



Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012/2013

Local Authority Name: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

This report sets out the key areas of progress for the year 2012/13 in Merthyr Tydfil Social Services Department and areas for future improvement

Summary

Merthyr Tydfil social services has strengths in a number of areas. The authority focuses on supporting its citizens to help them to retain their independence. There has been a commitment to develop integrated services to enhance effective delivery.

Safeguarding is one of the top priorities for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and the council has made significant progress including the amalgamation of safeguarding for children and adults under one head of service. A joint Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board (CTSCB) and a Local Safeguarding Board for adults has been established with Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT). Although at an early stage, this will promote more consistent safeguarding practices across Cwm Taf as well as sharing the expertise built up by managers and practitioners in this challenging area.

Adults

The council continues to work well in partnership with others and works diligently towards integrated service provision, and increasing collaboration particularly with health. This is borne out by the opening of the Kier Hardie Health Park (KHHP) managed by Cwm Taf Health Board but including social care services for adults which promote independence and support at home.

One of the council's stated priorities is to implement its Home for Life strategy and the council has also made significant progress in doing this. Ty Cwm Extra Care Scheme commenced occupation in July 2012, with 60 apartments allocated and was officially opened in October. This has given a number of people the chance to be relocated from high cost placements into more appropriate independent living

accommodation. Ty Gwyn Newydd day services for older people have been relocated to the same site. This creates continuity and familiarity for service users living there, many of whom have dementia.

Children

It has been a year of consolidation in children's services, with an emphasis on understanding changing patterns and trends for children and young people. There are a number of initiatives being progressed which have been based on both Welsh Government initiatives and the recognition of the benefits for the council to work with neighbouring authorities. These include regional arrangements for fostering and adoption services and the potential to deliver youth offending services across Merthyr Tydfil and RCT. The success of these initiatives will be reported on next year.

The success of the Gellideg Family Centre is to be commended. It has achieved national recognition for its work with families.

The director's annual report is comprehensive and citizen focused. It sets out priorities for improvement and change that are clear in their intentions and easily readable for all audiences. Whilst it celebrates a number of achievements, it also recognises the particular need to concentrate on measuring outcomes for those who use services. It acknowledges the challenges faced by the authority, particularly the impact of diminishing budgets and the consequences of changes to legislation over the next few years.

CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- Budget pressures and the potential for ongoing and increasing budget deficits, especially in light of external factors like welfare reform.
- Increase in demand of a rising population on the delivery of services particularly in relation to older people.
- The impact of winter pressures on demand for services and the impact on social services budgets, particularly when clarity is needed around financial responsibility for care home placements.

Response to last year's areas of development

The council has made progress in a number of identified areas of development. It is continuing to address these in its business and development plans. Improvements have been made in children's services in relation to the timeliness of assessments, transition planning and developing a preventative approach. More work is needed in relation to adoption and fostering services whilst longer term partnership arrangements are being developed.

In adult services the implementation of the joint health and social care service provision is progressing successfully.

The council engaged positively with CSSIW during the year to discuss and report on progress and developments.

Good practice identified

CSSIW has identified the following areas of good practice:

- Safeguarding awareness training undertaken by social services staff in schools and nurseries across the borough. Over 400 staff were trained during the year.
- The Gellideg Family Centre where the quality of the service provided has been recognised independently by the British Standards Institute (BSI) award and International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 kite mark, the first centre in Wales to achieve this status.
- “Merthyr Noise” a website for young people to air their views through the medium of websites and social networking which has been nominated for a national award.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

In addition to regulatory inspections carried out on registered services, CSSIW undertook the following work in Merthyr Tydfil this year:

- Site visit to the Gellideg Family Centre.
- Site visit to the KHHP.
- Observation of a Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- Visit to the Integrated Family Support Team (IFST).
- Meeting with carers.
- Attendance at Merthyr Tydfil Independent Provider Forum.
- Attendance at Multi-Agency Operational Group (MAOG) and Safeguarding meetings.
- Meeting with the quality assurance lead officer.

Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

A number of specific areas for improvement have been identified in the body of this report. The council’s progress in relation to these areas will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year. Emphasis will be placed on progress with the improvement priorities identified in the director’s annual report including:

- Safeguarding.
- Continued partnership working with health.
- Permanency for looked after children.

- National thematic inspection of looked after children.
- National thematic review of commissioning of social care for older people.

PERFORMANCE

Shaping services:

Adults

Links are evident between the community strategy, partnership and corporate plans and are reflected in the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) introduced in April 2013. The SIP has clear strategic objectives and appropriately incorporates the key planning aims identified in other plans such as the Health and Well Being Strategy and Children's Partnership Plan.

The council is committed through its "Home for Life Strategy for the older people of Merthyr Tydfil" (2006 - 2020) to work towards providing services which promote independence.

The KHHP is a good example of how this works in practice. This new service was part of CSSIW's programme of site visits during the year to consider how far integration and co-locating supports social services to provide services in one place. Discussions with senior managers in health and social services indicated that the initial idea of bringing all adult services staff within social services into the accommodation at the KHHP changed to bringing in the enabling aspects only. Although senior social services managers continue to be located at the council's main offices, some middle managers are based at the site alongside health managers in similar roles. Representatives of third sector organisations, such as Age Concern, are close by. This is promoting close operational working across disciplines.

The council is clear about the future intentions of directly provided services. In last year's annual report, the director identified the need to stimulate the provider market through contracts and commissioning. Whilst work is ongoing to support this intention, more needs to be done to move this agenda forward.

Children

The council has increased its expenditure from £1m to £1.5m in the last year to strengthen family support services. This reflects the commitment to the council's strategic vision on early intervention service models. The Gellideg Family Centre based on the outskirts of Merthyr Tydfil town is the hub for children's intervention in the department. It provides a number of services, including contact and outreach work as well as a number of specific support programmes for families. The centre gauges customer satisfaction via questionnaires to families. Feedback from people who are supported is positive and the quality of the service provided has

been recognised independently by the British Standards Institute (BSI) award and International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 kite mark, the first centre in Wales to achieve this status. A visit to the centre by the inspectorate found a group of professional staff with very stable leadership who were committed and worked well as a team. Staff working there said that the service is well supported by senior managers who have a detailed knowledge of the service, the extent of its current provision, and where it needs to be in the future. This demonstrates strong, distributed leadership in children's services.

The IFST continues to work with a small number of families in the borough and is provided jointly with RCT. Whilst this is a valuable service, more work needs to be done to assure its longer term future, particularly if grant funding ceases. The service is currently being reviewed and the outcome of the review will help shape the decision on its future.

The Flying Start provision has been successfully developed in a number of areas and is having a positive impact in Merthyr Tydfil. It is reported that there are 18% (792 children) of all children under the age of four benefiting from some kind of services, making it the third highest in Wales.

Generally CSSIW's regulatory inspectors have found under eight's services in the borough to be satisfactory. However, the current policy in the borough's planning department may be inhibiting the growth of child minding provision due to the restrictions on numbers of places allowed in domestic settings. This has the potential to impact on low cost provision. Some of these settings may also be linked with Flying Start.

The department is keen to explore new ways of being creative and innovative. Social work staff are currently working closely with the Social Services Improvement Agency (SSIA) developing and piloting a framework for self-evaluation which is identified as one of the council's priorities for next year.

Areas of progress

- Progress with modernisation and working in collaboration with others identified through the work at the KHHP.
- The Gellideg Family Centre in achieving the British Standards Institute (BSI) award and International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 kite mark.

Areas for improvement

- Based on the outcome of the review of the IFST, the council will need to consider how the IFST is best placed to maximise the contribution it makes to supporting families in the borough.
- Reviewing planning policies in relation to under eight day care settings.

Getting help:

Adults

Access to the initial response team is straightforward and offers practical help quickly to avoid loss of independence. The structure of the team means that staff can begin to assess strengths and needs in a timely way, even if a unified assessment is also required for longer term care.

There are some areas of fragmentation and service gaps in relation to mental health services. Further discussion around Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's strategic response to the provision of services to older people with dementia would help to clarify this to staff working at an operational level. Performance data on the outcomes for service users over the past 18 months would help to evaluate success and progress of the service.

Delayed transfers of care have improved significantly this year averaging one placement per month. The impact of winter pressures saw an increase in numbers of delays in quarters two and three last year. Although there are mechanisms in place to deal with such increases, more work needs to be done with the local health board around identifying roles and responsibilities to ensure patients are not delayed unnecessarily in hospital in the future.

Care plan reviews have dipped slightly but remain within the Welsh average. It was anticipated that the under achievement in relation to reviews identified earlier in the year would be improved upon as a result of a dedicated reviewing officer being in post. This has happened.

The introduction of person centred planning for people with a learning disability is ongoing. All plans were reviewed this year as part of the transfer from the day centre to the new site at the health park. Care plans now reflect a holistic record of the support being provided.

Children

This year there are fewer children looked after, more children in need known to social services and an increase in the level of children on the child protection register in Merthyr Tydfil.

Performance data trends show that front door services have improved with an increase in initial assessments undertaken within statutory timescales. This has risen significantly and is now in line with the Welsh average. However, fewer initial assessments were undertaken by a social worker than in previous years and this is something that the council is continuing to address. The council is considering a move towards whole family based assessment in the future which could free up resources.

Timeliness of most core assessments is good with more being undertaken. However, where assessments took longer than 35 days to complete, the average length of time has increased. The council says that this is partly due to additional pressures faced by social services in meeting the new timescales introduced around court work.

Decisions on referrals are made within one working day and more than a quarter of referrals did not proceed to initial assessments. The re-referral rate in children's services mirrors similar patterns in other comparable councils in Wales. However, the authority is monitoring this as the level of re-referral has increased even though the number of initial assessments has decreased. The council suggests that this rise may relate to multiple contacts for the same issues being recorded as re-referrals.

The authority has worked hard to improve key performance indicators and all children on the child protection register and looked after children (with the exception of two children) are allocated to a qualified social worker. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of children in need who have been allocated a social worker. This suggests that resources are more effectively deployed following initial screening. One of the advantages of serving a small geographical area with a stable workforce is the use of local knowledge. Children and their families are often known to social services before they become looked after and social workers are often working with second generation families.

Areas of progress

- Improvement in response times and performance around front door services for children.
- The work of the initial response team in adult services in providing suitable and practical help to maintain or help achieve independent living.
- Improvement in the approach and quality of care planning in relation to people with a learning disability.

Areas for improvement

- Further clarity is needed with the Cwm Taf Local Health Board around identification of roles and responsibilities to ensure timely discharge from hospital.

The services provided:

Adults

The total social services expenditure for adults is £19.6m which is significantly lower than other similar authorities. Of this, half is spent on older adults. The council continues to promote a community based services agenda and, for its size, Merthyr Tydfil has a broad range of services available to meet people's needs well for independent living. Performance data suggests that the rate of people over 65 supported in the community per thousand of the population went down slightly last year although it remains well above the Welsh average. However, more people over 65 are receiving a service at home. Whilst the number of people who are supported in care homes has risen slightly this year, the council reports that this is linked to issues around nursing placements at the end of the financial year. The authority will want to monitor closely the possible exposure to displaced demands from the health board in the future.

Staff involved in the Initial Response and Reablement Team are motivated to deliver person centred care. During a site visit by CSSIW they demonstrated detailed knowledge of people's preferences and how to engage with them. Support workers working with the therapists have the skills and training to cope with family dynamics and significant experience of motivating people to pursue the objectives identified for them.

The level of funding for people under 65 with physical disabilities has gone down significantly which is similar to other neighbouring authorities. However, in learning disability services spending has increased. This has been linked to a small number of high cost placements within the authority. A number of people in these placements have now moved to the extra care scheme which should lead to a change in the balance of this expenditure in the future.

Senior officers and commissioners within social services facilitate an independent provider forum which meets regularly with local providers. This is well attended by both the independent and the third sectors.

The quality of commissioned older person's services in Merthyr Tydfil is mixed. There are a small number of care homes where there are concerns about instability around leadership and management. The status of some overseas workers employed in care homes has also been an issue.

A provider performance monitoring protocol has been drafted to monitor ongoing service improvement. The protocol is based on early identification of issues of concern and clearly sets out the stages of provider performance monitoring. This includes a MAOG where emerging concerns are raised with external partners and a further stage where escalating concerns are instigated. Regulatory inspectors say that the group works well in identifying settings where there is cause for

concern. Ongoing communication between all partners is important to ensure messages are consistent to providers where concerns or poor performance have been identified and enforcement action is being considered.

The council's own care homes are good. CSSIW will be working closely with the council regarding two new developments which will require registration. Services for younger adults are reported by regulatory inspectors to be satisfactory and the in house domiciliary care provision is perceived as being well run with strong leadership.

Children

The permanence agenda remains high on the list of priorities for children's services in Merthyr Tydfil which poses some challenges for the authority. The size of the authority means that it has to give consideration to working with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for children who need significant levels of support which cannot be provided within their own families or locally.

The long-term plan is for fostering and adoption services to collaborate regionally which will align with the Welsh Government's vision as well as being more sustainable. In the interim, however, the authority will need to continue to satisfy itself that it is providing a robust service that meets the needs of the looked after children population.

Regulatory inspections have taken place for both the fostering and adoption services this calendar year. The report on fostering services identified good training opportunities for staff and foster carers, as well as inclusion of foster carers and foster children in consultation events. However, compliance notices were issued around some aspects of leadership and carers reviews.

The council acknowledges that whilst foster care recruitment has progressed, it is difficult to recruit from a relatively small population base. As a result, there is significant reliance on the use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) with almost half the children who are fostered being placed with families outside the borough. As well as being significantly more costly (the annual expenditure in looked after children in this financial year has increased), this has an impact on children themselves. There has been an improvement in school placement changes for looked after children which compares with other neighbouring authorities. Whilst there is an emphasis on placing children locally when appropriate this is not always achievable. In Merthyr Tydfil it is acknowledged that finding a placement that is appropriate for a child sometimes means that this is at the expense of a change in school.

The adoption service was subject to a recent inspection and, whilst it was undertaken in the first quarter of this financial year, it reports on performance looking back over a three year period. It found that there were good links with the

child care teams and the service was child focused. A robust decision making process had been put in place to accommodate the changes in legislation around the “ought to be placed” decisions. Gaps were identified in relation to the process for managing complaints and a compliance notice was issued.

A report on the quality of local authority education services for children and young people was published by Estyn in November 2012. It concluded that the council’s education services were “not good enough”, with standards for learners at all key stages deemed unsatisfactory. As a result, an Independent Recovery Board has been set up to oversee improvements. To date, the trend in performance around educational attainment at Key Stage 2 for looked after children is poor and lower than last year; however attainment at Key Stage 3 is higher and is similar to other authorities. All but one child out of 82 children had personal advisors although figures for looked after young people who are not in education, employment or training are below the average for Wales.

The success of safeguarding awareness training undertaken by social services staff in schools and nurseries across the borough was recognised in an Estyn inspection report stating “the authority’s arrangements for safeguarding meets requirements and gives no cause for concern including a thorough programme of training”. Over 400 staff were trained during the year.

The transition policy has been reviewed and the authority reports that it places an emphasis on ensuring that the principles of transition are fully embedded in practitioners’ practice. There is a five year projection plan which covers both children with a learning disability and care leavers.

Areas of progress

- MAOG in working closely with partners and regulators to identify and address poor practice in local service provision for adults.
- Training undertaken in educational establishments across the borough to raise awareness around safeguarding children.
- Review of the transition policy and additional work around planning for transition.

Areas for improvement

- Ongoing progress in the development of adoption and fostering services.

Effect on people’s lives:

Adults

Reablement offers a very positive service. The team engages well with service users and carers to retain or regain independence. Service users and carers are

encouraged to set their own goals and to comment on whether outcomes have been met. However, it is not clear the extent to which the council analyses the outcomes from reablement. Whilst it was reported that more people end the service after six weeks than go on to a longer term service, no detailed analysis was available to confirm this.

More people have control about how they live their lives in Merthyr Tydfil. This is because the use of direct payments continues to be actively promoted to allow people to exercise full choice and to encourage them to be in control of the personal support they receive. The number of people accessing direct payments in the authority has doubled in the last few years.

The council recognises the vital role that carers play and the contribution that they make in the local community. A new carers strategy incorporating a multi-agency approach was launched in summer 2012. Its vision is that carers will be universally recognised and valued as being fundamental to strong families and stable communities. This will go some way to addressing the requirements of the Carers Measure to improve their lives and to ensure they are supported by appropriate services and information available to them. A vibrant carers network exists and a carers development officer is in post to support this. A significant number of carers have been offered an assessment and the number of carers who have taken up the offer has risen this year, however carers provided with a service remains a challenge to the authority. In order to understand this the council is making this an area for further attention.

Corporately, the council prioritises safeguarding of both children and adults and the social services department has made significant progress in pursuing an integrated approach including the amalgamation of safeguarding for children and adults under one head of service. The level of referrals relating to vulnerable adults has almost doubled during the year (116 – 203) which the authority sees as a positive trend and linked to its work around raising awareness and recognising abuse. Safeguarding will continue to remain a priority in the coming year with training for all elected members planned. The corporate induction policy reinforces that safeguarding is every employee's responsibility.

Children

The department has faced some challenges in children's services around staff shortages resulting in a reliance on a number of agency staff, although this has now improved.

More work needs to be done to improve statutory visits in the looked after children sector as figures show that performance has deteriorated. The council recognises that further attention needs to be given in the next year to work with children in need, and particularly to develop prevention services. This should deliver a more

holistic though focused approach to meeting family needs, preventing children from moving through the system and requiring more costly interventions.

Initial child protection conferences are timely as are initial core group meetings. However, reviews of children in need show poor performance.

All the young carers in Merthyr Tydfil who were assessed as needing support in their own right were provided with a service.

The Family's First programme is instrumental in providing services to young disabled children to access mainstream pre-school nursery provision and support to young carers in the borough. Discussions have taken place with health partners about the needs of children with disabilities to try and provide a different and better service through the roll-out of a care pathway model.

The council has explored the possibility of developing a joint advocacy service with a neighbouring authority but little progress has been made to date.

Twitter and Facebook are extensively used for communication in the borough. For younger people (12 - 25 year olds), "Merthyr Noise" was launched in June 2012. This is a website for young people to air their views through the medium of websites and social networking. The site is managed by young people for young people and includes information, advice and guidance and local news. It operates within the Ten Entitlements (the rights of young people as set out by Welsh Government). Merthyr Tydfil Youth Service and Children and Young People's Partnership were at the forefront of developing the service. It has already been nominated for a national award.

Areas of progress

- Significant increase in the number of people using direct payments.
- Co-ordinated council response to safeguarding for children and adults within one team.
- The launch of the new carers strategy.

Areas for improvement

- Continued focus on children in need and the ongoing development of the preventative agenda.
- Improved performance in completing statutory visits to looked after children.
- Continued work with carers to understand the low take up of services.

CAPACITY

Delivering Social Services:

The council's corporate plan was agreed early in 2013. One of the priority areas in the plan for 2013 to 2017 includes meeting the needs of vulnerable children and young people. This is underpinned by a single integrated plan.

The council has a Medium Term Financial Plan, although the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement report states that there is significant work to do to align the plan, the council's asset management strategy and the workforce strategy if they are to be used fully to inform and support the achievement of the council's priorities. There is an indicative revenue budget deficit of £4.5m over the next four year period based on current service configuration.

The director's report recognises the challenges that will come with the introduction of legislation such as the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Bill and the impact that welfare reforms will have on the council. In addition "Reconnecting to Care" has introduced new responsibilities to former care leavers between 21 – 24 to support them in education and training. This will also impact on the council's finances.

In adult services, the management of delayed discharge from hospital will need to be carefully managed so that it is aligned with the overall budget for residential care.

Children who are looked after by the council have placed a high demand on services and, as a result of expensive placements, projected overspend will create an overall deficit in the social services budget this year. Whilst the council is looking at long-term regional collaborations, fostering and adoption services in the short-term will remain an area for continued attention.

Merthyr Tydfil is committed to "Grow your Own" social workers and currently there are eight people on social work courses, which is commendable given the size of the social services department. Staff are well trained and supported and 92% of home care staff are qualified which well exceeds the level expected in regulations. 89% of all care home staff are qualified to the expected level.

Areas of progress

- Resilience in dealing with financial constraints.
- Commitment to developing social work staff and overall a well-qualified workforce in directly provided services.

Areas for improvement

- Financial planning and budget management in the future within a challenging environment.

Providing direction:

The council has clearly thought out the strategic direction for the future of social services based on numerous collaborations and its attitude to partnership working. This has supported better services to people within their own community. Shared facilities are more cost effective and foster co-operation across service areas. The integrated facilities, such as those at the KHHP, offer the public a more holistic experience and access to a wider range of information and services to support their independence which is a key aspect of the council's strategic direction.

Overall there is corporate support for the work of social services in Merthyr Tydfil. There is effective scrutiny. This was evident when CSSIW attended a scrutiny committee meeting during which members effectively challenged senior officers around the new models of care proposed, as well as examination of performance information in children's services. There is recognition however that more work needs to be done with members corporately in order to fully understand and further develop their roles.

Safeguarding is identified as one of the council's priorities for improvement and change, and there is a commitment to raising awareness that safeguarding is everyone's business in the council. All elected members and staff will have access to information and training, and the corporate induction policy is being reviewed to ensure it clarifies the expectations and responsibilities that individuals have around protecting vulnerable people and children.

The council has a structure in place which promotes clear leadership and direction through the senior management team, divisional meetings and team meetings. The senior management team is small but works well together to provide the stability necessary to continue to move forward on the change agenda. Each team member carries a wide portfolio which creates a significant dependency on individual managers. It works closely with partners and is keen to work with regulators to address areas of concern or development identified. The council has set itself a task of focusing on outcomes across both children and adult services which will lead to better outcomes for those who receive support from Merthyr Tydfil social services.

Areas of progress

- Proposals for training and awareness raising around safeguarding for all employees and members.

Area for improvement

- Ongoing development of the role of members in their understanding of social services.