

Dear Director

CIW Local Authority Performance Review

We published our code of practice for review of local authority social services in April 2019 which outlined our intention to write and publish an annual letter for local authorities which will:

- provide feedback on inspection and performance evaluation activity completed by us during the year;
- report on progress the local authority has made in implementing recommendations from inspections and/or child and adult practice reviews;
- outline our forward work programme.

This letter summarises our review of Swansea City Council's performance in carrying out its statutory social services functions. It follows the four principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) and our increasingly collaborative and strengths based approach to supporting improvement. The letter is intended to assist the local authority and its partners to continually improve.

The content is informed by CIW's inspection of:

- Swansea Council's children services during July 2018
- Western Bay Youth Offending Service Joint Inspection in December 2018

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

- Joint HIW and CIW inspection of Community Mental Health Team

And, performance evaluation activity during the course of the year:

- Local Authority self-evaluation in respect of thematic work focusing on prevention and promoting independence for older people (65+).
- Focused activity within adult safeguarding and deprivation of liberty safeguards service area.

We discussed these matters and our proposed performance evaluation activity for 2019/20 with you at the annual performance review meeting on 1st May 2019.

Summary of strengths and areas for improvement in line with principles of SSWBA

- Well-being

A designated deprivation of liberty safeguards (DoLS) team has been in operation since July 2018 and has processed the backlog of applications. DoLS authorisations are now consistently being processed in a timely manner and under the 11-week national average. There is good management oversight ensuring consistency and quality of work. We heard from staff members of the benefits of having a designated DoLS team where they could “hone and develop their skills and knowledge.” Staff we spoke with felt supported and enjoyed their work, however the new model faced some challenges due to a six monthly rotation of staff within the team.

We found safeguarding referrals are responded to in a timely manner and action is taken to safeguard adults at risk. The safeguarding process is devolved to the teams and presents the local authority with some challenges including ensuring consistency of threshold decisions and quality of work. We will be reviewing the local authority’s plans in improving outcomes for adults at risk ensuring personal outcomes are linked to safeguarding.

Designated lead managers shared with us there were no formal support processes in place, however informally supported each other and felt a mentor system would be beneficial in providing support. The local authority will need to ensure there are clear policies in place to support practitioners to undertake their role. We heard of the challenges of work demands from staff members and they viewed a designated safeguarding team would be more effective. We heard this was an area currently under consideration by Senior Managers.

Swansea City Council’s Signs of Safety (SOS) approach within children’s services, which underpinned assessments as well as safeguarding and care planning, provided a detailed framework which was well understood by staff, and clearly prioritised risk. Sound assessment and care planning processes were utilised as a basis for identifying need, and planning and delivering the support required to achieve agreed individual outcomes. The ‘what matters conversation and voice of the child were not always apparent in assessment and planning records; improvements are also required in recording strengths and personal outcomes.

- People – voice and control

We assessed the local authority leadership, direction and progress in embedding Welsh language in front-line services as part of inspection and annual performance evaluation activities with the need to meet the requirements of the Welsh language 'active offer' being recognised. The local authority also supports people from a range of black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and has access to translators and interpreters to assist with this.

Swansea Council children's services have a relatively stable and resilient workforce that is committed to being child focused, and is passionate about keeping families together and achieving good outcomes for children. Staff consistently told us they enjoyed working for the local authority where there was a culture of support which they valued, even when demands were high people were happy within their roles. In contrast, staff morale was noted to be low within the youth offending service inspection, and an area for focus for the local authority when involved in organisational changes.

Children and young people we spoke to were generally positive about the support they received, and were appreciative of the relationships established with individual social workers.

Our monitoring of the deprivation of liberty safeguards has identified the local authority, in common with many others in Wales, is unable to assure itself people's human rights are not being breached by being deprived of their liberty unlawfully. We will continue to monitor this.

- Prevention

The local authority has reshaped its services to meet the requirements of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA). There has been an increase in demand for children's services over recent years, and the need to work more effectively with partner agencies to respond positively to children and their families had been recognised and acted on. The launch of the multi-agency Pathway to Provision Guidance has promoted clarity around thresholds and pathways for partner agencies.

As part of the local authority's wider Poverty and Prevention agenda, the Team Around the Family (TAF) service has been successfully embedded within the majority of schools across Swansea, and is considered by partner agencies to be working well. The plans we heard about to further develop a 'Signs of Wellbeing' approach at the first point of contact are likely to strengthen the local authority's early intervention and prevention services. This will be an area for consideration of our focused activity in 2019/20.

Throughout 2018 our programme of work focused on care experienced children and young people. Qualitative evidence was gathered from six local authority children and fostering inspections, 22 self-evaluations completed by local authorities, challenge meetings held with those local authorities who were not subject to an inspection and engagement activity with care experienced children, care leavers and foster carers. The report will be published on our website, with key findings made in respect of profile, sufficiency, practice, partnerships, stability, governance and corporate parenting. Many of the areas we have identified for improvement are being considered by Welsh Government's Ministerial Advisory Group on improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people and we also hope local authorities will consider their own contribution to addressing these findings.

- Partnerships

Our CMHT inspection found areas of strength and made recommendations for improvements. An integrated approach is needed by the local authority and its partners in following up the recommendations. The inspection found good compliance with the Mental Health Measure around service users' rights to a reassessment by the CMHT once discharged by the team if the person felt this was needed.

Effective working relationships were in place between the CMHT and child and families team. Our children's services inspection highlighted some areas of good partnership working with a need for improved partnership working between education and children services. We will follow up with the local authority as part of planned focused activity.

We found good quality practice in Swansea Council children's services, with positive outcomes being achieved for many children and young people. The performance hub had enabled strengthening quality assurance and management oversight.

The local authority had worked hard to increase the proportion of children and young people placed with in-house foster carer placements instead of being placed outside of the local authority. We saw that attempts were consistently made to maintain children within their families, where this was in their best interests.

Placement choice continued to present on-going challenges, particularly for children and young people with more complex needs. There have been occasions where children have been placed in unregulated settings for short periods due to these challenges and an area recognised by the local authority in need of improvement. There have been some challenges to achieving the best outcomes for children with complex needs and partnership working with health boards. The local authority are proactive in its approach in identifying areas for development and use a range of approaches for supporting improvement.

The youth offending service inspection found the governance and leadership of the service to be ineffective. The inspection found concerns in respect of the management of risk and outcomes for children and young people. The local authority have considered the findings of this inspection and is developing plans for a Swansea youth offending service (YOS) to ensure better outcomes for children and improve oversight.

The need for strengthening of supervision arrangements were areas identified in three separate inspections: the children services inspection, CMHT inspection and YOS inspections. This is an area senior leaders will need to review to ensure there are robust systems in place to support staff within the workplace.

Within children services there has been a stable, consistent and experienced senior leadership team which has led the department with confidence. Workforce is a source of challenge for the local authority and there is a need to focus on future proofing the organisation and maintaining stability.

Within adult services there has been a period of instability due to reshaping services / operational structures and also changes in personnel. There is a need to focus on strengthening management oversight of this service to enable effective delivery of the local authority's transformation agenda and ensuring the workforce are supported through a period of change. There is a need to ensure a right balance of managing day to day risks alongside reshaping services in order to drive improvements.

Swansea Council is a learning organisation and fully aware of its strengths and areas in need of improvements and have a proactive approach to improvement and ensuring positive outcomes, however this is an ongoing significant challenge due to budgetary and workforce issues.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2019-20

Our scheduled thematic adult services inspection programme for 2019/20 will be focusing on prevention and promoting independence for older people and for children services thematic inspection the focus will be on prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. If your local authority is selected for inclusion in this programme, you will receive four weeks' notice of the scheduled date of the inspection.

We will undertake engagement activities aligned to the thematic inspections and meet with people who receive care and support services. CIW will be convening a meeting with the local authority and its key partners in the summer to follow up areas identified in the self-evaluation submitted in January 2019 focusing on prevention and promoting independence for older people self-evaluation. A thematic national report will be published upon the completion of inspections and engagement activities.

In late 2019 we will pilot a joint inspection of child protection arrangements. The joint inspection will be led by CIW and in partnership with HIW, Estyn, HMI Constabulary (HMICFRS) and HMI Probation. With the drive towards collaboration and integration in public services, CIW work closely with other inspectorates to share intelligence and jointly plan inspections. We will work closely with Social Care Wales to support improvement in social care services.

CIW will continue in 2019/2020 to work with HIW in jointly inspecting community mental health teams. CIW will be following up recommendations made within HIW and CIW joint thematic review of Community Mental Health Teams as part of bi-annual head of service meetings with local authorities.

Our focused activity with the local authority will include following up areas for improvement following inspection activity, learning outcomes for children with focus on partnership working and the first point of contact service. Within adult services we will focus on reviewing personal outcomes of adults at risk.

This may be subject to change in the light of emerging issues.

You will note that this letter has been copied to colleagues in WAO, Estyn and HIW. CIW works closely with partner inspectorates to consider the wider corporate perspective in which social services operate, as well as local context for social services performance.

We will publish the final version of this letter on our website.

Yours sincerely

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

Sharon Eastlake
Interim Head of Local Authority Inspection Team
Care Inspectorate Wales

Cc.
WAO
HIW
Estyn