

Julie Boothroyd
Chief Officer of Social Care and Health
Monmouthshire County Council
County Hall
Rhadyr
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NP15 1GA

Dyddiad / Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Julie Boothroyd,

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

The code of practice for review of local authority social services published 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 Monmouthshire County Council's 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 older adult services – report published August 2019
- annual focused activity undertaken in children’s services on 6 and 7 February 2020
- annual focused activity undertaken in adults services on 12 and 13 February 2020
- practice and performance meetings held with the Head of Adults Services on 20 August 2019 and 24 February 2020
- practice and performance meetings held with the Head of Children’s Services on 27 August 2019 and 25 February 2020

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

The numbers of looked after children within the local authority continue to increase. The local authority has developed interventions to maximise opportunities to reduce the number of looked after children. For example, a Child Protection Panel has been implemented with the aim of exploring professional practice, risk analysis, risk management, safety planning, and exploration of process to promote consistent thresholds.

During our focused activity in children’s services, we found that the local authority had focused on practice development, and shaping the way in which they work with families to promote strengths, manage risks and achieve good enough outcomes. Which is in line with their initiative ‘Building Best Practice in Children’s Services.’

Whilst the foster carer recruitment campaign has been successful, at times the demand for placements has outstripped availability. This has resulted in a lack of choice of placements for some young people entering care, heightening the risk of placement breakdown, and the need for out of county placements. The development of the MyST Service in collaboration with Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council is an example of action taken by Monmouthshire County Council to develop therapeutic placement provision, improve availability and choice of placements and provide support for foster carers.

Our inspection of older adults services found a collaborative, outcome-based approach is taken, in which people are pro-actively involved in ‘what matters’ conversations and subsequent decision-making. We found there was effective multi-agency working and staff at all levels demonstrated a long-standing commitment to, and practical understanding of, the local authority’s vision for well-being and the promotion of independence for older adults living in the community.

One of the challenges faced by the local authority is the lack of availability of domiciliary support services in some remote / rural areas. This has resulted in some people experiencing delays in returning home from hospital. Our inspection activity found there

was a need to improve the timeliness of domiciliary support to ensure people achieve their personal outcomes. The local authority identifies costs and lack of availability of domiciliary support as an ongoing pressure point and one that is likely to intensify in future. They are working with independent domiciliary support providers to address some of the challenges of commissioning domiciliary support, particularly for people living in remote/rural areas.

The local authority has seen an upward trend in numbers of safeguarding reports. Our focused activity identified that there had been a review of the adult safeguarding services and a revised structure was planned for April 2020 to increase capacity and strengthen the facilitation of whole authority safeguarding business. People we spoke with told us that the subject of the adult at risk report was central to the safeguarding process and that their views and wishes were sought. Improvements are required to strengthen recording to evidence this practice.

Our annual activity identified that improvements are required across service areas to strengthen recording to evidence and ensure consistency and quality of practice, and to provide assurance regarding adherence to legislation, policy and procedures. A new quality assurance framework had been developed, this needs to be embedded to ensure that quality assurance processes are strengthened. The implementation of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) was planned for 2020-2021. This will provide an opportunity to consider how WCCIS can assist with the collation of relevant data to support practice and quality assurance.

People

Monmouthshire County Council has a dedicated and committed workforce. A stable leadership team articulate a clear vision for social care across Monmouthshire. During our focused activity, people told us that there had been some turnover of staff. One parent told us they had to “re-tell my story” to a number of workers and how difficult this was. Some professionals told us of turnover of staff but felt that they had developed good relationships with core staff/managers. We saw action taken by the local authority to address gaps in teams, which included use of consistent agency staff. A proactive recruitment programme and a Workforce Mental Health Well-being Initiative are in place.

Our inspection found the approach to carers’ assessments varied. In some instances, carers’ needs were recognised with repeat assessments being undertaken where requested. However, in other instances, outcomes were very service-led, with little or no exploration of wider personal outcomes. Further work is required to ensure that carers’ assessments are routinely offered and undertaken in line with the 2014 Act.

There are two secure estates within Monmouthshire. During our inspection, we saw a multi-disciplinary approach to assessment and provision of care and support for prisoners.

Improvements are required to ensure that people are routinely offered direct payments to provide them with the opportunity to manage their care and support. An audit of use of direct payments had been undertaken and the local authority were considering how they could embed direct payments.

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.

An action plan is in place in relation to the implementation of the required Welsh Language Standards.

Prevention

A particular strength of Monmouthshire County Council is its commitment to develop a range of innovative and creative preventative services, and ways of working with people in finding their own solutions in preventing or delaying their need for statutory care and support. We saw evidence in our annual activity of an extensive range of preventative community-based services that support early intervention and good outcomes for people.

The broad principles of 'Healthier Wales' have underpinned the development of the three existing community hubs. We saw good working relations established with primary care professionals/GP's in some areas of the county.

The local authority had identified a need to explore more extensive use of tele-care and other assistive technologies to assist people in achieving greater levels of independence. Following our inspection, a project undertaken by an occupational therapist was looking at how technology could be used to combat social isolation and support people with dementia.

Professionals we spoke with stated preventative services were provided to support children and their families, this was apparent in the files that we viewed and confirmed by parents we spoke with during our focused activity.

During 2018 our programme of work focused on care experienced children and young people. The [report](#) is published on our website. Key areas highlighted for improvement include respect of profile, sufficiency, practice, partnerships, stability, governance and corporate parenting. 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 local authority confirmed that it holds placement stability meetings in situations where there is a risk of placement disruption and these processes are being embedded.

Partnerships

The Regional Partnership Board (RPB) through its investment of Integrated Care Fund (ICF) has developed some innovative and creative services and approaches. For example, the Opening Closed Doors Project is a whole-family approach being delivered across

Gwent. The project assists children and families to recover from their experiences of domestic abuse, build resilience, strengthen parenting capacity and support systems to improve outcomes for children and their families.

Building Strong Families initiative is an example of how a partnership approach is becoming more effective in delivering more proactive interventions to children and their families. Key to this has been the partnership working with early years/flying start and third sector agencies, with primary health personnel becoming increasingly involved.

Monmouthshire Early Help Panel includes representatives from a wide range of services including primary and specialist mental health services, housing services, youth services, substance misuse services, school based counselling service, sports and leisure services. The panel meets weekly and takes referrals from multiple sources. The panel provides a multi-agency 'no wrong door' approach to supporting families.

Monmouthshire County Council and Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) have a proactive approach to partnership working, underpinned by an Integrated Services Partnership Board. Jointly funded posts operate across operational and strategic functions, facilitating the effective implementation of longer-term plans. The implementation of WCCIS will align with the national system for Wales and with the aim of full integration with the Health Board.

A Gwent wide task and finish group is working on the roll out of the new Wales Safeguarding Procedures. The rollout will include 'What's Different' Procedure Training. Work is ongoing to develop a regional threshold document across five Gwent authorities to aid consistent practice. The local authority has led on a Gwent wide child exploitation policy and training.

Partnership arrangements at both local and regional level continue to develop and mature. This has resulted in significant improvements in commissioning, pooled budgets and increasing social care services delivered on a regional footprint.

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 persons 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lou Bushell-Bauers', with a small circular mark to the right.

Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn