

Performance Evaluation Inspection

Swansea Council Adult Services

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertook an inspection of adult services in Swansea Council between 29 April and 3 May 2024. The purpose of this inspection was to review the local authority's performance in exercising its social services duties and functions in line with legislation, on behalf of Welsh Ministers. We consider the quality standards in the Code of Practice in relation to the performance and improvement of social services in Wales and key lines of enquiry. We seek to answer the following questions aligned to the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (The 2014 Act):

People – voice and control

How well is the local authority ensuring all people are equal partners who have voice, choice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them?

How do professionals ensure people, including their families and carers, are treated with openness and honesty and understand the decisions that are made?

Prevention

To what extent is the local authority ensuring the need for care and support is minimised, and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best possible outcomes for people are achieved?

To what extent are adults provided with care and/or support in a timely manner?

How are waiting lists managed, to minimise the impact of these on people and their carers?

Well-being

To what extent is the local authority ensuring that people are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm?

How well are people supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own informed decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible?

Partnership

To what extent is the local authority able to assure themselves effective partnerships are in place to commission and deliver fully integrated, high quality, sustainable outcomes for people?

How well are people encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners?

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect people. The scope of the inspection included:

- Evaluation of the experience of adults at the point of the performance evaluation inspection
- Evaluation of the experience and outcomes people achieve through their contact with services
- Evidence of the local authority and partners having learnt lessons from recent experiences and plans for service developments and improvement
- Consideration of how the local authority manages opportunity and risk in its planning and delivery of social care at individual, operational and strategic levels

1. Summary

- 1.1 Like many local authorities in Wales, the current adult services context is one of persistently high levels of demand and increasing complexity of people's needs, in addition to workforce resilience challenges and budgetary pressures faced by the local authority. Leaders understand the needs of people in their area and provide good strategic direction to meet these needs and service demands. They have a good understanding of service strengths and areas for improvement. To address the pressures in adult services, the local authority has implemented a transformation programme. The local authority is currently working on the transformation programme in adult services established in 2023/2024. The overarching objectives of this programme align with the corporate plan 2023-2028.
- 1.2 The transformation programme is built around three fundamental themes, prevention and early help, promoting and enabling independence, and prioritising resources (demand management). The transformation programme has achieved progress in several areas. These include the development and implementation of delivery models within prevention services, the successful refocussing of the Assistive Technology strategy, advancement of the externally commissioned domiciliary care contract, and a comprehensive review of the structure of Assessment and Care Management teams.
- 1.3 This review and restructure of Assessment and Care Management teams is designed to enhance service delivery by redistributing responsibilities, which is expected to improve efficiency. The majority of practitioners shared an understanding of the ultimate outcomes that the restructuring aims to achieve, and a robust consultation exercise was carried out by the local authority. However, a few practitioners felt their views weren't adequately considered during the consultation, impacting morale. Leaders will now need to continue to collaborate and engage with staff to reassure them while the new approaches are implemented.
- 1.4 Notwithstanding the acknowledged challenges, the local authority has a clear understanding of market stability in its area and the needs of its population. It has implemented strategic plans in response to identified needs. This has been achieved by working in partnership with Swansea Bay University Health Board (SBUHB), other relevant regional partners, and citizens to develop services.
- 1.5 The local authority, providers, and third sector partners told us about the challenges of increasing demands on budgets and the difficulty in planning essential prevention services on short-term grant funding. Staff also told us about the challenges in supporting people to achieve their personal outcomes due to a lack of resources.

- 1.6** This financial landscape is underpinned by strong corporate and political support, yet leaders, practitioners, service providers, partners, and people are acutely aware of the financial realities and have vocalised how it is negatively influencing service delivery. The need to identify further efficiencies across services in the current climate presents a formidable challenge. It is imperative that the local authority continues to maintain regular and transparent communication with all stakeholders to keep everyone informed and help to alleviate any undue concerns.
- 1.7** Whilst many people experience delays in being assessed for care and support, once this is provided, assessments and care plans support creative approaches to promoting people's wellbeing. It was observed that some people experience a negative impact on their wellbeing during this waiting period. However, people's social care records reviewed, demonstrated appropriate prioritisation based on need and risk.
- 1.8** There are ongoing challenges related to the sickness absence rates among staff. This has had a variable impact upon teams. It is accepted that this is a contributing factor for waiting times for assessments and reviews.
- 1.9** The local authority has a committed workforce. Practitioners stated leaders are accessible, approachable, and supportive. 88% of respondents to our anonymous staff survey feel adequately supported by their managers, 72% reported that their workloads are manageable.
- 1.10** Recruitment and retention of social care practitioners is a national challenge across Wales. The local authority continues to work on strategies to support the continued recruitment and retention of staff. These include recruitment campaigns, wellbeing resources for staff teams and an apprenticeship programme.
- 1.11** The local authority demonstrates a robust commitment to coproduction. This commitment is strategic and operational, with a coproduction framework, charter, and governance groups in place. The focus on coproduction, and working in partnership with people and communities, evidences positive practice and aligns with the principles of the 2014 Act.

Key findings and evidence

We present our key findings and evidence below in line with the four principles of the 2014 Act.

2. People – Voice & Choice

Strengths

- 2.1 The collaborative communication model is embedded in the ethos of the local authority, empowering practitioners to support individuals in identifying and building on their own strengths and networks. This strengths-based model is well-understood and effectively translated, from strategic planning and training, into practice, as confirmed by the review of social care records, staff interviews and surveys, and discussions with people. **This is positive practice.**
- 2.2 Assessments and care and support plans are comprehensive and person-centred. They reflect people's needs and preferences, outline personal goals, and detail preferred methods of support. Evidence of people's involvement in decision-making was observed. We saw detailed biographies, evidencing 'what matters' to the person. **This is positive practice.**
- 2.3 Through the analysis of people's social care records, we found that overall people are treated as experts on their own needs and wherever possible are encouraged to voice their opinion on what matters to them. The use of methods such as scaling questions are utilised to benchmark and understand the lived experience, goals, and desired outcomes of people.
- 2.4 Every assessment reviewed contained reference to the active offer of the Welsh language. There is a dedicated phone line for those people wishing to communicate through the medium of Welsh.
- 2.5 Carers' assessments are appropriately offered. Carers told us they significantly benefitted from carers' assessments and provision of support. We heard about a wide range of innovative practical support to promote carer well-being including counselling, grants, direct payments provision, and short-term break arrangements. Partners told us how the local authority proactively worked in partnership with carers on coproduced outcomes.
- 2.6 The workforce benefits from an organisation that prioritises professional development. Leaders ensure a learning culture is continuously communicated and embedded in all systems and practices. This includes

promoting reflective practice, coaching, online resources, well-being offer and opportunity for further accredited academic study leading to qualifications. Practitioners told us about the embedded learning culture and the local authority's commitment to professional development. Evidence of the learning culture was found in the form of a staff practice handbook, which serves as a roadmap for social work professionals, outlining the systems and processes that underpin practice. The handbook is a culmination of best practice, standard operating procedures, and effective care pathways. **This is positive practice.**

- 2.7** Practitioners in adult services understand the importance of advocacy, both formal and informal. It is clearly considered, consistently offered, and suitably taken up. Providers told us: *“Swansea works co-productively with Your Voice Advocacy to improve methods of communication with our users and the quality of their experience in using services. This includes the conversion of documents and communications into easy-read format and regularly engaging with our users on how well service-providers are communicating.”*
- 2.8** People and professionals value the well-established direct payments service. It is utilised creatively to support people's well-being outcomes. We heard about the creative use of direct payments including pooling of direct payments within co-produced working groups where people work to pool their payments to achieve specific shared goals.
- 2.9** Within staff supervision records we found a consistent focus on staff well-being and personal development and training. 88% of respondents in the staff survey told us they receive regular supervision that supports them to reflect on their practice.

Areas for Improvement

- 2.10** People are sometimes supported through a duty system. This can be challenging for people as there is insufficient oversight of their circumstances, lack of continuity of support, and people have to re-tell their story. Practitioners told us that this duty-based support system often results in crisis intervention rather than the provision of preventative services. People told us they would prefer to have a named worker. **The local authority should continue to address waiting times and ensure a consistent and sufficient workforce to reduce the need for people to be supported by a duty system.**

2.11 While there exists a well-regarded direct payments service which is valued by both individuals and professionals, we heard about delays in the allocation of direct payments advisors, whose role it is to guide and support individuals in effectively using direct payments to meet their care or support needs. The local authority has responded to this challenge by recruiting an additional advisor. **The local authority should maintain its strategic focus in this area to ensure continued improvement and efficiency in service delivery.**

2.12 Of the 31 people who responded to our survey, 45% told us they felt listened to when contacting social services. 55% of the respondents stated that they either didn't feel listened to at all or only sometimes felt listened to. This suggests that there is room for improvement in how the local authority engages with and responds to people who contact them. **The local authority should ensure focus is maintained on improving how it engages with and responds to people who contact them.**

2.13 Some carers told us about delays in reviews of their care and support needs. **The local authority must ensure timely reviews to meet the needs of carers.**

3. Prevention

Strengths

3.1 Senior leaders ensure the local authority is strategically positioned to develop its preventative approach, with a clear vision and robust plans that prioritise the development of innovative delivery models. These models are designed to enhance coordination in prevention and early help, thereby expanding opportunities for individuals to transition to lower levels of care. The local authority is committed to reshaping and redesigning its services, with a particular emphasis on the development of preventative models.

3.2 The local authority's commitment to prevention is supported by a number of third-sector organisations. Swansea Council for Voluntary Services (SCVS) is one such organisation. As the umbrella organisation for voluntary activity across Swansea, SCVS plays a pivotal role in supporting, developing, and representing voluntary organisations, volunteers, and communities. They contribute to **positive practice** and enhance the local authority's preventative approaches.

- 3.3** The local authority is committed to fostering collaborative partnerships with third-sector organisations. Continuous efforts are made to strategically allocate resources that bolster early help and preventative support. Third-sector partners spoke passionately about their work with the local authority in facilitating the well-being outcomes of citizens.
- 3.4** There are examples of community support initiatives which are co-developed with third sector, which promote people's well-being. One such initiative matches individuals offering spare rooms with those seeking accommodation and willing to provide informal support, fostering resilience and well-being. It addresses key issues such as affordable housing, community safety, and care needs in innovative ways. **This is positive practice.**
- 3.5** The importance of timely hospital discharge is understood and remains a priority. The hospital team has developed strong relationships and streamlined processes to ensure the creation of safe discharge plans. We heard about the partnership working which facilitates and contributes to this process, as well as the integration measures that support it. There is collaborative working between the integrated therapies team, the hospital discharge team and the home care team, promoting an effective hospital discharge process.
- 3.6** Many teams in the local authority are structured to enable specific knowledge, expertise, and a multi-disciplinary approach. For example, the Mental Capacity Team, Safeguarding Team, Learning Disability Team, Community Mental Health Team, and Community Resource Team. Practitioners who work in these teams **shared positive reflections** on how these arrangements and commitments benefit the quality of support and services provided to people and their families.
- 3.7** We found the local authority's Tackling Poverty Service (TPS) primarily focuses on preventing the escalation of people's needs. This is achieved through various initiatives. The Welfare Rights and Financial Inclusion Team and local area co-ordination are **areas of positive practice** providing advice and support to people across Swansea. TPS also coordinates grant funding opportunities to local organisations and groups that support the people and communities of Swansea. These include the Household Support Grant, Direct Food Grant, Sustainable Food Partnerships, Swansea Spaces, and Men's Sheds.

Areas for Improvement

- 3.8** We heard of difficulties in contacting the Common Access Point (CAP). This results in prolonged phone response times and a lack of follow-up emails beyond the initial confirmation of receipt. Our survey data corroborates these findings, with 48% of respondents reporting difficulties in contacting Social Services. **Overcoming these issues is crucial for enhancing the service's effectiveness and the local authority must provide timely access to information, advice, and assistance.**
- 3.9** We saw that there are waiting lists in some service areas. This situation means that some people are not receiving the appropriate support at the right time. The persistent delays in the assessment of people's needs and care reviews are a concern. Senior staff assure us that regular monitoring calls are made to people who are waiting for assessment and review. Staff update people's priority for assessment using a red, amber, green risk rating. Red represents high-priority cases, amber denotes standard priority cases, and green applies to routine reviews with no issues or concerns. However, evidence of this monitoring was limited in the social care records we reviewed. This approach doesn't align with the local authority's commitment to preventative work, an issue they acknowledge and plan to address in their restructuring of teams. **The local authority must ensure that explicit measures are in place to address the current delay in assessments and reviews. CIW will continue to monitor the local authority's position regarding waiting lists.**
- 3.10** The local authority has significantly reduced its waiting times for access to domiciliary support since 2022/2023 and has put actions in place to manage demand. This includes commissioning new domiciliary support providers and establishing outcome-based commissioning. However, despite these efforts, the demand for care and support is still outstripping the supply with regards to domiciliary support provision. **The local authority should continue to address the current delays in access to domiciliary support.**

4. Well-being

Strengths

- 4.1** Practitioners in the local authority work in an empowering manner with individuals, supporting positive risk management whilst respecting an individual's right to choice. This approach was observed across practitioners of different experience levels and within different service

areas, indicating a **positive culture** of risk management and a focus on strengthening individual rights.

- 4.2 Safeguarding enquiries and investigations in the local authority are mostly conducted within statutory timeframes. A dedicated team serves as a resource for professionals, supporting proportionate decision-making and timely recording of key decisions with robust management oversight.
- 4.3 Safeguarding information is shared appropriately and promptly when concerns about adults' safety and well-being are identified. There is good multi-agency attendance and participation in adult protection meetings arranged under the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.
- 4.4 The local authority has developed a trusted approach to safeguarding through the provision of a specialised safeguarding hub, safeguarding consultations, and a newly formed Mental Capacity Team. These mechanisms support knowledge sharing, reflection on risk, and informed decision-making that empowers professionals and the adults involved.
- 4.5 The collaborative communication approach is firmly embedded in the ethos of the local authority. This supports practitioners in providing support to individuals while empowering them to identify and build on their own strengths and networks so that formal support can be reduced or only used where necessary. **This is positive practice.**

Areas for Improvement

- 4.6 There is a waiting list for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) assessments, a common issue across many local authorities in Wales. In response, several measures and strategies are being implemented, including further recruitment and training of Best Interest Assessors, merging the DoLS and Mental Capacity Teams under one manager, and providing training to the care home sector to ensure referrals are appropriate and timely. **The local authority must ensure that arrangements for the provision of DoLS assessments are responsive and timely.**
- 4.7 Practitioners and people have expressed concerns about the high volume of demand in the Client Property and Finance Team. This is causing delays in financial assessments and the establishment of appointeeships. Practitioners voiced concerns that these delays impeded their ability to protect people from financial abuse. **The local authority must ensure that arrangements for the provision of financial assessments and appointeeship are efficient.**

5. Partnership

Strengths

- 5.1** We received positive feedback about partnership working from the individuals we interacted with during our inspection. At a strategic level, senior leaders collaborate to address cross-departmental challenges. The jointly funded Head of Integrated Services position strengthens partnership working and enhances service integration. It also provides a strategic overview when monitoring pressures across health and social care systems in the region.
- 5.2** We saw a mature operational integrated offer, where effective integration and collaboration between professionals was evident across teams. Most practitioners expressed the view that the integrated model of delivery is a strength. We heard about integrated posts and teams, employed using an integrated recruitment process, sharing one job description and leadership. Practitioners told us about the positive use of the trusted assessor's model to undertake proportionate assessments, to support and facilitate timely and safe hospital discharge.
- 5.3** A positive example of this collaborative working model is Bonymaen House, a 28 bedded residential provision. The aim of this collaboration is not only to reduce prolonged hospital stays but also to support a reablement-focused approach. This service also collaborates with a registered domiciliary care service, providing short-term support at home following hospital discharge.
- 5.4** The benefits of the local authority's approach to coproduction is recognised by leaders, providers, the third sector, people, and practitioners. In the Carers Partnership Board meeting we attended, we observed the crucial role of coproduction in delivering effective care solutions. This approach, (a key focus of the meeting), fostered a sense of partnership between carers and professionals, promoting tailored care and empowering carers. This approach is highlighted by a provider in the anonymous survey, *"The co-productive approach adopted by Swansea ensures that processes, including assessment, are designed with the involvement of our users. The user's voice lies not just at the heart of any individual process of gathering information and making decisions but also at a structural level in the design of systems, creating an inclusive environment for users, etc. Moreover, a mechanism has been established (the Advocacy Group) that allows for user experiences to be reflected on over time and fed back to the Council as a means of improving its recruitment processes, training priorities, and day-to-day service delivery."*

- 5.5** We saw a comprehensive coproduction strategy in place, including a coproduction toolkit and a coproduction charter. We were told about practical examples of coproduction in various areas such as interview panels, tender submissions, decision-making, restructuring processes, and direct payments. **This is positive practice.**
- 5.6** The Swansea Poverty Truth Commission (SPTC) is a **positive practice example** of coproduction. It brings together individuals affected by poverty and key decision-makers, fostering shared understanding and action. This initiative highlights the effectiveness of coproduction in tackling complex issues like poverty.
- 5.7** The local authority collaborates effectively with the Regional Partnership Board (RPB) and the Regional Safeguarding Board. The Director of Social Services co-chairs the Safeguarding Board, enhancing communication and collaboration. The Head of Integrated Services leads the population programme with the RPB and co-chairs the Communities and Older People's Programme. Their work aligns with the remit of both boards, demonstrating strategic alignment and commitment.

Areas for Improvement

- 5.8** We heard from carers that practitioners at the CAP require a more comprehensive understanding of the third sector services available in the region. Carers expressed that they sometimes find themselves needing to seek out services, even after contacting the local authority for support. It is a key strategy of the local authority to ensure that preventative and early help services within Swansea are not only visible but also accessible and well-known to the public. This strategy aims to enable people to access these services independently, without the need for direct signposting by the local authority. **The local authority should continue its efforts to promote these services and make them readily visible to the public. This approach will enhance the community's awareness and use of the available services, fostering a more self-sufficient and informed public.**

6. Next steps

CIW expects the local authority to consider the areas identified for improvement and take appropriate action to address and improve these areas. CIW will monitor progress through its ongoing performance review activity with the local authority. Where relevant we expect the local authority to share the positive practice identified with other local authorities, to disseminate learning and help drive continuous improvement in statutory services throughout Wales.

7. Methodology

Fieldwork

- Most inspection evidence was gathered by reviewing the experiences of people through review and tracking of their social care record. We reviewed 25 social care records and tracked 5.
- Tracking a person's social care record includes having conversations with the person in receipt of social care services, their family or carers, key worker, the key worker's manager, and where appropriate other professionals involved
- We engaged, through interviews and/or focus groups, with 8 people receiving services and/or their carer.
- We engaged, through interviews and/or focus groups with 39 local authority employees (this included but was not limited to social workers, team managers, operational managers, senior managers).
- We interviewed a range of partner organisations.
- We reviewed a sample of staff supervision records.
- We observed a partnership board and a professional strategy meeting.
- We reviewed supporting documentation sent to CIW for the purpose of the inspection.
- We administered surveys to local authority social services staff, partner organisations and people.

Our Privacy Notice can be found at <https://careinspectorate.wales/how-we-use-your-information>.

8. Welsh Language

CIW is committed to providing an active offer of the Welsh language during its activity with local authorities.

The active offer was not required on this occasion. This is because the local authority informed us that people taking part did not wish to contribute to this performance evaluation inspection in Welsh.

9. Acknowledgements

CIW would like to thank staff, partners and people who gave their time and contributed to this inspection.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LB', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection
Care Inspectorate Wales

Appendix 1

Glossary of Terminology

Term	What we mean in our reports and letters
Must	Improvement is deemed necessary in order for the local authority to meet a duty outlined in legislation, regulation, or code of practice. The local authority is not currently meeting its statutory duty/duties and must take action.
Should	Improvement will enhance service provision and/or outcomes for people and/or their carer. It does not constitute a failure to meet a legal duty at this time; but without suitable action, there is a risk the local authority may fail to meet its legal duty/duties in future.
Positive practice	Identified areas of strength within the local authority. This relates to practice considered innovative and/or which consistently results in positive outcomes for people receiving statutory services.
Prevention and Early Intervention	A principle of the Act which aims to ensure that there is access to support to prevent situations from getting worse, and to enhance the maintenance of individual and collective well-being. This principle centres on increasing preventative services within communities to minimise the escalation of critical need.
Voice and Control	A principle of the Act which aims to put the individual and their needs at the centre of their care and support, and giving them a voice in, and control over, the outcomes that can help them achieve well-being and the things that matter most to them.
Well-being	A principle of the Act which aims for people to have well-being in every part of their lives. Well-being is more than being healthy. It is about being safe and happy, having choice and getting the right support, being part of a strong community, having friends and relationships that are good for you, and having hobbies, work, or learning. It is about supporting people to achieve their own well-being and measuring the success of care and support.
Coproduction	A principle of the Act which aims for people to be more involved in the design and provision of their care and support. It means organisations and professionals working with them and their family, friends, and carers so their care and support is the best it can be.

Multi-Agency working	A principle of the Act which aims to strengthen joint working between care and support organisations to make sure the right types of support and services are available in local communities to meet people’s needs. The summation of the Act states that there is a requirement for co-operation and partnership by public authorities.
What matters	‘What Matters’ conversations are a way for professionals to understand people’s situation, their current well-being, and what can be done to support them. It is an equal conversation and is important to help ensure the voice of the individual or carer is heard and ‘what matters’ to them