Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru
Care Inspectorate Wales

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Date: 26/11/2026

Dear Jenny,

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) - Assurance Check of Conwy County Borough Council Children's Services.

1. Introduction

1.1 This letter describes the findings of our assurance check between 21-25 September 2026. We carried out inspection activity in accordance with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 ('the 2014 Act') 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.

1.2 We focused our key lines of enquiry in accordance with the four principles of the 2014 Act and sought to answer the following questions:

People - voice and control

- How well are children and young people and families treated as equal partners, with their voice, choice and control reflected in assessments, care and support plans, safeguarding decisions, permanence planning and reviews?
- To what extent does the workforce have sufficient numbers, skills, stability and support to deliver timely, relationship-based and outcome-focused practice?

Prevention

- How effectively is the need for care and support reduced, escalation prevented, and the best outcomes achieved for children, young people and their families?
- How well are families supported to stay together, where safe and in the child's best interests, through timely, strengths-based and preventative approaches, including effective step-down and support for young carers?

- How well are repeat contacts, re-assessments and re-referrals understood and responded to, including the effectiveness of early help in resolving need and reducing escalation?

Well-being

- How well are children protected and safeguarded from abuse, neglect and other types of harm?
- To what extent is there good analysis of risk, protective factors, cumulative harm, parental capacity and children's lived experience, with effective protection plans, care and support plans and timely action to safeguard children and young people and promote their welfare?
- How well are looked after and accommodated children and young people supported through safe, suitable and stable placements which promote their wellbeing, and how effectively are placement sufficiency pressures overseen and addressed?

Partnership

- To what extent are there effective partnerships to commission and deliver integrated, high-quality and sustainable outcomes, including how well children and young people, families and carers are enabled to influence the design and delivery of the care, support and services they receive?
- How well do partnership arrangements support timely, joined up and effective responses to children and young people and families, including where needs are complex or require multi-agency support?

2. Terminology and Quantity Definitions

A glossary of terminology is contained in Appendix one and a table of quantity definitions in Appendix two.

3. Summary of Assurance Check

3.1 Children's Services are stable and supported by a dedicated workforce. There is a strong focus on understanding children's lived experiences and involving children, young people and families in assessments, plans and decisions. Practitioners and leaders described a reflective and supportive culture, with a clear commitment to strengths-based practice, learning and improvement.

3.2 Visible and accessible leadership, strong corporate support and investment in workforce development contribute to service stability. Practitioners feel well supported by colleagues and managers. However, supervision records do not consistently evidence the depth of reflective discussion or clearly connect agreed actions with intended outcomes for children and families.

3.3 Prevention is a clear strategic priority. Family Centres, the Strengthening Families service and wider community-based arrangements provide accessible and valued support to children and families. Greater consistency is needed to ensure

assessments and interventions progress without avoidable delay and concerns are escalated promptly when children's circumstances do not improve.

3.4 Safeguarding leadership, governance and oversight provide scrutiny and professional challenge. Safeguarding practice was timely and responsive in most of the evidence reviewed, supported by effective multi-agency cooperation. Practice would be strengthened by more consistent use of chronologies and the involvement of all relevant practitioners in strategy discussions where circumstances allow.

3.5 Established partnership arrangements support coordinated responses for children and families, including those with complex needs. Progress is being made to strengthen local placement options. However, gaps in the availability and continuity of specialist health and neurodevelopmental input can delay joint decision-making and access to coordinated support for some children and families. Partners do not always reach timely agreement about the most appropriate support or placement arrangements, particularly where responsibilities and funding arrangements need to be agreed. The local authority should continue working with partners to strengthen shared decision-making, funding agreements and escalation arrangements.

3.6 Arrangements should be strengthened to ensure people's Welsh-language preferences are acted upon, wider family networks are routinely considered through family group conferencing, and unpaid and parent carers receive timely and responsive support. Access to formal advocacy should also be strengthened where this would help parents participate fully in decisions.

4. 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

4.1 There is a strong focus on understanding children's lived experiences. Practitioners use direct work, observation and age-appropriate methods to understand children's wishes, feelings and day-to-day experiences. This informs individual assessments, care and support plans, permanence planning and reviews.

4.2 The local authority demonstrates a clear commitment to hearing and responding to the voices of children and young people. At an individual practice level, social workers in childcare teams advocate for children, young people and their families, ensuring their views and lived experiences are represented in assessments, planning and decision-making.

4.3 Through Conwy Youth Council, young people have opportunities to express their views and contribute to scrutiny meetings, policy development and wider service improvement. Their views have also informed the development of local children's homes. This shows that participation is embedded at both individual and strategic levels and enables children, young people and families to influence decisions that affect them. **This is positive practice.**

4.4 The local authority is taking positive steps to embed a children's rights approach within its financial planning and decision-making. Its developing approach reflects the Children's Commissioner for Wales's guidance on children's rights budgeting, including consideration of how resource decisions affect children's rights and outcomes. The intention to involve children and young people in these processes provides a foundation for their views to influence spending priorities and the allocation of resources.

4.5 The local authority places children, families and carers at the centre of its work. Leaders set a clear strengths-based vision and model visible, approachable, relational and trauma-informed leadership. This creates a culture of trust, learning and professional autonomy, where practitioners feel supported and empowered to work with children, families and their wider networks to understand risks, identify strengths and agree achievable outcomes. Shared values are evident in practice and in relationships across services and with partners, supporting children and families to influence assessments, plans and the support they receive. **This is positive practice.**

4.6 Experienced, visible and accessible leaders maintain oversight of frontline practice and respond to emerging issues. Practitioners describe a positive and supportive culture that promotes professional curiosity, constructive challenge, reflection, learning and improvement. They feel supported by colleagues and managers and have access to regular supervision and opportunities to reflect on the demands of their work. Of the 116 practitioners who completed the Care Inspectorate Wales survey, **nearly all (98%) feel supported by colleagues and most (95%) feel supported by managers**. This contributes to a valued, stable and resilient workforce. **This is positive practice.**

4.7 Children's Services benefit from strong corporate and political support. Elected members demonstrate an understanding of Children's Services priorities, risks and performance and provide appropriate support and challenge through established governance arrangements. Leaders describe constructive relationships with elected members, with evidence that Children's Services remain visible within wider corporate decision-making. **This is positive practice.**

4.8 The local authority demonstrates a clear commitment to developing its workforce. Practitioners spoke positively and consistently about the learning and development opportunities available to them, and felt supported to develop their skills, knowledge and professional confidence. A structured approach to induction, mentoring and continuing professional development is complemented by opportunities for career progression and leadership development. These arrangements support practitioners and leaders to develop within the organisation, contributing to workforce retention, succession planning and service resilience. **This is positive practice.**

Areas for Improvement

4.9 We identified examples where parents may have benefited from formal advocacy support. The local authority offers parents access to independent advocacy within court proceedings, including the Public Law Outline process, and within some formal child protection processes. However, arrangements for identifying and responding to parents' advocacy needs outside these processes are less consistent. **The local authority should strengthen arrangements to identify parents' advocacy needs**

and ensure appropriate formal advocacy support is available outside court and formal child protection processes.

4.10 Practitioners value regular supervision and describe strong support from managers, including opportunities to reflect on their practice and well-being. However, supervision records do not consistently demonstrate the depth of reflective discussion or clearly connect agreed actions to the intended outcomes for children and families. **The local authority should strengthen the consistency and quality of supervision recording so that reflective discussion, agreed actions, responsibilities and timescales are clearly evidenced.**

4.11 The local authority records people's Welsh-language needs and preferences within electronic care records, and Welsh-speaking practitioners are available to provide support. However, records did not consistently evidence whether assessments, reviews and interventions were actively offered and delivered in Welsh where this was the person's preference. Practitioners also reported that English-only templates can require work completed in Welsh to be translated, creating avoidable additional work and making it more difficult to embed Welsh-language practice consistently. **The local authority should strengthen its systems and assurance arrangements, including access to suitable bilingual templates, to ensure people's Welsh-language needs and preferences are acted upon and that the language in which support is offered and delivered is clearly recorded.**

4.12 The local authority commissions a Family Group Conferencing service. Referrals can be made from the point of Family Centre involvement to involve wider family members in planning and decisions. Participation is voluntary, and some families may initially decline but agree later. However, records did not consistently show whether Family Group Conferencing had been considered, offered, declined or offered again. **The local authority should ensure practitioners clearly record the family's response and any decision to offer it again.**

4.13 Support for unpaid and parent carers is inconsistent. Although carers' assessments are offered, the resulting support is not always sufficiently timely, or responsive to the pressures experienced by unpaid carers and their families. **The local authority should ensure unpaid and parent carers receive timely and responsive support that reflects the identified eligible needs of carers and their families.**

Prevention

Strengths

4.14 Prevention is a clear strategic priority. Early help, targeted support and crisis prevention are connected through coherent pathways, including the Strengthening Families service, Family Centres and wider early intervention arrangements. These pathways help children and families access the right support at the right time and promote continuity across universal, targeted and statutory services.

4.15 The Edge of Care and Early Intervention Panels provide valuable multi-agency forums for professionals to share information, assess risk and protective factors, and agree the most appropriate support. Childcare social work teams make an important contribution by sharing current information about statutory involvement, children's lived experiences and the wider family context. This supports informed decision-

making and earlier, coordinated intervention to prevent needs escalating and, where safe and in children's best interests, help families remain together. **This is positive practice.**

4.16 The Family Centres are a particular strength. They provide welcoming, accessible and community-based support across different levels of need and are well used and valued by children and young people, families, practitioners and partner agencies. Their less formal environment helps families access support when they need it, encourages early engagement and enables practitioners to work alongside families before difficulties escalate. The Family Centres also provide continuity of relationships for families receiving statutory support. **This is positive practice.**

4.17 The Strengthening Families service is a valuable multidisciplinary resource, providing Early Intervention and Edge of Care support. Practitioners bring specialist expertise in social work, therapeutic support, mental health, substance misuse, policing and probation. Children and families receive tailored, relationship-based support that complements existing Children's Services plans, builds on their strengths and helps them identify goals and barriers to change. The Sessional Support Team provides flexible, practical and relationship-based support to children and families, complementing the specialist interventions delivered through Strengthening Families. The Reflect Project provides dedicated support to parents whose children have been permanently removed through care proceedings. Families report that they feel listened to, understood and supported to make sustainable changes. **This is positive practice.**

4.18 Leaders draw on audits, reviews, workforce feedback, critical events, performance information and analysis of children's journeys through services to understand where earlier intervention may be possible and where preventative arrangements can be strengthened. Evidence showed a focus on understanding children's experiences and outcomes alongside performance data.

Areas for Improvement

4.19 Some records show delays in completing assessments or progressing planned interventions. Also, where sustained support is not improving children's lived experiences, escalation and progression are not always sufficiently timely. **The local authority should strengthen oversight of assessments and interventions to ensure support progresses without avoidable delay and concerns are escalated promptly when children's circumstances do not improve.**

Well-being

Strengths

4.20 The local authority has established safeguarding leadership, governance and oversight arrangements. The introduction of additional safeguarding capacity has strengthened professional challenge, scrutiny and support across Children's Services. Leaders described a deliberate approach to safeguarding oversight that promotes consistency, reflection and informed decision-making.

4.21 Safeguarding practice is timely and responsive in most of the evidence reviewed. We saw prompt risk assessment, coordinated safety planning, management oversight and escalation for legal advice when required.

4.22 Section 47 enquiries are progressed in a timely and proportionate manner, in line with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures (WSP). Enquiries are comprehensive and child-focused, incorporating direct engagement with children and relevant family members. Information gathered supports informed analysis and decisions about whether a child remains at risk of significant harm and whether further safeguarding action is required.

4.23 Appropriate consideration is given to the application of Section 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures when concerns arise about any individual working with children and young people, including local authority practitioners, practitioners in partner agencies, and volunteers. This supports a consistent approach to safeguarding and promotes the protection and wellbeing of children and young people.

4.24 The local authority has strengthened corporate responsibility for safeguarding across the local authority, reinforcing that safeguarding is a shared responsibility beyond Children's Services. Safeguarding training is comprehensive, well developed and accessible to practitioners, managers and partner agencies, supporting a consistent understanding of responsibilities, decision-making and timescales in accordance with the WSP.

4.25 Partners describe responsive and accessible safeguarding arrangements, with evidence of coordinated information sharing, professional challenge and shared ownership of risk. Partnership arrangements relating to exploitation and risk outside the home are a notable strength, supporting coordinated responses to complex contextual safeguarding concerns.

4.26 The local authority has taken positive steps to strengthen placement sufficiency and reduce reliance on exceptional or less suitable placement arrangements. Evidence reviewed showed that more children are living in placements closer to their families and communities. This progress, alongside continued work to strengthen local fostering and residential provision, provides a stronger foundation for meeting children's needs within their communities.

Areas for Improvement

4.27 Chronologies are not used consistently to build a clear picture of children's experiences over time. This can limit practitioners' ability to recognise patterns, cumulative harm and escalating risk, potentially delaying action to protect children and improve their circumstances. In line with the WSP, the local authority should ensure chronologies are used consistently to bring together significant events, changes in children's lived experiences and the impact of previous interventions. This should strengthen risk analysis and decision-making, support earlier and more effective intervention, and help children and young people receive the right protection and support at the right time. **The local authority should ensure chronologies are used consistently to understand each child's lived experience over time, identify emerging or escalating risks, and support timely decisions and interventions that improve children's safety and well-being.**

4.28 Daily meetings within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) provide a forum for partner agencies to discuss concerns and share information. Arrangements for strategy discussions under Sections 3 and 5 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures are determined case by case, taking account of the nature, urgency and circumstances of the concern. Relevant partner agencies are included where appropriate. However, the evidence reviewed showed that report makers and practitioners already involved with the child and family were not always invited where their contribution may have supported the discussion. **The local authority should ensure all relevant practitioners, including report makers and practitioners already involved with the child and family, are invited to strategy discussions where circumstances allow.**

4.29 Despite positive progress in sufficiency planning and local provision, challenges remain in securing suitable local placements for some children with highly complex needs. For some children, gaps or delays in accessing specialist health and neurodevelopmental support are a significant barrier to meeting their needs locally and developing sustainable arrangements. The local authority should continue to strengthen local placement options and work with relevant partners to improve timely access to specialist support and monitor the impact of these pressures on outcomes for children and young people.

Partnership

Strengths

4.30 Strategic and operational partnership arrangements are well established and valued. Partners describe longstanding and trusted relationships across agencies and organisations. Direct communication, constructive challenge and clear escalation routes support effective information sharing and coordinated planning. This helps reduce risk, strengthen family resilience and prevent needs from escalating. The shared approach drives forward a collective commitment to improving outcomes for children and families. **Most practitioners (93%) agree that agencies work effectively together, and seven of the eight stakeholders who responded to the survey also report good communication between local authority teams. This reflects the positive feedback received through stakeholder interviews and focus groups. This is positive practice.**

4.31 The integration of Education and Children's Services at a corporate level, supports both safeguarding and preventative practice. Closer alignment between services promotes earlier identification of need, timely intervention and coordinated support for children and families. These arrangements strengthen information sharing, improve continuity of support and contribute to more joined-up planning across services. **This is positive practice.**

4.32 Multi-agency working supports coordinated responses for children with complex and specialist needs. Practitioners from disability services, psychology, learning disability nursing and other specialist services contribute their expertise to assessment, planning and intervention. Joint working between Youth Justice Services and Speech and Language Therapy helps practitioners understand and respond to children’s communication needs. Partnership arrangements also support coordinated responses to exploitation, missing children and risks outside the family home.

4.33 Strategic collaboration is strengthening community-based services and local placement options. Developments include the Bwthyn y Ddôl model, Reconnect fostering arrangements, regional sufficiency planning and integrated psychological support within preventative services. These arrangements help reduce reliance on higher-cost placements and enable more children to remain closer to their families and communities where appropriate.

Areas for Improvement

4.34 Partnership working is well established and valued. However, evidence suggests that differences in organisational priorities, professional perspectives, thresholds, statutory responsibilities and funding arrangements are not always aligned and resolved promptly. This can delay agreement about the most appropriate support or placement for children with highly complex needs. The local authority should continue to work with relevant partners to strengthen timely joint decision-making and escalation where responsibilities, priorities or funding arrangements differ. This should help ensure children and young people receive coordinated support based on a shared understanding of their circumstances, needs and intended outcomes.

4.35 Strategic and operational relationships between health and social care can work well. However, changes in key strategic health-board roles have affected the continuity of some strategic joint discussions and service developments. The local authority should continue to work with the health board to ensure children and young people experience coordinated and continuous support, with clear escalation routes and timely joint decisions that improve their safety, well-being and outcomes.

5. 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.

6. Methodology

Fieldwork

- Most inspection evidence was gathered by reviewing the experiences of 26 people through review and tracking of their social care records. We reviewed 22 social care records and tracked four.
- 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 seven people receiving services and/or their carers.
- We engaged, through interviews with 61 local authority employees and elected members, including social workers, Team Managers, Operational

Managers, Head of service and the Strategic Director of Social Services and Education.
- We held focus groups with 17 stakeholders and 13 children and young people.
- 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.

7. Welsh Language

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

The Active Offer was accepted on this occasion. We carried out our interview with the Strategic Director through the medium of Welsh during this assurance check.

8. 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

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.
Co-Production	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

Appendix 2

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%