

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 08 June 2022
Report Subject	Care Inspectorate Wales – Assurance Check
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Social Services
Report Author	Chief Officer (Social Services)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) are the independent regulator of Social Care and Childcare in Wales. They regulate social care and early years services using the regulations and national minimum standards set out by Welsh Government through the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

This report presents the findings of the CIW Assurance Check of Flintshire Social Services as detailed in the findings letter of the 26th May 2021. The report has previously been presented to Social & Health Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

The Assurance Check visit took place from the 19th to 23rd April 2021 with eight inspectors undertaking case file reading, meetings with individuals, families, practitioners, managers and partner agencies. All activities were undertaken virtually through Webex and some telephone conversations where this was appropriate. The inspectors were afforded remote access to PARIS for the duration of the visit.

CIW focused its key lines of enquiry within the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 which are:

- People – Voice and Control
- Prevention
- Well-being
- Partnership and Integration.

The inspectorate also had particular focus on:

1. How well is the local authority discharging its statutory functions to keep people who need care and support and carers who need support, safe and promote their well-being during the pandemic?

2. What is the local authority doing to prevent the need for children to come into care; and are children returning home to their families quickly enough where safe to do so?

This report reflects CIW feedback that there are many strengths in Flintshire Social Services and the inspectors were “assured” that Flintshire is discharging its statutory functions to keep people safe and promote their well-being during the pandemic, and that the Council prevent the need for children to come in to care; and are children returning home to their families where appropriate.

In the verbal feedback received on the final day of the visit, inspectors found evidence of “very good practice” across all areas in Social Services and that staff were “dedicated, knowledgeable and focused on outcomes” for people.

The letter also identified areas for improvement including giving further consideration to the value of independent advocates to support children and young people. It was also identified that an area of improvement was to ensure that there is sufficient evidence in children’s services of the analysis of need and decision making in care records.

Finally, during child protection enquiries it was noted that children are seen and seen alone by the social worker.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	Members to note the positive feedback received from CIW following the Assurance Check in April 2021.
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REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND
1.01	Care Inspectorate Wales undertook their Assurance Check of Flintshire Social Services from the 19 th to 23 rd April 2021. Eight inspectors reviewed 36 cases (18 in Children’s Services and 18 in Adult Services) plus 6 carer assessments.
1.02	Ten cases were tracked, meaning that the inspectors met with all the key professionals involved in the case as well as the individuals themselves, their families or foster carers.
1.03	Over the course of the week, inspectors attended 61 virtual meetings consisting of tracked case interviews, meetings with practitioners, managers, partners, carers and young people.
1.04	It is worth noting that this is the first fully-virtual CIW visit undertaken in Flintshire Social Services and it was pleasing to note that with the full support of IT colleagues, the 5 days took place with no technical issues or concerns.

1.05	Summary of findings and priorities for improvement
1.06	<p><u>People – Voice and Control</u> CIW asked ‘how well is the local authority ensuring people, carers and practitioners are having their voices heard, making informed choices and maintaining control over their lives?’ The inspectorate was also mindful of the Public Health Wales and Welsh Government guidelines associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
1.07	<p>The inspectorate found evidence that people are involved in the planning and delivery of their care and support and that they were supported to identify what matters to them. In most cases outcomes were clearly described and actions to achieve them identified.</p>
1.08	<p>There was evidence that people were supported by informal advocates who assisted them to participate in assessments and decisions affecting them. There was also positive reference to the Case Conference buddies who support children and young people through the child protection case conference process. There was also recognition by the inspectors that whilst the offer of advocates was made, it was always accepted.</p>
1.09	<p>CIW also noted that it was positive to see practitioners seeing themselves as advocates for the children they work with, but as an area of improvement it was identified that there needs to be an increased understanding of the added value and function of independent advocacy. As a result the following actions have been taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information was sent to all staff detailing the advocacy service and how to refer a child for independent advocacy • The independent advocacy provider has met with all teams to share information with staff directly and to discuss approaches for promoting the service with children and their families • The independent advocacy provider met with all newly qualified social workers as part of their ongoing induction and development • Information is now included in Community Care inform on the rights of children to be offered independent advocacy. • Changes to the Paris system to prompt practitioners • Case File Audits used to identify why young people decline advocacy and use the information to improve the offer • Quality assurance mechanisms now in place to ensure independent advocacy is offered at appropriate times at key points in the child’s journey • Feedback now sought from practitioners and partners on their experience of the service, which has in turn informed future procurement of the service.
1.10	<p>There was also recognition by CIW of the additional pressures the pandemic had placed on carers and evidence seen that they had been appropriately supported by the service. Particular positive regard was given to the direct payment offer which allows people the opportunity to manager their own tailored support. The inspectors also commented positively on the work being undertaken to support young carers.</p>

1.11	The inspectors commented on the positive work undertaken by the new in-house direct payment team who have created a pool of personal assistants and used technology to support people to search for a personal assistant and make informed choices about who will support them.
1.12	Practitioners responded to CIW through either a survey or during virtual meetings and they reported feeling supported by colleagues, managers and described feeling valued and said managers were supportive and accessible, whilst senior managers were described as being visible and responsive.
1.13	<u>Prevention</u> CIW asked 'to what extent is the local authority successful in promoting prevention and reducing need for increased or formal support from statutory agencies?' Linked to this inspectors also sought evidence of the support for people bringing up children and how their own mental health was cared for.
1.14	The inspectors noted in their letter that the Council works hard to ensure prevention is an inherent part of its business. They found positive integrated approaches with partners and the allocation of resources to provide the right help and the right time.
1.15	In adult services the inspector saw a focus on preventative and targeted support including specialist dementia support workers, timely access to equipment and assistive technology. They also heard about a solutions focused approach in mental health services to avoid escalation.
1.16	In children's services there was much emphasis on the Early Help Hub and the development of parental coping mechanisms from a range of resources. The close working arrangements between agencies was positively commented upon during the pandemic and examples given around children and young people's mental health services (CAMHS) represented in the Early Help Hub.
1.17	CIW also commented that senior managers had a good understanding of the looked after children population in Flintshire and that the well-being of the child was seen as a priority in all decisions. Positive reference was also made about the authority's investment in Multi-Systemic Therapy.
1.18	<u>Partnership and Integration</u> CIW were looking to extent the local authority was able to assure itself opportunities for partnership working and positively exploit it to maximise person centred planning.
1.19	The inspectors found that partnership worked well at all levels and that there was evidence of integrated sustainable approached which met the needs of individuals and promoted well-being.

1.20	Senior leaders and partners were asked to complete a survey and the outcomes from that told CIW that the strategic partnership between Flintshire County Council and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board had developed and strengthened during the pandemic. Reference was made to the work undertaken to establish Ysbyty Enfys Glannau Dyfrdwy.
1.21	Care Providers spoke positively of the support they had received during the pandemic and that they had valued the communication, and quality of advice and support provided to them by the local authority.
1.22	CIW also recognised the strategic approach used by the local authority to manage the pandemic and the targeted collaboration working across portfolios. Particular mention was made around the effective collaborative working between education and children's services to make appropriate provision for the most vulnerable children. The work of the Play Officers, Theatr Clwyd and Aura Sports was also singled out for positive comment.
1.23	Finally, the inspectors commented positively on the work undertaken to expand the North East Wales Community Equipment Stores to provide a PPE Hub and promote the effective delivery of PPE to the sector.
1.24	<u>Well-being</u> The inspectors asked 'to what extent is the local authority promoting well-being, ensuring people maintain their safety and achieving positive outcomes that matter to them?'
1.25	CIW gave positive regard to the strong political support for both adults and children's services and noted that there was a well-developed and thorough understanding of the services' strengths and current challenges.
1.26	The inspectors saw evidence of good practice with child protection review minutes being written directly to the child, acknowledging the child's wishes and explaining in child-friendly language the outcomes and decisions affecting them.
1.27	Inspectors found in some cases, timely responses to child protection concerns but also found in other cases reviewed there was a delay in the development of multi-agency safety plans. Work has been undertaken to improve this area and includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping the recording processes in the front door of children's services • Implementing the Family Support Framework to create consistency of decision making. • Events were held with Team Managers and Senior Practitioners to review existing practices and approaches and with the use of a Vanguard review, changes made to ensure compliance with requirements. • Practice Directives were issued to ensure core groups were held within statutory timescales • Capacity was redistributed to the front-door to ensure the timely processing of reports (referrals) onto the Paris system.

1.28	The inspectors also identified that the local authority needs to assure itself that children are seen and seen alone during the child protection enquiry stage and that core groups for children on the child protection register are consistently conducted in line with statutory requirements. This too was actioned by the service.
1.29	CIW saw evidence of good working relationships between the care management teams and key partners and that the right people were around involved in discussions.
1.30	In adult services, the importance of timely hospital discharges was understood and the authority had created additional capacity during the pandemic to facilitate safe discharges and support people to return home, thus avoiding unnecessary hospital delays.
1.32	Next Steps
1.33	CIW will continue to review progress on the areas of improvement through performance evaluation review meetings with the Chief Officer and Senior Managers.
1.34	Children's Services Quarterly Performance Meetings continue to review progress on the areas of improvement identified and these are also discussed in detail at the regular Children's Services Team Manager meetings.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Resources necessary to implement improvements identified by CIW are within existing budgets.

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	The risk relates to the reputation of the Council should there be significant areas for improvement identified by CIW which were not addressed by the service, resulting in non-compliance. The level of risk is currently low.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
4.01	Regular meetings between managers and CIW representative.
4.02	Information and feedback from the Assurance Check has been shared with the workforce and regular update are provided on any feedback received from CIW.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	CIW Assurance Visit Letter

6.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
6.01	Contact Officer: Jane Davies Telephone: 01352 702503 E-mail: jane.m.davies@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	The Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW): The inspectorate for Care and Social Services formally known as Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW).
7.02	Early Help Hub: The newly developed multi agency Hub for Children and Families in Flintshire. This collective response to future referrals will negate the need for no further action responses and will provide a transformation of practice.
7.03	Direct Payments: Are a payment made by a local authority social services department to an individual who has been assessed as having care and support needs who wish to arrange their own care and support services.
7.04	Carer: Someone, usually unpaid, and often a friend or family member who supports a person with social care needs either full time or part time.
7.05	PARIS: Social Services Client Information System where all information regarding individuals in receipt of support for Social Services is recorded.
7.06	Social Services Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014: The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act came into force on 6 April 2016. The Act provides the legal framework for improving the well-being of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, and for transforming social services in Wales.
7.07	Community Care Inform: a paid for internet information service available to social workers and support workers providing current legislative information, case law and scholarly articles as well as practical information to support practice.