

Jenny Williams
Director of Social Services
Conwy County Borough Council
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Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Jenny Williams

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 Conwy County Borough Council performance in carrying out its statutory social services functions from April 2019 - March 2020.

We acknowledge, due to the unprecedented circumstances relating to COVID-19, 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.

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.

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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.

The content of this letter is informed by the performance evaluation activity undertaken by the inspectorate during the course of the year. This activity included:

- inspection of disabled children services in November 2019
- focused activity in adults services in March 2019 (1 day only due to COVID-19)
- engagement work in older adults services
- meetings with heads of service in July 2019 & January 2020
- review meeting - prevention and promotion of independence for older adults – October 2019
- assurance and risk assessment review – February 2020
- intelligence received
- performance information

During the course of the year we have been in discussions with the local authority during all of the activity listed above, and as such, our annual performance letter content is an accurate reflection of our ongoing findings which we have consistently shared with the local authority.

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

Well-being

Conwy County Borough Council has an experienced and well-established senior management team who have confidence in developing a range of new projects and using grant money to create new models of care and support to improve outcomes for people.

There is good level of political support for the authority's direction and social care services. Performance management and reporting mechanism, which include opportunities to challenge, keep elected members well-informed. Senior managers continue to alert members to the increase in service demand, its complexity, the impact on budgets, and the risks associated with the service.

It is positive to note the challenge of providing and commissioning domiciliary care for adults continues to be well-managed by the local authority. People are provided with reablement and packages of care in a timely manner, this supports their well-being and promotes the recovery of people following a period in hospital.

At the time of the disabled children inspection it was disappointing that the local authority had not changed all its recording templates to reflect and reinforce the principles of the 2014 Act. Consequently, the 'what matters' conversation and voice of the child were not always apparent in assessments and care and support plans, and improvement is also required in the recording of strengths and personal outcomes. It was positive to note training has been arranged to further embed outcome focused practice. It is acknowledged that ensuring recording templates and reporting formats reflect the requirement of the 2014 Act is recognised as a priority by senior managers and during 2020 the local authority will change to the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). This will assist the local authority in ensuring the required information is consistently recorded.

People

The Director of Social Services described Conwy County Borough Council as a bilingual local authority. During the disabled children's inspection we were told people were able to communicate in their preferred language and managers in the disabled children services team were confident there were adequate number of Welsh speaking practitioners to implement the Active Offer.

Parents of disabled children were generally positive about the support they received and were appreciative of the relationship established with individual social workers. A person who received support from the Vulnerable Adults team shared how practitioners listened to her and focused on what was important for her. Practitioners and managers of partner agencies talked positively about the team's perseverance and their continued focus on building relationships and trust with vulnerable individuals.

Staff consistently told us they enjoyed working for the local authority and value the supportive culture.

More people are managing their own care through the provision of direct payments. Whilst people are given more choice and control, we found the benefits are at times mitigated due to the difficulties people face in the recruitment and retention of personal assistants. The local authority will want to monitor how this impacts on children, adults and carers.

We continue to monitor the implementation of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) which has identified the local authority, in common with many others in Wales, is unable to assure itself that people's human rights are not being breached by being deprived of their liberty unlawfully. Our joint national report on DoLS will be issued in due course.

Prevention

Senior managers are aware that access to early intervention is key to mitigating the need for statutory services. They are focused on building and promoting peoples own strengths and resilience in line with the principles of the 2014 Act.

The local authority has worked hard to reshape and re-design its service and focused its early intervention and prevention delivery around the development of five community-based family centres. The ambition is for people to have open access to universal services in local communities.

Disabled children are supported and encouraged to learn and develop to achieve their full potential and participate in society. Assistive technology is effectively used to help promote such independence and support families.

We identified a strong multi-agency approach to support care leavers and young people who are homeless. Constructive partnerships with housing and third sector resulted in good provision of accommodation and support for vulnerable people.

The local authority is committed to supporting carers and is aware of the need to be able demonstrate the impact of its work. There is a need to ensure a consistent practice in the offering and undertaking of assessments and a focus on ensuring that opportunities to support carers are not missed or delayed.

During 2018 our programme of work focused on care experienced children and young people. The [report](#) is published on our website. 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 also 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. We did not receive a formal response from the local authority and therefore request again that you advise us and confirm assurance of your practice in such reviews. For example, are disruption or placement breakdown meetings held and how learning from such reviews/meetings is embedded within practice.

Partnerships

Conwy County Borough Council is committed to partnership working at a local and regional level with senior managers taking a leading role in some of the region's priority working groups. There is also a willingness to contribute to the national agenda as was seen recently when the Head of Children's Services agreed to chair a national working group.

During our focused activity in adult services, managers of partner agencies talked positively about the work of Conwy's Vulnerable Adults team. All mentioned the 'Complex Case Panel' as an arena that enables multi-disciplinary agencies to come together to ensure they meet the needs and manage the risks of people with the most complex needs in Conwy.

The local authority is working towards piloting a multi-agency safeguarding hub. It is envisaged the hub will provide a swifter response to safeguarding concerns by removing delays from some of the current safeguarding pathways.

During the disabled children inspection, we found that the local authority's commissioning arrangements supports the development of some good quality services to meet the needs of disabled children and their families. However, sufficiency of resources remains a challenge and we saw delays in the provision of support. Some parents of children with complex needs identified a lack of provision. The local authority needs to continue to work with the local health board to develop a joint commissioning approach for children with complex needs.

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 children's services thematic inspection the focus is on prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. Due to the current emergency situation 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 the 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 'Lou Bushell-Bauers', with a small red mark to the right.

Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn