

Chris Humphrey
Director of Social Services
Newport City Council
Civic Centre
Godfrey Road
Newport
NP20 4UR

Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Chris Humphrey,

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 Newport City 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, 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 strength 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.

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:

- focused activity (older adults services), 6 and 12 August 2019
- focused activity (children's services), 7 August 2019
- practice and performance meeting (adults services), 8 August 2019
- practice and performance meeting (children's services), 8 August 2019
- joint inspectorate review of child protection arrangements (JICPA), December 2019
- practice and performance meeting (adults services), 27 January 2020
- practice and performance meeting (children's services), 4 February 2020

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 2014 Act

Well-being

Across CIW performance evaluation activity, staff in children and adult services told us that there was a supportive culture in social services. They said management and senior management supported a healthy working culture, with strong support within teams, and across different disciplines. They were also positive about training opportunities. The children's services senior manager group is a relatively newly established group, but is coherent and visible across the workforce. During the JICPA we found children's services senior managers communicated effectively with their staff, there was a supportive, open and non-blaming culture set by the head of service. This means practitioners feel 'safe', with sharing of risk decisions.

The current head of adults services has been acting up as statutory director of social services since November 2019, this has been extended given the current corona virus circumstances. Staffing level in Newport City Council is reasonable but there are some concerns in relation to recruitment and minimal interest as applications are low. Domiciliary care recruitment remains a challenge. The local authority's approach to Approved Mental Health Practitioners (AMHP) recruitment is good, with three or four staff supported each year to achieve the qualification, but these staff can be lost as demand for the role is high.

CIW focused activity for older people (over the age of 65) centred upon people who had stayed at home as a result of an intervention from integrated services and who had a care and support plan. Overall, we found that the promotion of independence and personal outcomes were considered in the planning and delivery of services within the local authority. The service is responsive to changing circumstances with a use of a range of services in securing people's well-being. We identified assessment of peoples' needs as an area requiring further development; more depth to the analysis of strengths, barriers and risk would improve these.

CIW focused activity work in children's services reflected a high complexity of young people at risk of exploitation in Newport. This represented significant challenges for professionals in keeping children and young people safe, however, overall we found that risk assessment process for Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) was in place and was understood by staff. The JICPA was a joint inspectorate inspection of the multi-agency response to abuse and neglect in Newport in December 2019. This inspection included an evaluation of how local services responded to child exploitation.

Professionals we spoke to were highly committed, motivated and demonstrated a good understanding of the nature of work. Within the files sampled, we however saw significant delays in holding child criminal exploitation strategy meetings. This means there are delays in conducting a multi-agency risk assessment. We found missing children strategy meetings were not convened in line with All Wales Guidance. The local partnership could not therefore be reassured that for missing children an assessment of risk and safety planning is robust. Inspectors concluded the response to section 47 enquiries was varied, some investigations were well-managed and had appropriate supervisory oversight. There were good examples also of joint-working with investigative and safeguarding considerations clearly identified and addressed.

People

In older people focused activity we received varied responses in relation to carers needs being fully recognised and met, but overall, people spoken with were satisfied with the care and support received. People felt their views were listened to and responded to.

In children's services whilst we recognised social work practice to positively engage with children we did not find this reflected adequately in documentation. "What Matters" conversations were not always evidenced so the voice of children and families was poorly represented. Assessments were not concise and lacked analysis. We saw several cases where there was a clear indication (through multiple recent re-referrals) children and families were in need of care and support but their situation was not progressed appropriately.

There is low demand in Newport City Council for Welsh language services. The Council are compliant with the Welsh language offer and there are Welsh speaking social services staff able to support the needs of service users. CIW performance evaluation has confirmed the Welsh language Active Offer is embedded within the Information, Advice and Assessment process, in both children and adult services.

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 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.

In the local authority there has been considerable focus on Best Interest Assessors (BIA) in readiness for Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS). Service managers are currently the signatories, the regional team will coordinate the BIA and Section 12 doctors. The local authority has expressed concern in relation to the impact of the new system, notably for providers given expectations. DoLS remain on the corporate risk register due to the demand and backlog.

Prevention

The Home First service has made good progress in 2019-2020, in February 2020 the service had been supporting up to 40 people per week to leave hospital without admission.

Newport City Council has been working on placement sufficiency in the last few years, there are five registered children's care homes in Newport with plans to register two further homes. It is positive that the Council has responded to the national paucity of placements for children and young people with complex needs. One home, has two non-compliance notices issued following an inspection earlier this year, one relating to safeguarding. Given the complexity and mix of the young people placed across the homes, keeping them safe is a challenge for staff. CIW has concerns about the capacity of staff to manage high risk at the homes. This is an area CIW will require further assurances in 2020-2021.

There is a comprehensive prevention offer in Newport, both at youth justice level and children's services. The JICPA inspection found strong support in this area from the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner. Partner agencies (both statutory and 3rd sector providers such as St. Giles, Barnardo's and Newport Live) are working to a shared ethos of safeguarding children and young people at different levels of vulnerability.

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.

Newport City Council reported that planned placements meetings are held before a child moves. For urgent moves, a planning meeting takes place as soon as possible which as the Council comment, while not ideal, does bring together key information. The Brighter Futures panel considers all the children where placements are new or escalating challenges. This includes consideration of additional support and input for children and/or carers. All moves to residential care, Independent Fostering Agencies and placement breakdowns are discussed at Brighter Futures.

Partnerships

JICPA Inspectors found the police and local authority have worked together to co-locate personnel at the safeguarding hub. This enables shared information and improved and timelier decision making. The arrangement would be enhanced with an improved interface between the hub and health and education representatives. At the safeguarding hub we saw evidence of strategy discussions taking place and Section 47 enquiries being commenced promptly. During the inspection, we had an opportunity to observe a hub

meeting where agency information was shared and referrals managed, we found this to be an effective process. Inspectors also observed a multi-agency exploitation meeting where there was good representation of professionals and evidence of multi-agency collaboration regarding the new exploitation measurement tool. Although this is currently being tested via a pilot, early indications show this gives the opportunity for information sharing and collectively agreeing the level of risk.

During our focused activity work in summer 2019 we identified an issue about the quality of communication between the Breaking the Cycle team and children's services – particularly about the sharing of information following de-brief conversations with young people. We also found there was a backlog of Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF's) being completed in a timely manner by that team upon receipt of police referrals. Concerns about this service were confirmed during the JICPA, and this regional service has now disaggregated in to individual Gwent local authority services. Newport City Council recognise it is important that this transition is managed with diligence given this is such an integral area of child protection practice.

In older people services we saw a good range of services available to meet individual outcomes, with good multi-disciplinary communication.

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 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 in Newport. 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', written in a cursive style.

Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn