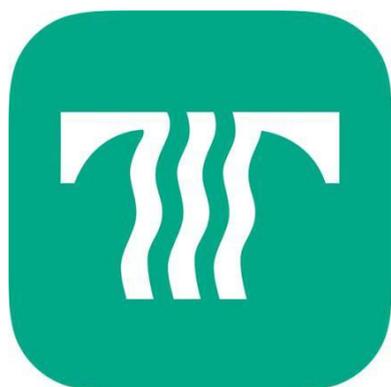


Changing Lives



Director of Social Services Annual Report 2022/23



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1. INTRODUCTION

‘Changing Lives’

This is the sixth Social Services Annual Report prepared under the 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 2022 to March 2023.

This is my second report as the Director with statutory responsibility for social care and is the first occasion that I have reviewed the period of time that I have been in situ.

This report provides a summary of our developments throughout 2022/23, our current position, future developments and aspirations, some of the challenges and risks that require ongoing focus and the opportunities that we will explore and monopolise going forward.

As we continue to recover post pandemic, we are faced with the increasing cost of living crisis and subsequent economic downturn, which has impacted on all parts of our communities and public services. This, combined with a shrinking workforce across health and social care, has continued to present challenges and has further confirmed the need for services to work collaboratively across all sectors.

As budgets reduce and the cost-of-living impacts on citizens lives and service delivery, it is essential that we promote and develop greater levels of collaboration whilst enabling communities to increase levels of resilience and solutions to limit the need for statutory service intervention. Indeed, this promotes independence and greater levels of individual citizen control.

We continue to focus on performance and information management to inform the effectiveness and shape of our services and have enhanced a tiered approach to performance management within the service areas; this has enabled key decisions to be made at all levels within the service providing effective immediate operational service delivery, as well as longer term strategic vision and service shape.

The social care workforce operates in an ever-changing set of circumstances both in terms of the needs of individual service users and within a strategic and political landscape that is diverse, and which aims to meet so many needs against so many challenges. To that end, the resilience, commitment, and dedication of the workforce within all parts of Torfaen’s social care sector (which includes Torfaen employees, private providers, voluntary agencies, partner agencies, third sector and back-office support) is commendable, and as ever, makes me exceptionally proud. The workforce, whilst fluctuating and being depleted on occasion, has been adaptable and innovative and has endeavoured to deliver high quality services.

There are continued challenges across the entire expanse of Social Care and Health. 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. Our challenge going forward is to ensure that our work is increasingly effective and transparent against continued shrinking resource, whilst drawing on and creating community resilience to

enable people to live the lives they want to live independently and safely, whilst engendering less dependence on statutory services. Innovation is key

Torfaen Council has developed an inclusive County Plan, with a delivery programme to 2027. The plan is inspired by the Well Being of Future Generations Act and promotes the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and aims to tackle all aspects of health inequalities.

This report should be read in conjunction with the County Plan in order to fully understand the aspirations for Torfaen and the synergies that exist in cross directorate planning within the Council.

<https://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/AboutTheCouncil/ImprovingTorfaen/County-Plan/County-Plan-2022-2027.aspx>

2. DIRECTORS SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE

The Social Care services within Torfaen continues to be responsive, imaginative, and committed to delivering quality services, and responds quickly and efficiently to the continued demands on the service. 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 continued demand, coupled with workforce pressures associated with recruitment and retention within the health and social care workforce; this has caused us to review some areas of service provision and change and flex in order to continue to meet changing demand. Indeed, responsiveness, and change management always has and always will form a key part of social work delivery and is underpinned by our analysis of performance.

The ability to recruit and retain social care workers continues to present challenges and pressures. This challenge is evident, despite national, regional and local strategies to attract people into social care careers. We recognise the whole system is impacted and we continue to work with colleagues from other sectors in order to ensure effective service provision for our citizens and to develop a workforce that is fit for the future.

One of our key areas relating to service delivery and subsequent performance, concerns the provision of domiciliary care packages within the community. This has been a crucial area of focus for us in order to prevent citizens from requiring any form of residential or hospital care, in order to enable rapid hospital discharges and in order to support colleagues in health when pressure have been evident in hospitals.

Graph 1 below illustrates the number of care hours waiting to be commissioned in the community over the 2022/23 period. A significant proportion of these hours are being provided by our in-house short-term teams but also need to provide longer term care from the independent providers so that care packages can flow, and where suitable, be de-escalated across the whole system. When we are unable to commission care, the result is a system that has blockages which affects our ability to provide the right level of care at the right time for our citizens. Graph 1 evidences a continued need with some fluctuations, but with an overall reduction in unbrokered hours. This is evidence of the investment and focus we continue to have on building up domiciliary care within the Local Authority area.

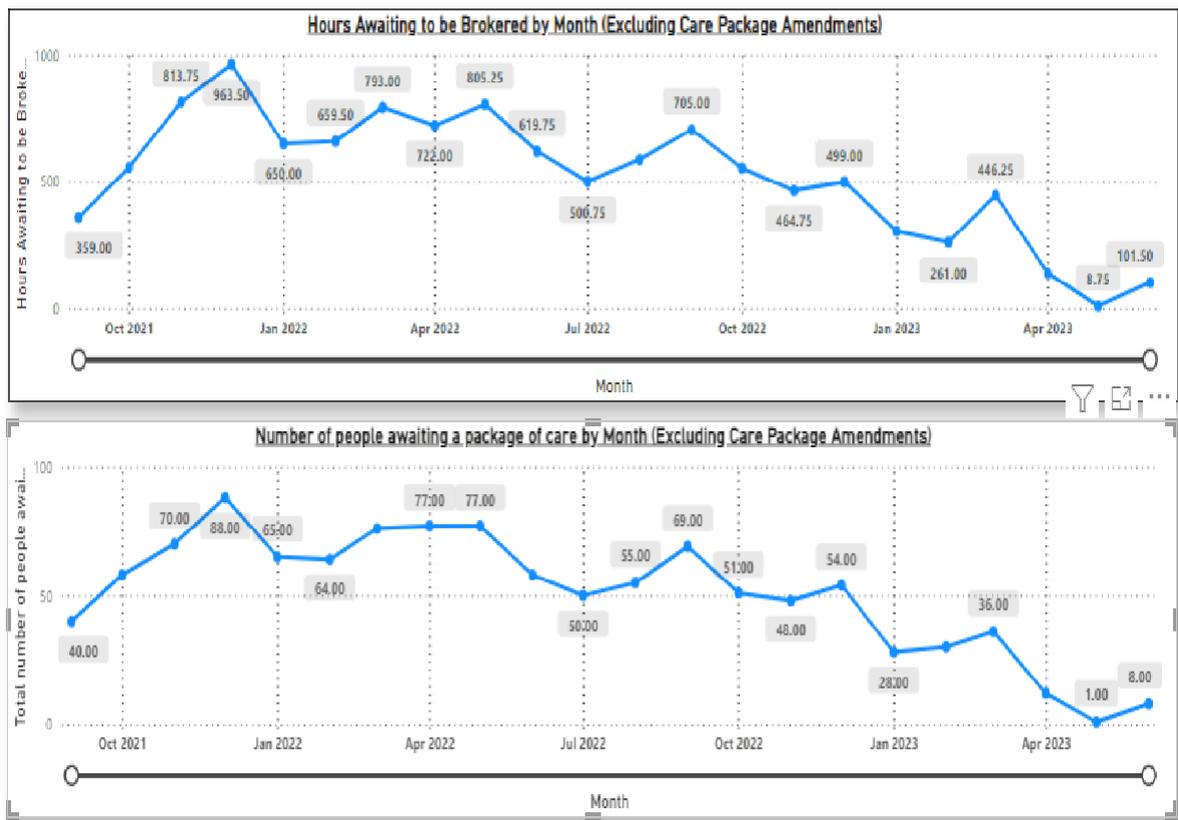
Graph 2 shows the number of individuals who are waiting for the correct care package to be delivered. It is worth pointing out that the “individuals” within Graph 2 have not been left without a service but will be receiving a level of service that does not correspond to their assessed needs; this could mean that they will have remained in residential care for longer whilst a package is being established / brokered.

In terms of both numbers of hours and numbers of individuals where packages of care are awaited, we have been effective in reducing this significantly and I am exceptionally pleased and proud of the way within which the service area has responded to demand in terms of in-house delivery and with varied approaches being adopted in collaboration with external providers. This reduction has been achieved throughout the more challenging periods of winter pressures, has been continued and

sustained in the past 12 months. This contrasts with the previous two years performance where we swam against the waves of the pandemic.

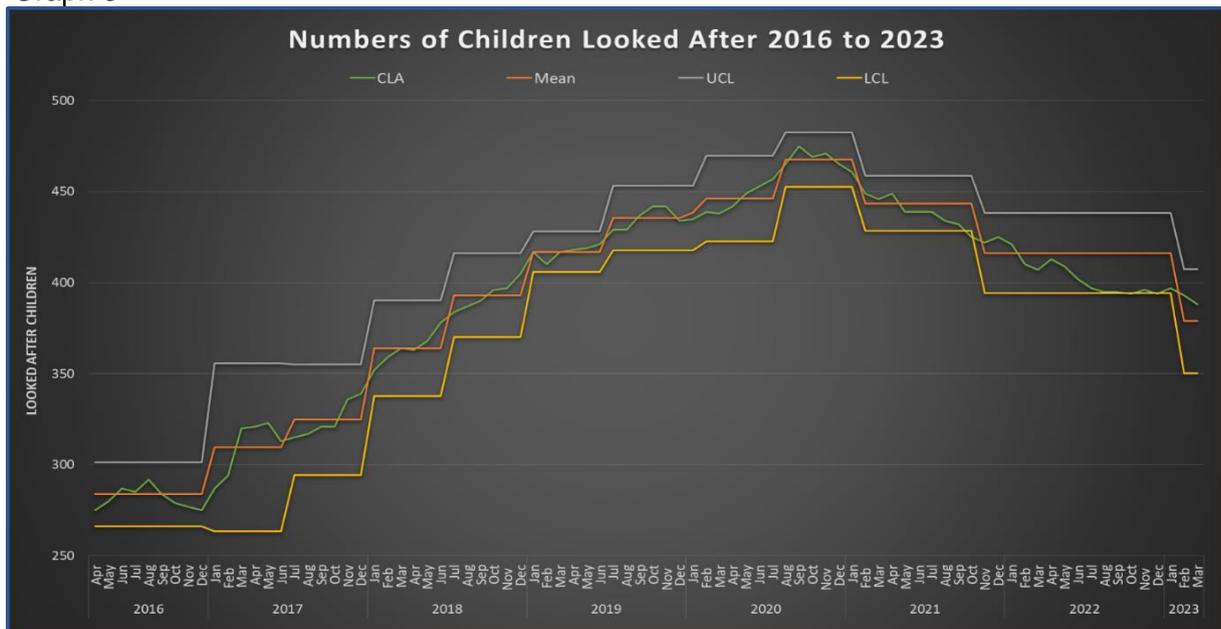
Whilst performance has improved dramatically, it is essential that we continue to develop community provision in order to ensure that citizens can maintain independence without escalating into the need for a higher level of care that, in effect, would reduce independence and move them from their homes and communities.

Graph 1 and Graph 2.

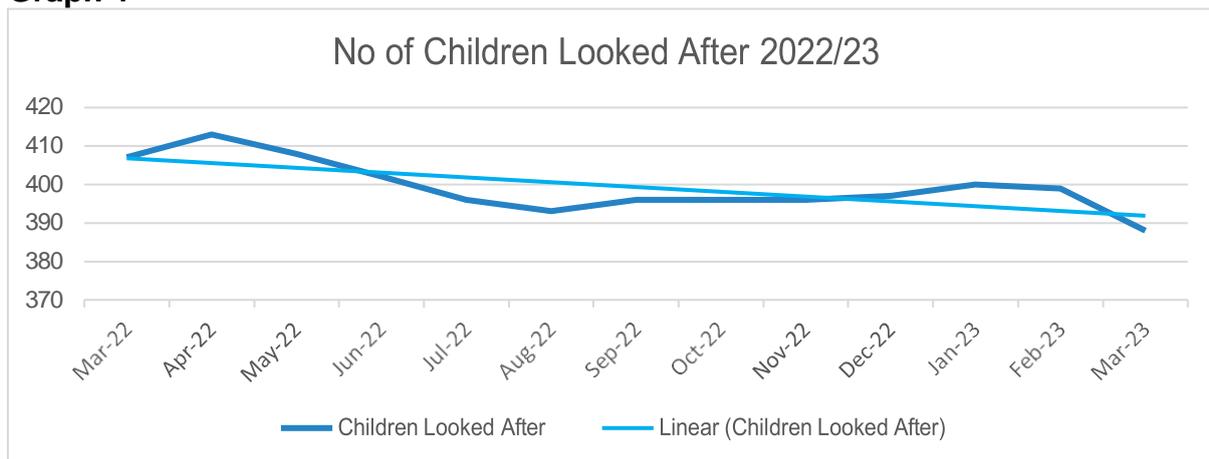


Another key area relating to service delivery and subsequent performance, concerns the number of “children looked after” by the Council. Torfaen has the highest Children looked after population per 10,000 (10-17 yr old) in Wales although sustained efforts and transformation within the service area has seen this reduce consistently since a peak of 474 in September 2020 to 378 as at March 31st 2023. Within our county plan we set an annual reduction of 15% within 2022/23 and achieved a 6% reduction. Despite our target not having been fully realised this needs to be taken in the context of a continued increase (of up to 15%) from 2016 to 2020, as depicted in **Graph 3** below, with **Graph 4** showing the reduction in isolation, for the reporting period of 2022/23.

Graph 3



Graph 4



The service area continues to strive towards a safe reduction of its children looked after population by focussing on strength-based decision making throughout the system whilst ensuring that risk can be managed, and by moving children out of the looked after system at the earliest opportunity by supporting effective and safe rehabilitation with parents.

The information contained below in **Table 1** shows performance as it relates specifically to adult services social care. The data for 2021/22 is included in order for comparison of activity and demand to be evidenced. The overall theme within the data for 22/23 (and indeed for 21/22) is that there is a significant amount of demand placed within the service area that ultimately does not lead to any substantial service, but which leads to a significant amount of time being generated in assessing “need”. For example, in 2022/23 there were 1426 assessments completed with only 222 of those resulting in the need for a care and support plan; and whilst the assessment itself may have resulted in need being diverted, it follows that a considerable amount of need could have been / was met effectively within the community and / or without the need for statutory support / intervention, and potentially without the need for assessment if

the commensurate community offer had been available for the individual. This information, and the level of continued demand on the service area, has led adult social care becoming aligned within communities and forming an Adults and Communities Directorate in order to create a more focused preventative, enabling and communities-based offer.

Table 1

Indicator	21-22 Actual	22-23 Target	2022-23 Actual	22-23 Status
The number of new assessments completed for adults during the year (AD/004)	1,520	Demand Led	1426	Demand Led
• Needs were only able to be met with a care and support plan (AD/005a)	258	Demand Led	222	Demand Led
• Needs were able to be met by any other means (AD/005b)	1,189	Demand Led	1153	Demand Led
• There were no eligible needs to meet (AD/005c)	73	Demand Led	51	Demand Led
The total number of carers needs assessments for adults undertaken during the year (CA/004)	128	Demand Led	130	Demand Led
• Needs could be met using a carer's support plan or a care and support plan (CA/005a)	20	Demand Led	12	Demand Led
• Needs were able to be met by any other means (CA/005b)	101	Demand Led	114	Demand Led
• There were no eligible needs to meet (CA/005c)	7	Demand Led	4	Demand Led
The number of carers needs assessments for adults refused during the year (CA/006)	300	Demand Led	331	Demand Led
The number of care and support plans for adults that were due to be reviewed during the year (AD/016)	921	Demand Led	794	Demand Led
• Of those, the percentage whose reviews were completed within the statutory timescales (AD/017)	44%	80%	87%	Green
Average number of calendar days taken to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant	339	220	337	378

It is pleasing that timescales associated with review completion has exceeded the target by 7% and has increased significantly on the previous years figure of 44% (AD/016 and AD/017).

The number of Disabled Facilities Grants continue to be of concern where the target for completions has not been achieved. This is attributable to the delays throughout the process and ongoing legacy of commencement / completion throughout covid,

particularly in terms of contractor completion and is a focus area for development in 2023/24. The process is being reviewed and we have developed additional levels of scrutiny and accountability to impact on performance and delivery going forward.

The directorate has demonstrated a commitment to transforming and modernising, and as above, has now become aligned to and Adults and Communities Directorate in order to increase and enhance community resilience and a community offer to prevent the need for statutory intervention / support. In tandem with this, there is a continued drive towards reablement for citizens to enable them to retain and regain the skills required to maintain independence and again, minimise the need for higher level / statutory support.

Ty Glas Y Dorlan was developed and came into operation at the end of 2021/22. The provision currently provides short stay accommodation with domiciliary care support aimed at enabling individuals to develop independence. This has been a successful provision and will enter stage two of evolution in 2023/24 where more focus will be played on a community-based offer whilst utilising the premises as a community reablement hub. The development of the community-based offer will aim to increase the number of reablement packages of support (AD/010a) with a focus on increasing the number of packages where the need for support is reduced (AD/011a).

Table 2

Indicator	21-22 Actual	22-23 Target	2022-23 Actual	22-23 Status
The total number of packages of reablement completed during the year (AD/010a)	238	Demand Led	252	Demand Led
• The total number of packages of reablement completed during the year Reduced the need for support (AD/011a)	71	Demand Led	4	Demand Led
• The total number of packages of reablement completed during the year Maintained the need for the same level of support (AD/011b)	165	Demand Led	178	Demand Led
• The total number of packages of reablement completed during the year mitigated the need for support (AD/011c)	0	Demand Led	70	Demand Led
• Neither reduced, maintained nor mitigated the need for support (AD/011d)	2	Demand led	0	Demand Led

The information contained below in **Table 3** shows performance as it relates specifically to children services social care. The data for 2021/22 is included in order for comparison of activity and demand to be evidenced.

The volume of demand on referrals and contacts continues to rise (CH/001). However, a theme in recent years relates to the number of referrals that are made which result in no further action. Considerable work continues to be undertaken with partner

agencies in order for thresholds to be better understood and taken into account, so as to ensure that referrals are appropriate and resources can be targeted where they are most needed.

Despite there being a high level of demand placed on the service, performance in terms of decisions being made by end of next day is positive with a deficit in target by less than 0.1%. This needs to be considered in the context of a high level of demand and continued challenges in relation to workforce recruitment and retention.

The numbers of children on the Child Protection register (CH/026) continues to be relatively stable and even though figures can fluctuate over periods of time, they tend to be within a narrow range. It is encouraging that we reduce our Children looked after population, there has been no adverse effect in terms of increase of numbers on the child protection register.

The number of children looked after (CH/039) is documented above and continues to be on a downward trajectory. Our work within the service area has focussed on strength-based decision making to (safely) prevent children from needing to become looked after and to support the (safe) exit of children out of the looked after system. This continues to be a priority area for the service in order to align Torfaen to the Welsh national Average. Our aspiration as highlighted within the County plan, is a further reduction of 15% within the forthcoming year. It should be noted that the Council has a proportionate allocated quantity of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers which, unsurprisingly continues to rise. By virtue of their circumstance and the manner within which the Home Office allocate these children to Local Authority areas, the Council has no control and cannot provide any preventative interventions to avoid these children becoming looked after.

For those children looked after, it is pleasing that we continue to provide high levels of placement stability with the target of 8% placement moves having been achieved and this being also understood in the context of some of these placement moves being part of an overall plan and representing a positive move (eg, a move to an adoptive placement or a move from a residential to family placement) (CH/043).

Whilst the number of approved local authority foster parents has decreased from 121 to 115 this should be considered in the context of the reducing children looked after population and the local authority's ability to be able to maintain its proportion of in house placements vs independent sector placements, with this continuing to be above target at 85% and which represents one of the highest performing Local Authority areas. Our target figure for 2027 as defined in the County plan is a proportionate split of 90% to 10%.

An area of continued focus with Children services is the shift from high level statutory work to the provision of more preventative and early intervention activity in order to prevent children and families escalating through the system.

Table 3

Indicator	21-22 Actual	22-23 Target	2022-23 Actual	22-23 Status
The number of contacts for children received by statutory social services during the year (CH/001).	4,792	Demand Led	5124	Demand Led
Of those identified, the percentage where advice and assistance was provided (CH/002)	68.66% (3,290)	70%	61% (3129)	Amber
The number of contacts received by statutory children's social services during the year where a decision was made by the end of the next working day (CH/003)	99.98% (4,791)	100%	99.9% (5120)	GREEN
The total number of new assessments completed for children during the year (CH/006)	3,195	Demand Led	3489	Demand Led
The total number of children with a care and support plan at 31 st March (part 4, local measure)	176	Demand Led	226	Demand Led
The total number of children on the child protection register at 31 st March (CH/026)	93	Demand Led	89	Demand Led
The number of children looked after at 31 st March (CH/039)	407	Demand Led	388	Demand Led
Number of approved foster parents on the local authority register at 31 March (aggregate data CA1 Part 1) (Annual)	121	Demand Led	115	Demand Led
% of foster placement made In House v Agency Placements - In house	86%	80%	85%	Green
% of foster placement made In House v Agency Placements - Agency	14%	20%	15%	Green
PAM028 - The percentage of new assessments completed for children during the year that were completed within statutory timescales (CH012)	95%	100%	94%	Amber
PAM029 - % of Children Looked After who have experienced three or more placement moves during the year (CH043)	7%	8%	8%	Green

The period 2022/23, like all other years, can be described as exceptionally challenging for a range of reasons, such as the nature of our work and functions. However, the use of performance information means that we have become more attuned to our communities needs and are able to plan more effectively going forward.

Performance information has become embedded in the functioning of social care and has been reviewed in order to ensure effective reporting within the teams and service areas so as to impact day to day operations, through to corporate and leadership

reporting so that we can impact positively on all aspects of performance, identify where there are challenges and deficits and plan accordingly by aligning strategic planning with operational need. In order to develop and achieve its ambitions of managing demand to a greater extent and promoting the independence and choice of its citizens via early intervention and prevention, the Council reviewed and realigned its directorates in March 2023, resulting in an Adult Social Care and Communities Directorate and a Children and Family Services Directorate (education and children's social care). It is anticipated that this reconfiguration will deliver greater results via a more aligned approach.

I am hopeful that what you read in this report matches your views and experience of social care delivery within Torfaen. I continue to be proud of the services we provide. 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.

Maximising independence, early intervention and prevention, partnership working and tackling key drivers of inequality remain at the heart of all our service delivery and planning.

Jason O'Brien
Strategic Director Children and Family Services
Director of Social Services.

December 2023

3. HOW ARE PEOPLE SHAPING OUR SERVICES?

In order to shape our services, we use a number of sources:

- Day to day feedback,
- Individual service user / citizen assessment,
- Complaints and compliments,
- Questionnaires,
- Specific focus groups,
- Performance information,
- Stories and real-life examples which form part of this report and tell the story from the individuals' perspective,
- We also use our own staff and workforce experiences.

The support we provide to our citizens, be it through early intervention, prevention or at a statutory level, is the single most important thing we do. We always aim to provide excellent practice and strive to continue to develop to changing needs.

Community engagement and co-production is key to achieving successful and sustainable change. We recognise that some people with limited communication will need additional support or an advocate that is suitably trained to aid effective engagement.

Throughout 2022/23 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 coproduced solutions.

Consultation and engagement with all service users is undertaken through our assessment, care planning and transition planning processes alongside focussed engagement on service development. We ensure that individuals are part of all aspects of their care planning and promote independence and de-escalation whilst, where required, balancing the need for safeguarding and statutory interventions.

As Covid restrictions are no longer in place, we have recommenced our engagement with citizens on a face-to-face basis whilst acknowledging that some citizens will require additional considerations due to own vulnerabilities and some citizens may continue to have anxiety as a result of the restrictions that were in place, and the impact of covid. To that end, where appropriate, hybrid contact is also facilitated.

Care experienced young people provide the voice of the child and greatly benefits and challenges corporate parenting via their involvement and attendance at the Corporate Parenting Board.

Quotes from Young People:

"Attending the Corporate Parenting Board is easy and accessible."

"The Board gives a platform for young people in care to speak their opinions and thoughts."

"Attending Corporate Parenting Board means I am able to make a difference."

There continues to be an emphasis within our Children and Family Services on families being able to utilise their strengths to help themselves or receive the right support to do so. 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.

Our Family Focus Service and Rapid Response Service undertake feedback on the service with each family with the parents and the children (dependent on their age and understanding). This has been used to shape service delivery and in 2022/23 we restructured this provision to become more embedded and aligned to

In recognition of the need for independence, objectivity and requisite additional support for some service users in care planning and establishing service users views, we commission specialist advocacy services for adults and children. In 2022/23, 259 referrals were made for advocacy via the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), for children and young people.

Our Commissioning Unit continues to be an essential member of The Gwent Health Social Care and Wellbeing Partnership, Commissioning Task and Finish Group and utilises the Population Needs Assessment (PNA), to plan and target services.

<https://www.gwentrbp.wales/population-needs-assessment>

Our work continues to be directed through our strategic partnerships, overarched by the Regional Partnership Board; 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

Young Carers Activities:

Young carers team have supported over 180 Young Carers (Aged 5 to 16) who engaged in a variety of activities throughout 2022/23. They have reported improved social skills, resilience, independence skills, reduced isolation, improvement in their mental well-being and develop friendship groups with health support networks. Activities have been delivered in partnership with the Youth service and Torfaen play service. The free gym sessions for young carers helped them to switch off and engage in fun and healthy activities, led by a qualified fitness instructor. The sessions not only help build strength they also build confidence and self-esteem.

Young carers celebrated carers week on 9th June 2022 by walking around the area of



Cwmbran waving the flags they made to make themselves visible in the community. They were joined by a Local Councillor.

They also celebrated the Carers Rights Day on 26 & 27 November 2022 by enjoying a disco, art and craft for the younger ones and a bowling session for the older ones.

In addition, young carers completed several residential trips including the URD in Cardiff for one night, PGL in Swindon for two nights, YMCA Festival in Southampton and All Wales Festival in Builth Wells. These residential trips have not only been organized to give young carers respite to recuperate and recharge their batteries due to the caring roles they undertake at home, but also for them to meet up with others and be children themselves, an aspect they miss out when they are at home in their caring environment.



Young carers were able to meet with the Deputy Minister for Social Services at the Wales Festival in August 2022.

Young Carers undertook vital courses to their caring role such as Emergency First Aid course with

very positive feedback. One young carer stressed that *"I am so glad I now know what to do if one of my family has any of these accidents"* another pointed out how *"the course is very useful"* and they

would like their whole family to attend it because of the emergencies they have with their cared for family member.





Young carers had an opportunity to undertake a sailing skills builder training activity for a day on the Wales Challenge Voyage.

Feedback from young carers was very positive, learning to work together as a team and relying on each other to achieve a successful voyage.

Three Torfaen young carers won the Argus PRIDE GWENT Unpaid Carer Award, which gave them a sense of recognition and acknowledged all their efforts, hard work and commitment.



together as a team and achieve a successful

won the Argus Carer Award, which gave and acknowledged all

- Other activities included:
- Photography project
- Go Kart Project
- Young Carers Forum
- Torfaen Leisure Trust – Gym and Fitness Classes
- Water sports Days
- Young Carers also attended Alpaca Days, Young Carers Family Forum, Family trips to Legoland, Longleat and Noah's Ark Zoo.



By the end of last year, we had issued over 180 young carer identity cards to young carers in Torfaen. A promotional video was produced and launched on Carers Rights day 2022, with our young carer as a character, showing all the benefits of the card. (To view the video, please click on the link below:

English

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygKQNI1a188>

Welsh

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZva-Uaob5E>

The video is shown in schools, youth clubs and other settings.

Adults Carer activities

To celebrate Carers Week 2022 and highlight the cost-of-living crisis we decided to run a Cost-of-living roadshow across all 3 areas of the Borough to provide information and guidance to unpaid carers. Several care providers: Threshold, Nest, Building Resilient Communities, Shared Lives & The Care Collective were present at the events to provide information to carers.



Following the success of the carers' week cost of living roadshow we chose to run another roadshow for Carers' Rights Day. These events were well attended, and carers were able to obtain information to help with the cost-of-living crisis.

A trip was arranged to the Brecon Beacons, which was well attended where carers and their loved ones were able to a canal boat trip with afternoon cream tea. Another trip to the Wye Valley which included a tour of the Wye Valley and Welsh afternoon tea.



We were successful in a bid for Carer Support Funding which launched on Carers Rights Day. Carers were able to apply for supermarket vouchers, white goods, educational resources and driving lessons.

The first half of the Carer Support Fund Grants was a huge success, and we were able to support 201 carers through the grants. As part of the grants, we also financially supported the start up of 2 new groups, Forget me not Friday and a new young adult carers group.

A Christmas party was arranged where unpaid carers enjoyed a hog roast and a live artist.

Throughout the year we have continued to support the local dementia group as well as the bowling group. We also had an active presence throughout the year on social media, advertising clubs and activities and a wealth of information.



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

The following displays highlights of activity within 2022/23:

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 continued to build 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.

We have continued to further develop outcome-focused care plans and contracts, rather than concentrating efforts on monitoring tasks and processes. Whilst 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 with determined levels of need and within the resources available. 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.

At the end of 2023 the Directorates within the Local Authority were reconfigured with the creation of an Adult Social Care and Communities Directorate. This saw our Community Connectors moving within the Communities strand of the directorate in order to access greater community focussed support for individuals with the aim of preventing escalation into statutory services. Our 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.

In 2022/23 we reviewed the use of Ty Glas Y Dorlan Community Hub and mapped out phase two of its continued innovative development. Whilst it has been used effectively since its inception, in line with our developing community based focus, we are developing the provision to be outward looking and to focus on community reablement and in doing so, focussing on enabling individuals to develop the skills to maintain themselves in their own homes and communities. This continues to be an ongoing piece of development in line with our desire to increase resilience and independence and impact on demand across the entire health and social care sector.

We have further invested in our MASSH (Multi Agency Support & Safeguarding Hub) so as to continue 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 MASSH process is embedded within all aspects of children's social care.

Our strengths-based practice of service provision within children's social care has continued to be developed and we have appointed a consultant practitioner to (amongst other functions) ensure that staff continue to be trained and mentored to utilise the strengths of families and limit the need for statutory intervention. Indeed, this practice has seen our Children Looked After Population continue to fall in year

from 407 to 388 and is evidence of our continued drive to enable children to remain safely at home and for Children looked after, to be rehabilitated back home.

In line with providing the right support at the right time, the functions of the Rapid Response and Family Focus Teams within Children Services were reviewed and moved from stand alone services to become embedded within the MASSH and locality teams, thus enabling quicker activation of service provision when required. This reconfiguration of service also enabled us to review resource and create capacity within our Young Carers service in acknowledgment of this increasing need within this particular cohort of young people.

In January 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales carried out a review of care planning for children subject to Public Law Outline Proceedings and concluded with many positive aspects that focussed on co production with children and families. The summary of findings can be found here:

<https://www.careinspectorate.wales/care-planning-children-and-young-people-subject-public-law-outline-pre-proceedings-torfaen>

Adult Services continue to 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 have flexed in house and commercial provision in order to meet variable demand and this has been effective in reducing and managing the level of unbrokered hours, further enabling people to receive a service within their homes and communities.

We have and will continue to work in collaboration with people and carers to develop and review care and support plans and will be creative, innovative and scope new opportunities. We are a local authority that will not stand still and recognise the need for continually developing solutions against decreasing resource.

We have and 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. Indeed, this is a key focus for all aspects of Council work as highlighted within the County Plan and a key factor that has contributed to Directorate reconfiguration and alignment with Adult services and community services.

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

We have continued to maintain and build on our strong partnerships both internally and externally.

We have enhanced our internal partnerships via Directorate reconfiguration and alignment, and by reducing the number of Directorates within the Council so as to promote and ensure greater synergy in all aspects of service delivery. To this end, there is now an Adult and Community Services Directorate and a Children and Family Services Directorate which incorporates social care and education.

The County Plan focusses on nine wellbeing objectives which ensures collective accountability for service delivery within the Council.

There continues to be significant partnership working across the social care and health sector. In order to promote economy of scale, and in recognition of five local authorities operating across the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) there are a number of regional projects that are aligned to the work of the Regional Partnership Board and fall out of the regional population needs assessment (PNA) and the regional Market Stability Report (MSR) both of which have been endorsed by the Council.

<https://www.gwentrpb.wales/population-needs-assessment>

<https://www.gwentrpb.wales/market-stability-report>

The work of the Regional Partnership Board is highlighted here:

<https://www.gwentrpb.wales/rpb-annual-reports>

In addition a significant number of strategic and operational partnerships exist which includes, Area Planning Board (APB), MAPPA strategic partnership board, Intergrated Service Planning Board (ISPB) to name but a few.

As part of Dementia Action Week 2022, once again, we developed a programme of social media materials to highlight the importance of diagnosis and have implemented the National Dementia Standards and worked closely with the multi-agency workstream leads to promote this work.

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 and managing their education and own personal lives, although this presents challenges for some young carers, depending on their individual circumstances and caring commitments.

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 continues to be developed in order to attempt to create consistency across the Local Authority areas.

We continued to work with local housing associations, Bron Afon and Melin Homes to identify new/hidden carers and highlight carer's issues regionally. Our Local authority Housing service continue to sit alongside adult services and, as above, has become aligned with Adult and Community Service directorate.

The alignment of Children services social care and education aims to build on internal partnerships with the key services for children and families and lends itself towards to development of enhanced levels of prevention and service delivery at the right time. This merge took place at the conclusion of 2023 and so, it is too early to report on its impacts within this reporting timescale.

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; officers within Torfaen are active within all of 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.

The Safeguarding children and adults is always a priority. It is not something that we do in isolation but share responsibility with other service areas and with our external partners. The Strategic Director chairs the corporate safeguarding leads group (CSLG) which continues to develop and monitor safeguarding arrangements throughout the Council.

A safeguarding awareness e-learning module is in place, and a clear mandate has been set that all employees are 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. This is monitored through the CSLG.

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 a continued 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 ensure that our strength-based practice is also underpinned with an ability to recognise and manage risk.

The Safeguarding team fulfils functions for adults and children. Whilst there are close working links with the safeguarding team and the Safeguarding officers and functions within the education service, it is anticipated that this will be further enhanced via the establishment of the Children and Families Directorate and will continue to improve on safeguarding arrangements and practices.

We remain committed to responding to the needs of those who are most at risk in the most effective way possible and we continue to update and transform the way that support is delivered.

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. We have also implemented Legal Decision Making Meetings in order to ensure effective decision making based on identification of strengths to mitigate risk.

Working with and supporting people to live-in suitable accommodation that is meeting their needs.

Feedback from service users, carers and citizens continues to reinforce 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. As has already been highlighted the inclusion of Communities and Adult Service within one directorate aims to enable greater resilience within the community and enable individuals to be maintained within their own homes. Furthermore, the development of Ty Glas Y Dorlan also aims to enhance reablement for individuals in order to support them living in, and maintaining their own homes / communities.

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.

2022/23 has seen an increase in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) being allocated to Torfaen, and we have provided suitable accommodation and service for all, depending on their individual needs and ages at the time of coming to Torfaen.

Working with Children's Services teams, our Commissioning Unit and Melin Homes we have progressed with the development of our own children's residential home and anticipate this opening in 2024. This aims to promote the principles of the Eliminate agenda in removing profit from the care of children looked after and supports the continued objective of enabling children looked after to remain within their communities.

<https://www.gov.wales/removing-profit-care-looked-after-children>

Torfaen continues to be proud of its foster carers and their commitment to our children looked after. We have reviewed our fees and allowances within the local authority and continue to maintain a high proportion of in house foster carers and have exceeded our target "To ensure at least 80% of the children we look after are placed with local authority foster carers" having achieved varied figure of between 84% and 86% throughout 2022/23.

Health and Social Care professionals continue to work hard to provide high quality services. For many families and individuals, 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 is 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

<https://www.gov.wales/more-just-words-welsh-language-plan-health-and-social-care>

The objectives of the plan underpin work programmes and themes within the Regional Workforce Development Board which is chaired by the Strategic Director

The adult population of Torfaen is predominantly English speaking with only 9.8% Welsh speakers. However, the Welsh Language is being promoted with Children and Young People with the continued aim of increasing the ability of the workforce to speak Welsh in key service areas and ensuring language awareness amongst all staff is essential. The Strategic Director chairs the Welsh Education Forum which aims to enhance the offer of Welsh Language provision within education.

The low 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.

5. HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO

Our workforce and how we support their professional roles.

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; indeed, this is essential within social care. To support the required changes, we have continued to invest in the learning, development, and wellbeing of our staff through ongoing training, peer support, fishbowl discussions, group & 1:1 supervision and annual review of individual and team goals.

The manner within which the County Plan has developed has ensured that staff have contributed to and understand how the plan is being delivered and the performance reporting frameworks into the County plan delivery programme are derived from team / service plans, which in turn are developed from individual objectives. Representatives from the workforce have been part of "Future Torfaen" events which have been used to shape the County plan and wellbeing objectives and the continued aspirations of the Council. Within recent years we have seen a more collective directorate response to service delivery and this has engendered and developed broader levels of understanding across all service areas.

Within Children Services, a consultant practitioner post has been developed which is supported through funding from Social Care Wales and our internal Organisational Development service. This post provides mentoring, training, quality assurance and is essential for ongoing staff development.

Human Resource functions are delivered centrally and based corporately within the Resources Directorate. This delivers consistency across the whole Council at both a strategic and operational level. The Organisational Development Team sit within the

Resources Directorate and we continue to work closely with them and influence their own planning.

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

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 Strategic Director chairs the Regional Workforce development board for health and social care, which aims to develop and build the workforce across the sector. The activity and outcomes of this board are included within the earlier link for the annual report of the work of the regional partnership board.

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. The council provides enhancements for staff taking on students in acknowledgment of the extra work this entails and the value of the role in developing the workforce. 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.

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.

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. We have continued to welcome students from Coleg Gwent and are committed to this ongoing.

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 Children services Threshold of Need Document ensures consistency of practice and provides a framework for decision making. This document is being reviewed in order to be used as a good practice model on a regional basis.

Recruitment to the domiciliary care service both internally and externally continues to present a challenge and continues to be a priority for work across the region.

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, and will particularly be examining the benefits of artificial intelligence.

Our financial resources and how we plan for the future.

2022/23 has continued to represent financial challenges for Social Care against a backdrop of increasing demands and limited financial growth. That said, the Council has continued to invest in its social care provision, and it is recognised that Social Care is instrumental in protecting those who are most vulnerable; the Councils culture in this regard is well evidenced in the County Plan and associated Delivery programme. We continue to receive 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 whilst some decisions will be challenging, our key objective is to manage demand by increasing community resilience and focusing on strengths and, in doing so, be able to target resources effectively and efficiently.

The 2022/23 Directorate Budget and corresponding spend is highlighted in **Table 4** below:

Table 4

	Working Budget	Actual Expenditure
Children Services (social care)	£21,593,526	£22,087,399
Adult Services (social care)	£31,920,313	£29,462,911
Total	£53,513,839	£51,550,310

The majority of expenditure within the service areas relates to staffing costs and third party spend.

The vast majority of “underspend” within adult services relates to a high number of staffing vacancies across the service area, and whilst this has resulted in some operational pressures, it has acted as an enabler for us to review our service provision and demand management into and beyond 2023/24.

The vast majority of overspend within children services relates to high-cost placements with increased pressure in the system as a result of Welsh Government’s Eliminate agenda on removing profit from the care of children looked after. This (in the short to medium term) has resulted in adverse market forces, where some providers are removing their business operations from Wales thus reducing the number of available placements, and in turn, driving up costs. In order to mitigate this, the Council continues to provide a high level of support to its highly valued foster carers, and is in the process of setting up its first small residential provision for children looked after; this will form part of a continued strategy linked to placement sufficiency.

Torfaen operate a rigorous budget monitoring process in 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 and meetings between lead financial officers and budget holders' pressures are identified and mitigations 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.

All funding derived from the range of grants we receive continues to be administered in line with the terms and conditions set out in each individual grant and, due to effective financial planning corresponds to associated expenditure.

The five local authorities across Gwent and ABUHB continue to work towards a regional approach to commissioning residential care provision for people aged 65 or over.

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 continue to focus our energy on working with partners, providers, 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 (TVA) 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 and enabling us to continue to develop community provision and resilience to manage demand on statutory services. 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, in the region of 85% is spent on externally contracted services, we have externalised most direct provision and have developed expertise in commissioning functions to ensure value for money. We have a small specialist, in house domiciliary care service, and a number of quality day opportunities for people with commensurate 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 whilst ensuring value for money and effective financial management.

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. At the present time, we have no in house residential children's care provision but, as previously mentioned, are progressing with development of in house provision. We have a particular focus on high-cost residential placements in order to ensure value for money and effectiveness of service and to correspond with, and support to the principles of Welsh Government's Eliminate agenda. Ultimately, we want to ensure that we are able to provide high quality provision which focusses on

outcomes for children whilst removing profit from care.

Our partnership working, political and corporate leadership, governance, and Accountability.

The County Plan ensures that as a Council and as a Directorate, we channel resources effectively and efficiently to help support the most vulnerable in society. The County Plan is forward thinking with a clear strategic approach and a defined Delivery Programme, which has senior leadership oversight and a high level of political examination and analysis, via scrutiny committees, Cabinet and full Council. Torfaen is a Council that aspires to providing the highest quality of service in all domains, and this aspiration is reflected at all officer and political levels.

Our Members scrutinise our work and determine the areas of work or service delivery that they wish to examine annually. This means that the service will be challenged and critically analysed to ensure and inform effective service delivery in line with Member and community expectations. In addition we provide Member seminars on particular topics as determined by the service area links to the schedule of Council and scrutiny activity, including Council and Cabinet activity and associated reports, can be found here:

<https://moderngov.torfaen.gov.uk/mgListCommittees.aspx>

The Social Services & Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 has impacted significantly on how we work with vulnerable people. It provides the framework to empower local authorities, in partnership with key stakeholders, in order 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 and, in line with our Directorate make up, we are committed to developing community participation and community resilience which support and promote sustainable independence.

Torfaen hosts the Regional Partnership Team, which plays a crucial role in developing collaboration and consistency with social care across the local authority areas and ABUHB. The team resources the Regional Partnership Board and 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.

Continued 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.

As is previously highlighted, in January 2023, Care Inspectorate Wales carried out a review of care planning for children subject to Public Law Outline Proceedings and

concluded with positive aspects that focussed on co production service users.

We set high standards but sometimes things do go wrong. Anyone that 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 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 2022/23 the number of Stage 1 complaints received has increased from 14 to 15 in comparison to 2021/22. There have been two Stage 2 investigations. There were two further complaints considered under the Corporate Complaints process. It is worth noting that a further 79 queries for Children and Family Services and 36 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 (including legal processes) 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 12 Stage 1 complaints which covered issues with communication, quality of service and promoting independence. In Adult Services, there were 3 Stage 1 complaints which were largely related to assessment, range and quality of services.

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 2022/23 was 133, a decrease on the 158 received in 2021/22.

A total of 15 Stage 1 complaints were received:

- 3 for Adult Services (1 part upheld, 2 not upheld)
- 12 for Children & Family Services (5 part upheld, 7 not upheld)

Two complaints were investigated at Stage 2.

Summary of Complaints April 2019– March 2023								
	Stage 1				Stage 2			
	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
Children & Family Services	6	8	6	12	1	0	1	1

Adult Services	3	2	8	3	0	0	0	1
Total Number of Complaints	9	10	14	15	1	0	1	2

The following table sets out an analysis of complaints over the past 3 years: **Complaints for April 2020 – March 2023 by Divisions**

	2020/21		2021/22		2022/23	
	C&FS	AS	C&FS	AS	C&FS	AS
Access	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assessment	1	0	0	3	0	1
Care Management & Review	1	2	3	2	2	0
Range of Services	0	0	0	0	1	0
Quality of Service	6	0	2	3	8	2
Promoting Independence & Social Inclusion	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total Number of Complaints	8	2	6	8	12	3

Ten stage 1 complaints this year related to Quality of Service, with others relating to Assessment, Care Management & Review and Promoting independence and social inclusion.

The complaints for Children & Family Services were largely around communication issues. Where it was found that there were gaps in clear communication these were acknowledged, an apology provided and actions agreed to improve going forward. Others raised concerns about lack of support and delays in processes as well as rationale behind decisions. Another claimed that police were not made aware of specific communication needs by a social worker requesting a welfare check.

In Adult Services, one complaint was about the support provided to secure housing. Another raised concerns around support put in place for an elderly parent and the third claimed that inadequate checks were made before placing an estranged family member with the complainant.

All issues involving staff are addressed with the individuals concerned by their manager.

There have been two stage 2 complaint investigations, one for Adult Services and one for Children's Services.

	25 working days			
	2021/22		2022/23	
	Met	Not Met	Met	Not Met
C&FS	0	1	1	0
AS	0	0	1	0
Total	0	1	2	0

The stage 2 complaint for Adult Services followed a stage 1 and related to delays in the provision of care. The investigation determined that despite the national shortage and lack of engagement from the individual, workers had made numerous attempts to provide options and alternatives, but these were repeatedly refused. The complaint was not upheld.

The stage 2 complaint for Children's Services had also previously been considered at stage 1. The investigator found no evidence to support lack of action and highlighted the pressures on the service and the need to prioritise. There was one matter upheld, due to unclear communication around waiting times. Overall, the complaint was not upheld.

There were another two stage 2 complaints accepted for investigation, one each for Adult and Children's Services. Due to lack of engagement from the complainants, these investigations did not proceed.

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

We learnt lessons from the complaints we received and have reviewed and implemented practices where 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 were made aware of 49 compliments for the year, 36 for Adult Services and 13 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:

- *To all Staff, Thank you all so much for everything you have done for me. You've all made my stay here a lovely one. Lots of laughs and only a few tears! You put my mum and dad's worries at ease knowing I was being looked after well. Thank you, doesn't seem enough!*
- *Thanks very much for looking after my mum...for all these weeks. Your help*

has been priceless in assisting getting her home. All the best wishes xxx

- We are so grateful to you and your team who tirelessly provide for the elderly and vulnerable. Mum enjoys your meals and we could not cope without them being delivered. Thank you to all.*
- Brilliant, thank you so much for all your help and support, I honestly couldn't have got through the last few weeks of it all without you, both myself and mum think you are lovely and definitely an asset to Torfaen Social Services.*
- You have helped our family in so many ways, helping us to find the jigsaw piece and slot it in the correct way. Dad and son regaining relationship, improved mental health, positive outlook and making us smile again.*
- Mostly thank you for the fact she listens to us and speaks to us not at us. She has never judged which so many schools and organisations have done. Mental health isn't a choice and through all our struggles has never given up on us.*
- I want to tell you what a fantastic job she does. She is so reliable and consistent. She always does what she promises she will do, returns calls, attends meetings. If xxxx says she will do something, I know it will be done. There is so much anxiety around waiting, people breaking promises etc but xxxx always relieves that stress.*
- We can't thank you enough for what you have done for us, it was hard to trust a social worker after what we endured in the past. Thanks for trusting us, and letting us have the freedom of being with the children without supervision from CFCS etc. I know the road ahead is long for us but we will both strive to do right by the children and gain the trust and respect from our children.*
- There are no words that could even come close to thanking you for everything you've done for xxxx since she met you such a short time ago. The connection you've made we're sure will be life long and we consider to be xxxxx's "Mary Poppins" moment, where she gained the exact "critical friend" that she needed to make progress on her change of lifestyle journey and we'll never forget*

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

Social Care functions in a dynamic system where there are continued challenges both predictable and unpredictable in nature. We have continued to rise to the challenges, demonstrating professionalism across the directorate evidencing determination and flexibility. Such is the nature of social care that staff go above and beyond to ensure the services are delivered effectively and efficiently with the service users needs being at the centre of planning and decision making. We have supported providers and partners have been able to respond in the best way possible to an ever-changing landscape.

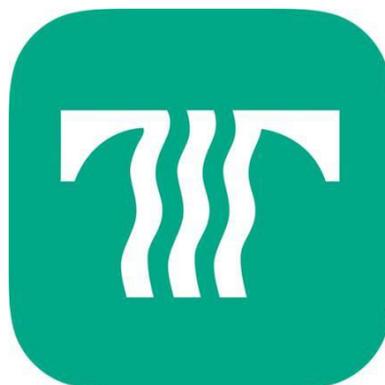
The work is often relentless but as an entire system across the partnerships within health and social care and with the full Council approach to service delivery, we continue to strive to provide a quality service that, as individuals and as an entire service we can be proud of. We recognise that we cannot stand still and our service planning mechanisms and conduit into corporate planning within the County Plan are instrumental in shaping strategy to operational delivery and operational delivery to inform strategy.

Our role in safeguarding vulnerable children and adults continues will always be a political and corporate priority area for the Council and we want to focus on continuing to make strength-based decisions that promote safeguarding and creates independence so that our services can be enable individuals and communities to be resilient and rebalance the broad range of health inequalities that exist.

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.

Within Social care, it is the case that our greatest resources will always be our communities, our partnerships and our staff. On that basis I will end this report where I started; that is to say: As a directorate and as a Local Authority, and in collaboration with our partner agencies, we will aim to tackle challenges and inequalities 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. Our challenge going forward is to ensure that our work is increasingly effective and transparent against continued shrinking resource, whilst drawing on and creating community resilience to enable people to live the lives they want to live independently and safely, whilst engendering less dependence on statutory services. Innovation is key.

Jason O'Brien
Chief Officer Social Care and Housing
(STATUTORY DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES) December 2023



December 2023

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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