the importance of diagnosis. We are currently preparing work regionally for the implementation of the National Dementia Standards and worked closely with the multi-agency workstream leads to promote this work.

We have been working closely with Gwent Police, ABUHB and the Alzheimer's Society Cymru, supporting the coordination of the Dementia wristband project, which piloted in June 2022. The dementia wristband scheme means emergency service workers can easily identify and get the right help and support for those living with the condition. The pilot will offer 80 local residents to trial the band and provide valuable feedback which could support a national launch. The wristbands will be distributed by memory assessment services across Gwent, and we will be supporting the evaluation and report back to the Police and Crime Commissioner. Gwent Police will become the first police force in Wales to adopt this scheme.

This scheme bolsters the Herbert Protocol which Gwent Police alongside the other Welsh forces support and will provide valuable information on anyone living with dementia and other neurological conditions.

*"If a person gets lost or confused when out in the community, it can be an extremely upsetting experience for both the person living with dementia, their family and carers. The Gwent Regional Partnership Board are pleased to support Gwent Police and partners as the first area in Wales to trial this technology. The wristbands will contain essential information, including the wearers name and next of kin details, which can be accessed by community members through an app on their phone should they find someone in need of help and support. This technology is not a replacement for good care but will act as an added layer of safeguarding alongside the Herbert Protocol, to help keep people safe, as people continue to do what is important to them to live well".*

*Cllr Paul Cockeram, Gwent Regional Partnership Board Chair:*

The Gwent Carers Hub is available to all carers in the Gwent region. During 2021/22 There were:

- 8441 contacts with carers;
- 774 new referrals into the hub;
- 1186 number of carers accessing the service;
- 2181 carers signposted to services;
- 140 onward referrals;
- 141 surgeries were held;
- a total of 377 'What Matters' conversations were undertaken;
- 29 training courses were offered;
- 111 young / young adult carers were identified;
- 96 outreach events took place

Activities at the hub include, armchair yoga, crafts, wellbeing walking groups, first aid training for carers, legal clinics, coffee mornings, complimentary therapy, Halloween get together and drop-in services.

Torfaen Council has supported this training through its workforce development department; holding 11 Training sessions this year: 6 closed sessions for individual teams and 3 open workshops.

Our commitment to supporting young/young adult carers in education remains high. In identifying hidden carers, we have seen a changing climate for young carers balancing their caring roles, alongside coping with school closures, and managing online learning and then reopening of schools further exacerbated by outbreak quarantines.

The Young Carers in schools programme delivered by Carers Trust South East Wales (CTSEW), now Care Collective has seen an increase in demand. The table below shows the schools engaging in this project.

	Number of Primary Schools	Engaging Primary schools	Number of Secondary Schools	Engaging secondary schools	Engaging PRS 1/5
<b>Blaenau Gwent</b>	23	3	4	3	
<b>Caerphilly</b>	78	8	12	7	
<b>Monmouthshire</b>	30	1	4	4	1
<b>Newport</b>	46	3	9	8	
<b>Torfaen</b>	26	6	6	5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>21 (10%)</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>27 (77%)</b>	<b>1 (20%)</b>

TCBC has been an active participant in the regional commissioning work co-ordinated by the Gwent Regional Partnership Team. This has included the weekly regional webinars with the domiciliary care and care home providers throughout the pandemic and beyond. We have also contributed to the development of the Regional Market Stability Report required by Part 9 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Although the local authorities and the health board in the area all arrived at separate fee settlements for 2022-23, Torfaen has and continues to be an active member of the regional fee negotiations work with independent care home providers in the area. The Authority has also played an important part in the development of a regional approach to direct payments and to the review of day services. The regional commissioning process is in the process of being revised and refreshed as the restrictions of the pandemic recede.

The Council recognises the invaluable role undertaken by children, young people, and adults, who provide informal care for others. In the last Census, over 12,000 people in Torfaen indicated that they provide some type of informal daily care for members of their own family or for other people. Carers often only present to statutory services when caring for another person becomes overwhelming for them. They often report that they feel unable to enjoy their own lives due to their caring commitments and Torfaen is fully committed to helping to support this section of our community.

We continued to work with local housing associations, Bron Afon and Melin Homes to identify new/hidden carers and highlight carer's issues regionally. We are part of the Gwent Programme Board Working Group which consists of the other 4 Gwent LA's and all the LHB Carers Leads who are working hard to improve the health and wellbeing of Welsh carers.

Into 2022/23 and beyond, we will see the continuation of a place-based approach to community support aided by the Integrated Wellbeing Coordinator. Alongside the wellbeing coordinator we will be expanding our thinking and agreeing a way forward to embrace the work of 'Compassionate Communities'. Both work strands will link together the jigsaw of community resources to ensure less duplication and start the thinking about how we fill the gaps.

The Regional Partnership Board will be key in steering the long-term strategy that considers local need and delivery.

There are several major change activities within Adult Services planned for 2021/22, which will touch on coproduction, protection, and promotion of wellbeing, safeguarding, learning, promoting positive relationships and economic wellbeing.

The key areas for consideration are

- Domiciliary Care Strategy
- Review our Short and long-term bed-based provision
- Redefine and redesign day opportunities with key partners
- Scope out the implications of legislative changes - Liberty Protection Safeguards due to be implemented in April 2022 to replace Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS).
- Review the "front door" mechanisms and pathways for adult social care

We will also continue to support the development of Dementia Friendly Communities' and the further development of joint commissioning processes for domiciliary care services linking in with CIW's report 'Above and Beyond' and the 'Care and Support at Home' plan being developed by Social Care Wales. The aim of this work is to provide practical support to enable people to live fuller lives within their own communities.

In Children and Family Services the main areas for consideration are:

- We will build on the success of the effective multi-Agency approach to the safe triaging of referrals.
- We fully implement the review of the overall functions and composition of the family placement team.
- We will complete the rollout of the risk management / strengths-based practice framework and review the effectiveness of newly developed practices.
- We will continue to focus on safely moving children out of the looked after system.
- We will increase capacity for Family Group Conferences.
- We will develop placement sufficiency for children and young people with complex needs.

### **C. Taking steps to protect and safeguard people from abuse, neglect, or harm**

Arrangements for safeguarding across the region are led by the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB), Gwent Wide Adult Safeguarding Board (GWASB) and Violence against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Board (VAWDSV), which has a range of sub-groups that deliver safeguarding in its practical form. The sub-groups promote greater collaboration, increase effectiveness, and share practice learning and officers within Torfaen are active within all these groups.

Torfaen's Local Safeguarding Network improves the quality of inter-agency safeguarding arrangements and practice at a local level, promoting a direct link between the regional Boards and sub-groups and front-line practice across. The group promotes a culture of multi-agency learning and increased accountability with local authority areas supported by the Board's Business Unit.

Safeguarding children and adults is one of our corporate priorities. It is not something that we do in isolation but share responsibility with other service areas and with our external partners. The Chief Officer chairs the corporate safeguarding leads group (CSLG) which oversees an annual action plan, monitored by Overview and Scrutiny Committee. We have an effective Corporate Parenting Panel, led by Elected Members

The CSLG has continued to develop and monitor safeguarding arrangements throughout the Council. The corporate safeguarding policy is continually updated to ensure fit for purpose and use a corporate communications strategy to further raise awareness of safeguarding expectations and where to go for help.

A safeguarding awareness e-learning module is now in place and a clear requirement has been set, that all employees will be required to complete both the Safeguarding Awareness Raising E-Learning, and the Violence against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) E-learning modules within the first two months of employment. While there are lots of training opportunities both within the Council and through the Boards which many staff are required to access in their roles and / or choose to access to enhance their knowledge of safeguarding matters, the CSLG has also mandated that in future Safeguarding refresher training is a requirement for all staff, to be completed every 2 -3 years.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), highlighted nationally through the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997 – 2013), has continued to have high priority within the service. This led us all to examine how we recognise and support children and young people who are at risk or affected by CSE, and colleagues in Education put in place measures to ensure awareness and knowledge of CSE is a safeguarding priority. We work closely with other agencies to ensure that we promote a strong challenge to those people who will exploit the vulnerable. A programme of awareness training has been rolled out to the broader community and significant numbers have now been trained to recognise the signs of CSE. This remains a key priority for the Gwent Safeguarding Board.

Children and Adults at risk continue to be supported through relevant safeguarding measures. This is reflected in the numbers of cases where protection needs are

identified. Since the introduction of the Social Services & Well Being Act (2014) there has been an increase in the number of adult protection referrals. The numbers on the Child protection register have stabilised and the implementation of the strength-based approach will continue to support this to ensure that the appropriate children are on the child protection register. We have continued to safely reduce our overall Children looked after population and 2021/22 is the first time in 7 years that we have experienced a net reduction. (2019/20 - **438**. 2020/21 - **446**. 2021/22 – **407** as at end of the year)

We remain committed to responding to the needs of those who are most at risk in the most effective way possible, we continue to update and transform the way that support is delivered. The early intervention and prevention agenda continues to inform the way we do business. Our Family Focus Team continue to deliver intensive support to children and families in order to de-escalate risk and need.

*Really positive meeting. And thank you for everything you have done. Not just for the kids and us individually but you helped us get our relationship back on track. And you have helped xxxxxx in so many ways you wouldn't understand.*

*Family member*

MyST is a therapeutic intervention service that works with looked after children who are trying to overcome significant adversity. MyST aims to help young people develop greater emotional well-being and control over their behaviours so that they can engage in meaningful relationships, participate positively in the community, take advantage of opportunities in education, and develop to live independent living.

MyST offers an alternative to residential or out of county care by providing intensive wraparound care through therapeutic foster placements, kinship care and supporting local mainstream foster placements in the young person's local community. MyST also supports children within their families to prevent the need for alternative care. MyST provides a very intensive service, which is necessary for only a small number of young people in our borough who have complex needs. In recognition of the critical need for this service and as part of the transformation of children's services agenda, we continue to invest in the service.

The success of the Torfaen developed MyST service has been recognised regionally and the scheme now exists across the five Gwent local authority areas. This provides a greater economy of scale and promotes a Gwent wide consistent approach in partnership with ABUHB to managing complex needs.

Into 2022/23 and beyond, our Corporate Safeguarding Leads Group will continue to develop and implement a work plan which will be responsive to child and adult protection themes and in identifying and addressing areas for improvement in safeguarding across the organisation.

Torfaen will continue to be committed to ensuring that children and families have a proportionate care and support plan and appropriate applications and discharges for

care orders are managed effectively. This is promoted by cases being presented to Vulnerable Children's Panel (VCP) and Complex Case panel which are chaired by members of the senior management team. These panels monitor and endorse all plans for children and young people that are in and on the edge of care in order to ensure consistency in approach. There will be continued emphasis on the promotion of an Early Intervention and Prevention agenda.

CSE (child sexual exploitation) remains a local and regional priority, collaborative work between agencies ensures that those at risk are identified in a timely manner. Gwent Police and Torfaen Safeguarding Team have collaborated in the implementation of the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation forum (MASE) for Torfaen and this model has now been rolled out across the region. The purpose of this forum is to identify strategic issues and any barriers to case management. A new national centre of excellence for CSE has been developed with regional hubs sharing learning and good practice. Torfaen have committed staff to working in collaboration with this regional hub to develop a consistent approach across the Gwent region to the issue of CSE.

The region is getting ready to implement the Liberty Protection safeguards, this will replace the Deprivation of Liberty safeguards which are designed to provide safeguards for our most vulnerable citizens. We are having a renewed focus on understanding the Mental Capacity Act will be essential in order to apply the new legislation.

#### **D. Encouraging and supporting people to learn, develop and participate in society**

Promoting and supporting people to do the things that matter most to them and helping them to achieve their personal outcomes is a vital part of our role.

The development of the "Refining and Redesigning" of Day Opportunities has continued throughout 2021/22. COVID-19 has reshaped the relationship between users of provision and the local authority. We have seen an emerging need for this shift in the recovery and delivery of services. The concept of 'a good day' fits with the ideas of building back better (or build back different) as enshrined in contemporary policy and legislation (Social Services and Well-being Act 2014; Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015)). The commitment to improve people's voice over their own lives is underpinned through the values of transforming the delivery of Social Care by encouraging collaboration and partnership working.

COVID 19 presented some barriers such as making face to face assessment more difficult, but equally the enforced change in service provision enabled a greater level of creative thinking and the strengthening of partnerships.

As a service we are committed to transforming Day Opportunities in partnership with others, especially the people who use services and their families. We recognise that quick fixes are unlikely to deliver. Lasting change will require a change in culture as well as transformation of models and systems of care. This will require us to test new approaches, refining and improving in response to evidence.

Children and young people in Torfaen have access to a wide range of good quality opportunities to help them develop safe, healthy behaviours and attitudes that have a positive effect on their overall wellbeing. With our partners we provide a good range of mechanisms to engage children and young people in decision making and a few partners now have well established participatory practice that has been nationally recognised.

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

The Early Intervention and Prevention strategy has embedded a preventative focus within the authority. This has seen Family First projects strengthened with professional social work support and a partnership approach to resource early intervention at referral stage. The Family Focus Team continue to support the work of Family First. This means more families, who may become at risk of needing statutory intervention, are receiving support to assist them with their parenting and at an earlier stage in their children's lives.

61% of all care leavers are in education, training, or employment at 12 months after leaving care.

The Adult Services strength based; person centred social work assessment includes identification of any barriers an individual may have to maintaining such relationships and involves working with that individual to enable them to overcome those barriers.

Examples of how individuals are supported to maintain and develop personal and community relationships are the Good Day project, the inclusive social and leisure opportunities offered by Ty Glas Y Dorlan and the work of the community connectors where they work with individuals to help them find meaningful community opportunities.

Into 2022/23 and beyond, we will work with partners to develop multi-agency place-based models which include wider partners such as housing associations, employment support and community programmes for people with poor mental health.

We will encourage and promote community groups and friendships

We will continue to recognise the role of, develop services and support carers of all ages in Torfaen.

We will support the review and realignment of third sector commissioning principles to support befriending for carers requiring support.

**F. Working with and supporting people to achieve greater economic wellbeing, have a social life and live-in suitable accommodation that is meeting their needs**

Responding to Welsh Government policy changes last year we have continued to implement the new practice guidance in respect of the Housing Support Grant (HSG)



which brought together three funding streams (Supporting People Programme Grant, Homelessness Prevention Grant, and Rent Smart Wales Funding).

Through the Housing Support Grant, we have reconfigured and tendered for the following services to meet the needs of communities in Torfaen:

- VAWDASV Support Services
- Generic Hostel Provision
- Regional Offender Services
- Young Persons Pathway (collaboration with Children & Family services)

We have worked in partnership with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector providers to expand capacity where this has been needed and pilot new services, such as, Housing First and Assertive Outreach to respond to the demands and challenges faced by our communities.

Feedback from service users, carers and citizens has reinforced the message that people want independence in their own home whatever their circumstances. 'Home First' has become a mantra in Adult Social Care to ensure that all community support options have been explored before considering long term placements. Of course, there will always be a need and a place for residential and nursing care placements offering a safe and friendly environment to people with complex needs who cannot be supported at home.

All young people leaving care have a named social worker to support them and a personal advisor to support their individual circumstances. The 16+ team, as part of Torfaen Young Person's Support Service (TYPSS), provides most of the support to young people leaving care undertaking the statutory social work duties and is compliant with the requirement laid down in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. 0.6% of our care leavers experienced homelessness during 2021/22.

Working with Children's Services teams, our Commissioning Unit has developed an Enhanced Support Service (ESS) and Supported Accommodation Pathway for young people leaving care. This service, with access to both supported accommodation and community-based support, enables young people to live in their own homes, empowers them to live independently while being supported toward becoming independent. The service offers young people more choice, control in their lives whilst living in their own chosen community. It improves quality of life, minimises social problems, provides opportunity to maximise independence and increases involvement in decision making.

Everyday Health and Social Care professionals work hard to provide high quality services. For many families and individual's high-quality care means the ability to use services through the medium of Welsh, because they feel more at ease in their own language. Actively asking people's language preference and offering services in Welsh has been a key principle of the WG's *More Than Just Words* strategic framework to strengthen Welsh Language provision in Health and Social Care.

In October 2021 a small task and finish group was established by WG to develop a five-year plan for *More than just words*, following an independent evaluation of the

framework. The five-year plan will be based on the following themes, which emerged from the task and finish group's work:

- Culture and leadership
- Welsh language planning and policies
- Supporting and developing Welsh language skills of the workforce
- Sharing best practice and developing an enabling approach

Social Care is committed to the five-year plan due to be launched in August 2022. We will continue with a focus on understanding the Welsh Language requirements of service users placed in residential and nursing care.

The adult population of Torfaen is predominantly English speaking with only 9.8% Welsh speakers. However, more Children and Young People are attending Welsh schools and using Welsh as their language of choice. Therefore, increasing the ability of the workforce to speak Welsh in key service areas and ensuring language awareness amongst all staff is essential.

The number, 9.8%, of Welsh language speakers in the Borough means provision of services through the medium of Welsh will always present us with a challenge, but we continue to positively recognise the importance of service delivery in the medium of Welsh for some service users and we have therefore carried out surveys with staff, provider workforces and carers to assist us in 'actively offering' social care services in Welsh throughout the Borough. In addition, attendance at the regional 'Mwy Na Geiriau' group is enabling us to share learning and best practice with colleagues from other Local Authorities and the Local Health Board.

We need to ensure that we continue to improve the quality of care whilst (and by) maintaining professional standards and complying with statutory requirements whilst meeting the language needs of service users.

Into 2022/23 and beyond, we will work with partners and across directorates to improve the wellbeing of the citizens of Torfaen.

We will continue to operate our community hub, Ty Glas Y Dorlan and fully evaluate its effectiveness and ensure that we are:

- Providing appropriate solutions for individuals that promotes independence, positive risk taking and social inclusion
- Reducing inefficiencies
- Providing flexibility
- Enabling independence
- Making use of alternative housing stock

We will adopt and work within Welsh Government revised five-year action plan in respect of *More than Just Words*; ensuring that we adopt the performance management framework which will measure progress against actions in the plan.

## **6. HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO**

### **A. Our workforce and how we support their professional roles**

Our staff are our greatest asset; a skilled and a motivated workforce is essential to safeguard and support vulnerable people, promote independence, and enhance service delivery. Ensuring that front line practitioners and managers are supported and well trained, is crucial to the success of the service. Throughout this year our workforce has risen to the challenge presented by the pandemic, however we are beginning to see the impact of the pandemic and the related pressures on our workforce. This is not unique to Torfaen and is a reality of the ongoing national challenges Social Care workforce.

Any service's performance is reliant on the staff that deliver the support and functions daily. The staff have embraced the need to adapt and respond to a wider and more complex range of needs and requirements. To support the required changes, we have continued to invest in the learning, development, and wellbeing of our staff through ongoing training, fishbowl discussions, group & 1:1 supervision and annual review of team goals.

We have built confidence and skills in the teams to work in a strength-based manner and develop relationships and conversation to prevent reliance on services. We encourage a culture of learning by building development opportunities, and we facilitate positive learning experiences for occupational therapy and social work students in teams. We believe in the concept of "growing your own" and have enabled staff to develop in current and new roles.

As a response to the challenges associated with workforce pressures, we have commissioned additional training and provided development opportunities, for example:

- Collaborative Communications training for all members of the adult patch teams to help develop their skills in difficult conversations and coproduction.
- Autism awareness,
- Positive behaviour management
- Dementia Friends training in the Central Cwmbran Team
- SQI report writing
- Placement matching
- Continued to roll out in depth training from the Gwent wide attachment service.
- Offered specific individual training based on individual development plans.

In return, staff are well motivated and report good job satisfaction resulting in better retention and recruitment in some areas. We have promoted career progression within the service area and have increased capacity where the need has been identified.

Human Resource functions are delivered centrally and based corporately within the Resources Division; broadly this delivers consistency across the whole Council at both

a strategic and operational level. The Organisational Development Team sit within the Resources Directorate. We continue to work closely with them.

We have ensured that, where required, staff have access to occupational health and relevant ongoing support such as counselling services.

We highly value staff, both internal and sector wide and we endeavour to support teams and individuals to carry out their roles to the best of their ability. We promote effective performance management at all levels, to support staff to contribute positively to achieve the best outcomes for themselves in terms of development for service users overall.

The Gwent Regional Partnership Team continues to support the Regional Career College Consortium. The consortium's three aims are:

- To help introduce a new source of staffing already engaged with the sector, supplying a sustainable pipeline of talent to LA's, hospitals, and local care providers.
- To support the principles of the Foundational Economy through the development of skills and talents within local communities while meeting the vision of HEIW's and SCW's joint workforce strategy.
- To ensure that care has 'currency' and value in the region to a broad range of people who may be seeking to enter or progress within the Health and Social Care workforce.

Improved engagement with Further Education and Higher Education students will help increase care capacity and potentially improve the functioning of health and social care by encouraging people into the sector. Creating greater engagement, support and work opportunities for students will provide a sustainable solution to our acute national and local recruitment and capacity issues, while supporting the principles of the Foundational Economy through the development of skills and talents within local communities. It is hoped that the consortium will provide a long-term sustainable approach to meeting future workforce needs across the sector.

A regional framework has been developed to facilitate student placements within ABUHB and local authority social care teams to provide experiential learning and development opportunities for students. Torfaen CBC has played a key role in developing this framework and encouraging in-house social care teams to consider student placements. Work placements will not only help students to achieve work-based learning hours for qualification but also expand their experience and knowledge of career pathways within the sector and provide opportunities for recruitment.



The Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWWDP) is a grant funded programme supporting training, learning and development for the social care workforce in Torfaen. The Regional Workforce Development Board (RWDB), a subsidiary of the Regional Partnership Board provides governance to the SCWWDP programme. The Chief Officer for Social Services chairs the RWDB.

The SCWWDP grant funding has continued at a consistent level during 2021/22 for Torfaen, with a slight uplift to support an increase in qualifying social workers across the region. Workforce development remains essential in developing and retaining skills, supporting effective succession planning, and meeting registration requirements. The grant continued to support digital transformation, enabling further investment in online learning and digital resources to support the needs of the workforce.

The Organisational Development Team was able to respond quickly to changes as COVID-19 developed through the year and support Adult Services in their emergency planning, enabling them to continue to safely meet the needs of their workforce and Torfaen citizens.

During 2021/22 we were able to offer 2654 training places to the social care workforce across Torfaen: 82 in classroom and 1280 in virtual, 1292 in eLearning.

By working closely with the Higher Education institutions and our service areas we were able to continue to maintain our traineeship offer for five staff, and host 24 direct social work students on placement.

In addition, during 2021/22, we supported 27 members of staff and 2 foster carers to continue working towards the relevant Health & Social Care qualification (at either Level 2 or 3); 13 members of staff to undertake the Level 4 Social Services Practitioner Award; and 10 newly qualified staff during their first year in practice. We have also enabled 18 social workers to continue with their Post Qualifying education and 2 managers to access the Team Management Development Programme.

Through our work with colleagues in Gwent, and the Regional Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Partnership, we have developed a consistent, regional, coordinated approach to supporting social care students to access placements within the authority. In 2021/22 we welcomed one student from Coleg Gwent and are committed to increasing this number in the next financial year.

Our Adult Services Staff Handbook captures our policies, procedures and guidance which have proved invaluable for new starters and for existing staff to ensure we have the appropriate governance in place. Improvement is also driven by the Practitioner Forum which looks at best practice examples and enables support, mentoring and learning.

Our approach is to provide challenge and support, to fully utilise the skills, expertise, and capacity of our teams. We are seeing evidence in improved service performance and in sickness rates, despite the pressure on teams.

Recruitment to the domiciliary care service both internally and externally remains a challenge and is a priority for future work across the region.

The consultant social worker post within children and family services has been instrumental in developing and supporting training and learning as it relates to the strength-based approach to practice. The role has provided ongoing support and developed a mentoring programme for ongoing development, understanding and practice relating to the strength-based approach. The role has expanded to provide support to newly qualified staff and has supported all staff throughout various stages of development.

Into and beyond 2022/23 we will continue to work regionally and collaboratively with partners, to maximise collaborative working opportunities and resources where possible, to minimise duplication and deliver national priorities for workforce development.

We will also continue to explore creative and alternative ways in which we can provide learning and development opportunities in the future.

We recognise and will continue to promote the important role employers play in shaping the future workforce and therefore we will continue to work with relevant Higher Education and Further Education partners to ensure that appropriate, inspiring, and safe placements are available to students from a range of relevant programmes.

We will continue to work alongside our colleagues within Human Resources in order to review and continually develop our recruitment and retention campaigns and

continue to make Torfaen a place where staff feel valued and where they can develop in line with their own aspirations in conjunction with service needs and developments.

## **B. Our financial resources and how we plan for the future**

2021/22 has been represented another challenging year for Social Care and Housing, with a need to save £1,847,000, as agreed by Council in March 2021, against a backdrop of increasing demands and a Covid Pandemic. It is recognised that Social Care is instrumental in protecting those who are most vulnerable and in line with the Corporate Plan priorities. We have received significant corporate and political support to make difficult policy and service choices. We anticipate further policy choices will be needed in the years ahead, and the decisions will be extremely difficult.

The 2021/22 Directorate Budget was:

		£
Children's and Communities		
Children and Family Services	19,836,948	
Community Regeneration	529,684	
Community Farm	130,874	
<b>Total Children and Family Services</b>		<b>20,497,506</b>
Adults, Housing and Commissioning		
Adult Services	27,724,717	
Change management, sustainability & System Support	512,765	
Housing and Commissioning Services	885,833	
<b>Total Adults, Housing and Commissioning</b>		<b>29,123,315</b>
Social Care Strategy		(1,097,855)
<b>Total</b>		<b>48,522,966</b>

In 2021/22 the savings identified for Adult Services were focused on the reduction of third party spend through the continuation of Community focused support that identified and built on strengths, a person's own networks and skills alongside creativity, enablement and self-management and resilience all within the framework of the Social Care & Wellbeing Act 2014.

The 2021/22 savings for Children and Family Services focused the reduction of third party spend and to right size the support packages to more appropriate levels whilst focusing on outcomes, particularly relating to high-cost placements.

Torfaen operate a rigorous budget monitoring process in order to ensure all our resources are maximised and are used at the right time, in the right place for the best outcomes at any given juncture. With regular reporting to budget holders, where pressures are identified other mitigating alternatives are considered and, where a strategic approach to commissioning services is required. The Commissioning Unit remains flexible enough to react to hotspots in service provision, which is essential.

During 2021/22 the five local authorities and ABUHB continued to work towards a regional approach to commissioning residential care provision for people aged 65 or over, and Torfaen continued to provide the pooled fund management resource of the virtual pool of resources, in line with the Social Services & Wellbeing Act.

We recognise that the current economic climate and both the short term and anticipated long term impact of the pandemic, is putting individuals, partners, providers, and the public sector under significant pressure. We are focusing our energy on working with partners and service users to ensure we deliver quality services at appropriate and sustainable cost. Difficult choices are, on occasion, required but this is done within a risk assessment and in conjunction with partners and service users, ensuring that we keep vulnerable children and adults safe. We see the role of Torfaen Voluntary Alliance and other partners, being essential in supporting organisations to attract new funds and deliver efficiencies across the third sector. The third sector has a significant role in providing preventative support and early intervention to manage demand on statutory services and we hope our regional citizen and provider forums will help us shape future service models that are efficient and effective in responding to individual needs.

Of the total Social Care budget, around 85% is spent on externally contracted services, we have externalised most direct provision and have developed expertise in commissioning functions. In-house provision is minimal, with a small specialist domiciliary care service and a number of day opportunities for people with high needs. We recognise evidence-based commissioning is essential to the stability of a vibrant social care market, so that citizens are able to make choices about the way their care and support needs are met.

Into 2022/23 and beyond we will work across the council to ensure that citizens are provided with the right support at the right time. We will continue to work with our colleagues within the community's directorate in order to enhance community resilience and promote independence in order to prevent and escalation through the system and the need to employ statutory services.

We will continue to review our functions and structures within adult services and children and family services in order to ensure that we have the most effective and efficient systems in place and in order to ensure that resources are utilised and maximised.

We will continue to review our placement strategy within children and family services, particularly as it relates to high-cost placements and availability and suitability of such placements.



### **C. Our partnership working, political and corporate leadership, governance, and Accountability**

The Council's Corporate Plan channels its resources to help support the most vulnerable in society. Torfaen is a modern and forward-thinking local authority which works collectively with partners to provide efficient and effective services. Torfaen has a long-standing track record of partnership working and 2021/22 demonstrated the strength of these partnerships as we continued to be impacted by covid.

Officers, Public Service Board (PSB) members and elected members engage well with a wide range of stakeholders and share a common vision and accountability that ensures a high priority is given to all aspects of social care with a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people and adults in need of services and support.

The Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 has impacted significantly on how we work with vulnerable people. It was intended to provide the framework to empower local authorities, in partnership with key stakeholders, to address the demands facing social care in Wales. There continues to be a need for changes in community expectations as the public sector strives to manage the changing population needs alongside demand for services. Collaboration has been driven by placing duties on local government, local health boards, and other public bodies to work together to improve the wellbeing of people, by better aligning everyone's skills and resources. Whilst working across different agencies can be complex and challenging, we are part of a strategic framework that acts as an enabler to greater collaboration across health and social care; the Regional Partnership Board is instrumental in promoting such collaboration.

Torfaen hosts the Regional Partnership Team which plays a crucial role in developing collaboration with social care across the local authority areas and ABUHB. The team coordinates many aspects of regional work and provides a broad range of functions that are essential to partnership working.

We collaborate with other local authorities, the local health board, other partners as well as our service providers to ensure that service standards are secured at the best possible cost. At the same time, we recognise our service providers have their own cost pressures and must comply with changing legislation that inevitably will impact on the viability and sustainability of their businesses.

During 2021/22, we worked with our partners resulting in better outcomes for the citizens of Torfaen as well as the region. One of the issues clearly vocalised by service users relates to frustrations with duplication between agencies. Learning from the working in the pandemic enabled some of this to be stripped away. However, if we are to provide tailored responses to meet unique needs, one size does not fit all, and, for some services, it is appropriate to retain a local focus to respond to local need.

Care Inspectorate Wales oversee our functions and service delivery and act as regulators to ensure that standards are being met, legislation adhered to, and ongoing development and improvement underpins practice.

Our Members scrutinise our work and determine the areas of work or service delivery that they wish to scrutinise. It means that the service will be challenged, and we may need to give clarity to elected members. It is this challenge, which comes from a different perspective, including a community perspective, that is always helpful and ensures accountability across the service areas.

Feedback on Internal Audit reviews across the service during the year confirmed that safe processes are in place and, where areas for improvement have been highlighted, action plans have been implemented. The external auditors reviewed all major funding received from external grants. All expenditure was found to be in line with the terms and conditions set out in each individual grant.

We set high standards but sometimes things do go wrong. Everyone who makes a complaint has a right to be listened to and have their complaint resolved quickly and effectively. When complaints are received, we accept them as an essential part of our performance feedback, believing that it is important to learn lessons by establishing action plans to avoid repeating the same mistakes. We are organisation that values our service users and in turn values their views. We adhere to all processes relating to complaints and ensure that we deal with and manage all complaints effectively and efficiently.

During 2021/22 the number of Stage 1 complaints received has increased from 10 to 14. There has been one Stage 2 investigation. There was one complaint regarding charges that was considered under the Corporate Complaints process.

It is worth noting that a further 110 queries for Children and Family Services and 33 for Adult Services were received. In circumstances where a manager has contacted the service user and resolved the concern by close of play the following day, contacts are not recorded as a complaint. Others will not have been accepted as a complaint as they did not meet the criteria or concurrent action has prevented a complaint being progressed. The continued support of managers has helped to ensure that contacts are handled quickly and effectively.

In Children and Family Services, there were 6 Stage 1 complaints which covered issues with communication, quality of service and care management and review. In Adult Services, there were 8 Stage 1 complaints which were largely related to assessment, care management and review and quality of service.

As previously mentioned, under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 if a complaint is resolved to the satisfaction of the person who made the complaint by the end of the next working day that is excluded from consideration as a complaint. This investment in prompt resolution is crucial to competent complaint management and supports the on-going co-ordination work of the team to promote effective resolution. It increases customer satisfaction as sufficient resourcing enables an early response to complaints.

The total number of queries and complaints dealt with in 2021/22 was 158, an increase on the 145 received in 2020/21.

A total of 14 Stage 1 complaints were received:

- 8 for Adult Services (2 upheld, 1 part upheld, 5 not upheld)
- 6 for Children & Family Services (1 upheld, 2 parts upheld, 3 not upheld)

One complaint went to Stage 2.

<b>Summary of Complaints April 2018– March 2022</b>								
	<b>Stage 1</b>				<b>Stage 2</b>			
	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>	<b>21/22</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>19/20</b>	<b>20/21</b>	<b>21/22</b>
<b>Children &amp; Family Services</b>	1	6	8	6	2	1	0	1
<b>Adult Services</b>	1	3	2	8	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Number of Complaints</b>	2	9	10	14	2	1	0	1

The following table sets out an analysis of complaints over the past 3 years:

<b>Complaints for April 2019 – March 2022 by Divisions</b>						
	<b>2019/20</b>		<b>2020/21</b>		<b>2021/22</b>	
	<b>C&amp;FS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>C&amp;FS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>C&amp;FS</b>	<b>AS</b>
<b>Access</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Assessment</b>	1	1	1	0	0	3
<b>Care Management &amp; Review</b>	0	0	1	2	3	2
<b>Range of Services</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Quality of Service</b>	5	2	6	0	2	3
<b>Promoting Independence &amp; Social Inclusion</b>	0	0	0	0	1	0
<b>Total Number of Complaints</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>

Five complaints this year related to Quality of Service, a further five being about Care Management & Review, three for Assessment and one Promoting independence and social inclusion.

The complaints for Children & Family Services were largely as a result of communication issues. In some instances, it was acknowledged that there was a gap and arrangements made to help build relationships and rectify the issues. One complaint about failure to complete a section 47 investigation was escalated to stage 2 by the complainant.

In Adult Services, one complaint related to a Deprivation of Liberties assessment not being completed for an individual who was CHC funded. There were three complaints about care providers, one related to monitoring of family contact, another that notice of only one week was provided for withdrawal and the third included various concerns about the current and previous providers. None of these were upheld.

All issues involving staff are addressed with the individuals concerned as appropriate.

There was one Stage 2 (Formal investigation) complaint investigation for Children Services.

	<b>25 working days</b>			
	<b>2020/21</b>		<b>2021/22</b>	
	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not Met</b>	<b>Met</b>	<b>Not Met</b>
<b>C&amp;FS</b>	0	0	0	1
<b>AS</b>	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

The stage 2 complaint was escalated by the complainant following the stage 1 response. The investigation was completed by an Independent Investigator and Independent Person. The complainant and numerous staff were interviewed, and case records reviewed. Due to availability of staff and investigators there was a delay to the investigation, the complainant was kept informed throughout. The complaint was largely not upheld, one aspect was partially upheld regarding communication, and this has been addressed.

Six complaints were progressed to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, None of the complaints were progressed.

We learnt lessons from the complaints we received and have reviewed and implemented practices were appropriate. We have valued the input of service users to enable us to continue to develop and deliver a quality of service they expect and are due.

We received 42 compliments for the year, 27 for Adult Services and 15 for Children & Family Services. The comments provided praise for care services and the way in which teams and individual staff members had dealt with specific cases.

The comments received have included thanks for empathy, advice, professionalism, and support during what is often a very difficult time. Some of the compliments were:

- *You are such a genuine, kind, and caring person and are truly interested in making people's lives better, in whichever way you can. You are what I believe a Social Worker should be. I do hope that some of your light shines and rubs off onto your colleagues, as you are a beacon for your profession.*
- *As a family, we have expressed to X that we appreciate all she has and continues to do for us, it's so rare that someone enters your life and makes such an impression. Our thanks are genuine and her flawless, professional, sunny disposition has not gone unnoticed.*
- *Was calling to say how thankful the whole family were for community meals as they are an integral part of the whole team that cared for his mother. It wasn't just a meal they also kept an eye on her which was a great help. The family really cherished the service.*
- *Her stay with you was so pleasant and you all made her feel so comfortable. It really felt like she was staying in a home away from home*
- *I can't imagine social workers get much credit for the job that they do but I would like to thank you and all your team for everything you have ever done for xxxx and for me. I know that you have a job to do but honestly, I will never forget how much you have helped me and my family through some tough times.*
- *During these horrible, emotional, stressful times every person we have met at the centre has shown kindness, caring, and understanding and has been much appreciated.*
- *The family were very positive about the support worker, and she has been great and fantastic, and the family have benefitted from her involvement. They don't want her to end her involvement as they feel they have been listened to.*
- *Really positive meeting. And thank you for everything you have done. Not just for the kids and us individually but you helped us get our relationship back on track. And you have helped xxxxxx in so many ways you wouldn't understand.*

Into 2022/23 and beyond, the Complaints and FOI team will continue to work closely with managers to ensure that the complaints process remains consistent and fair. The Complaints and FOI Manager attends regular briefings with heads of service and within divisional meetings which helps to highlight any issues and learning, new processes and any changes in legislation or expectations.

## **6. Conclusion**

2021/22 has been a year like no other. We have all risen to the challenge, demonstrating strength, loyalty, professionalism, and we have evidenced a determination of staff in all areas to support citizens and communities within Torfaen. Staff have gone above and beyond to ensure providers and partners have been able to respond in the best way possible to an ever-changing landscape and we have built on our strong relationships with our commissioned providers of care. The continued presence of covid in our communities and the necessary recovery has continued to be hard work, with little time in 2021/22 to pause and reflect. We have, however, continued to be responsive and have utilised partnerships and relationships throughout the local authority area and across the region. Our communities have also experienced and faced significant challenge and, in themselves, have responded supportively and evidenced an ability to develop solutions.

We have continued to embed the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 by ensuring that the principles of strengths-based assessment and positive risk taking underpins our way of working.

Our role in safeguarding vulnerable children and adults remains a political and corporate priority for the Council. Going forward, we want to focus on continuing to make strength-based decisions that promote safeguarding, rebalances vulnerability and creates independence so that our services can be enabling and as least intrusive as possible.

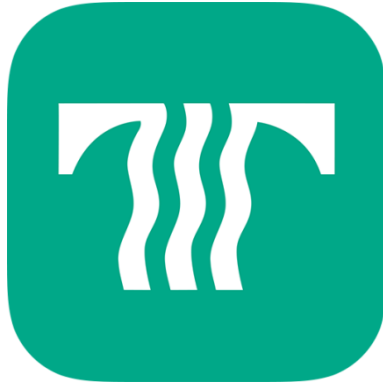
The directorate remains firmly committed to keeping the service user at the heart of everything we do, and we continue to work across a broad range of communities with a broad range of needs within the council area, evidencing a responsive approach.

Our greatest resources will always be our staff and our communities. Going into 2022/23 and beyond, I am keen that we utilise the strengths, expertise, knowledge, and passion to align our services with the needs of our communities to enable greater levels of independence and continue to develop in line with the changing needs and challenges that are presented in the coming years.

In conclusion, the directorate has encountered and risen to many challenges within 2021/22. The ability to rise to, and deliver against these challenges, has been made possible by commitment and collaborative working across the local authority and with partner agencies. We know that a range of challenges continue to emerge and will impact on service delivery, but we aim to mitigate against these through continued review and planning of our service.

I am committed that my tenure within this role will see further developments, which will enable us to manage demand and deliver effective services through partnership working across directorates within the local authority, with partner agencies, the third sector and with communities themselves.

**Jason O'Brien**  
**Acting Chief Officer Social Care and Housing**  
**(STATUTORY DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES) September 2022**



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### **Accessing Further Information and Key Documents**

This Annual Report can be made available in Welsh and other languages and formats upon request.

Please contact Customer Care on (01495) 762200.

If you require more detailed information in relation to anything contained in this report, please contact:

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