

SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Thursday 5 th November 2015
Report Subject	CSSIW Inspection of Children's Services in Flintshire
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer, Social Services
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales CSSIW concerning their Inspection of Children's Services In Flintshire and sets out the clear action plan of the council in response to the report.

The inspection carried out a detailed inspection of services during May and June 2015, concerning 4 main themes:

- Theme 1 Access Arrangements
- Theme 2 Assessment
- Theme 3 Safeguarding and Care Management
- Theme 4 Leadership and Governance

The report reflects that there are many strengths in the service notably good social work practice, strong political and corporate support for children's services, and, timely, well managed and child focussed child protection conferences and reviews. The service was also found to have a committed, suitably trained and qualified workforce with a strong commitment from senior managers to achieve improvements in the support for children and families.

The report reflects areas that the council needs to secure improvements in the duty and assessment model for children, our process for initial screening and the quality and timeliness of assessment and care plans. Furthermore the council's strategic vision for the service needs to be translated into a strategy that is well understood by staff, users and partners.

The report acknowledges that children's services has undergone a period of transition in the last year and supports the approach of the new senior team in taking forward positive service change. Flintshire's action plan in direct response to the 12 recommendations for improvement is included as Appendix 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Scrutiny consider and comment on the conclusions of the inspection report, the effectiveness of the action plan and the process for monitoring as laid out in Appendix 1.2.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE INSPECTION REPORT
1.01	Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales undertook an inspection of children's services in Flintshire County Council during May and June, 2015, looking closely at the experiences of children and young people who needed help and protection, The scope of the inspection was wide and included investigation of all areas of children's services. Over 70 cases were reviewed and a team of 4 Inspectors spent 2 weeks on site meeting with staff, managers, service users and partners.
1.02	The report is appended in full in Appendix 2, including an evaluation of the council's own assessment of its own performance and how it was seeking to improve the service. In the main the conclusions of the report coincided with the councils own evaluation of its strengths and areas for improvement, and the suggested Recommendations for change are areas that the council is already taking forward. This report summarises a number of the main findings.
1.03	The report examined 4 key areas of service or themes as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to Services• Assessment• Safeguarding and Care Management;• Leadership and Governance
1.04	Theme 1 Access to Services In this theme the report concluded that our early intervention/ prevention arrangements were not yet sufficiently impacting on early help. The report finds that the Councils' initial screening and referral managing process is in need of improvement and also needed to be more clearly understood by partner agencies. The report also concluded that the configuration of small teams or 'pods' within duty and assessment did not sufficiently consider continuity for young people and families.
1.05	The Council was seen to be rightly responsive to situations of risk, but needed to increase the consistency of response in other situations. The service has already started to reconfigure the front door of the service and, as is recognised in the report, our action plan is already well underway in restructuring the service. This includes a complete review of the front door duty and assessment team, moving away from the pod system to a structure that responds supportively to the needs of families and maximises continuity of social worker.

1.06	<p>Theme 2 Assessment</p> <p>A clear and important conclusion of the inspection is that they found good sound social work practice in our services. However the inspection team believed that the design and structure of the assessment process needed to improve to support this approach. In particular the report found that a duplication in assessment process needs to be stopped and the overall quality and timeliness of assessments and care plans needs to be improved to a consistent standard.</p>
1.07	<p>Again assessments carried out by Social Workers often truly reflected and articulated children's, wishes and feelings but this needed to be further translated into plans which were fully child focussed.</p>
1.08	<p>Theme 3 Safeguarding and Care Management</p> <p>The inspection found that the councils approach to child protection conferences was timely well managed and child focussed. Furthermore looked after children reviews were well managed with Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) having the skills and experience to provide a good quality service. Social workers' could effectively articulate children's needs and their actions required for reducing risk and achieving desired outcomes, the Public Law Outline approach was a real strength.</p>
1.09	<p>There were, however, areas of improvement needing to be made to risk assessment, reducing changes of social worker and increasing consistency of care plans.</p>
1.10	<p>Theme 4 Leadership and Governance</p> <p>The findings identified that Senior Leaders and Officers saw safeguarding as a priority for the council and were committed to developing and improving the service. Another welcome finding was a real positive reflection on our frontline workers and their managers, with a suitably qualified, experienced and committed workforce found to be in place. Flintshire has a good reputation as a positive place to work, where staff were valued and enjoyed working in an authority that promoted a good work life balance. Social worker recruitment and retention was highlighted as a clear strength.</p>
1.11	<p>However, the report found that the strategic direction for children's services needed to be translated into a strategy for the delivery that is effectively communicated to all stakeholders and that performance and quality assurance information needs to be further strengthened.</p>
1.12	<p>Based on the conclusions of the report, twelve Recommendations for required change in the service were made for which the Council has prepared a robust action plan appended as Appendix 2. Certainly a number of the recommendations recognise that the Council have already identified the area concerned as requiring support and have started to make progress in response to this key issue.</p>

1.13	It is important that the governance for the oversight of the action plan in response to this report is taken forward at the most senior level in the Council, with full political and corporate oversight of the further improvements to be made in children's services. Therefore it is proposed that a full report on progress with the action plan is made in 3/4 months' time, and again 6 months later in the summer of 2016. Ongoing oversight of the action progress will be made by the Social Services Programme Board, one of the key Boards set up by the Council to oversee portfolio business plans.
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2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
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2.01	The action plan in response to the report will require considerable capacity from staff and managers at all levels, and there will be a resource implication. However this is already accounted for in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
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3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
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3.01	No specific consultations required in this report. There will be extensive consultation with service users, staff, trade unions, partners, as a result of the taking forward of the action plan in response to the report.
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4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
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4.01	The proper exercise of safeguarding functions is one of the most important functions of the council. Therefore it is very important that the effective development of children's services is supported, which is achieved by the action plan in response to this report. As the report says the oversight of this action plan will be taken forward by Modernising Social Services Programme Board, one of the key Programme Boards set up to oversee portfolio business plans in the council, and through Cabinet.
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5.00	APPENDICES
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5.01	Appendix 1 - CSSIW Inspection of Children's Services, September 2015
5.02	Appendix 2 - CSSIW Inspection Action Plan Update, October 2015

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
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6.01	<p><i>None.</i></p> <p>Contact Officer: Neil Ayling, Chief Officer, Social Services Telephone: 01352 704523 E-mail: neil.j.ayling@flintshire.gov.uk</p>
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7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	CSSIW - Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales IRO – Independent Reviewing Officer