

Dear Director

## **CIW Local Authority Performance Review**

We published our code of practice for review of local authority social services in April 2019 which outlined our intention to write and publish an annual letter for local authorities which will:

- provide feedback on inspection and performance evaluation activity completed by us during the year;
- report on progress the local authority has made in implementing recommendations from inspections and/or child and adult practice reviews;
- outline our forward work programme.

This letter summarises our review of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's performance in carrying out its statutory social services functions. It follows the four principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) and our increasingly collaborative and strengths based approach to supporting improvement. The letter is intended to assist the local authority and its partners to continually improve.

The content is informed by CIW's inspection of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council in children's services during February and March 2018 and performance evaluation activity during the course of the year. This has included:

- We consulted with staff and service users experiencing mental health problems as part of our support to the HIW review of community mental health services. Staff and people using services via Cwm Coch Hospital were interviewed.
- Adult Services Self-Evaluation submitted to CIW earlier this year.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- Visit to the VITCC Centre, Tredegar and Brynmawr Resource Centre on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019. This included discussion with members of IAA and CRT, a review of case studies and focus groups with stakeholders and citizens accessing the connector service.
- Focused activity in March 2019 reviewing the progress of the Mental Health Triage Project; a pilot with Gwent Police placing professionals within the police control room to assist with people presenting with mental health needs.

We discussed these matters and our proposed performance evaluation activity for 2019/20 with you at the annual performance review meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019.

### Summary of strengths and areas for improvement in line with principles of SSWBA

- Well-being

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has invested considerable time to address fragility in the domiciliary care market. Joint planning was undertaken with Caerphilly, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr. The Blaenau Gwent Commissioning Team is working with Caerphilly to jointly procure a sustainable model of domiciliary care for the two local authorities. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council believes this model will provide greater choice and options for citizens living in Blaenau Gwent.

When we spoke to people at Cwm Coch they described very supportive social workers who had regular contact. Hafal day services also received positive comments about the range of activities and support available including socialising opportunities, music and craft activities.

Our focused activity found the IAA team and partners understood and embraced having what matters conversations, recognising how this helped people to work with others to achieve outcomes. The MIND worker told us that a high volume of their work was a result of Public Protection Notification (PPN) referrals from Police. We identified this role as a valued interface with other key services such as Women's Aid and Cwm Coch. In addition the post was able to provide direct emotional support via telephone, signpost to relevant services and cascade information within the team. The lack of mental health supportive housing and extra floating support was identified as a potential barrier by the IAA team which the local authority need to address.

- People - voice and control

The Welsh Language Standards and strategic framework for Welsh Language Services in Health, Social Services and Social Care support people who are Welsh speaking to have services provided in Welsh, when they need it, without them having to ask for it. We assessed the local authority leadership, direction and progress in embedding Welsh language in front-line services as part of the children services inspection and annual performance evaluation activities. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council report that they have a very small population of Welsh Speakers in the borough. They recognise that further work is required to promote services in the Welsh language, both internally and externally. There is one Welsh speaking school in the borough and discussion is taking place talking about whether to have another.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council reports that it checks with providers to see if have had any requests to provide a Welsh language service, there have been none since *More than Just Words* was introduced. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council report that they promote Welsh Culture and encourage care homes to celebrate and put on events around Welsh culture.

A five-year advocacy strategy will be in place across Gwent by April. It is positive to note that commissioners, providers and citizens worked on a co-production basis (supported by Co-production Wales) to develop a regional commissioning strategy. There is also a regional Gwent arrangement with ABUHB for independent mental capacity advocates (IMCA).

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has reported that since the inspection in children's service in February 2018 there is indication that changes to practice are being implemented and are starting to embed. For example, the number of children being looked after has steadied and is currently at 223. There has also been a reduction in legal care proceedings. There has, however, been a continued increase in placement with parents and kinship placements; it is important Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council continue to consider how this impacts on mainstream foster care recruitment. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are reviewing the feasibility to convert some kinship placements to Special Guardianship Orders, recognising this will not necessarily reduce spending as many of these children have high needs.

Placement Sufficiency has continued to be a challenge for Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council; there remains an issue in recruiting mainstream and professional foster carers despite a recruitment campaign. One professional foster carer was recruited and another family is being assessed. Also, the Monmouth and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council 'MyST' (My Support Team) project will be fully operational from July onwards and will provide intensive support to carers of children and young people with complex needs. The proposal is for young people in residential accommodation to be prioritised and returned to live closer to home where appropriate. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council do not expect to see clear progress for another year; formal reporting on this to scrutiny is scheduled for February 2020.

There have been concerns across Welsh local authorities about people being potentially deprived of their liberty unlawfully because of deprivation of liberty safeguards waiting lists. Our monitoring of the deprivation of liberty safeguards has identified Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is addressing the backlog through a regional approach and a project board that meets regularly. We will continue to monitor this.

- Prevention

The Adult Services Senior Management team has been re-configured and a new Integrated Service Manager (Prevention) post has been established (fixed term). This post has been funded by colleagues in Health using Pacesetters Funding and will be a key post in the development of the Prevention Strategy.

The people we spoke to during our focused activity in Blaenau Gwent had become involved with community connectors through a variety of routes, for example via a hospice following bereavement, a CPN and GP. This illustrated there is breadth of understanding of the

community connectors' role and people from a range of circumstances can benefit. All people we spoke with had been linked in with activities that helped their emotional/mental health. For the small group of people we engaged with, the preventative approach had addressed and prevented needs escalating and made a positive difference to their well-being.

During our visit to Brynmawr Resource Centre we saw evidence of a developing preventative approach, a modern and energetic environment and primary care and social care beginning to work well together. Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council are active partners in the development of the ABUHB Care Navigation Pathway that seeks to offer information, advice and assistance to citizens at the GP surgery. This will facilitate the formal establishment of well-being networks cross Gwent including Blaenau Gwent, and transformation funding has been made available to ABUHB to develop existing early intervention and preventative services.

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council host a Well-being Manager post to ensure a partnership approach in the development of new Health and Well-being Hubs in both Brynmawr and Tredegar Well-Being Centres. This is positive in terms of organisations communicating and working together. We were told that in Tredegar the specification is going to be more developed than that in Brynmawr, with a café and more focused community approach. There is potential for people being supported by learning disability services to run a café. Flying start will also have a presence in Tredegar with links to Compassionate Communities; pilot areas being Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and North Caerphilly.

Through our focused activity we also saw a range of partner agencies working within the IAA. The IAA service provided opportunities to share knowledge regarding for example, housing and services generally. We heard about the carers' project working closely with the Carers Trust in supporting carers; often with support being accessed through GP surgeries. The group of professionals we interviewed reported an increase in carers' assessments. We heard about work undertaken with GPs to improve the use of assistive technology and that the IAA service has been promoting and promptly installing assistive technology.

Throughout 2018 our programme of work focused on care experienced children and young people. Qualitative evidence was gathered from six local authority children and fostering inspections, 22 self-evaluations completed by local authorities, challenge meetings held with those local authorities who were not subject to an inspection and engagement activity with care experienced children, care leavers and foster carers. The report will be published on our website, with key findings made in respect of profile, sufficiency, practice, partnerships, stability, governance and corporate parenting. Many of the areas we have identified for improvement are being considered by Welsh Government's Ministerial Advisory Group on improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people and we also hope local authorities will consider their own contribution to addressing these findings.

- Partnerships

Our focused activity confirmed that the IAA team works as a first point of contact in the local authority and this service works towards a preventative agenda. A focus group of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, health and partner organisation staff we spoke with told us that they had seen a drive towards more preventative services being developed with a reduction of in-house residential services and more community based support. In common across many other local authorities, they told us the citizens of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council have found this difficult in that there was a culture of service dependency. This was also highlighted in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council's self-evaluation. We were told that good partnership with the third sector has been developed and that there is collaborative work with the Health sector in the Home First service. The Hospital discharge schemes are 'getting' the new approach and people are reassured that support is there and they can make their own choices.

An example of collaborative working between the five Gwent local authorities and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and other public bodies is the establishment of the Home First Service based at Royal Gwent and Neville Hall Hospitals. Transformation funding has been used for this service to support people going home independently. In the short time since the team has been established, significant development has and continues in preventing unnecessary admissions to wards and timely discharge. Home First is valued by health colleagues and evidences innovative, collaborative and integrated working, ensuring good outcomes for people through undertaking what matters conversations and building on people's strengths. It is important the local authority and partner agencies continue to develop their shared vision for this service.

We visited the Mental Health Triage project (MHTP). Although this is a relatively new project the data available has indicated that there has been a reduction in the number of occasions when police have been deployed to incidents and the amount of time police spend dealing with incidents. Moreover, there are indications that peoples' outcomes are being improved through signposting and negotiating access to more appropriate services as well as through a reduction in Section 136 detentions.

During our engagement with people at Cwm Coch we received feedback about the effectiveness of multi-agency working. The Home Treatment Team (a health funded service) was described by some people as unresponsive, particularly at times of crisis. We understand that the Home Treatment Team is currently being reviewed by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board and consideration is being given to the 'out of hours' model. People told us they saw the role of GPs as important in providing a route to access timely and appropriate support, where the GP was responsive. People also fed back that social workers gave time and made this a priority, they were considered a good link to GPs and other services.

Following the children's services inspection the complex needs panel had been identified as an area that required improved partner cooperation, notably through health colleagues' participation. The Head of Service has reported that a regional panel has now met three times. The five regional heads of service sit on the panel which considers young people with complex needs. Appropriate health representation has recently been established (for the last meeting) and this worked well with immediate improved health contribution to planning.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2019-20

Our scheduled thematic adult services inspection programme for 2019/20 will be focusing on prevention and promoting independence for older people and for children services thematic inspection the focus will be on prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. If your local authority is selected for inclusion in this programme, you will receive four weeks' notice of the scheduled date of the inspection.

We will undertake engagement activities aligned to the thematic inspections and meet with people who receive care and support services. CIW will be convening a meeting with the local authority and its key partners in the summer to follow up areas identified in the self-evaluation submitted in January 2019 focusing on prevention and promoting independence for older people self-evaluation. A thematic national report will be published upon the completion of inspections and engagement activities.

In late 2019 we will pilot a joint inspection of child protection arrangements. The joint inspection will be led by CIW and in partnership with HIW, Estyn, HMI Constabulary (HMICFRS) and HMI Probation. With the drive towards collaboration and integration in public services, CIW work closely with other inspectorates to share intelligence and jointly plan inspections. We will work closely with Social Care Wales to share information to support improvement in social care services.

CIW will continue in 2019/2020 to work with HIW in jointly inspecting community mental health teams. CIW will be following up recommendations made within HIW and CIW joint thematic review of Community Mental Health Teams as part of bi-annual head of service meetings with local authorities.

Our focused activity with the local authority will be confirmed with the new CIW inspector. We are considering for children's services, focusing on early intervention and prevention, with a small audit of case files and some follow up calls to people, looking in particular at work with police and IAA. For adult services, we are considering evaluation of the impact of community connectors and engagement activity centring on adult safeguarding.

This may be subject to change in the light of emerging issues.

You will note that this letter has been copied to colleagues in WAO, Estyn and HIW. CIW works closely with partner inspectorates to consider the wider corporate perspective in which social services operate, as well as local context for social services performance.

We will publish the final version of this letter on our website.

Yours sincerely



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Cc.

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