

Alison Bulman
Director of Social Services
Powys County Council
Powys County Hall
Llandrindod Wells
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Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Alison Bulman,

Care Inspectorate Wales 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 review
- outline our forward work programme

This letter summarises our review of Powys 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.

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.

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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 Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and our increasingly collaborative and strengths based approach to supporting improvement.

We undertook an inspection of adult services in January 2018 and a follow up inspection of children's services in October 2018. Due to the serious/significant concerns arising from these inspections, CIW has maintained Powys County Council under formal monitoring arrangements. The content of this letter is informed by the findings of our monitoring and other performance evaluation activities undertaken during the course of the year:

- monitoring activity – information, advice and assistance service – adult services - May 2019
- monitoring activity – support for care leavers – children's services – June 2019
- monitoring activity – care and support – adult services - September 2019
- monitoring activity – case management of children subject to (pre) care proceedings – November 2019
- meeting to discuss LA self-evaluation on promotion of independence for older people - November 2019
- monitoring activity – reablement – adult services - January 2020
- joint inspection of Newtown Community Mental Health Team – February 2020
- ten meetings with heads of service
- interim assurance review meeting – adult services – March 2020

We agreed to postpone the planned multi-agency improvement conference due to the need for senior managers to focus on the response to COVID-19. The interim assurance review provided the opportunity for senior managers to make us aware of progress made in adult services and for CIW to be informed of any significant areas of concern.

During the course of the year we have been in discussions with you during all of the activity listed above and our annual performance letter is a reflection of our ongoing findings which we have shared with you.

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

Well-being

There have been significant developments and improvements in corporate governance in Powys County Council during 2019 with the appointment of a permanent chief executive and key senior staff. Elected members are informed through improved council procedures, improved performance information and the operation of the Improvement and Assurance Board. There is a stable senior leadership team in social services, with the head of adult services having been in post for one year.

Senior managers outlined significant improvements in capacity in domiciliary care at the interim assurance review meeting. These are recent developments as monitoring throughout the year evidenced there were some hard to cover areas in Powys with significant shortfall in capacity. Several agencies withdrew from the local authority, although senior managers maintained this was not the cause of deficits in capacity as they inform us they successfully re-provisioned these care packages. Some people did not receive the care they needed in a timely way. Some people were delayed in leaving hospital or moved into a care home due to the lack of homecare. Senior managers

undertook several initiatives to increase capacity in the market and we understand the current improvement is due to the cumulative impact of these.

Historically there were large numbers of adults in Powys who did not receive a review of their care and support plan within the required 12 month timeframe. This was discussed on several occasions with the Head of Service who described considerable efforts by practitioners to address this throughout the year. We understand this backlog has been effectively addressed and senior managers have plans for ongoing management and oversight of this process to prevent a build-up of delay in future. Very recently, the local authority has questioned their own figures and has developed a new data report on timeliness.

Significant improvements were required in how Powys County Council supported young people leaving the care system. When we undertook monitoring activity in June 2019, we found relationship-based working, a new structure and increased management support for personal advisors. Clarity and detail in pathway planning remained an area for improvement. All young people leaving care can receive support up to the age of 25 years and some progress had been made in developing accommodation options and apprenticeship / traineeship opportunities.

Senior managers continue to review placement quality and sufficiency for care experienced children and we acknowledge this is a challenge for all Welsh local authorities. In February 2020, one third of children were placed outside of Powys County Council. The local authority has plans to increase its own care home accommodation for children. Senior managers have placed a small number of young people in unregulated care settings in the year, when particular challenges arose.

Improvements were noted in November 2019 when we undertook activity to monitor case management and decision-making for children subject to the public law outline. We found a new level of structure and oversight, including weekly legal tracking meetings. The oversight and escalation function of the independent reviewing officer had been strengthened, in part due to a new manager post.

Children's services has adopted a particular social work model that aligns with the principles of the 2014 Act. We have not evaluated the impact of this due to the outbreak of COVID-19. We are aware of training undertaken and the strategic planning for roll out of the model.

Quality assurance frameworks have developed across adult and children's services. While targets for monthly case file audits are not always reached, quality assurance remains an area of significant improvement. Powys County Council has continued to develop its range of performance information that drives individual, operational and strategic decision-making. Powys County Council is at the forefront of Welsh local authorities with regard to the range of performance management available.

We have previously identified significant deficits in multi-agency systems and processes to safeguard young people at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE). We are aware of the commitment of senior managers to address these matters and the difficulties in recruitment to a key post. A new safeguarding team manager was appointed and we are assured of increased rigour in the oversight of safeguarding support for children at risk of CSE, which we will review in future activity.

People

Powys County Council has removed a cap on the maximum amount that can be paid for care via direct payments. The local authority is committed to exploring choice and control with individuals as a first option to deliver meaningful outcomes. People may also choose commissioned services and this choice has sometimes been impacted by insufficient domiciliary care capacity in parts of the county.

Recruitment remains a challenge for Powys County Council, particularly in children's services. We are aware of considerable efforts to recruit and retain staff, including financial incentives and plans to explore international recruitment. Some new and innovative posts have been filled and brought capacity and specialist support to practitioners.

We have seen evidence of the impact of training to align practice with the principles of the 2014 Act in children's and adult services. We generally found people are treated with dignity and respect by social care practitioners. There was an improving picture of assessments and care and support plans based on people's strengths and identified personal outcomes.

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. We understand the local authority has carried out an internal audit and developed an action plan in response to this. Our joint national report on DoLS will be issued in due course.

Prevention

The inspection of adults services in 2018 found the 'front door' was performing very poorly. Our visit in May 2019 found the service remodelled and improved, albeit with further improvements to be made. In March 2020, we were informed of further developments. Telephone calls are much more likely to be answered in a reasonable time. Investment in staff training and additional staff resource means proportionate assessments are undertaken and many more people can be helped with a single telephone call. Evidence was provided of improved timeliness of allocation to adult teams.

When we monitored the reablement service in January 2020, we found assessments showed good understanding of the person and care and support plans were reviewed to reflect changing needs.

Children's services had insufficient and ineffective early help services for children until these were significantly remodelled in 2019. There is now an Early Help service and a dedicated intervention and prevention service to provide direct support to families which includes an edge of care service. This has been a significant investment for Powys County Council, which aligns it with other local authorities and the principles of the 2014 Act. We postponed our plan to evaluate these services in April, due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

During 2018 our national 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 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. The response from Powys County Council indicated it was reviewing its disruption meeting policy to embed the use of disruption reviews. The local authority informed us it did not routinely gather data on placement breakdowns and did not have an established process for learning from these. There was an intention is to evaluate the effectiveness of disruption reviews in preventing placement breakdowns.

The local authority does now produce monthly data on placement moves, reviewed by senior management and the Corporate Parenting Board. We are informed the revised Disruption Policy invokes a meeting after the unplanned end of a placement. The Independent Reviewing Officer will chair a Stability Meeting when there is instability in a placement.

Partnerships

Senior managers in Powys County Council are now more active participants in the regional safeguarding board. There is increased collaborative working between the local authority and Powys Teaching Health Board.

Senior managers had acknowledged for some time that discharge arrangements and reablement services required improvement. We undertook monitoring work in January 2020, which found indications of improved arrangements for patient pathways across health and social care. In March 2020, we were assured by senior managers these new arrangements were being embedded and relevant patient flow meetings were in place. These were timely improvements given the outbreak of COVID-19. We were assured discharges from community hospitals were considered at the earliest opportunity. Delayed transfers of care had substantially reduced.

In children's services, we noted improvements in access for care leavers to housing, which had ended the pre-existing requirement for care-experienced children to present as homeless. We will seek re assurance Powys County Council continues to fulfil its duties as a corporate parent in this regard.

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 peoples 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 Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (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,



Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn