

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 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's (MTCBC) 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 children's services during July 2018 and performance evaluation activity during the course of the year, including the bi-annual meetings held with the respective heads of service. CIW was also involved in a visit to the CMHT team in Merthyr Tydfil, as part of a programme of inspections undertaken in partnership with HIW.

We discussed these matters and our proposed performance evaluation activity for 2019/20 with you at the annual performance review meeting on 1 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

Changes within this electoral cycle resulted in the appointment of a new cabinet, with an independent group retaining overall control, following the outcome of a recent by-election. There is keen involvement from the new cabinet lead for social services. Elected members recognise the challenges social services face, and appreciate the budgetary pressures encountered by them, in the context of those faced by the wider authority. The financial position of the local authority is an area of serious concern. An increase in the number of children becoming looked after, with the allied expenditure on placements significantly contributed to these financial pressures.

Notwithstanding the financial situation, there is a need to accelerate the pace of change in updating the local authority's in-house provision for adults, in line with the increasing complexity of people's needs and expectations.

This year has seen particular challenges in respect of domiciliary care provision, which has seen the introduction of the living wage for staff employed in the sector across the region. Whilst this has been welcomed in terms of the positive wider impact on recruitment and retention, this has added to overall financial stresses for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. These were described by senior managers as being 'pressurised', but not impacting on day to day decision-making.

We inspected services focusing on looked after children and care leavers and found there was good corporate support for children's services from elected members and the wider council. The local authority is bringing into effect changes to its overall 'offer' for care leavers via a re-tendering process, and it is positive to note significant elements of this have been co-produced with, and informed by, feedback from young people.

- People – voice and control

In relation to compliance with the Welsh Language Standards, we have been informed that Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council are complying with the 'active offer' and there are Welsh speaking staff able to support the identified and anticipated needs of service users. There is currently low demand in Merthyr Tydfil for Welsh language services; the Welsh Language Officer is new in post and is currently promoting events for social services staff in line with 'More than just words'. The front door service is being evaluated by the local authority to ensure compliance. Training opportunities for the Welsh language are being reviewed.

During our inspection, we saw examples of good practice in children's services, but we found this standard was not consistently delivered across all teams. Significant drift was evident in a small number of cases involving the assessment and delivery of care to children and their families, and we also found delays in the transfer of cases between teams. There was an evident professional commitment to children and young people by staff, who were clearly dedicated to delivering a high standard of care. An action plan has been drawn up by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and the effectiveness of some of these measures is likely to form a focus for some of CIW's forthcoming focussed activity.

We found quality assurance across the service was in need of further development, in order to embed consistency and incorporate lessons learned from audit and performance management activity.

The local authority placed a child in unregistered arrangements as there was no suitable alternative residential placement. The local authority have demonstrated a focus on meeting the particular needs of the individual in their care, and have kept CIW informed of developments throughout. It is anticipated that this will be resolved via a successful registration by the provider, which is currently being progressed.

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's ability to meet the current need for children requiring managed care and support has seen significant challenge, with the number of children being looked after at its highest level in recent years. This has been linked to a number of reasons, resulting in the deployment of additional staffing and other resources required in order to discharge the authority's statutory duties.

The local authority has experienced ongoing difficulties in the recruitment and retention of sufficiently experienced and qualified social workers in children's services, although it is encouraging to note the use of agency workers, primarily to fill short-term posts, has reduced.

We have sought assurance from the local authority in respect of capacity within social services due to key changes following a voluntary exit scheme. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is aware of the need to give urgent attention to its financial challenges to enable it to deliver safe and sustainable services for people.

Long-standing plans to re-shape services for adults with learning disabilities, focusing on the identified priority areas of employment, homes and health, are due to be implemented. Regional partnerships are key to progressing this, as reflected in a co-produced 'statement of intent'. Once again, these have been identified as a result of significant co-production, alongside current users of these service, and their families / interested others.

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 re-modelling of preventative services for children is underway. The first phase of which is an 'early help-hub'. The next phase - supporting change - will be implemented following the release of funds resulting from the authority's withdrawal from the existing regional IFST arrangements, enabling the new arrangements to be fully operational by 2020/21. Again, the impact of these changes on outcomes for children and their families is likely to form a focus for some of CIW's forthcoming activity.

Outcomes from the recent inspection by HIW and CIW of the local Community Mental Health Team in Merthyr will be formally reported on in due course. Preliminary findings suggest that sound inter-professional relationships underpin positive outcomes for people utilising this service. Issues were also highlighted in respect of the signing off of care and

support plans, the integration of the health board data base / shared access to information on WCCIS; and the need to ensure that safeguarding training is delivered on a multi-agency basis, and accurate records are kept in respect to this. A joint health & social care action plan has been developed in response to this.

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

In response to the identified need to have more robust arrangements in place for securing placements for children with more complex needs, children's services are drawing up a revised commissioning strategy, alongside other interested parties, including 4C's.

Effective operational and strategic relationships with other regional partners have facilitated the implementation of some innovative projects, such as the hospital based, multi-agency Stay Well @ Home initiative and proposed Valley's Life project. This reflects a strong commitment to co-production across its services. The authority and its partners are aware that the long-term sustainability of this and future planned projects needs to be secured, as in the meantime they remain heavily dependent on short-term, grant funding.

We found that an effective multi-disciplinary approach in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub assists in promoting sound safeguarding practice.

In respect of Bridgend participating in the recently formed Cwm Taf Morgannwg regional arrangements, a number of 'shadowing' arrangements in place over past year, for example in relation to the regional safeguarding board, will be brought into full-implementation. Other services, such as the Youth Offending Service and staff training arrangements, will continue to be run and managed in line with existing arrangements, pending further discussion. The revised regional structure also presents opportunities to strengthen practice and learn from others.

In its self-assessment of community-based preventative services for adults over the age of 65, the local authority has identified the need to do more to promote social enterprise and other third sector partners in providing care and support for carers. Initiatives designed to meet this need are likely to be developed across a regional footprint.

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 is likely to include following up inspection findings relating to children's services and care experienced children and young people; our engagement in adult services will focus on people aged over 65s in the community, and possibly day services.

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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