

Susan Cooper
Director of Social Services
Bridgend County Borough Council
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Angel Street
Bridgend
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Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Susan Cooper,

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Local Authority Performance Review April 2019 - March 2020

The code of practice for review of local authority social services in April 2019 outlines 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 from April 2019 - March 2020.

We acknowledge, that due to the unprecedented circumstances relating to COVID-19, that in many instances we were unable to complete the annual performance review meeting.

However, we believe that there remains significant benefits in identifying and drawing the attention of the local authority and its partners to the areas of both strengths and improvements required. The letter is intended to assist the local authority and its partners to continually improve.

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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.

It follows the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and our increasingly collaborative and strengths based approach to supporting improvement.

The content of this letter is informed by the performance evaluation activity undertaken by the inspectorate during the course of the year. This activity was the inspection of older adults' services in September 2019. We cancelled planned focused activity in March 2020 due to COVID-19.

During the course of the year we have been in discussions with you, and as such, our annual performance letter content is an accurate reflection of our ongoing findings which we have consistently shared with you.

Summary of strengths and areas for improvement in line with principles of the 2014 Act

Well-being

Bridgend County Borough Council's social services has strong corporate support and a clear vision for adult social care, which was strongly articulated across social care and partner agencies at inspection. Overall, we found practice to be pro-active, person-centred and outcome-focused. Assessments and care and support plans were good, evidencing the views and wishes of people. We found carers did not always have access to a short break from caring responsibilities and identified this as an area for improvement.

Reablement and enablement was not always available when people needed it. A review of brokerage and the delivery model for domiciliary care may identify opportunities to increase capacity. The local authority developed an improvement plan to address all areas identified from our inspection and we recognise the pace of improvement will be affected by the challenges of COVID-19.

There was an identified lack of capacity in care homes for people with dementia and nursing needs, which meant some people were delayed in being discharged from hospital.

There was a reduction in performance in 2019 in timescales for completion of assessments of children, which has been addressed. More children than expected were being placed on the child protection register for a second or subsequent time. Senior managers found some children had come off the register too soon, or care and support for families after registration was not sufficiently robust or for a long enough period. Managers were ensuring practice and decision-making was improved.

We could not be confident that children on the child protection register or in the care system were visited by social workers frequently enough. Senior managers sought to reassure us that this was a recording issue. The local authority will wish to ensure it sets performance targets at an appropriately high level, given the importance of visiting the most vulnerable children.

Overall, the numbers of care-experienced children in the local authority has not reduced. The current focus is on increasing the numbers ceasing to be looked after. The local authority has created reunification worker posts to aid this and managers are promoting applications for Special Guardianship Orders where appropriate.

Managers have worked to improve choice and quality of placements for children and therapeutic services available. New services have opened for young people over 16 years with additional planned services stalled due to COVID-19. Senior managers recognise ongoing challenges in achieving the therapeutic approach envisaged across placement provision. Inspections of one of the local authority's children's home has evidenced areas of non-compliance. Necessary staff recruitment, training and building work are delayed by the current crisis.

The local authority has continued to experience significant challenges in identifying suitable placements for a small number of children with the most complex needs, despite the remodelling of its own provision. The local authority have placed three young people in bespoke, unregulated, arrangements in the last year. CIW, Welsh Government and the courts continue to review these arrangements, which present enormous challenges.

People

Bridgend County Borough Council engages well with people to inform and shape service developments and the Chief Executive is committed to this approach. The voices and choices of older adults is heard and responded to. Practice to establish whether people have mental capacity to make specific decisions is robust. An outcome-focused social work model is being introduced in children's services.

The local authority must ensure people are always given the Active Offer to receive services in the Welsh language as we identified some deficits in this at inspection.

The positivity and commitment of staff is a noteworthy feature of adult social care. Staff feel supported by managers. There is a stable leadership team; changes are pending due to the retirement of the Director of Social Services.

Some improvements were required in consistency and recording of staff supervision in adult services. Some managers had a large span of control that impacted on their ability to oversee staff and undertake quality assurance work. The local authority was experiencing difficulties in recruitment and is providing more support for people to obtain qualifications during their employment.

We continue to monitor the implementation of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS). Senior managers assured us there was no backlog of applications. The team are considering the implications of the new Liberty Protection Safeguard legislation. Our joint national report on DoLS will be issued in due course.

Prevention

We saw evidence of strong financial commitment to preventative services by the Chief Executive and cabinet and a good range of community groups of particular interest to older people. Health and social services have invested in posts to connect people with resources. We found effective early intervention to prevent escalation of need, including robust safeguarding procedures and targeted preventative work undertaken with specific groups of vulnerable people.

There is creative use of direct payments. The mobile response service for people using the alarm system is an example of good practice. The local authority takes a proactive approach by ensuring people have anticipatory or contingency planning in place.

During 2018 our programme of work focused on care experienced children and young people. The [report](#) is published on our website. Nationally, key findings highlight areas for improvement in respect of profile, sufficiency, practice, partnerships, stability, governance and corporate parenting. Many of the areas we have identified for improvement continue to be considered by Welsh Government's Ministerial Advisory Group on improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people and we hope local authorities will consider their own contribution to addressing these findings.

In December 2019 we wrote to all local authorities asking for information about the Public Accounts Committee report following their enquiry into care-experienced children, specifically recommendation 5 concerning the effectiveness and frequency of end of placement reviews. The response from the local authority sought to provide reassurance. A placement support worker provides support for carers when there are risks of placement instability. Placement stability meetings are held within 48 hours. The independent reviewing officer (IRO) convenes a 'LAC Review' meeting within 20 working days of an unexpected end to a placement and identifies learning to inform the young person's next placement.

Partnerships

Bridgend County Borough Council entered into new regional working arrangements in April 2019 and there was considerable work to establish new operational and strategic partnerships across Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB). Senior managers in the local authority were committed to develop robust and effective joint working arrangements and integrated health and social care delivery. Senior managers are working with the NHS delivery unit to develop an improved regional approach for people leaving hospital. At inspection, we found quick decision-making and a joined up approach was of clear benefit to older people in the local authority. Senior managers are active members of the regional partnership board and other regional fora.

We identified areas for improvement at inspection, most of which reflected service developments already planned. These included ensuring the structure, practice and transfer processes within the short-term teams were efficient and minimised delay.

We also identified the need for improved commonality of approach with mental health and hospital ward staff to improve joined up services and discharge arrangements at the Princess of Wales Hospital. Social care presence at the hospital has been increased since inspection and additional funding has provided further support to prevent admissions, improve flow and facilitate discharge.

Anticipated changes in the arrangements and structure of governance within CTMUHB will impact on joint working arrangements with the local authority. Senior managers and people using services reviewed the Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) prior to the changes in health board boundaries and this is due to be reconsidered when new health

structures are in place. The regional partnership board is reviewing placement sufficiency for children with complex needs, with a view to joint commissioning.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2020-2021

Our scheduled thematic inspection programme for 2019-2020 focused on prevention and promoting independence for older people, and for the current the children's services thematic inspection, the focus is on prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. Due to the current emergency relating to COVID-19, we have paused the publication of our older people's report and paused all activity relating to the disabled children's review. We will advise you in due course when we envisage recommencing our inspections.

We hope to publish the older people's national report in due course and want to take this opportunity to thank you for your local authority's contribution to this.

Due to the unforeseen circumstances we find ourselves in, we are currently reviewing and considering our work plan for the remainder of 2020-2021.

CIW worked together with HMI Constabulary (HMICFRS), HMI Probation, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Estyn to develop a model of joint inspection of child protection arrangements in Wales (JICPA). This approach was piloted during the autumn of 2019. This was a fantastic example of new ways of working across Wales and a real drive towards collaboration and integration in public services.

We continue to work closely with Social Care Wales to support improvement in social care services.

You will note that this letter has been copied to colleagues in Audit Wales, 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,



Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn