

Lisa Curtis-Jones
Director of Social Services
Civic Centre
Castle Street
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AN

Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Lisa Curtis-Jones,

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Local Authority Performance Review April 2019 - March 2020

The code of practice for review of local authority social services in April 2019 outlines 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 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's performance in carrying out its statutory social services functions from April 2019 - March 2020.

We acknowledge, that due to the unprecedented circumstances relating to COVID-19 we were unable to complete the annual performance review meeting.

However, we believe that there remains significant benefit in identifying and drawing the attention of the local authority and its partners, to the areas of both strengths and improvements required. The letter is intended to assist the local authority and its partners to continually improve.

Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru (AGC)
Swyddfa Llywodraeth Cymru
Sarn Mynach
Cyffordd Llandudno
LL31 9RZ
www.arolygiaethgofal.cymru

☎ 0300 790 0126
✉ ciw@gov.wales

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)
Welsh Government Office
Sarn Mynach
Llandudno Junction
LL31 9RZ
www.careinspectorate.wales

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.

It follows the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and our increasingly collaborative and strengths based approach to supporting improvement.

The content of this letter is informed by the performance evaluation activity undertaken by the inspectorate during the course of the year. This activity included:

- national inspection: Prevention & Promotion of Independence for Older Adults Living in the Community (September 2019)
- focused activity (children's services): 26 July 2019 and 5 August 2019
- practice & performance review meeting (adults services): 06 August 2019
- practice & performance review meeting (children's services): 08 August 2019

During the course of the year we have been in discussions with you during all of the activity listed above, and as such, the content of our annual performance letter is an accurate reflection of our ongoing findings which we have consistently shared with you.

Summary of strengths and areas for improvement in line with principles of the 2014 Act

Well-being

Due to escalating budgetary pressures, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council requested support from Welsh Government. In summer 2019 a package of support was agreed under section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Act 2009. Subsequently an Improvement and Assurance Board with independent external members was convened. The overall purpose of the Board is to assist the Leader in driving forward required change and improvement. At time of writing, the Board is continuing to perform an assurance role and is assessing ongoing progress.

There is some evidence of good outcomes being achieved for people and their families in the local authority. Our inspection and engagement work with social services, that included talking to people, indicates that staff are committed to providing responsive services that are underpinned by strength based approaches. We found that people with complex needs can expect to be supported to live at home for as long as possible, with a focus on promoting their independence and ensuring they receive the right service at the right time.

Concerns about social services are characterised by lack of capacity. Annual cuts in budgets coupled with reduced staffing levels, particularly at principle officer level, have left social services vulnerable in terms of ensuring delivery of safe and consistent well-being outcomes for people. Lack of strategic capacity also challenges social services to play a full role in regional partnership work and the ability to drive through strategic changes at necessary scale and pace. Risks to maintaining adequate service delivery has been exacerbated in children's services by the recent departure of the experienced head of service without permanent replacement to this vacancy.

Despite successfully reducing the projected overspend for 2019-2020 the nature of social services, remains demand led. Corporate support for making difficult budgetary decisions to meet statutory provision is not always sufficiently robust. Morale amongst senior officers is low.

People

People's views were sought during the planning and reconfiguration of services. Families were involved in developing the specification for revised care leaving services and planning for early help services was co-produced. Dementia Care Matters were also commissioned to undertake a strategic review of day services for people with dementia which included stakeholder engagement sessions and focus groups with representatives from the sector and families and friends. Key issues and priorities were identified for inclusion in the regional dementia action plan 2019-2022.

Generally, people are able to communicate in their language of choice. However, the provision of the active offer of Welsh is not always recorded on casefiles to evidence that this was taking place.

The local authority continues to be challenged by the registration requirements for domiciliary care workers. At time of writing a significant number of domiciliary care staff working within the authority still needed to register, as required with Social Care Wales.

We continue to monitor the implementation of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) which 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. Our joint national report on DoLS will be issued in due course.

Prevention

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has continued its journey toward remodelling early help and prevention services. The Early Help Hub was launched in October 2019, initially to other professionals and then to families. This incorporates Information, Advice and Assistance, Family Information Service, Team Around the Family Co-ordinator and services for Young Carers. This Hub also signposts to universal services. Alongside this for adults, GP support officers and community coordinators are in place and people in hospital can expect to get a timely response from the Staywell@home initiative to help them return home.

Increasing staffing capacity at the front door remains challenging for the local authority. Senior managers need to continue to ensure that recruitment and retention of staff is sufficient to meet demands of the service and that practitioners undertaking assessments are suitably qualified and appropriately supervised. We identified a need for managers to ensure 'what matters' conversations are fully embedded in practice to ensure that specific personal outcomes people want to achieve are always identified and recorded. During our focused activity in children's services we found that there were some improvements in the quality of assessments since the last inspection. These improvements had taken place following a detailed improvement plan by senior managers who demonstrated a commitment to ongoing development.

The local authority placed a child in unregistered arrangements for a period of time as there was no suitable alternative placement available. The local authority has demonstrated a focus on meeting the particular needs of the individual in their care, and have kept CIW informed of developments throughout. This situation has subsequently been rectified.

During 2018 our programme of work focused on care experienced children and young people. The national [report](#) is published on our website. Key findings highlight areas for improvement in respect of profile, sufficiency, practice, partnerships, stability, governance and corporate parenting. Many of the areas we have identified for improvement continue to be 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. We will monitor with interest the development of much needed commissioning and market position strategy to map future demand for services and help shape the market.

In December 2019 we wrote to all local authorities asking for information about The Public Accounts Committee report following their enquiry into care experienced children, specifically recommendation five concerning the effectiveness and frequency of end of placement reviews. We did not receive a formal response from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and therefore request again that you advise us and confirm assurance of your practice in such reviews. For example, are disruption meetings or placement breakdown meetings held and how is learning from such reviews / meetings embedded within practice?

Partnerships

Regional arrangements are undergoing significant change. As the newly constituted Cwm Taf Morgannwg has been operating shadow arrangements, for example in relation to regional partnership and safeguarding boards, 2019-2020 has been a transitional year. The dynamic of regional working is therefore changing. Notwithstanding some budgetary challenges, including Integrated Care Funding (ICF) remaining separate until April 2020, the new partnership is making progress on transformation arrangements for safeguarding priorities and the development of a new regional approach to carers. The changes have been broadly welcomed by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and opportunities for learning different approaches, such as incorporating early help into the MASH, are being actively explored. During 2020-2021 there will be a need for further alignment and embedding new ways of working. The local authority is also committed to working with neighbouring local authorities especially Rhondda Cynon Taf with whom they share DoLS and workforce planning responsibilities.

Partnership working across the region has remained innovative with clear commitment to integrated service delivery. Initiatives designed to make the best use of resources and promote well-being such as Staywell@home and Valley's Life projects are examples of partnership arrangements that capitalise on positive strategic and operational working relationships between health and social care services. Joint planning is also underway to further expand the Staywell@home services to include pre-admission services and to broaden some dementia extra care services to a wider cohort of adult service users. We recommend strengthening links between the local authority, third sector organisations, community coordinators and general practitioner support workers, in order to further improve outcomes for people.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2020-2021

Our scheduled thematic inspection programme for adult services 2019-2020 is focused on prevention and promoting independence for older adults in the community and, for

children's services the focus is on prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. Due to the current emergency situation relating to COVID-19 we have paused the publication of our older adults report and paused all activity relating to the disabled children's review. We will advise you in due course when we envisage recommencing our inspections.

We hope to publish the older adults' national report in due course and want to take this opportunity to thank you for your local authority's contribution to this.

Due to the unforeseen circumstances we find ourselves in, we are currently reviewing and considering our work plan for the remainder of 2020-2021.

CIW worked together with HMI Constabulary (HMICFRS), HMI Probation, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Estyn to develop a model of joint inspection of child protection arrangements in Wales (JICPA). This approach was piloted during the autumn of 2019. This was a fantastic example of new ways of working across Wales and a real drive towards collaboration and integration in public services.

We continue to work closely with Social Care Wales to support improvement in social care services.

You will note that this letter has been copied to colleagues in Audit Wales, 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



Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn