

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 Powys County 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 of this letter is informed by our inspection of children's services in October 2018 and monitoring activity in children's and adult services in July 2018, November 2018 and February 2019. We discussed these matters and our proposed performance evaluation activity for 2019/20 with you at the annual performance review meeting on 16 April 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

- Well-being

Creating and maintaining a permanent workforce in children's services continues to be a major challenge. While senior managers have made significant efforts to recruit, continued turnover has lessened the impact of this on reducing the number of agency staff. A newly established assessment team became untenable in the last few months due to staffing problems and was temporarily abandoned. While recruitment and retention is not such a significant issue in adult services, difficulties in recruiting experienced by domiciliary care providers is having an impact on capacity within the sector.

Senior managers have told us they understand the priority to engage with staff and have established improved lines of communication. Staff are now much more likely to receive regular line management supervision, although a dip in recent performance indicates this must be subject to ongoing focus. At the most senior level, a permanent management team is now in place and vacancies at senior manager level are subject to recruitment. This is a substantial improvement considering there were three (Interim) Heads of Adult Services in the year. Stable leadership is certainly a positive development this year.

Increased corporate oversight and the scrutiny afforded by the Improvement and Assurance Board has continued throughout the year and a permanent Chief Executive came into post in February 2019. We saw the beginnings of a culture and practice of quality assurance during the year, particularly in adult services. The local authority has produced a good range of performance management information from the WCCIS database that improves senior managers' oversight and monitoring of performance.

We raised concerns about Powys County Council's poor response to complaints. We are informed additional staff training has been undertaken and of more active oversight by senior managers. We will review complaint handling again this year.

On inspection, we found the strategic vision for children's services was poorly defined. A re-structure of children's services is underway, the plan for which is well articulated by the Head of Service and is based on a coherent understanding of services and current legislative drivers. The intention is for people to be better enabled to access advice and assistance at the earliest stage and gain support more often from a community resource, outside of social services. We are aware of plans to enhance the offer to families and to continue the roll out of a specific strengths based approach to children and families. This should provide opportunities for greater professional consistency across partner agencies.

However, there are significant challenges in resourcing, existing partnerships and culture change which senior managers and staff will need to overcome in order to achieve implementation and sustainability of this whole system change.

Overall, the local authority has made significant improvements in the timeliness of its assessments of children. Powys County Council reports on assessments completed in shorter timescales, rather than measuring all assessments against the maximum timescale and this is good practice.

More children are subject to care orders in Powys now than in the previous 12 months. Senior managers have ensured a review of all children in residential placements to ascertain who could be accommodated nearer to home. It appears this strategy is yet to impact, since one third of looked after children continue to be placed out of county at year-end.

Despite considerable focus on the importance of practitioners seeing looked after children and those on the child protection register at regular intervals, this remains an area for improvement. We acknowledge significant improvements have been achieved, but there remains more to do. For looked after children, managers must ensure all children have a current care and support plan.

When we completed monitoring work in adult services in November 2018, we found assessments and care and support plans that we considered good and excellent because they were strengths based and outcome focused. However, we did not consistently identify improvement and so we could not be sure of the extent of change since the inspection in January 2018.

We found delays and deficits in service provision seriously affecting people. The length of time for people to have an assessment was impacting on people, particularly those waiting to be discharged from hospital. Senior managers consider the number of people delayed in hospital for social care reasons unacceptable. A review of the reablement service has been initiated and the local authority and health board have developed a programme of work designed to bring improvement.

We are concerned at the high number of people whose plan for care and support has not been reviewed. We cannot be sure, therefore, that care and support provided by adult services is appropriate. The local authority will want to assure itself that services offered are contributing to the outcomes people want to achieve and are making best use of resources.

We have discussed the considerable deficit in domiciliary care provision with senior managers. A number of care providers have stopped operating in Powys during the year and while other providers have endeavoured to cover, this has exacerbated an already difficult situation. People in Powys are undoubtedly being negatively affected due to insufficient domiciliary care services. Additional occupational therapy resource is being considered to review levels of homecare support provided and we have been informed of the challenge in securing additional provision.

A relatively high proportion of people in Powys use the direct payment system. We have suggested the local authority reminds staff and managers of the value of direct payments in allowing people to have more control and flexibility in their arrangements. The system is not in place to compensate for a lack of domiciliary care available via the local authority.

- People – voice and choice

We reviewed the local authority leadership, direction and progress in embedding Welsh language in front-line services as part of inspection and annual performance evaluation activities. Powys County Council is having some difficulties recruiting Welsh speakers. This means the new first point of contact service for adult services does not have a Welsh

speaker, although an arrangement is in place to use staff from another team. There are good opportunities for Powys County Council staff to take Welsh language classes to increase the use of Welsh at all levels.

In the course of our work, we noted reports written by social workers for child protection conferences often outlined a thorough analysis of information and were outcome focused. The timeliness of meeting minutes improved during the year. However, reports were not always sent to parents sufficiently in advance so they could meaningfully join discussions in the meeting. We expect senior managers will aim to rectify this to ensure children and families are able to participate fairly in key meetings that have such a significant impact on them.

In July 2018, we noted safeguarding officers for adults at risk were not confident in completing capacity assessments. Senior managers told us relevant training has been provided and officers can now assess, in most instances, if a person has the capacity to make a particular decision. We found those managing the safeguarding process were unlikely to involve the person or the family in the safeguarding process. We are unclear how Designated Lead Managers (DLMs) can know what people want to achieve if they have not communicated with the person or their family. We will consider if there have been improvements in practice in further work.

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.

- Partnerships

There remains considerable scope for further development in partnership working between Powys County Council and Powys Teaching Health Board (PTHB). The Chief Executive confirms she has been pursuing improvement in partnership working since starting in post. More joined up services will deliver better outcomes for people in Powys, reduce duplication and deliver more sustainable services.

Senior managers have achieved better attendance at the regional safeguarding boards and become more active participants. We understand there have been some improvements in the professional arrangements for regional working in adoption and fostering. Powys County Council will benefit by continuing to collaborate with other local authorities, accepting support, sharing best practice and gaining from work completed elsewhere to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'. The Chief Executive is confident the stable senior management now in place will drive the integration and joint working agenda across children's and adult services.

The greater emphasis on early help for children and families must involve greater commissioned and collaborative working with the third sector if it is to be successful. We look forward to the development of the Early Help Hub planned for Newtown. There remain more children entering the planned care and support system following assessment, than are being signposted to early help services and increased options for families should impact on this.

We are concerned with the level of engagement by Powys County Council with independent providers of children's homes in Powys. This is an area of priority action for the local authority, given the numbers of children who remain placed far from their home area.

A review of reablement services is underway to explore its effectiveness in promoting people's independence. Delays in receiving reablement support is significantly affecting people waiting in hospitals and care homes. We understand there are plans to increase social worker presence in hospitals to improve discharge planning, strengthen the multi-agency response to prevent unnecessary admissions and speed up other processes to improve support at home.

- Prevention

It is disappointing that fewer child protection assessments were completed within timescale in recent months, when fewer assessments were undertaken overall. Senior managers have aimed to ensure greater multi-agency information sharing prior to the decision to undertake a formal investigation. In this context, a reduction in unnecessary investigations is positive and reduces the impact on families. However, recent performance information suggests there remains considerable opportunity to share information at multi-agency strategy meetings. The Head of Children's Services plans further development work on these matters.

We raised concerns with Powys County Council about how it engages with protects children at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) in July and October 2018. In response, we are aware senior managers wish to bring in more expertise and capacity for staff development and operational management.

Powys County Council is completing almost all of its adult protection initial enquiries within the requisite timescale, an improvement across the year.

In November 2018, we found community connectors could be used more effectively. In some instances, we felt care managers could be more knowledgeable about community resources and the value of signposting to non-statutory services. Powys County Council has heavily invested in community connectors and we reviewed the service in May 2019. While this is outside the scope of this annual letter since it falls in 2019/20, we have feedback the dispersed model of operation was popular with those we spoke to and community connectors were well regarded, although this may not be uniform across the local authority.

Senior managers in adult services are enthusiastic about the potential of assistive technology to improve access and support for people and reduce the demand for homecare services. Local authorities across Wales are pursuing the same agenda and we hope collaborative working will provide efficiencies.

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.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2019-20

Our scheduled thematic adult services inspection programme for 2019/20 will be focussing on prevention and promoting independence for older people and for the children's 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 reviews of Community Mental Health Teams as part of bi-annual head of service meetings with local authorities.

We have completed monitoring work in May 2019 on the new ASSIST service and will be looking at the support provided to care leavers in June 2019. CIW will consider undertaking a follow up inspection of adult services before the end of 2019 and will inform the Director in due course with regard to this. We will continue to actively review performance by regular monitoring activities.

You will note 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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharon Eastlake', written in a cursive style.

Sharon Eastlake
Interim Head of Local Authority Inspection Team
Care Inspectorate Wales

Cc.
WAO
HIW
Estyn