

Keith Rutherford
Chief Officer Social Care and Housing
Torfaen County Borough Council
Civic Centre
Pontypool
Torfaen
NP4 6YB

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Dear Keith Rutherford,

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 Torfaen County Borough Council's performance in carrying out its statutory social services functions from April 2019 - March 2020.

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.

Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru (AGC)
Swyddfa Llywodraeth Cymru
Sarn Mynach
Cyffordd Llandudno
LL31 9RZ
www.arolygiaethgofal.cymru

☎ 0300 790 0126
✉ ciw@gov.wales

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)
Welsh Government Office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ
www.careinspectorate.wales

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 adults services October 2019
- disabled children's inspection February 2020
- focused activity – adults services April 2019
- focused activity – children's services September 2019
- performance and practice review meetings September & November 2019
- performance review meeting March 2020
- audit wales assurance & risk assessment review 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 the 2014 Act

Well-being

Torfaen County Borough Council continues to work under the principles of the 2014 Act ensuring the principles of strength based assessments, positive risk taking and what matters conversation underpin practice. The ongoing development of structures to scrutinise performance at different levels within adult and children's services is providing the senior management team with a comprehensive overview of performance. This information is being used proactively to inform further improvements in services along with learning from neighbouring local authorities in Gwent and other Welsh local authorities. We found practice that was focusing services on delivering the outcomes sought by people, this showed a significant change of culture in relation to practice and the planning, commissioning, and delivery of services

Within adults services patch-based teams have been developed. Teams actively strive to understand what matters to people to identify personal outcomes and support people's self-determination. During CIW's older people thematic inspection we found evidence of that the local authority had also worked to strengthen its relationships with other professionals and local communities to deliver its preventative agenda.

Transformation of children's services continues with the 'Demand and Early Intervention Strategy' embedding a preventative approach facilitated by the recruitment of a manager to lead on this. The local authority understand change will not happen overnight, but the laying of foundations has begun with aligning early intervention and services with statutory provision in order to ensure that service users who are in need, receive the right support at the right time.

We saw how the development of the 'front door' to a Multi-Agency Support and Safeguarding Hub (MASSH) has started to change practice with the correct level of support being offered to children and families.

Throughout 2018-2019, the local authority has continued to manage the challenges around its looked after children population as part of the programme for transforming children's

services a review and development of the 'Threshold for Need' is taking place. This work will include developing a risk management/strengths-based model of practice.

Despite the ongoing work between the local authority and Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) to identify suitable placements that can meet the complex needs of children and young people, placements in unregistered settings continue to be made. However, this was limited to two specific placements where there were identified plans in place to mitigate against the unregistered status and to progress to registered. This is an area which will require stringent management oversight as the authority needs to understand and assure itself that all avenues are being explored to avoid the use of such unregistered placements. Improved early contingency planning mechanisms are needed to respond to early placement pressures and minimise potential placement disruption.

Our focused activity in children's services looked at the reviewing process for looked after children. Children and families were mainly positive regarding the consistency of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and we saw evidence of good communication between IROs and social workers/managers. However, some areas for improvement include senior managers reassuring themselves that they are receiving comprehensive performance information regarding the review process. The voice of the child was not always evident in the record of the review and this is an area that needs to be strengthened. IROs should also enable children to have a voice in the review process.

Through the adults inspection we saw how the work of Community Connectors has become an integral part of the wider Building Resilient Communities Team. This provides a quicker response to individuals and mitigates the perceived need to visit the GP for non-clinical interventions or access statutory services.

The local authority must ensure all elected members receive training on safeguarding and child protection issues and the local authority's corporate policy on safeguarding. This is an area CIW will monitor over the next twelve months.

People

Torfaen County Borough Council seeks and uses citizen feedback to inform and improve its services. At a strategic level, data from the Population Needs Assessment coupled with the data available from the Future Trends Report informs the local authority's thinking and direction for the future. Within adults' day services the use of conversations with service users and carers has better shaped and delivered services for people with learning or physical disabilities, delivering daily activities and interventions that have had a positive impact on their lives. Children's services have worked with Young Carers Service, and Care Leavers; seeking their views on developing and implementing service delivery.

A challenge faced by adult services has been the lack of take up of carers' assessments. We found further work is needed to promote carers' assessments and this had been recognised by the local authority in its own self-assessment. The local authority will need to look at how it promotes the offer of carers' assessments and have in place a system to record data that can be analysed and used to develop practice in line with the expectations set out in the 2014 Act.

Advocacy services have been strengthened through the recent launch of the Gwent Access to Advocacy (GATA) service with work being undertaken by the regional transformation team and Golden Thread Advocacy Partnership to ensure effective advocacy services across the region

Through its attendance at 'Mwy Na Geiriau' group, the local authority is able to share learning and best practice with colleagues from other local authorities and the local health board. It further promotes the 'More than Just Words' action plan through gaining an understanding of Welsh language requirements of service users placed in residential and nursing care, and increasing the ability for staff to access training. As part of the adults inspection process we found offers of assessments being made through the medium of Welsh.

During our focused activity, we found staff spoke confidently about their use of the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) as part of their daily practice. We found mental capacity assessments to be well structured and generally recorded verbatim, capturing the voice of the person. This provided clear rationale and evidence to inform decision making.

As part of a regional approach the local authority is developing its process for implementing the Liberty Protection safeguards which will replace the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS). We continue to monitor the implementation of 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. A regional risk assessment matrix is used to prioritise cases and mitigate any negative impact on individuals. Our joint national report on DoLS will be issued in due course.

Prevention

The successful transfer of 'Families First' into children's services has strengthened social work support and partnership support to resource early intervention at referral stage. Family Focus Teams continue to deliver intensive support to children and families, bolstered by the Rapid Response Team. Work continues with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) to develop a shared navigation pathway for children who require Continuing Health Care.

Closer working with ABUHB and other stakeholders has been evidenced by improving and expanding multi-agency care and multidisciplinary working to reduce delay in transfer of care. This reduction has also been achieved by the patch-based teams working across the local authority; this was evident during the adult inspection.

Torfaen County Borough Council has experienced difficulty in commissioning domiciliary care packages. This has had a negative impact on people living at home and those who were waiting to be discharged from hospital. During the adults services inspection, care providers and staff described how the local authority was trying to address the number of unallocated care packages, through working with providers. In addition, we were told of the work being undertaken with Coleg Gwent to improve uptake and training for health and social care students to promote a career pathway within the care sector.

The local authority has undertaken work with ABUHB to develop some new initiatives to improve outcomes for people in Torfaen. This includes developing of an integrated

occupational therapy service and establishing some local clinics to avoid people having to travel to hospitals.

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. The local authority has reviewed its placement disruption policy and rebranded it as the placement stability policy in recognition that prevention of disruption commences at the onset of placement and offering a different focus.

Partnerships

We found during our work with the Torfaen County Borough Council this year, effective partnership working in place to commission and deliver fully integrated, high quality, sustainable outcomes for people. Within the adult inspection we found building relationships with partners was crucial in enabling partner agencies to become fully involved in the improvement agenda. Domiciliary providers spoke of developing a good understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities, enabling them to work together with the local authority on developing new ways of delivering care to support people to remain in the community.

We saw how the 'Home First' partnership initiative to prevent admissions to hospital had effectively lowered the admission rates for people being admitted to hospital. The scheme enabled people to be discharged home earlier and prevented admission and re-admissions. We saw within assessments appropriate care and support being implemented to meet personal outcomes.

A positive development found was the Domiciliary Care Strategy aimed at bringing about improvements in services for both in house and external agencies. This strategy has a number of strands which will include an increase in the in-house service from 10% to 14%. In addition, £500k has been allocated from the Integrated Care Fund to support innovative ways across the local authorities and independent sector to address some of the pressures in domiciliary care. The local authority are also supporting the third sector to access Welsh Government Funding.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2020-2021

Our scheduled thematic inspection programme for 2019-2020 focused on prevention and promoting independence for older adults living in the community, and for the 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 adults 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 adults 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



Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn