



Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012/2013

Local Authority Name: Conwy County Borough Council

This report sets out the key areas of progress for Conwy County Borough Council Social Services Department for the year 2012/13 and areas for future improvement

Summary

The director of social services is now permanently in post. Following completion of the first phase of the council's transformation programme, the director is well placed to take the department forward, albeit in a climate of financial and economic challenge. The management team still faces a period of considerable change. The head of adult services is now confirmed in post however the interim head of children's services and the head of the transformation programme will be leaving this year. This will present a challenge in maintaining the momentum of this year's progress.

The director's report provides a good overview of the social services department and sets out its priorities for the coming year. The first phase of the transformation programme has enabled the director to evidence where improvements are needed and sets the scene for a challenging year ahead.

Adult services

There is evidence that the action the council has undertaken is promoting people's independence. This is particularly evident in relation to the effectiveness of reablement, extra care provision for people with dementia and the support given to people leaving hospital.

Children's services

A review of processes has led to positive changes that are improving the timeliness of responses to children and families. There is, however, scope for further improvement in some areas particularly in relation to completion of reviews.

CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- The head of service governance, efficiency and transformation programme is leaving her employment with the social services department this year. This is a time limited additional post and she will not be replaced. The council will need to consider how it will ensure continued momentum of the transformation programme.
- The head of children's service is leaving this year. This could cause discontinuity at a time when improvements made in children's services still need to be embedded and further progress achieved.
- Maintaining and progressing effective joint work with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).

Response to last year's areas of development

The council responded positively to last year's areas for improvement, particularly in relation to the responsiveness of children's services. Improving outcomes for young people leaving care remains an area for improvement.

Good practice identified

There has been strong engagement with people who use services in shaping and developing services and in receiving feedback about the quality of care received. Loud Voices is a forum for fostered children and care leavers. An independent advocate attends the meetings and feeds back to the council. People have been listened to and positive developments have been made to improve the service as a result.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

CSSIW completed its programme for inspections for regulated services in the Conwy area and held regular engagement meetings with senior officers of the council.

CSSIW visited Llys Elian, the residential service for people with dementia, and were able to discuss developments that had taken place with the manager. There are promising plans for the future. We saw clear evidence of positive stimulation and an emphasis on enabling people and supporting their personal development. Investments made this year have put the council in a strong position to further develop an effective and desirable service for people with dementia.

CSSIW undertook a visit to the Llandudno Community Hospital and spoke with front line staff to understand the developments in partnership working and the impact on managing discharges from hospital back into the community. The work of the One Ward project, and subsequent sub-groups, identified and addressed processes and practices that affect the quality of discharge. Progress has been

and continues to be made, although obstacles persist that are not so easily rectified. Turnover of nursing staff makes it difficult to build lasting relationships that are so important to good and effective communication.

Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

A number of specific areas for improvement have been identified in the body of this report and the council's progress in relation to these will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year.

In particular:

- The partnership with health and development of integrated services.
- Development of collaboration with the third sector.
- Support to young people leaving care.
- Implementation of the corporate parenting strategy.
- National thematic inspection of looked after children.
- National thematic review of commissioning of social care for older people.

PERFORMANCE

Shaping services:

Conwy has continued to develop partnership working with neighbouring authorities, the health board and education. The development of stronger links has helped in planning for change, sharing of resources and ultimately a improved, more integrated services for people in Conwy.

Adults

In 2011/2012 Conwy social services expressed a commitment to developing a vision for the future of adult social care. This year the council completed a review of commissioning within its transformation programme. This review made recommendations that, if taken forward, will enable more effective recording and analysis of unmet need and assist the department in shaping services for the future.

The council's own analysis of demographics indicates a significant rise in demand in relation to dementia care. Conwy continues to invest in its dementia services, recently utilising the expertise of a consultant to advise on best practice. The council commissioned a project management team to develop an improvement action plan. Providing accredited training to staff will be fundamental to the success of the service. Effective consultation with staff has resulted in a motivated workforce prepared for change. CSSIW visited Llys Elian and found a positive environment in which people were relaxed, stimulated and content. Staff were enthusiastic and engaged. The domiciliary care service based on site includes a

small team offering support to people with dementia living in the community. Conwy's commissioning strategy will need to consider how it can further develop its dementia care services in the future, particularly in relation to community based services in rural areas.

Conwy's forward work plan for 2013/2014 should enable health and social services to work in partnership in developing its health, social care and wellbeing strategy. Conwy has made a commitment to monitor this throughout the year. Following the cessation of the previous partnership agreement for mental health services in July 2013, a Memorandum of Understanding has been drawn up with health colleagues to help ensure continued clarity of aims and expectations.

The adult services inspection in 2012 identified a need to develop the relationship with the voluntary sector. Whilst the council has put effort into reviewing its commissioning and contracting arrangements, and carried out research in this area, the full potential of this partnership in a changing market has not yet been realised. This is noted by the director as a social service strategic priority for 2013/2014.

Children

In 2012/2013, the council continued to engage with children and families as part of its programme of evaluating and developing services. Following a 100% response rate in one consultation exercise relating to Snap Dragons after school club, Conwy is reviewing its methodology to ensure consistently good response rates for future consultations. This includes the plans for the Gogarth integrated short break service. Consultation and partnership working with education has been crucial throughout this particular project. A short break service statement has been written to inform parents about services available to them and offers further commitment to consultation and participation with children and their parents.

Children living in the Glan yr Afon residential home have been consulted and their views captured. An analysis of this data has enabled the council to identify areas of weakness and identify necessary improvements. This will be reflected and followed up during the regulatory inspection of the home planned for later this year.

Conwy has drawn conclusions from the Lost after Care report and recognises that change is needed to ensure children leaving care are well informed in the way most appropriate to them. Conwy recognises the need for greater user participation and a more flexible approach that meets the needs of individuals. A number of priorities for service improvement have been identified and some action has already been taken by the pathway team.

The council has used an advocacy service to provide an independent presence at meetings that take place with looked after children and young care leavers. Views

sought from the children and young people have led to initiatives that will help other looked after children feel welcome when starting placements

The council has drawn up a corporate parenting strategy for 2012-2015 which recognises its collective responsibility to care and to protect looked after children who are in care or leaving care. Many parts of the action plan do not have timescales and CSSIW has insufficient evidence to comment on progress made at this time. The corporate parenting group is responsible for monitoring progress.

A child protection user satisfaction consultation took place in May 2012 to capture people's perceptions and experience of receiving services. Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with families who have been through the child protection case conference process and a number of suggestions for improvement have been made.

Areas of progress

- Delivering phase one of the transformation programme which has involved a review of all services. This provides the director with a clear picture of what is needed to take the department forward.
- There has been increased consultation with people using the services, staff and partners in education and health.

Areas for improvement

- Progress with the corporate parenting strategy.

Getting help:

People in Conwy can contact social services through the Conwy County Borough Council's own website via e-mail and telephone numbers are also provided. There is a range of information available on this site and information leaflets have been updated. The transformation programme included an access and information project looking at access to information, the performance of current working arrangements and compatibility of current service models in meeting the new demands of a changing operating context. This project report and its recommendations provided the director with a good overview of the current situation as well as the changes needed to further develop access to services.

Adults

A joint working arrangement with other council departments has created a single point access for telephone calls and visitors, and the council has noted a reduced number of the latter. Although the council finds most visitors are professional colleagues, it will need to keep the situation under review to ascertain reasons for this reduction in visitors and ensure it remains fully accessible to the public.

The council carried out an evaluation of the enquiry, referral and assessment process in December 2012 and this highlights issues with the effectiveness of some responses to callers where access to professional, more knowledgeable staff is not possible. The council acknowledges this as an area for improvement.

There is an indication that timeliness in the reviewing of care needs to be improved. This year fewer people in receipt of care packages had reviews. CSSIW is aware of people living in residential care whose care has not been reviewed or reassessed in a timely manner. This has come to light during inspections and our involvement in adult protection. This is an area for attention and improvement.

Performance figures show there are no delayed transfers of care from hospital for social care reasons in Conwy. A shortened assessment of needs process is being considered that should further improve timeliness of discharge. CSSIW visited hospital social work staff who explained this will not present any risk to patients as, soon after discharge, they will be visited in their own home to ascertain whether a more comprehensive assessment is required. Staff explained that laptops have been provided for use on the ward. However, the equipment is old and not suitable for the task. Staff have therefore reverted to handwriting assessments and returning to the office to input the information into the computer. Time available to spend on the ward has actually reduced as a result rather than increased as was the intention. The council will need to consider providing more effective and practical devices if timeliness of assessments is to improve.

The One Ward Project with the council's Llandudno hospital social work team has resulted in improved communication with health colleagues, with weekly meetings to discuss and improve the quality of discharge arrangements. Progress has been positive and incidents of unsafe discharge have reduced from fifteen last year to none this year. Conwy has developed an informal complaint letter and encourages social workers to complete this where someone needing care has been discharged without a care package. Conwy is proactively seeking opportunities to learn lessons and improve services.

CSSIW is aware of occasions where pressure has been placed on care home providers to accept people, sometimes from hospital, with needs they are not able to meet. Social work staff must familiarise themselves with the home's Statement of Purpose to ascertain whether a person's needs can be met before making arrangements for placement.

The performance data shows a high proportion of carers known to social services were offered an assessment, but around two thirds of these declined to have one. Further, the data shows fewer than only one third actually received a service. Conwy may wish to explore the reasons for this and consider ways to improve this in the future.

Children

In May 2012 a user satisfaction telephone survey was undertaken on the council's behalf by a research company. The two emerging messages identified were the need for social workers to listen more and to be more supportive and understanding. The council has reviewed their communication arrangements and has implemented several initiatives with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. Further training has been provided to staff across all agencies, including specialised training to ensure more effective intervention, support and information. The council has improved the range, accessibility and clarity of information for parents in relation to child protection processes.

The council launched its Team around the Family service to facilitate access to information, advice and support on activities, services and childcare by using only one telephone number and acting as a one stop shop for information. This is a recent development, the success of which has not yet been evaluated. People can also use the Conwy website which links to the Family Information Service. CSSIW accessed the website and found, at present, information is limited, for example there are only two childminders and two day nurseries listed and this may mislead enquirers about the range and number of services available. The council may be able to provide more comprehensive information if it inputs the information directly rather than rely on organisations to submit their own details. There are currently no details of the costs of accessing these services on the website, and more comprehensive information would be useful to parents.

The performance information indicates improvements in most areas in children's services. There has been a marked improvement in the number of initial assessments completed within the seven day timescale and of the core assessments completed within 35 working days.

Areas still to be improved include the completion of and timeliness of reviews of children in need plans and looked after children, and also statutory visits to looked after children. The percentage of looked after children with a personal education plan within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school has reduced markedly this year and the reasons for this are not clear. CSSIW will be further discussing performance with the council at future engagement meetings.

Areas of progress

- Consistent timely hospital discharge.
- Minimised risk of unsafe hospital discharge.
- Timeliness of initial and core assessments in children's services.

Areas for improvement

- More effective response for telephone enquirers.
- Reviews and reassessments for older people, especially those in residential care.
- Exploring alternative equipment to increase efficiency of hospital social workers.
- Providing more accurate information on the council website about child care services available.
- Completion and timeliness of reviews in children's services.
- Exploring the reasons for a drop in personal education plans for looked after children.
- Exploring the reasons for the low uptake of carers' assessments.

The services provided:

As part of the transformation programme, audits have been completed of commissioning and contracting, access and information and of the practice framework including quality assurance, assessment, care planning, rehabilitation, disability, and safeguarding. The resulting reports provide a self-critical analysis identifying what needs to be done to improve practices across the services. A number of recommendations have been put forward and the council has already made some changes. The director now has a clear overview of the services provided and is in a more informed position to effect change where they will most benefit people in Conwy who use social services.

Adults

Conwy has a good range of resources available to adults.

CSSIW's last inspection of the Conwy domiciliary care agency found that good quality services are provided. The service has been further enhanced by creating specialist dementia support and provision for people with mental health needs. The council canvasses people's views of the domiciliary care service on an annual basis.

There are two extra care facilities currently operational and a further two to be opened later in the year, giving more people greater choice for independent living while still accessing support if needed. CSSIW has found that the residential care home Llys Elian provides a good quality service to people with dementia and is investing further to enhance the service provided. The Colwyn Bay locality dementia care and re-enablement service operates from the same building, providing an excellent opportunity for the pooling of information and resources. The council seeks the views of people using the services, their relatives and staff and these views are taken into account when developing services.

CSSIW has noted that the quality and reliability of domiciliary services commissioned externally from other agencies is monitored closely and any weaknesses are acted upon swiftly. The views of people using the service are sought and this is very much an integral part of the quality assurance process. The director's report acknowledged that the last year has been a difficult time for residential care providers and CSSIW is aware that the council has provided additional support and greater flexibility around payments to help struggling businesses. There has been an increased need for meetings to be held under the escalating concerns protocol where continued non-compliance and/or poor care has been repeatedly identified by CSSIW. The council has utilised this arena effectively to gain a multi-disciplinary perspective of the service and canvas support from health colleagues to assist failing nursing homes to improve practice.

This year more adults in Conwy have retained their independence through community based services particularly in homecare, day care and reablement, and more adults under 65 years are using direct payments to access this support. People experiencing a sudden, short-term loss of independence now benefit from the services of an occupational therapist recently assigned to the reablement team to speed up the assessment process and enhance service delivery. The total number of adults needing residential services is largely unchanged.

Further developments have taken place in services supporting people with learning disabilities where a reablement approach is promoted. This follows a review of the service which has indicated an over-provision in this area. Whilst enhanced independence and the empowerment of service users is positive, the council may wish to undertake regular reviews of individuals affected to ensure their needs are still being met effectively. CSSIW will be considering this factor in its inspection of the regulated domiciliary care services this year.

CSSIW has seen the social care workforce development plan and has been made aware throughout the year of the training offered to staff working in private care homes in Conwy. This is seen as positive and helps to ensure people are provided with care from competent and knowledgeable staff.

Children

CSSIW's regulatory inspection of the council's residential disability short break service again found good quality service provision. There are regular quality audit reviews undertaken taking into account all aspects of the operations. The quality of these reviews and subsequent reports would be further enhanced if they included stakeholders' views of the service.

The number of previously looked after children who were in education or employment at the age of 19 has increased but the number is still comparatively low compared with the rest of Wales. The council says it has reviewed its processes and compiled an action plan which includes a NEET (not in

employment, education or training) panel to identify young people earlier and provide support needed to enable them to be in education or employment by the time they are 19. The plan is still in its infancy and therefore the benefits have not yet been seen. CSSIW will be interested in the impact these changes are having on the lives of this group of young people in the coming year. A careers advisor has recently joined the leaving care team and this will help care leavers in deciding their next steps. This is only a secondment and the council may wish to make more permanent arrangements should this new development prove successful.

In addition to this, the Let's get Working programme provides support for hard to reach young people aged 16 and over to help them reach their potential, and so reduce workless households and contribute to reducing child poverty.

Other consultations have taken place with after school clubs, foster carers and fostered children. It is evident that the council is proactive in seeking views about their performance and this has inevitably led to a number of strategies for change, the fruition of which is ongoing. Action plans have been devised, the timescales for which are not always determined and therefore not measurable. It would be useful to Conwy to have evaluation processes in place to test and report on progress made with these action plans.

Areas of progress

- Improved support for care leavers.

Areas for improvement

- More effective monitoring and reporting of the progress of action plans, including the use of milestones so performance can be assessed.

Effect on people's lives:

Adults

A good range of options are now available to people in Conwy to enhance their experience of community based services. People are more able to exercise choice and control of their personal support including the use of direct payments. Social service staff are more confident in advocating the benefits of the service, however the take up of this has not changed significantly.

In 2012/13 CSSIW continued to observe effective meetings held under the escalating concerns protocol where collaborative interagency working was very evident. While some poor quality services have ceased operation, the council has been instrumental in leading inter-agency support for some failing services to good effect. People living in these homes have been able to continue doing so.

Training has been provided to staff in care homes on the protection of vulnerable adults to increase awareness and there has been an increase in the number of referrals leading to action taken from 218 last year to 245 in 2012/13. Data indicates a much greater number of these referrals resulted in the risk being managed, although it is acknowledged this could be down to more accurate recording on the IT system. CSSIW has been routinely involved in these multi-agency meetings and this collaborative approach has been effective in quickly identifying poor practices and improving outcomes for people using the services.

The positive record for achieving timely hospital discharges and ongoing work on improving the quality of these assessments will help ensure patients are returned to their home with minimum risk to their independence. The reviews of associated processes have identified further potential for improvement, the success of which hinges on good communication and collaborative working with health colleagues. Obstacles such as high turnover of nursing staff and the impact this has on networking have been identified and these need to be overcome for optimum success.

CSSIW has seen people are involved and contribute to their assessments and care plans, and are generally able to exercise choice and control. However, there have been isolated incidents of people not having choice when they want to move out of a residential care home and responses to requests for reassessments are not always timely. This is an area for improvement.

Children

Following disappointing performance figures last year, the council committed considerable attention to this area scrutinising performance and conducting audits. Some processes have been changed to allow more efficient working and ensure data captured accurately reflects practice.

Timeliness of child protection conferences has improved with nearly all conferences being held within 15 days this year. A high proportion of initial core group meetings are being held within the required timescale of 10 days, a small improvement on last year.

Additionally, the council's audit found the quality of care plans for children in need have improved bringing them nearer to the standard of those for children who are looked after or on the child protection register. The council will need to continue to audit practices while the improved way of working is embedded.

Areas still to be improved are the completion of and timeliness of reviews of child in need plans and looked after children and of statutory visits to looked after children. The percentage of looked after children with a personal education plan within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school has reduced markedly. This is an area requiring the council's attention.

Timeliness of completion of care plans for first placements of looked after children has significantly improved and similarly the percentage of children that had a plan for permanence at the second review.

Inspection of the residential service in January 2013 found that infrequent contact with key workers and absence of house meetings left children feeling their views and choices were not always listened to. This is an area for improvement.

The percentage of children who have had three or more placements during the year is similar to last year and is in line with other councils. Included in this data are five young people who presented as homeless and had a number of placement moves, and the council states this data does not reflect the overall stability of looked after children in foster placements.

The council has reviewed its processes, and developed a more proactive approach to identify and act to improve outcomes for care leavers. Changes made have not yet reflected on the performance data but the head of children's services is confident early signs are promising.

The council reports it has developed accommodation services for care leavers allowing a longer transitional period thereby offering stability to people beyond the age of 18. This was not an area followed up by CSSIW this year.

The council developed a youth homelessness strategy action plan in March 2013, identifying project work streams to push developments forward. This is in its infancy and CSSIW will be better able to evaluate the outcome of this next year.

In 2011/12 the council reviewed only half its child in need plans within timescales. Comparison data was not submitted this year and this is an area which CSSIW will pursue.

Areas of progress

- Quality of hospital discharge.
- Consistency in education for looked after children.
- Development to reduce incidents of people being NEET.

Areas for improvement

- Timeliness of reassessments when requested by care providers.
- Timeliness of reviews of child in need plans.
- Ensuring statutory visits to looked after children are completed.
- Improving outcomes for care leavers.
- Ensuring children in residential care feel they have a voice and are listened to.

CAPACITY

Delivering Social Services:

The transformation programme has put the council in a strong position to assess the impact of its services and use them most effectively and efficiently. Following consultation with key stakeholders, the council is primed to make changes that will take into account the current financial pressures whilst minimising impact and improving quality of services for service users. Whilst improved integration with partners and pooling of resources may reduce duplication and cost, regular reviewing of new ways of working will be needed to evaluate any resulting impact on service users.

The council has already made savings by promoting initiatives such as direct payments and may now be forced to look elsewhere to identify potentials for further savings. Opportunities for early retirement have been taken up by some staff and discussions with the director indicate she is hopeful further staff reduction will not be necessary. Sickness is being closely monitored and disciplinary actions taken where necessary. Streamlining of services is being considered, particularly in adults services where amalgamation of teams remains a possibility. Consultation has taken place with staff to capture their ideas on how this might work and consider their fears. This is clearly work in progress and will take time to come to fruition.

CSSIW found that the council provided a range of relevant training which was offered to other providers and the fostering service operating a clear strategy for the training, support and supervision of foster carers. The service is keen to improve and responds positively and promptly to recommendations made by CSSIW.

Records show training has been requested by staff but rarely delivered. Staff are recognising the need to enhance their knowledge and skills and the council should respond accordingly. This was an area identified for improvement last year and will be followed up again in 2013/2014.

There is a workforce development strategy for the children and families service, and training and development needs are recognised in the strategy. The training plan lists the training available and the numbers of staff who have made requests to attend this training. This records that, so far in 2012/2013, only two of the 81 requests have been fulfilled. In contrast, the end of year monitoring report for 2012/2013 states training has been provided to some social workers in relation to specific needs. CSSIW is unsure which of the records is accurate and the council will need to find ways of providing this to ensure a confident and competent workforce.

CSSIW has seen evidence in regulated settings of stability and competence of staff.

Areas of progress

- Quality assurance in all areas.

Areas for improvement

- Continued training for staff where the need for additional skills and knowledge has been identified by them.

Providing direction:

The director has seen the delivery of a very ambitious piece of work this year that has enabled her to evaluate Conwy social services and identify priorities for the future. The director's report indicates a clear vision of where she wants the department to be and of what changes will be necessary. The permanent appointment of the director of social services and head of adult services will undoubtedly help create stability in the service, although the head of children's services and the head of service governance, efficiency and transformation programme will be leaving. A lot of progress has been made this year and continued momentum will be essential to driving the changes forward.

Alignment with key partners has been a focus for the year. In adult services this has been with the BCUHB and in children's services it has been primarily with education. Problems within the health board could impact on the development of future partnership working.

The social services department has thoroughly scrutinised its practices and processes this year, and produced self critical, honest reports that demonstrate a real willingness to drive up standards and make best use of resources for the benefit of the people of Conwy.

The council has established a member scrutiny committee with extensive knowledge and understanding of social services. The members are very supportive and involved in the work of the service. The social services department has critically scrutinised its own operations this year and a number of strategies and action plans have been devised. It would be helpful if reports on progress made on different and specific areas could be made directly available to the scrutiny committee.

Areas of progress

- The director of social services and head of adults services is now permanently in post.

- Partnership working with the health board has led to improved services for patients in hospitals.

Areas for improvement

- Succession and contingency planning on retirement of head of children's services.
- Ensuring members of the scrutiny committee have access to a wide range of progress and performance reports.