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| Meeting of: | COUNCIL |
| Date of Meeting: | 24 SEPTEMBER 2025 |
| Report Title: | SOCIAL SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25 |
| Report Owner / Corporate Director: | CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND WELLBEING |
| Responsible Officer: | DEBBIE MORGAN GROUP MANAGER, BUSINESS STRATEGY, PERFORMANCE & IMPROVEMENT |
| Policy Framework and Procedure Rules: | There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules. |
| Executive Summary: | <p>The Social Services Annual Report 2024-25 is a statutory requirement providing the Council, the people of Bridgend County Borough, regulators and partners with an overview of the effectiveness of Social Services and Wellbeing in the county borough in the last year.</p> <p>The report reflects on 2024-25, highlighting achievements and challenges whilst outlining priorities for 2025-26. New report guidance has been introduced for the reporting year, with performance being assessed across the 4 areas of People, Prevention, Partnership and Integration and Well-being, with each area focusing on 2 quality standards.</p> <p>As well as the performance assessment section of the report, it also includes a Director's summary, information on leadership, workforce, inspections and reviews and complaints and representations.</p> <p>The report highlights our key risks and financial resources noting the key challenges and pressures the Directorate and the Council faces in fulfilling its statutory social services and wellbeing duties for the people of the county borough.</p> |

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to present the Social Services Annual Report 2024-25 (**Appendix one**) to Council for approval.

2. Background

- 2.1 Following the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA), Welsh Government developed a performance framework which aimed to ensure local authorities report on and performance evaluate against the well-being outcomes of the SSWBA. The Act seeks to do this by:
- transforming the way in which social services are delivered, primarily through promoting people's independence and giving them a strong voice and control.
 - promoting partnership working; and
 - enhancing the preventative role of social care and health, setting out overarching well-being duties to reduce or delay the need for care and support.
- 2.2 Initial guidance for the Social Services Annual Report was published in 2017, however, to reflect developments since 2017, including the new Performance Management Framework, as well as feedback from local authorities and stakeholders, in May 2024, Welsh Government and the Association of the Directors of Social Services Cymru issued the "Local Authority Social Services Annual Report (Director's Report) Guidance".
- 2.3 This new guidance comes into effect in 2025. This means reports reflecting the 2024-25 financial year will need to follow the new guidance. The new guidance clearly sets out what is to be included in the report and how Welsh Government will measure performance.
- 2.4 The draft Annual Report was presented to the Social Services, Health and Wellbeing Overview Scrutiny Committee on 11th September 2024. The Committee welcomed the report as an excellent picture of the service provision and in highlighting some areas, such as workforce, as an area of excellence. The Committee noted their thanks to Officers within the Directorate for the good work undertaken. The Committee did express concern regarding financial considerations, in particular, the reliance on grant funding and were keen that the Directorate maintain momentum to ensure sustainability of the level of excellence that it is reaching and striving towards within budgetary constraints.

3. Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 As outlined in the Annual Report guidance, the SSWBA requires local authorities, health boards and Welsh Ministers to promote the well-being of people who need care and support and carers who need support. It further adds that the Act seeks to ensure:
- People have control over what support they need, making decisions about their support as an equal partner.
 - There is proportionate assessment that focuses on the individual.
 - Carers have an equal right to an assessment for support to those they care for.
 - Easy access to information and advice is available to all.
 - Arrangements to safeguard people are stronger.
 - A preventative approach to care and support needs.

- Local authorities and health boards work in partnership to drive integration, innovation and service change including new forms of provision.

3.2 Welsh Government has now made the Annual Report an integral part of the Performance Improvement Framework, which focuses on eight quality standards under the four key areas of people, prevention, partnership and integration and wellbeing as noted in Table 1. These areas are addressed in the performance assessment section of the report with previous guidance measuring performance under six quality standards.

Table 1

| Area | Quality Standards |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. People | 1. All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them. 2. Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision. |
| 2. Prevention | 3. The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved. 4. Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn develop and participate in society. |
| 3. Partnership and Integration | 5. Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people. 6. People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners. |
| 4. Well-being | 7. People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm. 8. People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible. |

3.3 The Annual Report Guidance gives clear instruction on how to structure the report and highlights the key areas to focus on, which as well as the eight quality standards within section 3 of the report, also includes key information on leadership, the workforce, financial resources, inspections and reviews as well as complaints and representations.

3.4 The report must begin with a Director's summary focusing on the following areas:

- main achievements.
- key risks and challenges.
- priorities and overarching objectives for 2025-26.

3.5 Throughout the Annual Report there is evidence of key service developments made throughout the reporting year, the impact made and how we have engaged with the people that access our services. Examples of achievements included in the Director's summary note:

- a strengthened and stabilised workforce.
- further embedding of the "signs of safety" practice model in Children and Family Services and the "outcomes focused, strengths based" practice model in Adult Social Care.
- integration of the early help and edge of care services.
- the remodelling of care and support at home.
- the range of services provided by our prevention and wellbeing service to support people within a community setting.

3.6 The most significant risks the Directorate faces and how they will be mitigated are also included in the Director's summary. Examples include:

- the increasing complexity of need linked to an aging population.
- ensuring sufficient provision of care and support, including placement sufficiency for care experienced children.
- the impact of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill (2025) and the challenging timescales and financial implications of the removal of profit for children's social care
- the replacement of the current social services digital case management system
- increased pressures on our partners.

3.7 Whilst specific priorities are noted in the performance assessment section, under the four areas of people, prevention, partnerships and integration and well-being the Directorate's strategic priorities for 2025-26 are outlined in the Director's summary:

- Supporting workforce wellbeing, retention and recruitment to continue to achieve a highly motivated, well supported skilled workforce.
- Embedding our models of practice and using our quality assurance and learning and development programmes to address variation in quality.
- Enhancing our prevention, early intervention and edge of care services to support more people to live independently and well and for children to live safely with their own families.
- Embedding our operating models in adults, children and families and prevention and wellbeing which have early help and prevention at their core.
- Hearing and acting upon the voice of the people we work with and alongside.

- Addressing deficits in the sufficiency of services, particularly children's not for profit residential and fostering services and supported living, shared lives and extra care for adults.
- Understanding better current and future needs and projections for social services and wellbeing services, including the impact of new legislation and demographics, to align service and financial plans which mean we are as best placed as possible to achieve sustainable social services at a cost affordable to the Council.
- Investing in partnerships with other public services, the third sector and community groups to improve outcomes for individuals and families in the most effective and cost effective way.
- Implementing a new digital system which will modernise the way our workforce practice, whilst we support them to prepare for social care being at the fore of the Council's digital strategy.

3.8 It is important to note that all priorities are reflected in the Directorate's 2025-26 Business Plan and link to our 3-year strategic plans ("Think Family" in Children and Family Services" and "Building on Strengths, Improving Lives' in Adult Social Care).

3.9 In developing the Annual Report, engagement and consultation activity has taken place via a number of channels including People First Bridgend, the Bridgend Youth Forum, domiciliary care community meetings and the social services complaints and compliments process. It is important the voice of the people we work with is heard so that areas of good practice are shared and areas for improvement addressed.

3.10 Finally, it is important to note that the report acknowledges the support of the whole Council, our partners in South Wales Police, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB) and other statutory partners, the Cwm Taf Morgannwg regional partnership, our cultural and leisure partners Awen and Halo, and other third sector partners. It also pays tribute to the exceptional commitment to the most vulnerable people across the borough and the professionalism and commitment of the workforce across both statutory and preventative services.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

5.1 The implementation of the duties and responsibilities under the SSWBA, supports the promotion of two of the seven goals of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. By promoting an environment that maximises people's physical and mental well-being and by supporting children, young people, adults and their carers and

families to fulfil their potential no matter what their circumstances, the well-being goals of a healthier and more equal Bridgend and Wales are supported.

5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with five ways of working to guide how the Council should work to deliver well-being outcomes for people. The following is a summary to demonstrate how the five ways of working to achieve the well-being goals have been considered in this report.

- **Long Term:** Social Services is needs led and the SSWBA focusses on sustainable prevention and well-being outcomes for the future. There is a requirement to meet the needs of people in the longer term and, due to increased contacts, rising demographics and increasing complexity, the continued improvement and transformation of services remains a priority. The prevention section of the report demonstrates how we are thinking long term by supporting resilient communities. For example, our prevention and wellbeing service and their partners are ensuring people are connected to their communities and that carers have a range of support and services they can access to support them in their caring role.
- **Prevention:** The report highlights developments by the directorate in line with the SSWBA with the new guidance focussing on prevention as one of its 4 key areas for performance assessment. Key examples noted in report include the integration of early help and edge of care services in Children and Family Services providing timely support to prevent intervention by statutory services. In Adult Social Care the remodelling of the care and support at home service has enabled a more effective response to need to support people in maintaining their independence.
- **Integration:** The implementation of the SSWBA requires local authorities to work with partners to ensure care and support for people and support for carers is provided with another area of the performance assessment section focusing on partnership and integration. Key examples included in the report note how the Integrated Cluster Network Teams in Adult Social care work jointly with CTMUHB to deliver and adapt services to people within the community. The Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) co-locates adult and children safeguarding and partners from police, health, education and probation. The prevention and wellbeing service work with third sector partners HALO and AWEN to deliver cultural, leisure and wellbeing services across the borough
- **Collaboration:** The collaborative approaches noted in the report, are managed and monitored through various regional collaborative boards. These include the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Safeguarding Board (CTMSB). Working regionally enables the directorate to strategically plan and deliver local services by optimising available resources.
- **Involvement:** Our most important stakeholders are the people who use our services, and it is important their voice is heard and acted upon. One of the 4 key areas within the performance assessment section, focusses on people and ensuring they have a voice, choice and control over their lives and what is important to them. Within Children and Family Services we have implemented the “Most Significant Change” model to gather feedback from people and understand

the impact we are making. In Adult Social Care the “Better Together Bridgend” partnership brings together people with a learning disability to plan service improvements with the Council and providers to work together to plan and co-produce services.

6. Climate Change and Nature Implications

6.1 There are no climate change or nature implications arising from this report.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 How we support and continue to improve and strengthen our safeguarding arrangements is a key theme throughout the Annual Report and remains a key priority.

7.2 Key safeguarding actions are noted within the “Well-being” section and include:

- the implementation of the “no wrong door” approach across Children and Family Services to target early intervention to prevent situations getting worse.
- and the introduction of several panels and groups to support our statutory safeguarding duties within Adult Social Care. These include the complex care panel, the self-neglect panel and the suicide and self-harm prevention group.

7.3 The Directorate’s safeguarding priorities for 2025-26 include:

- the implementation of the Regional Exploitation Strategy.
- ensuring learning from Single Unified Safeguarding Reviews and other in-depth analysis is systematically embedded through learning, training and development.
- and monitoring the attendance and engagement at corporate safeguarding board meetings to ensure the Council is protecting children and vulnerable adults.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Whilst there are no direct financial implications from this report, the short, medium and long term sustainability of social services, well-being and prevention presents growing challenges on the Council to meet statutory responsibilities for the most vulnerable and deliver a balanced budget. Part 8 of the SSWBA requires the Head of Paid Service and the Corporate Director of Social Services to ensure Members have clear advice on the level of resources required for a local authority to effectively deliver its social services functions.

8.2 The report highlights the significant issues in respect of the directorate’s budget to meet the need for social care services in Bridgend. Whilst the budget outturn position for Adult and Children’s Social Care in 2024-25 was an overspend of £1.009 million against a net budget of £102.916 million, this was only possible due to a one-off funding grant and without this grant, the outturn would have increased the overspend to £2.986 million.

- 8.3 With over 10% of the Social Services and Wellbeing budget being dependent on specific grant funding, there is a significant financial risk to the Council should these grants be reduced or withdrawn.
- 8.4 The annual report also highlights key areas of financial pressure for the directorate including:
- Residential placements within Children and Family Services.
 - The impact of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill (2025) on not for-profit providers.
 - Pressures in adult social care within learning disabilities, mental health, physical disabilities and older people's services driven by increase in cost, volume of people supported and complexity of need
- 8.5 In February 2025, Council approved £8.8 million in budget pressures for 2025-26 as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025-26 to 2028-29 to support the Directorate in addressing these ongoing pressures. The Social Services Improvement Board is overseeing actions to address the service and financial pressures.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that Council approves the 2024-25 Director of Social Services Annual Report.

Background documents

None