



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Performance Evaluation Report 2013–14

Flintshire County Council
Social Services

October 2014

This report sets out the key areas of progress and areas for improvement in Flintshire County Council Social Services for the year 2013–14

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013 - 2014

Local Authority: Flintshire County Council

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Summary

The council is increasingly realistic about the challenges posed by the need to deliver improving services within the context of reducing financial resources. This has accelerated the drive to greater efficiency, improving strategic partnership working, more integrated services and a growing commitment to regional commissioning.

The council has responded within a regional context in outlining its plans for the integration of health and social care services for older people with complex needs. It recognises there is no single coherent system of integration operating across North Wales, but that all current systems meet the key requirements of a shared governance framework with emphasis upon prevention and early intervention.

There is evidence of progress in a number of key areas in adult services with more people able to restore and maintain their independence, with relatively few needing residential care.

Performance is less consistent in children's services and whilst there is evidence of good work, some planning and reviewing arrangements require strengthening in order to secure more robust quality assurance and the delivery of better outcomes in key areas such as health care and educational attainment. There have been large increases in the number of referrals to children's services and those on the child protection register, with a significant fall in the numbers of children in need.

The council is responding to the requirements of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 through its service transformation programme, and although the recent corporate senior management restructure has the potential to affect momentum, it is confident that it will remain on track to deliver key objectives.

The More Than Just Words action plan has the potential to provide a stronger framework in the delivery of equal status for English and Welsh languages.

Response to last year's areas of improvement

Area for improvement identified last year	Progress in 2013-14
The ability to influence locality focused strategic planning with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB)	Some progress in adult services, but more needs to be done to ensure that children and young people receive appropriate health care.
All adult service users having a timely review	Almost all have their care plans reviewed on time – the best performance in Wales.
Adult carer data capture	This requires further improvement as numbers of known carers have fallen by almost 50%.
Timely reviews for children in need	This has weakened further with little more than 50% of children in need having a timely review.
Stability of placements for looked after children	Placements are steadier and performance is amongst the best in Wales.
Securing consistently robust outcomes in adult safeguarding.	There is some evidence that safeguarding developments are leading to greater consistency in risk mitigation.
Stronger care management role in adult safeguarding	Awareness of safeguarding is increasing and there is greater care management representation.
Health assessments for looked after children	More work needs to be done with health colleagues to ensure that these are done.
Dental checks for looked after children	More work needs to be done with health colleagues to ensure that these are done.
Educational attainment for looked after children at age 16	There has been some improvement, but this needs to be sustained in order to match the best in Wales.
Absence management outcomes	There has been little progress in

remain an outstanding area for improvement from the previous year	addressing this and its impact upon capacity to deliver services.
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Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

CSSIW conducted two thematic inspections during the year. The first was undertaken in partnership with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Auditor General for Wales (AGW) and focused upon the commissioning of care and support for people with dementia and their carers. The second reviewed safeguarding and care planning for vulnerable looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour.

The CSSIW inspection of Flintshire Fostering Services was largely positive and found that there was effective support provided by a stable and consistent team, together with a well-organised fostering panel.

CSSIW has successfully undertaken its scheduled inspection programme of regulated services operating in the Flintshire area.

Quarterly engagement meetings have taken place with senior council officers. These have been used to review social services performance and discuss progress with the areas for improvement identified in last year's report.

Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

Priority areas for improvement have been identified in this report and progress in relation to these will be monitored through scheduled engagement meetings during the year. CSSIW will follow up:

- Strategic planning activity with BCUHB
- Assessment and care management arrangements for looked after children
- Assessment and care management arrangements for children in need
- Carer support in both adult and children's services
- The impact of the new senior management structure
- Absence management and its impact
- CSSIW will be contributing at a review with WAO examining whether councils are effectively supporting older people to live independently, including through joined up working across health and social care

Performance

Shaping services

Adults

The council is continuing to reshape and reinvest through a smarter commissioning approach that is designed to reduce dependency and promote independence. The recent CSSIW national review of commissioning in adult services found evidence of a maturing approach that balanced current and future demand against projected financial and market data. It determined that commissioning made increasingly effective use of market intelligence to inform planning and decision-making, leaving the council better positioned to secure longer-term goals. As a consequence few people need residential care as an outcome of greater emphasis upon supporting those in their own homes.

However, partnership arrangements with BCUHB for people with dementia are not as developed or effective as they should be. The council is committed to building upon existing initiatives and is hopeful that the period of senior management transition at BCUHB will be swift and that new opportunities will be presented to explore more integrated strategic planning approaches.

Partnership working with other councils across North Wales increasingly shapes planning and the council is an active participant within the North Wales Commissioning Hub (NWCH). This has resulted in improved cost rationalisation, better use of regional capacity and more consistent quality monitoring.

Resources are now more focused upon supporting strategic priorities and there is better alignment of commissioning with higher-quality outcomes for service users. For example, home care visits last a minimum of 30 minutes and the council has recently committed to no longer commissioning care home rooms with more than one bed, unless by service user choice. An increasing number of contract monitoring issues and CSSIW inspection outcomes have led to an identified need for further high-quality nursing home care in the local area. Furthermore, the council only has one nursing home for people with dementia within its boundary and 69 people who need this type of provision are placed out of county.

Children

The council is utilising grant funding e.g. Flying Start and investing more in an early intervention approach that works in partnership with key stakeholders to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. This requires a shift in focus to the causes rather than the symptoms of problems - with investment in prevention designed to reduce the demand for longer-term specialist services. As a consequence, the council is building the early intervention model within its

framework of core services. The Families First Programme is now providing a more consistent approach to fulfilling its aim of reducing poverty in families. The development of the use of the Challenging Years Programme that offers support for parents of teenagers is an example of how the Families First Programme is providing early intervention in the stage of a problem.

The establishment of the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) signals a greater drive to closer working partnership in delivering services. In collaboration with Wrexham County Borough Council and BCUHB, it encompasses a multi-agency approach to work with families where parents have substance misuse needs that affect the welfare of their children.

All out-of-area residential placements for looked after children are now contracted through the NWCH in order to secure greater consistency in quality and value for money.

Areas of progress

- Needs-led commissioning in adult services.
- Collaborative IFSS arrangement is first to be operational in North Wales.

Areas for improvement

- Strategic planning with BCUHB.
- Shaping and commissioning higher-quality nursing home care in the local area.

Getting help

Adults

There is a good range of information available online in formats that are responsive when viewed on a range of media devices of varying screen sizes. Accessibility is good, but a recent council survey of its website received mixed results and this has prompted a review of online navigation and signposting of services.

The council is the host organisation for a regional programme that aims to develop improved access to health and social care through the creation of a Single Point of Access (SPOA) across North Wales. The goal is to deliver a more streamlined service that will provide equal access to advice, assessment, community health and social cares services. It is anticipated that this will commence in 2016.

People contacting the council receive a timely response, and although there have been some delays in supporting people to leave hospital when ready to do so, performance remains better than the Wales average.

Almost all service users have timely care plan reviews - the best performance in Wales. This is important as it enables the council to monitor and review care needs on a regular basis and therefore more effectively respond to changing requirements.

The North East Wales Carers Information Service (NEWCIS) has been commissioned to assist in identifying and supporting adult carers. Last year, the council acknowledged that more needed to be done to improve data capture, as reported information suggested a fall in known carers. This has yet to reach fruition and there has been a further reduction in numbers due to continuing data issues – down by almost 50%. The council needs to address this in order to assure itself that its work with carers can be quantified and better inform commissioning processes.

Children

There is a good range of information available that is accessible and comprehensive. The council recognises that children and young people are increasingly using this online through mobile devices that require responsive websites to deliver information in formats that adapt to the size of the viewing screen. A smartphone app is also available – the first in North Wales.

Demand has significantly increased during the past year with numbers of reported requests for assessment of need growing by over 70% during the year. Repeat referrals have reduced to 13% and the initial response is timely, with over 99% of referrals having a decision made within one working day.

More initial assessments were undertaken, representing an increase of almost 18% against the previous year, although the overall proportion completed within timescales marginally reduced. More children were seen alone by social workers and this provides greater opportunities for a child or young person to express views and wishes. The number of core assessments undertaken increased by 40%, although the proportion completed within 35 working days has fallen by 9%. Onsite inspection work found that some assessments were not routinely updated and that a number of associated risk assessments were not complete. The council has indicated that increased numbers of referrals have affected its ability to respond within timescales.

The council has reported that there have been delays in obtaining specialist mental health services and has therefore taken steps to address this through direct funding of a Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) post – this will need to be closely monitored in order to assess its impact.

Fewer reviews of the needs of looked after children took place within required timescales, despite a small reduction in overall numbers of reviews due. This was

mirrored for children in need where there was an even greater fall in the proportion reviewed on time, with little more than 50% achieving this standard – the lowest in Wales. This was an area for improvement last year that has not received the sustained attention it requires. The council has further indicated that referral increases have affected its ability to conduct reviews on time and it will therefore need to closely monitor the impact this is having generally upon capacity and how best to address this.

Reaching young carers has been a priority and numbers have recently been increasing. Assessments are now commissioned through Barnado's Flintshire Young Carers project. These arrangements require strengthening in order to ensure more stretching service level agreement targets – as it stands, recent data suggests a fall in those known, assessed and provided with a service by social services.

Areas of progress

- Timely reviews of care plans for adults.
- Children seen alone by a social worker.

Areas for improvement

- Timely reviews for children in need – this has deteriorated despite being an area for improvement last year.
- Addressing the fall in numbers of known young, and adult, carers.

The services provided

Adults

There is a continued emphasis upon strengthening prevention and intensive early intervention opportunities for people in order to further maximise independence, promote wellbeing and enable self-determination – evidenced through initiatives such as Well Check and Living Well. Greater investment in partnership working is increasingly leading to the development of suites of services that are supporting more people in the community and fewer in residential care.

The council is seeking to increase its extra care provision through the development of two additional sites, whilst also establishing a dementia café at the Llys Jasmine setting.

The launch of the Bridging the Gap scheme for carers, in partnership with NEWCIS, provides increased opportunities to access flexible breaks and replacement care, frequently at short notice.

Contract monitoring services continue to be very effective in working proactively to identify shortfalls in care quality and seek immediate corrective action. This is increasingly influencing commissioning reviews to assist in driving up quality of care in partnership with other commissioning organisations. There has been a significant increase in action to address poor performance in care services commissioned by the council.

The council is better engaged in seeking feedback about the quality of commissioned services, having developed a set of involvement standards that are increasingly meaningful and outcome focused. This is supported by the use of questionnaires and analysis of work undertaken by independent organisations, such as Care Checkers, which provide important service user information about perceptions of care and support. This has been used by the council to underpin its development of the recently implemented Older People Commissioning Strategy.

The council recorded an increase in complaints, up from 51 to 62, of which four progressed to Stage Two of the process that facilitates an independent investigation. Over 90% of Stage One complaints were managed within the required timescale of ten working days. This represents a further improvement on last year, with those affected largely being as a result of scheduling issues.

There is evidence that complaint outcomes are prompting evaluation and review of policy and practice, and therefore driving improvement. This is indicated by recent changes to transport eligibility, hospital discharge arrangements and published information about how charges are calculated.

The council received 169 compliments, up from 140 the previous year. Almost half of these related to reablement services for older people and reflects very positively on the work of staff in this area.

Work is continuing to better respond to the needs of Welsh speakers and their families or carers, with the More Than Just Words action plan providing a stronger framework for detailing the practical steps taken to ensure English and Welsh languages have equal status. Amongst a number of initiatives, this has so far resulted in the inclusion of Welsh language requirements into commissioning and planning systems.

Children

Although there has been an increase in the number of children and young people who are looked after, those experiencing multiple placements have reduced and performance is now amongst the best in Wales.

Numbers of children in need have fallen by over a third within a year and the council will need to review the reasons for this and its potential impact.

There was a significant increase in the number of complaints, up from 57 to 87, of which seven proceeded to Stage Two of the process with three moving to Stage Three.

Fewer Stage One complaints were processed within required timescales with 25% not meeting the ten working day standard.

The council has reflected upon the lessons learned from recent complaints and, as a consequence, has improved processes relating to voluntary accommodation, direct payments and safeguarding. It is also developing an appeals panel process for residential placement requests that are turned down.

There were 74 compliments, up from 67, primarily from families with some relating to work during court proceedings.

Areas of progress

- Increasing range of initiatives that promote independence and support for older people and carers.
- Stability of placements for looked after children.

Areas for improvement

- Timescales in processing complaints, particularly in children's services.

Effect on people's lives

Adults

More people are using services that focus upon prevention, rehabilitation and reablement as a consequence of increasingly effective integrated working that has supported almost 1,400 people over the previous year – an increase of 46%. The council states that 55% of people using reablement services achieved full independence, no longer requiring any further services.

The timely provision of aids and adaptations is an important factor in restoring and maintaining independence. In order to further improve its response, the council has initiated a self-assessment project that is designed to speed up the process of obtaining small pieces of equipment, as grab rails and stair rails. Provisional evaluation and positive customer feedback indicates that this approach has much potential, with almost 100 referrals received within the first six months of operation, with 72% of people provided with equipment without the need for a home visit.

The council continues to review and strengthen its safeguarding arrangements in order to deliver a more responsive and consistent service. Supporting investigations are becoming more timely and thorough since the appointment of a social worker to focus specifically on safeguarding enquiries.

The council has been more effective in raising awareness of safeguarding matters and referral numbers increasing from 96 to 184 over the past year demonstrates this.

Contracts monitoring staff continue to play a pivotal and proactive role in early identification of potential safeguarding matters and work closely with commissioning staff in driving up the quality of care.

There has been an increase in recent work to support the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) that provides a legal framework to protect people living in care homes and hospitals who are vulnerable because of mental disorder and lack of mental capacity. Recent case law has considerably widened the scope for potential application of the safeguards and this is already having a marked impact upon demand and the need for the council to appropriately respond. Provisional analysis suggests that this could have significant resource implications for the council and it will need to work closely with partners on a regional basis to meet increasing demand.

Children

Numbers on the child protection register have grown sharply; up from 58 to 133 when compared at 31 March 2014 to the same point the previous year. While all have an allocated social worker, the increase in numbers will undoubtedly have had an impact upon capacity to provide the same level of support as previously.

Fewer initial child protection conferences are conducted within required timescales - down from 97% to 89% - and the council needs to closely monitor its performance in order to minimise any potential drift in ensuring a timely response at this critical stage.

Statutory visits to looked after children form an important part of the process of safeguarding and promoting welfare – they provide vital opportunities for a child or young person to voice concerns or raise issues. Although all were undertaken, fewer took place within timescales, with performance being amongst the lowest in Wales, affecting over 300 children and young people. The council needs to speedily understand and respond to this sharp decline in performance.

The importance of ensuring looked after children have equal access to health care services was identified as an area for improvement last year and, although some progress has been made, much more needs to be done. Health assessments

remain fundamental to this, but the proportion undertaken remains amongst the lowest in Wales at 57%. Although a shared responsibility with BCUHB, this requires effective partnership working to drive rapid improvement and must be prioritised by the council.

High quality and up-to-date Personal Education Plans play a key role in supporting positive educational outcomes for looked after children. They serve as the overarching means of ensuring needs are met, aspirations documented and progress tracked. On that basis, more needs to be done to address the decline in those being undertaken, when required, within the initial period of 20 school days – little more than half meet this standard, amongst the lowest performers in Wales.

Pathway plans are central to providing young people with opportunities to express their wishes and aspirations for the future – and how they can be supported in meeting them. The council does well in continuing to achieve a standard whereby all looked after children have pathway plans as required – this places it amongst a small number in Wales who achieve this level.

Educational attainment for looked after children aged 16 continues on an upward trend, but more needs to be done to improve life chances in this important area if the council is to rank amongst the best in Wales.

Outcomes for young adults aged 19 who were formerly looked after are mixed, with only seven of the twelve, known to be engaged in education, training or employment.

Areas of progress

- Reablement outcomes.
- Self-assessment initiative for small items of equipment.
- Dedicated social work role for safeguarding investigation in adult services.
- Pathway plans for looked after children.

Areas for improvement

- Initial child protection conference timescales.
- Statutory visits for looked after children.
- Health assessment for looked after children.
- Timely Personal Educational Plans for looked after children.
- Outcomes for young adults who were formerly looked after.

Capacity

Delivering Social Services:

The council champions a 'one sector, one workforce' approach in order to secure the best outcomes for people in living independently. There is a clear sense that planning for future workforce development requires the input of all stakeholders and strong partnership arrangements. This has resulted in increasing numbers of independent and voluntary sector staff receiving training alongside the council workforce.

Training options have been expanded in areas that support the council's vision to promote more integrated working that delivers better quality services – this includes wellness recovery action planning, reablement, dementia, Direct Payments, looked after children and safeguarding.

Staff turnover remains low, at 6% in adult services and 8% in children's services. This is balanced against sickness absence rates that are relatively high, with 16 days lost per full time worker in adult services and 13 in children's services. This compares with a UK all sectors average in 2013 of just over four days lost per full time worker. The council has made some progress in addressing long-term absences, but this remains an area for attention.

Performance monitoring arrangements are generally good, but not always used consistently to support service development and improvement. For example, there is scope to strengthen data collation and analysis of commissioning activity, together with better systems to test the impact of investment, from both quality and value for money perspectives. In some areas it is difficult for managers to judge the effectiveness of new commissioning initiatives.

The most recently published comparative revenue outturn data indicates that council expenditure on social services is amongst the lowest in Wales. There is a reported provisional £1.4m underspend for adult services and a £1.1m overspend for children's services for 2013-14.

Areas of progress

- One sector, one workforce approach to training.
- Low staff turnover rate.

Areas for improvement

- Data collation associated with commissioning to test impact and value for money.
- Sickness absence levels.

Providing direction

The council has undoubtedly benefited in recent years from strong leadership and a clear sense of direction and purpose. There has been progress, evidenced by a transformation of a number of services with greater emphasis upon safeguarding, reablement and maintaining independence.

Leadership arrangements have been subject to recent review with the intention of delivering a leaner and more operationally efficient senior management structure. This has resulted in a significant reduction in senior management posts across the whole council, with a single tier replacing directors and service heads. The recent departure of both heads of operational services has created a period of uncertainty and presents some risks in ensuring that momentum in service transformation is maintained.

CSSIW has reminded the council of the need to provide assurance that it retains sufficient capacity and capability to effectively deliver its statutory responsibilities for social services. As a consequence, initial proposals have been revised and a senior management transition risk assessment for social services has been developed that supplements the corporate version. This provides greater clarity of accountability for services and reporting lines, but identified risks and controls for their potential mitigation are limited.

This heralds a testing time for the council as it attempts to ensure that its commitment to reducing operating costs and overheads, coupled with on-going financial pressures, do not compromise its ability to innovate and continually improve the quality of social care. Its immediate budget strategy is largely based upon generating sufficient organisational efficiency savings, whilst prioritising the protection of local services. It recognises that the new operating model is not without risk, but is confident that services will be better placed to meet increasing demand and changing expectations.

Political support remains effective with strong commitment to the modernisation programme that is rapidly seeking to redesign how services are delivered. There has been significant investment in ensuring that the workforce is actively engaged within the change process.

Areas of progress

- Strong political support for service transformation.

Areas for improvement

- Reviewing the impact of recent senior management structural changes.