

Appendix B – Corporate Improvement Plan 2013-17. Summary of Developments since 2013/14.

This is a summary of the key developments that have taken place since the Corporate Improvement Plan was adopted last year.

Improvement Objective A: Provide support for children in the early years in Swansea so that they are ready for learning and make developmental progress.

How we performed last year

Since 2012/13, the Flying start programme has been expanding significantly, doubling the number of children who will benefit. Maintaining and improving performance during this enlargement will be challenging as new families are engaged and where, in some new Flying Start areas with less deprivation, parents already have childcare arrangements in place and may not want to take up Flying Start provision.

During 2013/14, there has been a further reduction in unauthorised absences from 4% of available spaces being unauthorised absences to 2% by Term 2 in 2013/14. The introduction of regular meetings between professionals during 2013/14 has provided the means to discuss and plan individual cases and take collective and creative approaches to solving problems, such as unauthorised absences.

There has been a continued focus on improving parenting. The Wellbeing and Behaviour Outcome Star, a tool validated by the Welsh Government and used in other services aimed at supporting families has been introduced in 2013/14 to enable professionals and parents to see how far they have progressed following efforts to improve parenting skills, self-esteem and confidence and children's behaviour. Other new elements were introduced to the parenting element of Flying Start during 2013/14; for example, all programmes now cover the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to improve parental understanding of its key principles.

What we plan to do this year? What we plan to do this year?

As part of being a Healthy City, Swansea is working on a number of initiatives aimed at improving the health and wellbeing on everyone and in particular addressing the health gap between the east and west of the city. The pre-school years are the time when the biggest difference can be made. Giving children a Flying Start in life will mean that they are likely to be healthier, to be better learners and less likely to experience deprivation.

Despite making progress in recent years, early language development continues to be one of the key issues that need to be addressed for children in targeted areas within Swansea. All Flying Start teams will develop programmes that will be available to all families at both the antenatal stage and following birth to provide intensive and

early language development support; this will be piloted initially within the Townhill area of Swansea.

Improvement Objective B: Support improvement to school attendance and attainment of learners aged 3-19 so that each can achieve their potential.

How we performed last year

Improving Primary Attendance was a Recommendation from June's Estyn inspection. Inspectors said that attendance in too many primary schools did not compare well with similar schools across Wales. Attendance in primary schools in the academic year 2012-13 fell as a result of an unusually high level of illnesses in the spring term.

End of Key Stage results in English fell slightly but were still at the level expected of the authority according to deprivation factors. Welsh language results remained strong. English results fell at GCSE for Swansea and Wales as a result of changes in the marking policy at the Welsh exams board, WJEC. To increase performance in English there is a focus on improving teaching, assessment and moderation across schools in the authority. The local and national literacy strategies are developing. The measure used in the Corporate Improvement Plan to indicate improvement has been changed from the local reading test to the national statistics on English and Welsh at key points in formal education (end of Foundation Phase, end of key stage 2, end of key stage 3, and GCSE). This is a better way to measure the contribution language/literacy makes to overall performance.

There was continued improvement in performance for the authority as a whole. English results fell at GCSE for Swansea and Wales as a result of changes in the marking policy at the Welsh exams board, WJEC. This affected the rate of improvement in the *Level 2 Threshold including English/Welsh and Maths*.

What we plan to do this year?

Post-inspection actions are in place and there has been an increased focus on attendance in primary schools. Estyn showcased good practice it had identified in Swansea secondary schools. Comparative performance in three secondary schools [out of 14] still requires improvement. These schools will be the target of challenge and support. The challenge to all schools to improve learning and provision will be delivered through a partnership between schools and the authority.

Improvement Objective C: People are safe, well and supported to live independently (Child & family Services).

How we performed last year

Since 2012/13, the Council has successfully reduced the numbers of children becoming looked after for the first time in a few years as part of its strategy to do so safely; the numbers of children becoming looked after has reduced by 20%.

The number and rate of children who are looked after is favourable compared to other similar local authorities. Whilst the overall number of looked after children to 2014 remains stable and falling, having been reduced by 8% as at February 2014, other local authorities have experienced very significant increases; the number of looked after children in Wales has increased by 24% over the last 5 years.

What do we plan to do this year?

The Council is working with partners to keep referrals to children's social care services low as part of its safe looked after children reduction strategy. The numbers of children in need has fallen back to similar levels seen in 2010/11 while both the number of referrals and re-referrals to children's social care services has fallen. At the same time, the Council works to ensure that there is no delay intervening to protect a child where necessary.

Improvement Objective D: Develop Partnerships, skills and infrastructure in order to attract and grow a knowledge based economy creating jobs grounded in key sectors.

How we performed last year

Increased local awareness of the Beyond Bricks & Mortar project has resulted in a wider application of social benefits clauses, in particular, within lower value contracts, increasing training and employment opportunities for clients. Greater awareness within public, private and the third sectors has also been achieved since the sharing of information via the "Inform Swansea" web portal. National recognition for Beyond Bricks & Mortar was received - the project won the Community Benefits Award at the National Procurement Awards Wales.

Staff numbers have increased within the Workways project, in particular employment liaison officers, increasing the contact with employers in order to secure employment opportunities for clients; this will continue into 2014/15.

The introduction of a new web based planning applications interface has improved clients transparency, understanding and confidence in the planning process. However, as with the introduction of any new IT solution, service levels have experienced short term disruption.

What do we plan to do this year?

During 2014/15, work will continue to raise awareness of Beyond Bricks and Mortar, build networks with public and private organisations and support more service based contracts in order to maximise training and employment opportunities.

Work with the Welsh European Funding Office and the Regional Learning Partnership will also take place in 2014/15 to prepare and submit a bid for a new Employability and Skills project to run from 2014-2020.

Improvement Objective E: Promote affordable credit and savings options and help people maximise their income and entitlements

How we performed last year

Changes to the welfare system have led to an increase in the numbers of Swansea residents needing support to access their benefits entitlement. The Council successfully trained 595 Council staff in welfare rights and benefits advice appropriate to their role in 2013/14, although fewer than the 650 intended. This was due to a number of reasons including staff not attending courses and courses being cancelled because of delays in implementation dates from the Department of Work and Pensions.

The introduction of Welfare Reform and the spare room subsidy in April 2013 together with the general economic climate over the last few years has meant that there has been an increased focus on providing early financial advice and support for Council tenants in a bid to help them avoid financial difficulties. The Rents team introduced the dedicated role of a New Tenancy Officer and Financial Inclusion Officer to proactively identify tenants with particular issues of debt in order to provide early support. A pilot scheme was also set up to encourage tenants to join the credit union and to date 89 are members. In addition there has been a significant increase in the number of suspended warrants for evictions by either the Housing Service or the Court which is encouraging as the early advice and support to tenants is taking effect.

Prevention activities are also the key focus in the homelessness service as demand in terms of the numbers of homelessness applications continues to be high; around 3000 applications this year. Performance preventing homelessness for 6 months or more has consistently improved since 2007/08, rising to 49.3% in 12/13 and results for 2013/14 showing a small further improvement to 53.6%.

What do we plan to do this year?

Further consultation will take place this year with tenants on the development of a rent strategy to raise awareness, gather feedback and consider what other mechanisms are available to support tenants

The Welsh Government has proposed changes to the Homelessness Legislation in Wales and Councils are currently being consulted on the effects these could have on performance and services. The Council is currently utilising prevention monies made available by the Welsh Government and piloting the impact of how this could assist when the new legislation is likely to be implemented next year.

Improvement Objective F: Improve Housing and Housing supply in order to increase the availability of good quality, affordable housing

How we performed last year

2013/14 has seen an increase in the number of affordable units provided compared to 2012/13. However, the economic recession, construction activity and reduction of Social Housing Grant all of which are outside the direct control of the Council have impacted on the number of units provided which remains significantly less than what is needed.

In addition, work to make the best use of the Council's existing housing stock by reducing the number of empty council homes has been challenging during most of 2013/14 as the number of tenants ending their tenancies increased. The structure and processes for dealing with empty properties have undergone a significant amount of change during the last year following a systems thinking review to deliver improvements. A new IT system has been developed in order to monitor the effect of the use of key safes in terms of how quickly it takes to turnaround a void. A multi-task clearance, garden and cleaning team has been introduced and is proving to be successful. The end of tenancy trend has slowed down in the last quarter of 2013/14 and performance overall is an improvement on 2012/13.

The Council has sought to increase in the percentage of tenants staying in their Council tenancy for more than 2 years in order to provide families with more stability and cohesive communities in which to live. There has been a slight increase in the percentage of tenants staying in their Council tenancy for than 2 years during 2013/14. The Council provides a wide range of advice and support services to help tenants maintain their tenancies. Improving the properties up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard may encourage more tenants to stay longer in their home.

What do we plan to do this year?

The Council will continue to explore new funding models to provide more affordable housing. Piloting Accompanied viewings during the repairs process has been positive and will be fully implemented during 2014/15. The Council is currently updating its estate management strategy to help improve estates and encourage tenants to sustain their tenancies.

Improvement Objective G - Help people adopt and develop healthy and sustainable lifestyles in order to improve health.

How we performed last year

Sustaining physical and sporting activity outside of school should increase to around 11% (from 6%) when reported in July 14 due to the successful implementation of an area based approach and the use of contracted community coaches and young volunteers to provide more opportunities.

The ability to swim by age 11 and improving upon the result of 89% (July 13) is being limited by low pass rates from schools with high numbers of hard to reach pupils (e.g. BME, transient pupils). Remaining active following a GP exercise referral (after 12 months) has increased by 20% (to 74%) due to a combination of greater client engagement during the scheme, a more balanced programme of activities and offering discounted gym membership to encourage clients to stay active after the scheme has ended.

The Council wants to increase the number of growing spaces to encourage people to grow their own food, deal with rising food prices, help tackle poverty, promote healthier eating and encourage community cohesion. In 2013/14, a new team was created to co-ordinate food and growing work in Swansea. A £50,000 Grow Local budget was provided towards the development of community growing spaces.

Work has continued to increase pupils taking up free school lunch, which will assist learning and help secure their future well-being. Secondary schools have been working towards total compliance with Appetite for Life Nutrition and Food based standards during 2013/14. There has been an ongoing effort in primary schools through parents meetings to improve the take up of free breakfast for all pupils, particularly in the schools with highest numbers of free school meals. The Council has made progress developing cashless payment systems so that it is not obvious which pupils receive free school meals; this will help reduce stigma associated with free school meals and encourage take-up..

What do we plan to do this year?

Efforts to directly address low swim pass rates from schools with high numbers of hard to reach pupils have started and form part of the improvement plan in 2014/15. Current discussions with GP Exercise referral scheme partners (Welsh Government) could result in potentially extending the scheme for identified children and young people.

The scope of the Grow Local scheme has been expanded to offer support towards opportunities around cooking as part of community garden projects.

We will publish guidance on Urban Growing aimed at new developments as well as community initiatives.

We will work with the Community Land Advisory service (CLAS CYmmru) to identify land suitable for allotments and community gardens.

The cost of school meals rose to £2.00 in January 2014 to help with increased food cost. Meal prices had not previously increased since 2012; any effects from this increase on take-up are being monitored

Improvement Objective H: People are safe, well and supported to live independently (Adult Services).

How we performed last year

Safeguarding is a core function of the work of social services. In 2012/13, the Council reviewed its safeguarding arrangements to ensure that they were effective at managing risk. This is being done through the Western Bay regional arrangements but also by fostering a collective approach to safeguarding by making it 'everyone's business', not just the responsibility of a discrete function or team; these new arrangements will be evaluated for their effectiveness during 2014/15.

Keeping people independent is a core social care value. During 2013/14 the Council has helped promote independent living in a number of ways; firstly, by continuing to roll out the assessment beds project. This project aims through a short period of rehabilitation / reablement within a care home setting, to help people live independently at home for as long as possible. The Council now has 20 assessments beds compared to just 2 beds when the project started in 2011. An evaluation of the effectiveness of Bonymaen House in providing reablement support was undertaken in 2013/14; of the 53 people who had stayed in the assessment beds, over half (60.38%) had returned home successfully and after 6 weeks, over three-quarters surveyed were still at home.

What do we plan to do this year?

Other ways the Council has helped promote people to live independently included setting up an integrated care team; social care and health professionals working together to provide care and support in hard to reach areas. Work also continued to ensure that people with lower support needs are diverted away from social services care and into community based and third-sector resources at the point of contact. Many service users were extremely positive about this initiative and the work undertaken to connect people with community resources.

Improvement Objective I – Minimise Waste and increase recycling through promotion, working with others and by targeting low participating areas.

How we performed last year

Despite introducing various initiatives, the Council failed to meet the statutory 52% recycling rate for 2012/13. Current estimations are that the authority is on track to meet the statutory 52% recycling target in 2013/14 with waste returns currently showing an increase in the tonnages recycled over the first 3 quarters up over 4,500 tonnes in comparison to the similar period last year.

The ongoing door knocking campaign has proved successful in persuading residents who didn't recycle/compost their household waste to start to do so. The introduction of recycling facilities at flats has also proved productive and our service has been recognised as a model of good practice. The development of a 'Re-Use' shop at the Baling plant has been a great success. The introduction of 'Meet and Greet' officers at HWRC's has been well received along with the introduction of rubble recycling facilities.

What do we plan to do this year?

The development of existing initiatives and the funding and implementation of further planned initiatives should see the Council meet the statutory target of 58% during 2015/16.