

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 Bridgend 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 our focused activity work in October 2018 with looked after children and care leavers, discussions around advocacy for children in February 2019 and co-production with carers and carers' assessments in February 2019. We met with Heads of Service for children and adults in September 2018 and CIW were involved in the inspection of Western Bay YOS and the CMHT inspection in the ABMU footprint (Neath).

We discussed these matters and our proposed performance evaluation activity for 2019/20 with you at the annual performance review meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019.

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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.

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

- Well-being

Bridgend County Borough Council has restructured its senior management of children's services to provide greater oversight of casework teams. We are aware it has been a challenge to recruit staff to fill vacancies in children's services and temporary staff have been used to cover vacant posts. We met with young people in October 2018 who told us of their dissatisfaction with changes of social worker. We understand this situation has eased in the last six months and the focus is now on retention of existing staff. Short-term funding streams have presented additional challenges as staff are often only recruited on a time-limited basis.

We were pleased to hear the local authority won a Social Care Accolade for support to newly qualified social workers. Practitioners are receiving line management supervision with senior managers actively reviewing performance indicators in this area to focus on improving the timely recording of supervision. Signs of improvement were evident at year-end with performance exceeding 80%.

There is a strong quality assurance framework to monitor and prioritise areas for improvement and regular communication with team managers ensures a joint view of management focus. We are pleased to see the inclusion of peer auditing, learning from good practice and dissemination of positive feedback.

Young people and foster carers told us they found it difficult to access child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), which they believe would have been of benefit. This is not a view unique to young people in Bridgend. Bridgend County Borough Council was part of a regional arrangement to provide therapeutic services. With the change of regional alignment, senior managers are trying to establish a similar resource in Cwm Taf Morgannwg. Locally, Bridgend County Borough Council has attempted to employ additional psychological support for young people; however, this is an area of challenge due to recruitment difficulties.

There is a need to ensure children receive timely assessments and are visited regularly when looked after. Senior managers offer assurance this is being addressed. There is evidence of improvements in the frequency of visits to children looked after. Compliance with statutory timescales at year-end was over 80%. Whilst the numbers of looked after children remain stable, senior managers are looking at ways of reducing numbers by reviewing if more children placed at home with parents could safely have their care orders revoked.

Care experienced children told us about changes of placement, which sometimes affected their education. Children told us they did not always feel sufficiently informed or prepared for these changes. The Head of Service confirms finding placements for some children is a major challenge. The local authority is making efforts to recruit more foster carers and engaged in a major remodelling of its in-house care home provision for children to better accommodate their needs. The lack of appropriate placements for children with complex needs is a nationally recognised issue and it is to the credit of Bridgend County Borough Council that it has sought to improve its local response.

Senior managers consider the revised model remains in early stages and report its emergency placements have been used extensively, which has prevented children being placed far away from their local community. However, we are aware challenges remain as the local authority has continued, on occasion, to use unregistered arrangements to care for children for short periods. The local authority recognises the need to focus on strengthening fostering and commissioning arrangements in order to meet demand and avoid situations where senior managers place children in unregulated settings. We would consider a successful outcome to the remodelling to be fewer moves for care experienced children.

We heard from foster carers who felt more should be done earlier to help prepare young people to leave care, particularly concerning independent living skills. Some foster carers thought more could be done to promote the 'When I'm Ready Scheme'. Most young people we spoke to found their personal advisors very helpful. They particularly valued the assistance to live independently and access training and employment.

There have been increasing pressures on providing domiciliary care throughout the year. Senior managers retain a positive relationship with provider agencies and are aware of difficulties experienced in recruiting carers due to the availability of alternative employment outside of the care sector. Again, this is a challenge common to many Welsh local authorities at this time. The local authority is also investing in an electronic scheduling system, which is intended to improve the deployment of internal care at home resources. Unfortunately, an effect of the lack of capacity has been to delay some people ready to be discharged from hospital because the necessary care at home is not available.

- People – voice and control

When we met with a group of looked after children in October 2018, they told us they did not always feel listened to by their social worker and felt decisions were made without considering their views. Some children said they were not offered advocates. Bridgend County Borough Council put an action plan in place and when we returned in February 2019, we found there had been an increase in referrals made to the advocacy provider. Children we spoke to this time told us how beneficial they found having an advocate to help them make their views and wishes known. They confirmed they had been able to access advocacy at the right time for them. We were aware managers undertook awareness raising around advocacy and monitored the active offer of advocacy as part of quality assurance.

We are pleased to be informed the local authority is considering how it can revise the format of reviews for care experienced children and young people to make these more meaningful, bring their views and wishes to the forefront of discussions and increase efficiencies. We spoke to young people who felt disengaged from their reviews and found them repetitive. We found the local authority could do more to embed improved engagement with children and young people when focusing on service improvement. We are informed children in receipt of services were consulted to aid in the development of the newly implemented residential service model. We also understand the local authority is re-establishing children and young people forums. This should allow increased consultation with young people on what matters to them.

We spoke to staff and carers with regard to the consultation process undertaken by Bridgend County Borough Council to develop a new service model to provide support and

information to adult carers. We were informed of an extensive stakeholder consultation and events held to gather views on what required improvement with existing support to carers. The consultation process was designed to enable co production. Some carers of people with mental health issues felt less engaged, although the Head of Service has assured us there is a specific mental health forum for carers. We found managers had a clear vision of supporting carers who had not previously been in touch with services, including those from ethnic minority communities. There is an intention to make more creative use of direct payments to empower and improve choice for carers and the cared for.

We considered the local authority leadership, direction and progress in embedding Welsh language in front-line services as part of our performance evaluation activities. Bridgend County Borough Council is aware of where Welsh speaking staff are situated in social services and while a larger number are adept in conversational Welsh, fewer staff than the local authority would wish are confident in undertaking assessments or other complex work in Welsh. When required, specific arrangements are made and senior managers are content staff are making the active offer. Bridgend County Borough Council supports staff to undertake Welsh language training. The Responsible Individuals are aware of the presence of Welsh speaking staff in the local authority's care homes and supported living services.

Our monitoring of the deprivation of liberty safeguards has identified the local authority, in common with many others in Wales, is unable to assure itself people's human rights are not being breached by being deprived of their liberty unlawfully. We will continue to monitor this.

- Prevention

A significant development within the local authority this year has been the establishment of a new 'front door' for children and families. While this is referred to as a multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), the model incorporates Bridgend County Borough Council's duty to provide information, advice and assistance. We understand feedback from people using the service and professionals is positive and there are arrangements for daily liaison with partner agencies with access to a range of preventative and early help services.

We noted an increase in the repeat registration of children on the child protection register at the end of 2018, which coincided with a reduced average registration period that is being reviewed by the Head of Service. Performance figures indicated room for improvement in the timeliness of visits to children in need of protection. Senior managers will wish to satisfy themselves of the frequency and quality of monitoring of children and direct work with families in line with their care and support protection plan.

We reviewed a small sample of carers' assessments and found the forma was in line with principles of the SSWBA. Only 3% of carers assessed have a resultant support plan and Bridgend County Borough Council's may wish to consider if there is sufficient use of plans to detail the support for carers where these may be required. We found some carers' assessments did not evidence best practice or accountable decision-making. Where people are asked to complete part of the assessment themselves, the subsequent contact from social services staff is vital to ensure all relevant information and needs are discussed and recorded. Some assessments would have benefitted from specialist information on carers' own health needs and we could not be sure people received a copy of their assessments

when they wanted them. Improving the quality of carers' assessments is an area of focus and improvement for the local authority.

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

Senior managers have undertaken a substantial programme of work in establishing a range of new partnership agreements within the new Cwm Taf Morgannwg region. Given the need to continue with 'business as usual', alongside other major operational and strategic developments referred to in this letter, 2018/19 has undoubtedly been a demanding year for Bridgend County Borough Council.

CIW was involved in the 2018 inspection of Western Bay Youth Offending Service (YOS), which resulted in an 'inadequate' rating. While Bridgend County Borough Council was the lead authority, the Education directorate manages the YOS. However, its relevance to social services is significant as many young people at risk of offending have care and support needs. The inspection identified gaps and misunderstandings between children's services and YOS in relation to children at risk. We were informed all individual young people have been reviewed to ensure their needs are being met. We understand findings are being considered by cabinet and corporate management board and any necessary actions will be taken forward by the newly established Bridgend Youth Offending Service.

Senior managers are proud of what has been achieved in respect of integration in adult social care and are transferring these arrangements across with their new health colleagues. They have identified further work to achieve preventative and integrated services which will enhance community and personal resilience. There is a work plan dependant on the receipt of grant funding with the inclusion of specific service development in dementia services which will use existing community opportunities.

We are informed of work on a strategic framework around people with mental health issues. This should create a support system where the medical element sits alongside social care and community supports. Funding is being used to provide early help for people with mental health issues via Supporting People.

#### 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. We 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 works 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 2019/20 to work with HIW in jointly inspecting community mental health teams. We 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 look at the operation of the MASH in children's services and support for vulnerable young adults. This may be subject to change in the light of emerging issues.

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

For your information, we will publish the final version of this letter on our website.

Yours sincerely



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