

Alison Bulman
Director of Social Services
Powys County Council
Powys County Hall
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29 October 2020

Dear Alison Bulman,

RE: Care Inspectorate Wales - Performance Evaluation Inspection Powys County Council Social Services

This letter summarises the findings of our performance evaluation inspection on the 14 September to 18 September 2020. The purpose of this inspection was primarily to review how well local authority social services continue to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being. We considered the safety of services, safety and well-being of people who work in services, and safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services.

We focused our key lines of enquiry within the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and have recorded our judgements and findings aligned to these: People - Voice and Control, Prevention, Well-Being, Partnerships and Integration.

Overview

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) identified the local authority has made significant progress since our last inspections in October 2018 (Children's Services) and January 2018 (Adult Social Care). Areas of strength we seen in leadership and management, partnership working and early intervention and prevention in Children's services.

People – voice and control

People in Powys can be assured the local authority is committed to enabling people to have their voices heard and ensuring they receive the care and support they need. Work is required to support continued improvement and embed good practice across all service areas.

Prevention

There is improved communication between local authority officers and council members. Lines of accountability and a fresh determination to learn have helped embed a collective

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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.

corporate willingness to focus on prevention as a means of ensuring communities and services become sustainable for the future.

Well-being

Senior managers and lead members have introduced a new culture of expectation and standards in social care in Powys. The local authority is aware of the challenges this presents and is working hard with all stakeholders to support the safety and well-being of people who work in services, and the safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services.

Partnerships and Integration

The local authority must continue to progress and reflect on the importance of effective leadership and governance in ensuring it succeeds in delivering upon its statutory responsibilities and functions.

Summary of findings and priorities for improvement:

People - voice and control – We asked: How well is the local authority ensuring people, carers and practitioners are having their voices heard, making informed choices, and maintaining control over their lives. While also balancing the recommendations and requirements made by Public Health Wales and Welsh Government to limit the spread of COVID-19?

Significant work undertaken during the year to review and create a new single point of contact for both adults and children's services has resulted in some marked improvements. The adult services information support team (ASSIST) is now functioning more efficiently, with clear written guidance to support its work. In both children's and adults services we saw examples of people appropriately offered information, advice and assistance allowing them to make informed decisions and choices in a timely manner or referred on to others teams for assessment and support.

Adults who are at risk of abuse receive an improved response from the Safeguarding Team. Referrals with safeguarding implications were appropriately forwarded to the Safeguarding Team who dealt with them in an appropriate and timely manner. Safeguarding is a key statutory duty the local authority must continue to develop and support. Improved reporting to regional safeguarding boards must be sustained.

Replies to CIW staff survey suggests work is required to ensure service responses and transfers of work between teams is not unduly delayed by complicated process. Managers are continuing to monitor how many contacts are responded to appropriately and identify where improvements are required (failure demand). Managers must ensure practice is maintained when posts filled by adult staff seconded to assist during COVID-19 from other teams in the local authority return to their usual duties. We noted an adult team manager post remains unfilled in a service crucial to ensuring people receive timely support and referral into services to support the outcomes they want to achieve.

There is wide variation in quality of mental capacity assessments undertaken across Powys, ranging from excellent to poor. The best provide clear insight into people's individual circumstances and their ability to understand, retain and use key information to make informed decisions. Others lack clarity of purpose and detail, contain inconsistencies

and were not fit for purpose. Senior managers are aware of these issues and are reviewing professional practice in line with Mental Capacity Act 2005 to drive up standards and ensure people's voices are heard at times when they are most vulnerable.

Variation in capturing and recording the views of people who need care and support and carers who need support, occasionally leads to lack of clarity in response. Managers need to ensure people have their voices heard and recorded. At times, we found the views of families and carers took precedence over the voice of the service user. Managers must ensure both are offered assessments in their own right, either individually or together.

The local authority recognises the importance of delivering a service in the language of choice. We found assessments being undertaken through the medium of Welsh. We also were informed of direct work sessions being undertaken with young people through the medium of Welsh.

The local authority's investment in the professional development of its workforce, particularly in introducing a systemic model of practice in children's services, shared with partners, is delivering positive results for children and families and delivering shared understanding of practice between agencies and families.

Safely reducing the number of children looked after is recognised as a priority by the local authority. The restructure of children's services to include early help, intervention and preventative services along with a Signs of Safety approach is enabling social workers and support staff to maintain a strength based focus when engaging with young people and families.

Senior officers have a high level of skills and professional knowledge with a robust understanding of relevant legislation, social care professional practice and workflow management. By developing shared responsibility, oversight of service delivery and a clear sense of direction, it has created an environment in which social work can flourish.

The current complaint system is working adequately. The local authority is committed to fostering an environment of collective responsibility which seeks to learn from complaints and compliments. This is enhancing their ability to learn in a no blame environment.

Prevention - We asked: To what extent is the local authority successful in promoting prevention and reducing need for increased or formal support from statutory agencies?

The number of older adults waiting for hospital discharge has reduced significantly from previous years. Across Wales this has been supported through the creation of surge capacity in response to COVID-19.

Operational health and social care patient workflow meetings aim to ensure people can leave hospital as soon as they are medically fit to do so. Managers should consider whether improved preparation with fewer people attending meetings could achieve the same result using fewer resources. Learning from recent complaints has highlighted the importance of good communication and engagement with families in discharge planning.

Recently reduced waiting lists for occupational therapy assessments are once again increasing as lock down eases and new referrals rise above previous rates. Managers should use workflow data to ensure effective management of waiting lists limits the

numbers of people who lose physical or mental capability while waiting for services to begin.

Some older people in Powys are moving into care homes because the support they need is not available in the community. At times, the support they need is domiciliary care to assist with washing and dressing. At other times, people are lonely and do not have support to maintain their emotional well-being. While senior managers are confident in their development of micro-enterprises and the ability of the third sector in Powys to fill gaps in provision, practitioners do not express the same level of confidence in available resources. Work is required to ensure resources and services are developed in areas where there are deficits and reduce the number of people leaving their own homes and entering residential care for avoidable reasons.

Within the sample of case files we reviewed, we saw variation in quality of direct work with adults, children and families. We did see some evidence that preventative intervention is both attempted and successful, and that appropriate step down arrangements were in place. The local authority is committed to developing mechanisms to understand and assure themselves of the impact of their early help and family support interventions by embedding learning from targeted audit and quality assurance into practice. We saw evidence where audits had identified improved assessments of need, risk and work required to determine how positive outcomes are achieved for people.

The use of collaborative communication training for home care and reablement staff has meant positive outcomes have been achieved as workers adopted a more strengths based approach. Many practitioners have the skills and knowledge necessary to work to engage with families and feel supported to do so. There are many positive examples of workers engaging with people about what matters to them, seeking solutions to ensure children are raised by their families and older people can remain in their own homes with support.

Well-being - We asked: To what extent is the local authority promoting well-being, ensuring people maintain their safety and achieve positive outcomes that matter to them?

During the pandemic the local authority has sought to promote well-being of vulnerable people by creating additional capacity to support people at home. This has been achieved by utilising staff from across the local authority and from day care centres which have closed temporarily due to COVID-19. A new bridging team has been developed to respond to people within their own homes. The team provides domiciliary care to support discharge from hospital, bridge the gap between short-term interventions and longer term domiciliary care, ensuring that people's well-being is actively promoted and their safety is maintained.

People in Powys have access to a discharge to assess team, a dementia at home team and a reablement team. All teams are fully utilised and provide direct benefits to people who have a right to care and support and enable people to return home from hospital. . Despite improvements in the provision of domiciliary care, we were told of the inability to broker large packages of care in some instances .Some people feel the times at which care is provided is too rigid and this is not helpful when health conditions vary on a day to day basis. It was apparent some people may need a care call at night to help them remain living at home and these were not available. The local authority recognises the roles of the different teams would benefit from review to ensure resources are used to best effect and

target those with greatest need. We recognise considerable work has been undertaken in reducing the time from assessment to the start of a care package being the lowest for over 3 res.

There is some evidence of the reablement team supporting people who live with dementia to receive personal care. However, it is not clear the reablement team is systematically supporting people to live well with dementia and adapt how they do things, reduce impact of practical difficulties and maintain a sense of purpose. The local authority should evaluate the role and impact of the reablement service to ensure people who live with dementia are offered the same opportunities to maintain their independence.

The local authority recognise supporting its workforce is business critical and it has a clear focus on recruitment, retention and workforce development. All staff benefit from the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and careers. The local authority is ambitious to ensure people living in Powys benefit from longer-term and trusting relationships with skilled and supportive social workers who understand their needs and how best to work with them to reduce risk and improve their personal outcomes.

The local authority is committed to continued recruitment and retention of new staff and reducing the number of agency workers. It must remain mindful of the negative impact agency staff can have on team working and relationship building, in addition to the financial implications. The local authority's own data shows that while the use of agency staff fluctuates it has reduced by half in a year.

Senior managers provide operational practitioners with internal guidance and management support to make informed choices about maintaining their own health and well-being and the health of those they visit. Management support and supervision is highly regarded and practitioners welcome opportunities to be autonomous and creative.

Support for practitioners during the pandemic has included a range of information, quizzes, virtual singing and virtual lunches. Practitioners told us about the difference this support makes to their well-being.

Partnerships - We asked: To what extent is the local authority able to assure itself opportunities for partnership working are positively exploited to maximise person centred planning and ensure integrated service delivery and service sustainability?

Many practitioners in Powys engage positively with children, adults and families and encourage a partnership approach to enabling people to achieve what matters to them.

Continued investment in managing adverse childhood experiences and expansion to reconfigure the service to address all childhood exploitation has resulted in revised terms of reference on Child Exploitation to direct new ways of working.

This integrated approach will develop a consistency and a focus on learning and informing practice across the region.

Managers, social workers and partners maintain a strong focus on ensuring children are supported to remain with their family and/or experience permanence at the earliest opportunity. In order to reduce delays in legal processes, the local authority has developed a number of multi-agency forums to help ensure children do not experience unnecessary

delay in care and support or in achieving legal or emotional stability. People we interviewed identified more participation work is needed to ensure the views of children and young people and their families are captured and used to inform service developments

People receiving services identified the value of being able to develop positive professional relationships with their social worker; we saw good examples of this in the integrated disability team. Some parents of disabled children told us they feel part of a team, an equal partner, respected, and able to have their voices heard. Some parents and carers told us children's happiness is considered and practitioners spend time getting to know children.

Powys County Council is a learning authority. Senior managers and leaders clearly demonstrate a willingness and capacity to learn from good practice and innovation in other areas and use that knowledge to drive improvement in standards in Powys. The positive use of data, work flow monitoring and micro delivery initiatives are tangible examples of significant improvements deriving from senior managers learning from others, maintaining ownership and oversight of service delivery and providing direct leadership.

The focus on using professional knowledge and skills underpinned by workflow data and workflow monitoring is enabling senior officers to build a culture of confidence and expectation. There are clear written expectations of service quality and timeliness at all levels to ensure all interventions make a positive difference to the lives of people who have rights to information, advice, assistance, and care and support.

Managers must build on the positive working relationships between health and social care occupational therapy teams and seek to improve the Wales Community Care Information System (WCCIS) process to ensure where necessary occupational therapists can pass referrals to each other, avoid duplication and maintain improvements in timeliness of response.

Partnership working during COVID-19 has highlighted positive examples of improvements partners can realise through closer working. For example, practitioners told us there was an opportunity to replace the present pupil inclusion panel (PIP) with an integrated access to services panel which places greater emphasis on joint working and decision-making. Panel members ensure the purpose of panel is to promote access, prevent children reaching crisis, and placing unnecessary demand on services. Arrangements for "virtual" meetings has improved communication with partner agencies. However, further work is required to ensure disabled children and their families benefit from fully integrated services.

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. Joint working with third sector organisations in the development and delivery of care and support and preventative services during these unrepresented times is seen as a strength the authority wishes to build on and embed in its practice.

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 of working.

There are positive, improving, working relationships with the health board. We were told about clear escalation processes in relation to professional challenges. Newly developed partnership working, stability of workforce and creative relationships driving service improvements at pace with a shared vision.

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

Next steps:

We expect the areas of improvement we have identified to be included in the local authority's improvement plans.

We undertook the following activities to inform our findings and judgement:

- we reviewed documentation supplied in advance of our visit
- we spoke with more than 20 people, some people who are supported by services, their families and their carers.
- we reviewed 15 case files
- we held case tracking discussions on a further 14 case files
- we reviewed 9 safeguarding referrals
- we reviewed 12 mental capacity assessments
- we spoke with over 40 professional staff
- we held 3 focus groups

We would like to extend our thanks to all those who helped with the arrangements for this work and to those people and staff who spoke with us.

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Yours sincerely,



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Care Inspectorate Wales