

Mr Andrew Jarrett  
Director of Social Services, Health & Housing  
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council  
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Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Andrew Jarrett,

### **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 Neath Port Talbot County Borough 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, that we were unable to complete the full annual performance review meeting cycle this year.

However, we believe that there remain significant benefits in identifying and drawing the attention of the local authority and its partners, to the areas both of strengths and of required improvement. 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 services for older adults during March 2019
- focused activity (children's services): permanency planning February 2020
- focused activity (adults services): safeguarding February 2020
- review of safeguarding action plan
- review of the local authority's response to CIW in respect of the review of care and support plans for care experienced children who have a placement move or disruption

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**

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's social services has a stable senior management team who exercise a substantial span of responsibility across relevant disciplines. Both adults' and children's services benefit from good political and corporate support and there is a shared understanding of the direction and drive needed to ensure that services effectively improve outcomes for people.

The local authority has continued to work hard, in the context of the 2014 Act, and at a time of financial constraint and budgetary savings, to reshape its services. The ambition of the local authority's plans signals its commitment to improving people's well-being and independence.

CIW's focused activity in adult services looked at the local authority's progress in implementing the improvement plan resulting from the inspection of older adults, published in June 2019, particularly in respect of safeguarding. The local authority has a good understanding of its own strengths and areas of challenge and senior officers are realistic both about progress made and the further action needed to advance and embed their post inspection improvements. Managers are alert to the demand on services and recognise the pressure, including the complexity of cases, on workloads and management capacity.

Following its systems review of adult services, the local authority has pro-actively progressed its plans for restructuring adult social care services. Since our inspection, the local authority has acted to strengthen the relationship between the adult services single point of contact (Gateway) and the Adult Safeguarding and Quality Review Team, to ensure timely screening of adult at risk reports and the availability of professional guidance and management oversight of adult at risk decisions. The introduction of new quality assurance measures should help to drive the consistency and quality of the safeguarding response.

Our recent focused activity in children's services looked at care and support planning arrangements, in relation to promoting timely permanence and good outcomes for children and young people. The Director of Social Services, Housing, and Health and the Head of Children's Services are members of the ministerial looked after children advisory group and are actively engaged in the Welsh Government Reduction of Looked after Children strategy.

The local authority has a relatively stable children looked after population and the service has developed a number of forums involving senior officers to support management oversight and consistency of decision making in relation to children on the edge of care and those in the safeguarding and looked after system.

The local authority has sought to improve professional accountability, for example around initiating the Public Law Outline (PLO) by strengthening case supervision expectations, introducing a formal principal officer consultation process and clear legal gateway requirements. We found these arrangements provided valued opportunities for constructive challenge including in relation to early intervention and the management of risk. Managers are aware of the need to improve practice and maintain stringent oversight in relation to permanency planning for children in family placements under section 76 arrangements

## **People**

Consultation and engagement events are used extensively to inform the directorate's future service direction. Neath Port Talbot, social services describe themselves as 'moving from planning services *for* people towards designing services *with* people'. This is underpinned by recently developed Participation & Engagement Strategies for Children and Adults.

Recruitment and retention remains an ongoing business-critical area and the service is well supported by a dedicated HR resource. The local authority has continued to adopt a 'grow your own' approach and benefits from a committed workforce; it is fortunate to have a skill mix that includes experienced social workers. The skill and experience of operational managers is a recognised area for development.

The local authority's investment in outcome-focused practice training, across adult and children services, is helping to foster the necessary change in ethos and the way staff approach their work with people.

It is positive that the local authority has refreshed its mental capacity training to improve practitioners' awareness and understanding of their significant professional responsibility when working with some of the most potentially vulnerable people and to prepare for the implementation of the Mental Capacity [Amendment] Act 2019 and Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS).

We noted that new electronic safeguarding templates provide helpful prompts to capture outcomes for adults at risk and we saw some good examples of social workers working with and advocating on behalf of the individual. However, while there are increasing opportunities for people to have their voices heard, a more consistent use of documentation is needed.

Our focused activity in children's services evidenced a children's rights culture. We saw examples of the efforts made to maintain greater continuity of social work relationships. Parents subject to pre proceedings told us that they appreciated the efforts made by professionals to work 'with them' and said this 'made the difference'.

Social Services officers working with corporate colleagues, continue to consolidate arrangements in relation to the Welsh language and Welsh Language Standards in line with the Welsh Government's Strategic Framework, 'More Than Just Words'. CIW's work in the local authority confirmed that the electronic templates capture people's preferred language and these arrangements are reported through the local authority's performance framework.

CIW's continued monitoring of the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) has identified that the local authority, in common with many others in Wales, needs 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**

Elected members endorsed three-year plans for both adult and children services which took effect from April 2019.

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council has continued to progress its 'Building Safe and Resilient Communities' agenda, working in close partnership with relevant others to establish an Asset Based Community Development programme. During our older adults inspection we heard from people who had benefitted from the support provided by local authority coordinators to access community activities, and from professionals who referred to the service, all of whom valued the resource; this is key to promoting independence and reducing social isolation.

The co-location of the Adult Service Gateway and the children and families Single Point of Contact (SPOC) has supported closer working between children and adults access arrangements. During our focused activity, we heard how the recent introduction of an integrated single point of contact risk report/referral form (across children and adult services) has raised awareness regarding the quality of information needed, to enable the local authority to make appropriate enquiries and early decisions.

The Safeguarding and Quality Review Team has effective links with the Commissioning Team and this helps drive safer commissioning and contract monitoring. Experienced safeguarding co-ordinators within the Safeguarding and Quality Review team have responsibility for the oversight and management of adult at risk enquiries and the local authority reports positive performance in relation to the completion of adult protection enquiries within seven days. However, the use of a chronology, as the record to detail the handling of the enquiry, did not always provide a sufficient analysis, which made it difficult to evaluate the quality of the subsequent decisions and resulting plans.

Children's services has continued to maintained its attention on early intervention and prevention services; it has worked hard to bring services into the local authority's children and young people services whilst consolidating its existing links with external services and partner agencies. Within the small sample of cases reviewed, we saw some evidence that preventative intervention is both attempted and successful and that appropriate step down

arrangements were in place. The local authority is still developing mechanisms to understand and assure themselves of the impact of their early help and family support interventions.

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 CIW wrote to all local authorities asking for information following the Public Accounts Committee report on care-experienced children, specifically recommendation 5 concerning the effectiveness and frequency of end of placement reviews. The local authority's response confirmed that they had an established range of mechanisms in place to help identify and prevent potential placement breakdown including the use of early placement stability as well as disruption meetings to inform planning.

## **Partnership**

Partnership arrangements at both local and regional level continue to develop and mature. Senior officers are increasingly able to demonstrate how the links between their different directorate responsibilities including health, housing and finance are supporting the social services agenda across the local authority. There is a wider understanding of the benefits of community-based prevention and the potential negative impact on people and budgets when service planning and responses are delayed or ineffective. Senior managers of partner agencies have told us about a more collaborative and inclusive environment.

During our adults services inspection, we identified the regional and local commitment to an optimal model of practice underpinned by closer integration with health. We saw evidence of the local authority progressing this agenda through the remodelling of services and its plans to establish co-located community multidisciplinary teams. More recently, it was noted that the local authority had completed improvement work with Swansea Bay University Health Board, to develop a clearer adult at risk pathway aimed at ensuring that the Neath Port Talbot Safeguarding Team was acknowledged as the lead for Adult at Risk Referrals.

The reorganisation of health board boundaries in April 2019 resulted in a change of regional footprint. The thorough preparation undertaken by the partners has acted to minimise potential disruption and the newly configured West Glamorgan region has taken the boundary changes as an opportunity to consolidate and innovate their partnership arrangements.

The local authority is a proactive member and contributor to the regional boards and aspects of the local authority's improvement and transformation agenda are being progressed through the priorities of the West Glamorgan Regional Partnership Board and the work of the Regional Safeguarding Board.

## **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 current children services. The current thematic inspection 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 expect to publish the older person 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 provides a positive 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