

Gio Isingrini
Director of Social Services
Rhonda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions Cambrian Park
Tonypandy
CF40 2XX

Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Gio Isingrini,

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 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough 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, in many instances 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 children's services, focusing on support for disabled children, in December 2019
- focused activity with regard to support for carers in March 2020
- focused activity with regard to support for care leavers in March 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 you.

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

Well-being

There is strong corporate support for social services in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council. The local authority had plans to change the delivery model for support for disabled children prior to our inspection of this service and the final model will address areas for improvement we identified. These included greater support for siblings of disabled children and increased assessment of parent carers. We were not confident practitioners and managers were promoting the legal rights of parents to assessment of their needs for support.

We found assessments of disabled children and care leavers could be improved by focussing more on the strengths of the child, and their family where appropriate, and the wishes and feelings of the child. Assessments should more clearly identify the personal outcomes the child or young person wishes to achieve. Young care leavers valued their personal advisors; but there were resource pressures on this service. Reviews of young people's pathway plans should be more consistently timely and thorough and ensure updates from relevant agencies are included.

The local authority has begun to introduce innovative practice in relation to support for carers of adults in response to our inspection of services for older adults in March 2019. In March 2020, we could see proactive efforts to support those caring for people in the community through 'carers' conversations' which can form the basis of assessments for support. At the time of our visit, senior managers were about to evaluate the impact of the new approach; our findings were positive.

The local authority continues to review care packages for adults where two care workers are delivering domiciliary care. The local authority has achieved considerable success in identifying additional equipment or techniques to allow a single care worker to deliver the same level of care. This has resulted in promoting people's independence as well as freeing up capacity to care for other people, where demand is high. Senior managers continue to review their care home provision and plan to further reduce capacity while establishing more extra care facilities.

The local authority has tried to meet demand for care placements for children with very complex needs and has registered a care home for emergency placements. The local authority is endeavouring to create a therapeutic approach within its placements and has trained staff accordingly. The therapeutic team, comprising psychologists and family therapists, supports children receiving early intervention and prevention services as well as care experienced children. The local authority has also been innovative in employing four practitioners to undertake life story work using digital technology and a proactive model of work.

As with all local authorities, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council wishes to reduce the number of children in care where safe to do so. A recent rise was due to an increase in babies being made subject to Care Orders and senior managers were ensuring vulnerable women were receiving the support they need in pregnancy.

People

Parents were finding it difficult to employ personal assistants for their disabled children. Senior managers in children's and adult services were planning to review how direct payments are promoted and used across Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council.

The local authority has improved its provision of advocacy services for older people since our inspection last year. We identified take-up of advocacy services for disabled children as an area for improvement and, generally, more could be done to ensure the voice of the child is central to decision making.

The local authority has consulted people about the development of its services. Staff have undertaken structured engagement with carers to understand their views about the carers' assessment format and process. This has influenced a new approach. Managers have also undertaken an extensive staff consultation exercise this year about remodelling teams to support disabled children.

We found positive and committed staff when we visited children's services this year. Recruitment remains a challenge and recent improvements to salaries and other financial benefits for some staff has led to a more comprehensive review across the wider workforce. Practitioners supporting disabled children would benefit from greater access to specialist training.

The disabled children's team and 16+ team would benefit from increased management oversight and quality assurance. A systemic review of capacity, allocation practice and use of resources may increase efficiencies in the 16+ team.

We were not confident young people leaving care were receiving the Active Offer of support through the Welsh language. This may impact on how young Welsh speakers perceive the value placed on their language and their right to choose how to receive their support.

The local authority must comply with its legal duty and re-establish a disability register.

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.

Prevention

During our inspection of children's services, we noted an improved initial response to enquiries and referrals at the 'front door'.

The Children with Additional Needs Service (CANS) delivered support focused on family strengths and personal outcomes for disabled children and their families. We were pleased to note a range of support groups and services for carers of disabled children. A planned review of commissioned services should ensure provision most meets the needs of families and will map future demand and help shape the market. The 'sitting' service was clearly valued and senior managers were planning to develop alternative approaches to the more traditional model of respite care/short breaks.

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 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. We have been informed of the local authority's placement stability policy that requires robust pre-placement planning and specific actions should a placement be at risk of breakdown. This may include the child looked after review being brought forward or a specific placement stability meeting being convened. An end of placement review appears to be an optional but not mandated element of this policy.

Partnerships

The multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) is well established and evidences good joint working arrangements. Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council is a strong and committed partner to the regional safeguarding board and other regional fora. The local authority entered into new regional working arrangements in April 2019 due to re-alignment of health board boundaries. There was considerable work to establish new operational and strategic partnerships across Bridgend County Borough Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB). Senior managers in the local authority wished to use the opportunity to strengthen and build on joint working arrangements with the health board.

The local authority and health board need to reach greater resolution on eligibility for continuing care arrangements for children with complex needs. This is an outstanding challenge that results in intra-agency discussions, which can be time consuming. It is important to note, however, that we did not see this impact on provision of services for children.

The local authority is establishing an emotional well-being service with CTMUHB, which is a positive example of joined up working that is designed to meet the needs of children in the region.

An improved offer to care leavers may be achieved by a more pro-active approach from the local authority's housing department.

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's services thematic inspection the focus is on prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. Due to the current emergency 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. 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 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