

Nicola Stubbins
Corporate Director Communities
Denbighshire County Council
County Hall
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Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Nicola Stubbins,

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

In line with our code of practice for the review of local authority social services this letter summarises our review of Denbighshire County Council 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, 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 included:

- inspection of older adults services – May 2019
- meetings with senior managers
- focused activity in adults services – January 2020
- engagement activity with older adults services
- focused activity in children's services December 2019
- feedback/intelligence received
- review of performance information

During the course of the year we have been in discussions with you 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 you.

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

Well-being

Denbighshire County Council benefits from an experienced and knowledgeable senior management team. Senior managers across the local authority have a good understanding of how a focus on prevention and well-being impacts upon outcomes for people, sustainability of services and the success of the local authority as a whole.

During the year we found evidence of positive transformation underpinned by legislation and internal audit. In both adult social care and children's services we met practitioners who spoke enthusiastically about their work and plans for the future. Many welcomed the autonomy they had gained from new ways of working under the 2014 act and told us they felt well supported. We understood practitioners benefited from training opportunities available to them although access to some training is limited by demands of front line work.

Adult services is improving its approach to strengths based conversations producing good outcomes for many people. In January 2020 we were able to report on significant improvements in the delivery of adult safeguarding. Practitioners were able to demonstrate how they were listening to the outcomes people want to achieve, and how they were supporting people to work creatively towards what mattered to them. Timeliness, recording, professional analysis and decision making has all improved during the year.

There are many very good written records in children's social services. The records clearly demonstrate the positive work practitioners have undertaken, in partnership with others to support the most vulnerable children in difficult circumstances, over extended periods. The senior management team have refreshed their audit process with an emphasis on ensuring all social work meets these high standards and all children receive timely and effective support.

People

Denbighshire County Council has an adequate understanding of how people benefit from the provision of information, advice and assistance and by being involved in developing services that meet their needs.

The local authority is not always successful in managing the fine balance between focusing upon adults' strengths as a means of maintaining their independence and the duty of the local authority to provide services to meet need. The local authority must take steps to ensure outcomes of assessment are recorded on the assessment and eligibility tool. The record must contain a record of advice and information given, and the local authority must uphold outcomes of assessments regardless of the individual's financial resources in line with the 2014 Act.

Fresh enthusiasm and creativity has enhanced the supported budgets project and recently the number of people who are offered more choice in how they manage their care and support has increased.

The local authority recognises the importance of ensuring people are able to communicate in their preferred language. Recruitment of Welsh speaking practitioners is a challenge. The local authority is addressing the deficit by working hard encouraging and supporting staff who want to learn to speak Welsh.

Retention and recruitment of children's social workers is becoming more of a challenge in the local authority. The local authority is actively looking at how they recruit and retain newly qualified workers and recognise the challenge this presents to more experienced workers who undertake mentoring roles.

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.

The local authority is taking steps to improve the quality of mental capacity assessments undertaken by practitioners. This work is essential to ensure the local authority is ready for changes in Liberty Protection Safeguards.

Prevention

Denbighshire County Council is aware of the continuing challenge it faces in providing domiciliary care and how this impacts negatively on people who need care and support. Senior managers assure us they regard this as a priority and are exploring different options to address market capacity. We will continue to monitor this activity.

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 are aware the local authority does hold disruption meetings and placement breakdown meetings and does learn from experience. The local authority recognises timeliness is an issue for them. The local authority has learnt this year of the importance of communication between social workers in differing local authorities who may both be placing children in the same setting.

Partnerships

Partnership working is mostly effective in the Denbighshire County Council. Housing, leisure and environmental health services work together to create opportunities to build community resilience and the bringing together of children's social services and education in previous years continues to provide benefits and opportunities.

The local authority continues to be actively engaged in local and regional partnership working and their contribution is positively noted by their partners.

Children's services continue to work with local and regional partners to develop new services and enhance support to children and families. There is a positive focus on providing the right care at the right time, to alleviate stress in the home and reduce the likelihood of children requiring care outside the family home.

The development of Community Resource Teams in adult services is evidence of good joint working between the local authority and the local health board. Being co-located and working in joint teams enables practitioners to share information and professional experience, reduce duplication of resources and co-produce better outcomes for people.

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 prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. Unfortunately, due to the current COVID-19 emergency, we have paused the publication of our older persons report and paused all activity relating to the disabled children's review.

Our intention is to publish the older people's national report in due course and we take this opportunity to thank you for your local authority's contribution. We are currently reviewing and considering our work plan for the remainder of 2020-2021.

During autumn 2019 we worked together with HMI Constabulary (HMICFRS), HMI Probation, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Estyn to pilot a model of joint inspection of child protection arrangements in Wales (JICPA). This is one example of the drive towards collaboration and integration in public services. We will learn from the experience and take forward the positives.

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.

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 dot at the end.

Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn