



Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012/2013

Local Authority Name: Torfaen County Borough Council

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

Summary

The council has implemented changes to the leadership structure in social services which included the termination of the director's role incorporating the locality lead for the Aneurin Bevan Health Board (ABHB). This has enabled the director to strengthen focus on the delivery of social services, whilst maintaining strong partnership working with health through the integrated post of head of adult services.

The director has reported that this was a year of consolidation and that progress on making improvements to services and developing new initiatives has been limited due to continued budget restraints. The council faces a significant challenge in moving services forward at a pace to meet future needs in a climate of significantly limited investment.

The council has a history of good partnership working with both internal and external partners. It has strong collaborative arrangements in place with neighbouring authorities and continues to explore opportunities for partnership working where this can deliver better services. The development of regional structures is also progressing in line with the policy direction of the Welsh Government.

The director has highlighted the impact that accommodation changes and relocation of teams had upon some aspects of service delivery during the year. The necessary changes brought with them challenges, but also opportunities to implement more flexible and modern working practices.

The establishment of a specialist commissioning unit within social services was achieved during the year and is reported to already be impacting positively on strategic planning and quality assurance. CSSIW will be interested to follow up on this early evaluation during the coming year.

Adults

The council has provided evidence of reviewing existing strategies and considering the future delivery of services to meet projected needs of the population. It has recognised the need to remodel some services and to improve the quality of other established ones. An improved performance in the annual review of adults who are in receipt of services has assisted in this work, along with a stronger focus on commissioning and contract monitoring. The council has also worked in partnership with neighbouring authorities on an initiative to improve the quality of care provided in care homes, with a particular focus on nutrition.

There have been improved working arrangements and a greater understanding between housing partners and social services to progress supported housing initiatives. This should support the desired outcomes of the council to promote and enable more people to live independently in the community.

The director's report indicates that the council takes a positive and serious approach to consultation with the people in Torfaen and responds to any feedback received.

Children

The structure of teams delivering services to children and families was changed during the year, along with relocation of staff from the old County Hall building. The head of service reports that the necessary dispersal of teams was progressed alongside this restructure and generally went well. There was a significant impact on social work services for disabled children and families, affected by team changes locating to their new base at the Serennu centre in Newport.

There have been limited opportunities to take forward the early intervention agenda which is vital to achieve the important shift to family support and prevention. While the structures to achieve early intervention are beginning to bed-in, a decision to move resources to education services led to the termination of the Enabling Families project. The council clearly has difficult decisions to make to meet immediate priorities whilst ensuring that there is sufficient investment to develop social services for the future.

The council is again managing a high number of looked after children in the borough, and has been actively reviewing practice and trends to understand the reasons for this. Senior officers are clear that the council does not take children into care unnecessarily and believe that front line practice is measured and appropriate. The council may wish to reflect on the need and opportunity for short-term investment in new models of support services to influence and potentially reverse this trend.

The fieldwork carried out with social services as part of a CSSIW thematic review on services for children in need and looked after children found evidence

of good working practice and strong commitment from social workers who were working under considerable pressure to develop services at that time.

The director's report provides an account of the challenges that have faced the department during the year and progress made against the planned outcomes that had been identified. It sets the agenda for future service delivery and partnership working, along with outcomes to be achieved in the year ahead, within the context of tightening fiscal controls. This report is supported by overview reports from the heads of service which provide more detailed performance information on each service sector.

CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- Severe budgetary pressures coupled with increasing demands and expectations to maintain and deliver services.
- Lack of investment and resources to deliver plans for sustainable social services for the future.
- Implementing new regional and national adoption structures within current budget restraints.
- Management and governance arrangements in relation to the joint children's disability service run in conjunction with Newport.

Response to last year's areas of development

The council made some progress on areas of development, within the limitations that have been clearly expressed within the director's annual report. The report is open and transparent about areas where progress targets and priorities have not been met.

Efforts have been made to improve performance in carrying out annual reviews of adults who are receiving social care services. This is important to ensure that people are receiving services that are appropriate for their needs and that resources are targeted and adjusted appropriately.

Progress on the council's work with carers has been limited and the need for a greater focus on this is recognised at officer and member levels.

The performance indicators for statutory work carried with children and families is still of concern for some service areas, although officers have given assurance that these statistics are not reflective of the direct work and good practice that is undertaken with children. This assurance is in line with the findings of the sample fieldwork undertaken by CSSIW.

Good practice identified

CSSIW has identified the following areas of good practice:

- Multi-disciplinary Intervention Service Torfaen (MIST) developed with Action for Children to provide services for young people with complex needs.

- The low level befriending project run in partnership with the third sector to provide local support to adults who may be vulnerable.
- Schools based co-ordinator to support looked after children.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

In addition to inspections of regulated services and engagement meetings with council officials, CSSIW undertook the following activity in 2012/13:

- Fieldwork was undertaken as part of the national thematic review of services for children in need and looked after children.
- Visit to Torfaen Young Carers group.
- Attendance at a community care team meeting.

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 will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year.

- Impact of budgetary pressures.
- Governance of children's disability services.
- Safeguarding practice and performance. Validation of assurances of timeliness of actions and anomalies in the reporting of PI data.
- Commissioning unit – progress and outcomes of new unit and developing specialist approach.
- Progress in work with carers.
- Reablement and progress in developing new service models.
- Work with the Wales Audit Office (WAO) to begin a review into the effectiveness of the Gwent Frailty project.
- National thematic inspection of looked after children.
- National thematic review of commissioning of social care for older people.

PERFORMANCE

Shaping services:

The council has developed a single plan outlining its priorities for the future. This plan has consolidated the objectives and statutory plans previously laid out in separate strategies developed by different service areas of the council. The council carried out and completed a consultation on the Torfaen Together single plan which has identified and committed to achieving seven overarching outcomes for the people in the borough.

A new commissioning unit has been established within social services in recognition of the need to improve data analysis, predictive mapping and the planning and shaping of services to meet future needs. CSSIW will be interested to examine this service more closely in the coming year and to

discuss emerging evidence of improved planning and outcomes for the people of Torfaen.

The council has a history of good partnership working with neighbouring local authorities, the health board and third sector stakeholders. The leadership is clear that collaboration will always be considered where it is indicated that this can achieve added value and better outcomes for people. Senior officers from the five Gwent local authorities meet on a regular (monthly) basis to ensure that existing initiatives are monitored and to explore the potential for future opportunities for support, collaboration and shared learning.

Adults

The council has provided evidence of consultation and information events held during the year seeking views and feedback from people who may use a variety of services. Social services actively supports a range of forums and works with third sector partners to ensure that people can be supported to be present and share their views. These include a “have your say” day, an established older persons forum which meets regularly and a “my way, my day” event for people using day care services.

The council has a clear vision for the future which is about promoting wellbeing and community resilience, enabling people to live independently in their local communities for as long as possible. In order to realise this vision, the council will need to continually review its resource and investment position to develop different services.

The Gwent Mental Health and Learning Disability strategy that is in place has been revisited and refreshed to take into account the future direction of services and new legislation that is anticipated in 2014/15. Plans to establish an integrated mental health service will be moving forward in 2013/14.

The Gwent Supporting People regional commissioning plans have also been reviewed to ensure that they are fit for the future.

Children

There is a clear recognition of the need to reduce the looked after children population in the county whilst ensuring that children are kept safe. Although Torfaen was not chosen as a pilot area for the Integrated Family Support Service model (IFSS), officers recognised the potential of this way of working and implemented the principles of the model in a modest project (Family Focus pilot). The evaluation of this project is due to be completed in 2013/14 and is expected to evidence positive outcomes. The vision of the senior leadership team is to be able to shift their intervention to one using the IFSS model, promoting community engagement and reducing the focus on a model of care management.

Services for children with disabilities are currently provided through a pilot partnership arrangement with Newport City Council and the ABHB. Teams are

now co-located at the Serennu Centre in Newport, providing comprehensive assessment and support services for families.

The council has an established partnership with Action for Children providing MIST for vulnerable children and young people. A formal evaluation of the impact of this service was completed and published during 2012, and reported improved and positive outcomes for looked after children and their families, for young people as they become young adults and for foster parents supporting young people with complex needs.

Areas of progress

- The development of a dedicated commissioning unit.
- Progression to co-location of teams at the Serennu Centre with multi-agency working and shared skills.

Areas for improvement

- Implementation of more preventative and early intervention services for children and families.

Getting help:

The council provides a range of useful information for people who may be seeking advice or services on its website and in poster/leaflet format in local communities. There are two offices that provide face-to-face advice and contact across the borough strategically placed in the towns of Cwmbran and Pontypool.

The council has improved its information for carers, and has developed and widely distributed new information packs throughout the borough, using local community contact points, such as GP surgeries.

The council produces a newsletter specifically aimed at the needs of children with disabilities and their families and has continued to publish a quarterly newspaper Torfaen Talks which is delivered to every home in the borough. This regularly provides information about social services and associated support events and activities.

Adults

The introduction of a “duty pod” to respond to referrals received for adult services has proved to be successful, providing more timely assessments and decision making. In the light of the council’s positive evaluation of this pilot, it is now planning to extend the model in the year ahead.

The council’s expressed aim is to support people to live independently at home in their communities and there are indications that this is being achieved for more people. For adults aged 18 – 65 who receive services, the vast majority are being assisted to remain in their own homes.

The number of older people receiving support services has also increased, although there has also been an increase in the number of people in residential care placements.

The reablement service has continued to respond to the need for short intervention strategies, but has experienced considerable pressure associated with unmet health needs and hospital discharge arrangements. In spite of this, the council has managed to improve its performance on delayed discharges from hospital to a position that is now below the Welsh average.

Children

The front line contact and assessment work of social services shows evidence of timely decision making. The rate of re-referrals remains around the Welsh average and this suggests that decision making is generally good. The fieldwork carried out by CSSIW in the autumn of 2012 found this to be the case in the majority of the sample cases that were reviewed, although there was also some evidence of inconsistency at that time.

Statistical evidence of performance in the completion of initial and core assessments is satisfactory, with social workers completing these tasks in line with the Welsh average. However, this is not always the case when children are received into care where the percentage of placement plans that are in place for these children has been very poor. Senior managers have advised CSSIW that this is a systems/recording issue rather than one of poor practice. CSSIW will be seeking further assurance and evaluating the performance information on this important aspect of care management in the coming year.

The integration of social services and housing within one directorate provides opportunities for collaboration and improved strategic planning to meet the needs of people in the borough. New initiatives to support young people back into the community from “external” placements, with appropriate accommodation on a new housing development and support networks have been progressed in partnership with housing.

Areas of progress

- Information for carers redesigned and distributed.
- Improved “duty pod” arrangements for adult service referrals.
- Management of reablement and Delayed Transfers of Care in a challenging health environment.

Areas for improvement

- Evidence of care planning at first placements for children in care.

The services provided:

There has been an improved focus on services for carers with evidence of keen interest, support and challenge from members. The number of assessments offered to carers has increased, but the uptake of the assessments themselves continues to be slow. The council reports reduced engagement in network meetings and recognises the challenges in this important area of work. Evaluation surveys have been used to try to engage and better understand the needs of carers across the borough.

A reduction in the capacity of the carers team will need to be monitored closely if the council is to be in a position to respond to future needs and the potential for increased demands.

Although work with carers has been slow to progress, the council has put in place a support programme for new carers which was attended by 52 people during the year and noted an increase in the use of benefits advice and support.

The council provides advocacy services for both adults and children in need of this support through contract arrangements with the third sector.

Adults

The focus on promoting independence and self help in Torfaen is making positive progress with a range of projects operating across local communities. These vary from a low level Befriending Project with “hubs” established in several neighbourhoods in the North and South of the borough (in partnership with the third sector) to the more intense frailty and reablement services that are inspected by CSSIW. CSSIW inspectors have reported that the quality of these registered services is generally good and the feedback from people in receipt of their services has been positive. The council also has an in-house evaluation and quality assurance system that indicates that these services are delivering good outcomes for people.

The council has in place a Disabled Facilities Grant improvement and action plan which it continues to address and monitor. Additional resources are required to progress these improvements at pace, but there has been an improvement in assessment times and the overall delivery times have reduced. However, these still remain high with people often having to wait unacceptably long periods for adaptations that could assist them to improve the quality of their lives and their ability to remain independent. The council has undertaken surveys with people who have received these services. There has been positive feedback about the quality of the service once work has been completed.

Torfaen County Borough Council continues to be the lead council in partnership with neighbouring social services departments in delivering the Gwent wide equipment service.

The council is part of a relatively new collaboration, the “Shared Lives Project” along with five other local authorities. The scheme is operated by Caerphilly

social services and aims to provide small, domestic placements for adults who are in need of care and support. Senior officers report that the success of this project within Torfaen has been limited to date, but recognise the potential to expand and develop its remit to meet both day care and short-term respite needs. Discussions are already underway with the project team to explore the potential for more creative use of the scheme and to attract more interest from prospective carers.

The council does not operate any residential care services for older adults itself and relies on its ability to commission placements with the private sector. It is placing a stronger focus on its responsibility for monitoring contracts with the sector and on ensuring that the services that are purchased are of suitable quality and are providing value for money. It has recognised an impending crisis due to a deficit in placements available to meet the complex needs of a growing elderly and infirm population, and is working with partner councils and the health board to explore potential solutions for the future.

Children

The council has continued to take forward the learning from work done on a collaborative pilot project on transition. This approach has now become part of mainstream practice and has supported 12 young people into adult services during the year. Young people are supported by a multi-agency team approach from the age of 14 years, with the aim being to support them into independent living as adults.

The service provided for children with disabilities and their families now operates from the Serennu Centre in Newport in partnership with the Health Board and Newport City Council. The facilities provided from specialist assessments through to therapy and day activities are exceptional and are much appreciated by families, although the location of this service presents some challenges for people who live in the North of the Torfaen borough. Staff changes for a range of reasons led to a temporary reduction in team capacity at the beginning of the year which has now been replaced.

The council provides play opportunities for children with disabilities and additional learning needs during the summer in partnership with Cwmbran Community Council in the South of the borough. There are seven registered schemes based on local school sites where children can be supported to join in supervised activities with their peers. These schemes are generally well organised although are staffed by young adults who do not always have the desired experience to deal with particularly challenging behaviours.

Services and support for young carers is again being provided in-house, following termination of a contract with a third sector provider. The in-house resource is currently very limited with one worker carrying a caseload of 47 young carers. There is an established young carers' forum with eight members and there are 16 young people active within the support group. First aid training has been provided for the young carers during the year and one

member attended a council meeting in November 2012 to make a presentation to members.

Officers have informed CSSIW that they are seeking alternative resources through the Big Lottery Fund to try to improve the resource and capacity to develop their support work with young carers further.

The council's fostering and adoption services have been inspected by CSSIW regulatory inspectors. The fostering service suffered a significant reduction in resource during the year which impacted upon the level of service and support that could be provided. The inspection also highlighted improvements that need to be made to the service as a matter of priority. However, foster carers who were consulted as part of the inspection process gave positive feedback about the workers supporting them, acknowledging that there was pressure on the service but that they were still able to obtain advice and support when needed.

The adoption service is a three council collaboration service that is hosted by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. The service is well run and there were no significant areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. This service will be developing further into a regional adoption service for the five Gwent councils, and it will be important to maintain the standard of provision while this expansion and new governance arrangements are put into place.

The council works in partnership with Action for Children in the continued delivery of MIST which has been in place since 2004. It works with young people aged between 10 and 21 who are in care and who present with such significant challenging and risk-taking behaviours that their placements are threatened. Whilst the numbers of children assisted are relatively small, the work is intense, specialist and the outcomes have proved to be very positive.

The council currently commissions much of its Flying Start provision for very young children from registered private providers in the borough. There are some crèche facilities provided directly by the council to support lifelong learning classes. These are run by different departments in the council and do not necessarily fall within the direct remit of social services, although they are used to support families and children in need.

Areas of progress

- Improvements have been made to reduce the waiting times for Disabled Facilities Grants, although progress has been slow.
- MIST continues to deliver good outcomes for children in care and can provide support that helps to keep young people out of residential placements.

Areas for improvement

- Care planning and permanence planning.

Effect on people's lives:

Adults

The council is able to evidence that more people are being supported in the community and that a range of services of varying intensity are having a positive impact upon people lives. People have spoken positively to CSSIW inspectors about the personal care and reablement services assisting them to remain in their own homes. They have described a reliable and consistent service which is delivered by caring and sensitive staff. Feedback received through council surveys also indicates a high level of satisfaction with the services delivered.

The use of direct payments in Torfaen continues to grow slowly. This can provide people with more choice and the independence to arrange their own care packages and merits further promotion and support by the council.

Safeguarding vulnerable adults receives high profile within the council and the objectives of the Torfaen Together single plan. Performance information indicates that the number of incidents that have been reported where the risk has been managed have dropped. Officers acknowledge that this is the case, and that this is related to individuals who have the capacity and understanding to manage their own lives and do not always accept advice or recommendations that might best keep them safe. In these instances the council considers that it is reporting honestly that risks to such individuals cannot always be managed.

Performance in completing annual reviews for adults receiving services have improved and indicates that the council should be in a stronger position to understand the changing needs of individuals and to make appropriate service adjustments. This is vital in a climate of managing limited resources.

Contract monitoring of services purchased for vulnerable people have improved in their focus on quality and providers are being held to account where improvements are required. Officers work well in partnership with other agencies and with CSSIW through the escalating concerns process where care home services are failing. There is also evidence of shared learning and practice development in applying these principles to the domiciliary care sector.

Children

CSSIW fieldwork concluded that the work of the council with children in need and looked after children provided evidence of good practice and a strong commitment from social workers. The outcomes for children and young people were good and families were positive about the quality of the relationships that they had with their support workers, seeing this as the main feature of success and good outcomes.

They also felt included in decision making as part of these relationships.

Educational outcomes for looked after children at the age of 16 are above the Wales average. The work of the dedicated children's education co-ordinator with schools in the borough in respect of looked after children has shown signs of success with a significant reduction (by 50%) in school exclusions compared to 2011/12. This improved continuity should have a positive impact on the potential of young learners to achieve their best.

Safeguarding arrangements for children are satisfactory, although performance on the timeliness of holding initial conferences is very poor and significantly lower than every other council in Wales. Officers report that this reflects a technical/recording issue and is not indicative of unsafe or tardy practice. CSSIW will be keen to explore and validate this in the coming year.

Officers have sought feedback from young people about their experiences of the safeguarding process. A sample of 30 young people were approached to share their views in order to help officers to understand their "journey" and to improve practice where possible in the future. The response to the survey was good and provided some reassurance that the early fears and resentment at the beginning of the process were frequently replaced with the young person benefitting from the process and feeling safer at the end. Officers intend to continue to use this quality assurance exercise to inform practice and learning.

The MIST project has continued to deliver good outcomes for young people with particularly complex needs. An evaluation of the project in 2012 identified continued improvement in both long and short-term outcomes in respect of emotional health and well being, the capacity of young people to parent their own children, the stability of relationships with birth families, enhanced competency and skills of foster carers involved and a reduction in costs of out of county residential care. The project has established a good reputation with professionals across South Wales.

CSSIW visited a young carers activity group and spoke with the young people there about their experiences and the support that they receive. All provided positive feedback about the service, describing how it gave them a break from home. They talked about activities in the past and some planned for the future and were enthusiastic about the support workers and their relationships with them.

Areas of progress

- Improved timeliness on carrying out reviews of adults receiving services.
- Improved contract monitoring with focus on quality measures.
- Significant reduction in school exclusions for looked after children.

Areas for improvement

- Improve "marketing" and uptake of direct payments.
- Continue to address the high numbers of looked after children, ensuring that there is sufficient capacity to take action to revoke court orders in a timely way where it is appropriate for an order to be discharged.

CAPACITY

Delivering Social Services:

The director of social services reports very openly that continued local and national financial pressures have had a direct impact upon their ability to take improvement and modern service planning forward at the pace required to meet future projected need and the sustainable social services in Wales agenda.

A three year medium-term financial plan was developed during 2012/13 in which front line services have been afforded some initial protection from efficiency savings, but the council has now stated publically that this cannot be guaranteed for future years.

The council recognises the importance of their workforce and 2012/13 was designated as a “staff engagement year” by the chief executive. Each department was expected to focus more closely on the experiences of staff and to actively seek feedback from them. Senior officers within social services reported positively that their staff felt supported and were clearly committed to the work that they do with people in Torfaen.

Staff training and development is recognised as essential in retaining and developing a skilled and resilient workforce. All staff in social services have annual dedicated development days, although the director reports that the level of training in 2012/13 was reduced due to the availability of trainers for some specialist programmes.

Senior officers and managers are also committed to supporting student placements and have an established first year in practice programme which is providing support and mentorship to newly qualified workers.

The workforce has remained relatively stable and the ability to retain experienced staff to support workforce development is widely appreciated by senior managers. Middle tier managers have described the way the organisation uses skill audits to ensure that the right skills are in the right place and to identify any skill gaps and development needs. Managers have also endorsed the robust guidance that is provided to support and enable staff to carry out their roles.

There continues to be a focus on improving sickness absence rates in the department. Senior officers have acknowledged the negative impact that office relocation and changes in working practices had upon this at points during the year. However, they are confident that stability is being restored and anticipate an improvement again in sickness absence rates.

Areas of progress

- Positive direct engagement with staff at senior officer level as part of wider staff engagement initiative.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that appropriate skills and resources are available to deliver essential and specialist training to the workforce.

Providing direction:

There is support for social services at a corporate level as evidenced by the protection of budgets to date to ensure that essential services can be delivered.

The importance of the role of social services and social care in delivering corporate priorities is well recognised but there is tension around the investment that is needed to achieve these aims in a difficult financial climate. This has been compounded by the additional and competing pressures arising from the identified improvements required in education services.

Leadership has remained stable at both corporate and divisional levels. Social services has an experienced and committed senior management team which is clear about the vision and challenges for the future. The role of the director changed at the beginning of the year with the previous dual responsibilities linked to the ABHB no longer in place. This has enabled the director to focus more strongly on her statutory role whilst maintaining strong links with health partners at head of service level.

There is evidence of improved and more effective scrutiny by members of the council as well as lively interest, continued support and constructive challenge of officers.

The WAO has recently been working with the council to review the processes used for internal evaluation and audit. It has made recommendations to strengthen these important areas of council business to ensure that members and officers can be confident about performance across all service areas.

Areas of progress

- Evidence of increased challenge and more effective scrutiny of business by members.

Areas for improvement

- Implement recommendations made by the WAO to strengthen internal quality assurance and performance measures.