

Ms Audrey Somerton Edwards  
Statutory Director of Social Services  
Ceredigion County Council

Date: 09 July 2025

Dear Director,

## **Improvement Check visit to Ceredigion County Council social services**

### **1. Introduction**

This letter describes the findings of the Improvement Check visit to Ceredigion County Council (CCC) between 13 and 14 May 2025. This was an Improvement Check (Adults) following the Performance Evaluation Inspection (PEI) in March 2023.

We carry out inspection activity in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014; key lines of enquiry; and the quality standards in the *Code of Practice in relation to the performance and improvement of social services in Wales*. This helps us determine the effectiveness of local authorities in supporting, measuring and sustaining improvements for people and in services.

The Improvement Check focused on the progress made in the following areas identified for improvements during our PEI in March 2023:

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Areas of improvement identified from PEI in March 2023</b>	<b>Progress identified at improvement check</b>
People	<p>The local authority must ensure people's voice is central to the work they undertake with people.</p> <p>The local authority must ensure practitioners consistently comply with the general duty to promote the well-being of the carer, by explicitly offering carers assessments to people to discuss what support they require, with</p>	<p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p>

	<p>reasons for refusal of an assessment routinely recorded.</p> <p>The local authority must increase short break provision across the county to help address the well-being needs of parents and carers.</p> <p>The director of social services annual report must be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of a financial year.</p> <p>The local authority must carefully consider their future workforce strategy to prioritise a sufficient and sustainable workforce, with the capacity and capability to consistently meet statutory responsibilities.</p> <p>The local authority should ensure robust management oversight of practice and reflective conversations are taking place with sufficient information noted to evidence decision making.</p> <p>The local authority must ensure it has a competent and confident workforce.</p> <p>Arranging in-person meetings for adult and children's services can be a challenge due to lack of suitable facilities.</p> <p>The local authority must implement and embed a robust quality assurance framework.</p>	<p>Some improvements made – further action is required</p> <p>No improvement made – action required</p> <p>Some improvements made – further action is required</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p>
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	<p>The local authority must ensure complaints are consistently responded to in accordance with the prescribed timescales in “The Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014”, and lessons learned from responding to complaints drive improvements.</p>	<p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p>
Prevention	<p>The local authority must review its current arrangement to ensure people consistently receive a timely response when they contact them.</p> <p>The local authority must take the required action to ensure compliance with timescales for statutory reviews and ensure all relevant professionals are invited to contribute.</p> <p>The local authority should continue to work strategically and operationally with its partners to look for solutions to alleviate a lack of domiciliary care across the county.</p> <p>The local authority should engage with people experiencing sensory loss to hear their voice to influence the development of services.</p>	<p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Some improvements made – further action is required</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p>
Well-being	<p>Records could be strengthened by consistently evidencing all reasonable steps have been taken to enable the person to participate in the adult safeguarding process.</p> <p>The local authority should review current arrangements to ensure</p>	<p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p>

	<p>the outcome of referrals are shared with the reporter and that strategy meeting minutes are shared with attendees in a timely manner.</p> <p>The local authority must ensure there is robust oversight of safeguarding practice to assure itself of compliance with the WSP.</p> <p>The local authority must review adult assessment documentation to ensure it follows all core statutory requirements as outlined in Part 3 Code of Practice (Assessing the Needs of Individuals).</p> <p>The local authority must review its recording policy to include robust managerial oversight to ensure all records are maintained appropriately.</p>	<p>Some improvements made – further action is required</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p> <p>Improvements made and must be sustained.</p>
Partnership	The local authority should review its communication strategy to ensure that their TAW model is understood and accessible.	Improvements made and must be sustained.

## 2. Summary

- There is a strong foundation and a clear trajectory for improvement in the local authority with recognition of the need for continued focus on embedding good practice consistently across services.
- Leadership within social services is both visible and responsive, fostering a culture of well-being and professional growth.
- The local authority is embedding the principles of voice, choice, and control into practice. The use of frameworks such as Signs of Safety (SoS) reflects a structured approach to capturing individual voices and tailoring services to what matters most to people.

- There is a clear strategic focus to prevent recourse to long term statutory care, promote resilience in local communities and a shared ethos and practice culture to support people to fulfil their potential. Actively encouraging and supporting people who need care and support to remain independent and participate in society has a positive profile across services.

### 3. Key findings and evidence

Key findings and some examples of evidence are presented below in line with the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

#### People

##### **Strengths**

- Ceredigion leaders foster a culture where employees are supported, valued, and empowered, underpinned by a strong 'Team Ceredigion' ethos. This is **positive practice** as leaders model behaviours that foster an inclusive work environment.
- Ceredigion is an Age-Friendly community, this supports a shared understanding in the local authority helping older adults stay healthy and active
- The local authority has a dedicated workforce who are passionate about supporting people and working in Ceredigion. Staff receive good quality support from their managers, including formal and informal supervision opportunities.
- The through age service provides good opportunity to promote consistency and continuity for people, for example in moving from child to adulthood. The governance and management structure promotes good communication across services
- The Council's "grow your own" strategy for social workers, which has been in place since 2023, is projected to address succession planning in the medium and longer term. Discussions continue with Aberystwyth University on the potential introduction of an MSc in Social Work. Workforce development is clearly prioritised, with staff actively engaged in structured learning pathways such as Continuing Professional Education and Learning (CPEL) and e-learning.
- People's views are represented through proportionate assessments undertaken by a range of professionals, with relevant narrative clearly outlining personal circumstances. Ceredigion undertake a high number of assessments. These are often issue based which means many assessments focus on a single issue, for example, a request for practical support in the home. This approach can provide clarity and focus and demonstrates professionals being responsive to changing needs.

- Assessment and review processes routinely capture people's preferences, health conditions, and social context. Combined with a focus on strengths and capabilities of the person and presenting need, there is clarity in context and an understanding of life for that person.
- Best practice examples demonstrate a strengths-based approach in 'What Matters' conversations, identifying outcomes with people and how outcomes will explicitly be met with a clear link between information gathered and how care and support can be delivered to achieve personal outcomes. Managers routinely sign off assessments, which is important for ensuring quality assurance in relation to people's well-being, safety, and professional development.
- Prompts on the local authority IT system in relation to equality and diversity are a helpful reminder for practitioners to be proactive in clarifying personal information such as language preference, Welsh language preference, mental capacity and consent.
- When people do not have capacity in relation to decisions, this is routinely considered and people supported and represented appropriately. Practitioners demonstrate a strong understanding of the principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, taking time to consider peoples' needs, wishes, and circumstances. Assessments reflect a commitment to exploring the least restrictive options and are grounded in meaningful engagement with the person and, where appropriate, their representatives. This approach ensures decisions are made in the best interests of individuals, with clear evidence of thoughtful analysis and professional curiosity.
- The local authority has made progress in reducing the backlog of DoLS assessments, ensuring that authorisations are applied in a timely and proportionate manner. As a result, more people who require these safeguards are now appropriately protected.
- The local authority work force plan outlines a commitment to promote a bilingual workforce, and data is available to identify Welsh language speakers and Welsh language skill levels. There are a range of Welsh language learning opportunities and Welsh language mandatory e-learning for all staff.
- There is a commitment to offering people a choice of receiving a service in Welsh, and we saw evidence of the offer being made. The local authority IT system includes prompts for practitioners to capture preferred language, and there is emphasis on the Welsh Language active offer and bilingual documentation, ensuring accessibility and respect for identity. It is important that people's language preferences are both identified, and an offer made to converse in preferred language.
- The local authority demonstrates a strong commitment to promoting choice and control through the effective use of direct payments. Records reflect creative approaches to resource provision, with direct payments being a popular and well-utilised option. There are structures in place to support the

direct payments service and personal assistants, supporting and enabling more autonomy and personalised care arrangements and to balance the demand on direct care provision. A shortage of personal assistants is limiting the full delivery of direct payment arrangements in some cases, impacting people's ability to access personalised care.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- A few staff said there should be more opportunity to improve information sharing via senior managers and to develop cross-team collaboration. A few staff also said a designated social services hot desk areas may encourage more staff to attend offices and therefore improve collaboration and better opportunity for confidential work-based conversations. **The local authority should consider this staff feedback.**
- Workload is high in many service areas, but this is consistently addressed in supervision. In our staff survey, 85% and 90% of respondents respectively said, they were supported and able to manage workload. Ceredigion's 2024 staff survey results have recently been made available to managers. Whilst this reflects similar positive staff responses in the CIW staff survey, a high percentage of staff respondents report work related stress impacting their mental health. **Managers will need to understand this feedback and should ensure staff are fully supported to address the finding.**
- A few staff referenced the need for better transport to be able to access provision, limited public transport in rural communities and lack of disability access on the public service provisions. In addition, local authority transport is limited and frequently changing which can cause disruptions to families. **The local authority should continue to address this area.**

### **Prevention**

#### **Strengths**

- Investment in prevention and early intervention is reducing the rate of escalating care packages. This is against a backdrop context of increased demand and complexity in the population.
- There is a range of information available to people such as a Carers Fact Sheet and the Ceredigion Carer Card. Staff at the corporate contact centre (Clic) provide a single point of contact, they receive targeted training to support their ability to recognise and respond to social care enquiries. Calls are triaged with an understanding of complexity, and staff are equipped with the knowledge to signpost effectively or escalate appropriately. This approach ensures people receive a positive and informed first point of contact, contributing to a responsive and person-centred experience from the outset.

- Referrals to social care are then further triaged by multi-disciplinary professionals who identify “what matters” to individuals, ensuring needs are addressed at the earliest opportunity. This approach is supported by the SIF model, which places skilled workers at the point of first contact, enabling timely assessments and reducing the likelihood of escalation.
- The Penmorfa Centre for Independent Living is an example of **positive practice**. This was launched in 2024 as a new resource to support individuals in Ceredigion to live independently in their own homes. It brings together a range of solutions and services provided by social care, health and third-party organisations. For example, there is a dedicated visual impairment (VI) room displaying equipment and technology, with the VI Team organising information and support days from the centre. A carers and cared-for support and drop-in group and a drop-in Direct Payment Service also run from the centre. Technology Enabled Care demonstrations, telecare and assistive technology information is also available. We saw examples of people accessing a range of practical and technology enabled assistance such as care pendants and falls detectors.
- The Carers Information Service provides accessible information and advice to unpaid carers. This team also offers short breaks and administers a local Carer Card, which recognises carers' roles and provides a range of discounts and offers.
- Micro carers are increasingly available to support people in communities, these are usually self-employed individuals who can provide bespoke support, enabling people to have choice about how their support is delivered.
- The local authority has a quality assurance officer who is establishing a consistent way of auditing work across the service to identify good practice and those areas needing improvements. This involves all teams and feedback to the senior leadership team promoting a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Coupled with reliable performance information data, the local authority understands the effectiveness and quality of service. There is opportunity to identify and disseminate wider learning at some team events, with a service wide forum recently established providing protected time for development and learning.
- Some social services complaints exceed the standard timescales for resolution; however, this remains compliant with statutory regulations when the Statutory Director of Social Services provides written authorisation for the extension.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- There can be waiting lists for some services such as for occupational therapists (OT), these are managed through ‘RAG’ prioritisation, ensuring support is both responsive and as equitable as possible. Challenges in sourcing services, such as care at home in some rural localities and short



break provision, can add pressure on informal carers and increases the risk of situations reaching crisis. There are high numbers of people waiting for a domiciliary support service, although for some people the local authority has a bridging service that can meet this need. The consequent challenge is the impact on this service when delay in identifying a domiciliary support service becomes extended. The availability of providers able to deliver a service in rural communities is an on-going challenge, although two new providers have recently joined the commissioning framework. **The local authority must ensure people receive the same standard of service, regardless of where they live, to ensure fairness and equality for those in need of care and support.**

- The local authority reviews older people's care and support needs for those assessed as a priority, this means they can receive appropriate support as their circumstances change. There are many examples of care and support requirements being adapted to address changing social, emotional and health well-being. Delays in review of many people's care and support plans, however, are a persistent concern. When reviews are not taking place, there is potential for risk and people's changing needs not being addressed and ultimately requiring more intensive intervention. **The local authority must ensure the review of all people's care and support needs is timely.**

## **Well-being**

### **Strengths**

- There is a collaborative focus on supporting people in their own homes, underpinned by prompt and comprehensive assessments and support across professional groups.
- Records connect the important detail about personal outcomes to the practical support often provided by care workers. There is clear exchange of information between practitioners commissioning support and those providing direct care (such as domiciliary support workers) with regards the specificity of the personal care required in care and support plans.
- A clear model of working is used consistently across interactions and is an example of **positive practice**, demonstrating a strengths based and co-production approach. This is illustrated in practice examples, ranging from plain language used in prompts used in the IT system to the person's views consistently represented across social care activity. The use of the SoS framework helps promote safety and well-being as central to practice.
- There is good practice in the safeguarding team in line with Wales Safeguarding Procedures (WSP). Responses are mostly prompt and proportionate to concerns, with people's views included in the development of safety plans. Best practice examples provide focus in relation to analysis and

decision making, prioritising the safety and promotion of the well-being of people.

- There is good multi-agency attendance at strategy meetings and evidence of good communication and involvement of key stakeholders in safeguarding communication. Effective multi-agency collaboration ensures coordinated responses, and a strong safeguarding culture embeds the principle that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
- The overall culture with regards learning is one of shared responsibility and continuous improvement. Supervision reflects a good standard of practice which is reflective, supportive, and developmentally focused, with clear attention to well-being, task management and organisational alignment. This is an example of **positive practice**. Supervisors create environments where staff feel safe to express concerns and explore challenges. This could be improved with consistency of approach. There are different templates being used across the service, while there are gaps for some staff in aligning learning with appraisal goals.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- The annual director report has been significantly delayed again for 2024-25. **The director of social services must prepare and publish an annual report about the exercise of the local authority's social services functions. This annual report must be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of a financial year.**
- The local authority reports the outcome of adult safeguarding enquiries are shared with the reporter, albeit there is uncertainty whether this is consistent in relation to enquiries delegated to health partners. **The local authority must ensure adult safeguarding practice consistently meets with the requirements of the WSP in this practice area.**
- Although case management authorisation and oversight are evident, formal case management supervisory dialogue is not routinely evident. **The local authority should ensure case file supervision is routinely recorded.**

### **Partnerships**

#### **Strengths**

- Although strategic relationships between health and social care can be challenging when finance is a consideration, there is a shared approach by senior managers across the local authority and with partners in the joint planning for the delivery of preventative services. This supports people to remain healthy and independent, without recourse to more formal statutory services. Interagency working is mostly effectively, evident in triage, visual

impairment and mental well-being teams for example. There are examples of a flexible, multi-disciplinary person-centred approach to joint working. OTs often provide an appropriate first point of contact with people who have acute presenting needs, providing a valuable service when people require prompt support.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- The synergy between health and social care has changed over recent years with less co-location as some healthcare staff have moved back to health premises. Some staff said communication remained positive, but a few staff said this has created a culture where multi-disciplinary teams have become fractured, notably with regards the OT service. When health and social care staff work together collaboratively, there are better outcomes for individuals through sharing information and expertise. **The local authority should work with the local health board to better understand and address how reduced co-location and changes to multi-disciplinary working are affecting the quality and coordination of care and support for people.**
- A few staff said the effectiveness of working with the police varied, with misunderstanding sometimes evident when working with people living with a learning disability or neurodivergence and disagreement about lead agency in adult safeguarding enquiries. **The local authority should work with the police to improve this area of practice.**
- At present there is a shortage of health board provision of 'Section 12'<sup>1</sup> doctors and we identified this causing delay in responding to people in crisis. There is also reduced support available through the 24-hour crisis team provision. **The local authority should work with the health board to improve this area of practice.**

## **4. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 12(2) of the Mental Health Act 1983 requires that, in those cases where two medical recommendations for the compulsory admission of a mentally disordered person to hospital, or for reception into guardianship are required, one of the two must be made by a practitioner approved for the purposes of that section by the Welsh Ministers

## 5. Methodology

### Fieldwork

- Most inspection evidence was gathered by reviewing the experiences of people through review and tracking of their social care records. 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, with 5 people receiving services and/or their unpaid carer and 4 people responded to our survey.
- We engaged, through interviews and focus groups, with 51 local authority employees, this included social workers and team managers. 55 employees responded to our survey.
- We reviewed supporting documentation sent to CIW for the purpose of the inspection.

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

## 6. Welsh Language

The inspection team included a Welsh speaking inspector, enabling CIW to make the active offer of conducting part of the inspection process in Welsh.

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 improvement check in Welsh.

## 7. Acknowledgements

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

Yours Sincerely,



**Lou Bushell- Bauers**

Head of Local Authority Inspection  
**Care Inspectorate Wales**

## 8. Glossary

Term	What we mean in our reports and letters
<b>Must</b>	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.
<b>Should</b>	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.
<b>Positive practice</b>	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.
<b>Prevention and Early Intervention</b>	A principle of the 2014 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.
<b>Voice and Control</b>	A principle of the 2014 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.
<b>Well-being</b>	A principle of the 2014 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.
<b>Co-Production</b>	A principle of the 2014 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.

<b>Multi-Agency working</b>	A principle of the 2014 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.
<b>What matters</b>	'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

### Quantity Definitions Table

Terminology	Definition
Nearly all	With very few exceptions
Most	90% or more
Many	70% or more
A majority	Over 60%
Half	50%
Around half	Close to 50%
A minority	Below 40%
Few	Below 20%
Very few	Less than 10%