



Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012/2013

Local Authority Name: Wrexham County Borough Council

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

Summary

The council has continued to make progress in the remodelling of its services in order to provide a clear focus on enabling people to maintain their independence through support, reablement and addressing barriers to social inclusion. Evaluation of the effectiveness of these developments is ongoing. Further progress has been made in the engagement of service users. The council recognises the challenges it faces in ensuring that service user engagement is firmly embedded and implemented consistently.

Adult services

There has been development of strategic and commissioning plans in most service areas providing clarity in the direction of service development in the context of the demographic, financial climate and, in some areas, legislative change. This is particularly the case in adult services. The clarity and effectiveness of business planning is less well evidenced and the council needs to ensure that business plans are sufficiently specific, achievable and managed to ensure they drive improvement.

The council has demonstrated a proactive and energetic approach to the development of carers services and is evaluating the effectiveness of these in consultation with carers and representative groups.

Children's services

Children's services have continued to develop a preventative approach to service provision in partnership with other statutory and independent agencies. Service

user feedback indicates that these are providing good outcomes for some service users.

Some improvement has been achieved in the assessment and care management of children's services but the pace of improvement remains slow in relation to some of the important areas in which improvement is required. Action to tackle areas of poor performance are being introduced and the council needs to ensure that performance management and quality assurance arrangements effectively support their effectiveness. This is particularly relevant to the planned major service development being taken forward in adult and children's safeguarding during 2013/14.

The director's report places performance and the plans for future service development within the demographic, legislative and financial context. Emphasis is placed on future developments and objectives and although some challenges and areas for improvement or development are referred to, the report provides limited critical analysis on areas where the council has faced significant challenges in achieving its objectives or ensuring the pace of improvement. The council provides radar grids or narratives to provide greater detail of service actions and achievement of outcomes. These vary in quality between service areas but the council is responsive and helpful in providing evidence to support statements made where this is available.

CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- Continuing risk in its ability to influence locality focused strategic planning with BCULHB (continued from last year due to further organisational change).
- Development of a major partnership initiative to implement a Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub led by North Wales Police and the integration of council children and adults' safeguarding processes.

Response to last year's areas of development

Whilst the council has provided evidence of progress in relation to most of the improvement areas identified in last year's performance evaluation report, some areas remain improvement areas for the coming year. These include progress of joint initiatives with the BCULHB and the pace of improvement in children's services.

Good practice identified

CSSIW has identified the following areas of good practice:

- The introduction of peer review as part of the quality assurance arrangements in older peoples services.

- Service users engagement embedded in the Together Achieving Change service model.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

An inspection of The arrangements for the Assessment and Care Management of Children in Need in Wrexham County Borough Council was undertaken in March 2013.

The focus of the inspection was on the evaluation of timeliness and quality of assessment and support to children in need and their families, both from council services and from those which the council commissions and provides in partnership. The case file analysis was undertaken on a selection of cases referred to the council between October and December 2012.

The inspection case file analysis found that the council had improved performance in a number of areas including the timeliness of initial assessment, decision making, the numbers of re referrals received and the quality of recording.

The quality of assessments remained inconsistent, however, and in need of improvement. The recording of risk assessment and risk management on files remained poor and it was recommended that the council audit the referrals not allocated for assessment on a regular basis to provide further scrutiny of decision making.

Positive feedback was received about the TAC services and about the further development of preventative services. It was noted that management capacity within the assessment team was being increased with the addition of an extra management post.

Wrexham took part in CSSIW's thematic study of the role of the director of social services. This broadly found that whilst guidance was not being adhered to, the current arrangements were generally effective.

CSSIW met with the senior officers of the council throughout the year and also undertook inspections of regulated services run by the council and operating within the Wrexham area.

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

Areas for particular CSSIW focus will include:

- Implementation of the DoLS legislation. This is part of a national review.
- Progress of joint initiatives with BCULHB.
- Performance in relation to adult and children's safeguarding during the implementation of the multi-agency safeguarding hub and integrated adult and children's services safeguarding unit.
- National thematic inspection of looked after children.
- National thematic review of commissioning of social care for older people.

PERFORMANCE

Shaping services:

Adults

The overarching adult services commissioning plan provides a comprehensive strategy for service development and activity. It contains a needs analysis and a vision, and is supported by individual service strategies for most service areas. The importance of identifying unmet need and the outcome of service users and partner involvement is well articulated. The recent increased externalisation of services has highlighted the need for more sophisticated market position knowledge and influence in order to support strategic initiatives, and work is under way with providers to develop these. The overall aim is to ensure that investment and service focus is primarily on maximising independence and choice through the development of universal services. This approach directs the reablement strategy, the commissioning of services and the use of grants to promote community services.

Mental Health services are not yet supported by a clear strategic plan. A contributory factor may have been the lengthy process of restructuring within BCULHB. The council recognises that this work needs to progress and that anticipated changes to management arrangements and service models are implemented to ensure that its service aims are supported.

The engagement of service users and carers has been further developed. The council identifies that whilst progress has been made, more needs to be done to ensure consistency across service areas and to develop effective strategies for engagement with hard to reach groups.

The council demonstrates a clear commitment to partnership working and contributes or leads on a number of regional initiatives. The inspection into the role of the director of social services indicated that the role is respected and the commitment to partnership working is recognised by Wrexham's main partners. The council reports some progress having been made in local service developments with health and in some joint funding agreements. However, the

picture in relation to other major service developments with health remains problematic.

Children

The work of the Prevention and Social Care Service is guided by a series of strategic documents which include the Council plan, the Wrexham Joint plan, and the Families First plan. The Children and Young People Framework Commissioning Strategy 2009 is currently being updated through a light touch review, as it is anticipated further work will be needed to ensure compliance with anticipated Welsh Government guidance. A Children and Young People's Commissioning Strategy 2013 - 2016 is in draft. The focus of the commissioning strategy has been a review of the value for money of current contracts and the retendering of contracts with more focus on outcomes. The document makes reference to a needs assessment and to consultation with children, young people and carers but is limited in detail. The strategic documents referred to have different time spans and focus. As stated in last year's report, the extent to which service delivery plans are sufficiently detailed and specific to support the delivery of strategic intentions and is not always clear.

Improving the engagement of children has been a continuing priority for the council and progress has been made in this area. A Children and Young People's Participation Strategy, supported by a participation toolkit, is in place. Some very positive existing initiatives have been further developed and new initiatives introduced. However, some planned initiatives have not progressed because of lack of capacity within the service. These have included a plan for the independent safeguarding and reviewing officers to record views of children in all reviews and also plans for the introduction of an annual process for gaining the views of children, young people and carers who are no longer involved with the service. Further progress is therefore required in this area.

Areas of progress

- Service user engagement in specific service areas.
- The development of strategic planning documents in most service areas of adult services.

Area for improvement

- Mental health services strategic planning and service development.
- Development of market position statements to support effective service development.
- Formal processes to consistently collect and collate service user feedback to improve services.

Getting help:

Adults

New models of service delivery in adult social care have been further developed with the extension of reablement or enablement to all service user groups. Access to this service has been supported by the appointment of additional occupational therapy posts and a workforce development officer. The council is seeking to integrate reablement into a range of services including longer term service provision, intermediate care and enhanced care. The enhanced care model currently only operates in the north of the county and development of this service in partnership with BCULHB, across the county, is needed to provide more equal service provision.

The council has responded positively to the findings of a serious case review by increasing the level of social work intervention and through the introduction of a new vulnerable adults policy for the Contact Assessment Team (CAT) with the aim to further promote people's safety. The council aims to develop the response services further during 2013/14 so that all initial assessments are undertaken by CAT prior to referral to reablement where appropriate.

Its own assessment is that the current mechanisms for contacting the department work satisfactorily but more needs to be done to develop a whole systems approach to identify individuals experiencing risk to their independence before crises develop. The council performs well in terms of supporting discharge from hospital, evidenced by the low number of delayed transfer of care cases being reported. In addition, the intermediate care service reports success in enabling the avoidance of hospital admissions and facilitating early discharge.

The council has recognised the need for mental health information to be improved and updated. This work is being undertaken and includes website links being created to local mental health services in the third sector and to BCULHB. Electronic referrals, a single point of access with a single allocations meeting for CMHT has been established. The council reports that information waiting times for assessment and intervention have increased across the North Wales region. These statistics are not available on a county basis and the council has provided limited analysis of its performance in provision of mental health services. Consideration is being given to changes being made in management arrangements as apart of the review of the current partnership arrangements with BCULHB. This work needs to be taken forward.

Children

A number of areas for improvement were identified in last year's performance evaluation report. The case file analysis undertaken during the inspection in March 2013 found improved performance in a number of areas including in the timeliness of decision making in response to referrals received and of initial assessments

carried out. The quality of assessments was seen to be variable with some reaching a satisfactory standard but others being seen by inspectors as weak. There was little evidence of effective risk analysis recorded on files.

Performance information indicates that whilst there has been improvement in most areas but further improvement is needed. The number of contacts to the department that are classified as referrals is much higher than the other North Wales councils, even when taking into account the number of referrals that were not allocated for assessment. The council compares well to other Welsh councils in terms of the numbers of initial assessments undertaken, percentage of referrals allocated for assessment and those allocated to qualified social workers. There was improvement in the percentages of children seen and of those seen alone during an assessment, although further improvement is needed. Performance in the timeliness of initial assessments and the percentages of re-referrals received has improved. Performance in these areas particularly the timely completion of initial assessments still needs to improve significantly.

Performance deteriorated in terms of core assessments completed in accordance with timescales. This is of concern as this has been identified as an area requiring significant improvement for some years. Performance also ranked in the lower quartile for the percentage of care plans in place at the start of a placement and the statutory visits carried out to children who are looked after by the council. The evidence indicates that the council needs to give priority to increasing the rate of improvement in these areas.

The council has taken some action in response to the inspection in 2011 which had not had time to have effect by the time of this year's inspection. These included the introduction of a risk model, establishment of a recording practice group to improve the quality of recording and additional management resource to the CAFAT team. The council has provided an action plan in response to the recommendations of the 2013 inspection and the identified areas of poor performance relating to timeliness of initial and core assessments. The plan includes the establishment of a Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). This is a North Wales Police led partnership initiative. The council also plans to integrate council children and adults safeguarding into a single unit. These are major developments which have potential for service improvement. The process of change in this critical front line service will require effective risk and performance management. Progress in these developments will be considered during CSSIW engagement meetings with the council during 2013/14.

A joint adult and children's service protocol for children in transition to adult services is under review with the aim of ensuring that the process is delivered in a seamless way and that the responsibilities of partner agencies are clearly defined. Integrated children and adult services will contribute to the final transition plan prior to transfer to adult services at age 18/19. Work is ongoing to establish the feasibility of creating a 0 to 25 team, consisting of staff from both children and adult

services. The aim of this is to improve the quality of the service and support the transition process along with future planning and commissioning requirements.

Areas of progress

- Timely decision making and the rate of re referrals in children's services.
- Improved access to reablement/enablement services for adults.

Areas for improvement

- Access to assessment and intervention for mental health service users.
- Timeliness and quality of initial and core assessments in children's services.

The services provided:

Adults

Service development to support the council's strategic aims is progressing and the council is providing some innovative community based services in partnership with the third sector. These include grants to community groups to develop specific services to meet an identified need. The council has identified that there is limited day care provision in rural areas, and accessibility can be a problem for hard to reach groups and that it is not consistently provided throughout the borough. There is recognition that services are often not accessible to people living in residential homes. Actions being taken to improve provision to these groups include a review of subsidised community transport and supporting people services and the expansion of intermediate care to provide a service outside of office hours.

An identified action to review the accommodation needs of older people and incorporate deliverable recommendations within the local housing strategy was not implemented within the desired time frame but is now being taken forward. In learning disability services two new supported living projects have been established. The provision of affordable housing to meet the special needs of older and disabled people, as well as people in receipt of mental health services, remains areas requiring further service development.

Changes in organisational structure and service provision in the learning disability service have been made to support a more enabling approach to care. The council states that this needs to be further embedded, however, there is evidence of services being increasingly offered from a person centred approach.

A main focus of the work undertaken in mental health services has been the implementation of the Wales Mental Health Measure and organisational change. The council reports that mental health services are moving towards an ageless system of support for older people who have a functional mental illness. The CSSIW inspection of the in-house recovery service resulted in a positive report. New services have been provided to support people in recovery from substance

misuse and also suffering from post natal depression. Feedback indicates that, whilst support services are positively viewed by service users, there is a need for these to be offered more consistently across the county and for opening hours to be extended or made more flexible. A review of contracts with the third sector for carer support and low level preventative services are planned for the coming year.

The council has continued to develop its use of questionnaires to gather feedback from service users and to use these in performance evaluation. Feedback indicates high levels of service user satisfaction overall. There were specific areas where there was a fall in satisfaction levels, such as in the information provided when there was a change in a domiciliary care worker. The council is able to provide evidence of taking action in response to feedback received. It articulates a commitment to ensuring that this is developed further and consistently applied across the services.

Wrexham's situation as a border county has created some complication in contracting with regard to the registration requirements for providers based in England when operating in Wales. The council has worked with CSSIW to clarify the requirements and will make adjustments to its tendering process. Contract monitoring is proactive and has shown commitment to working in co-operation with CSSIW to improve services with the aim of improved outcomes for services users.

The council performed less well during the year in the percentage of service users who received a review of their care plan and needs to improve performance in this area in the coming year. On a more positive note, the council has commissioned a service from the Wrexham Over Fifties Forum to undertake service user interviews to obtain feedback of their experiences, involve them in service development and to identify a reference group of people willing to be contacted for consultation. This is a very positive development.

Children

Wrexham has continued to develop the interface between preventative and statutory services. The intake procedures operating in children's services are arranged to allow for early consideration of whether Together Achieving Change (TAC) services are suitable for those contacts to the department that do not reach the eligibility criteria for statutory services. The duty desk is supported by guidelines about eligibility criteria that are reviewed on an annual basis by the LSCB.

During CSSIW's inspection in March 2013, evidence was found of a good range of services including parenting support services being available to support prevention. There was, at that time, a waiting list for Action For Children services and whilst there was no waiting list for TAC, take-up was sometimes felt to be slow.

The TAC service has well developed procedures for engaging children and their families in the design and review of the services they receive, and this increasingly influences commissioning of services. Feedback from families in receipt of TAC services has been very positive.

The council has demonstrated improved performance in relation to the recording of children seen as part of an assessment and of children seen alone, however, performance in both these indicators is still below the national average. The council has introduced new documentation to ensure that this information and the sharing of assessments with families is recorded more accurately.

There has been an increase in children needing to be looked after during the year. There has been an improvement of placement stability but, in comparison to other councils, this remains a poor performance placing Wrexham within the lower quartile in Wales. The council is proposing to review the WRAP scheme as it has experienced difficulties in recruiting the desired number of therapeutic foster carers. The council report that the service has been successful in providing a service to eight children and young people but the continued difficulties in recruiting foster carers limit any plans to extend the service.

A transitions co-ordinator and specialist social worker to support children in transition from children's to adult services are now in post, and services to support children with disabilities to remain cared for at home include respite with foster carers or a specialist residential facility, direct payments or project worker support.

There has been improvement in the timeliness of the statutory reviews of children who are looked after to 92.3% completed within timescales but the council's performance remains in the lower quartile when compared with other Welsh councils. Reviews of children in need, however, have also improved and the council's performance places them in the upper quartile for this indicator. The council's performance in relation to statutory visits to children who are looked after has also improved.

Areas of progress

- Development of new models of community support services for adults.
- Reviews of children in need.

Areas for improvement

- Reviews of adult service user care plans.
- Increased housing opportunities available to vulnerable people.
- Placement stability for children who are looked after by the council.

Effect on people's lives:

Adults

Information provided by the council states that the number of older people supported in care homes has reduced slightly over the year and the rate at which people are supported in the community has risen slightly. Current provision includes a range of services including extra care housing and sheltered housing or supported housing schemes. The number of telecare packages has increased overall although the number of new basic telecare packages did not reach the desired target. The council has successfully reduced the waiting time for occupational therapy assessment and for completion of a Disabled Facilities Grant.

The council has extended the reablement model to a wider catchment group. Feedback and review indicate that although the council has not achieved its target of 54% there has been a slow increase in the number of people who no longer need ongoing purchased services following reablement. 60% of service users felt their independence and quality of life had improved as a result of the intervention. The council shows commitment to gaining feedback and to developing meaningful performance measures.

Significant progress has been made in the development of carers services during the year. Wrexham performs well in terms of the known carers who are offered and receive assessment. Feedback indicates that 87% of carers who were assessed found this had helped them. Three quarters of those assessed receive a service and the numbers of carers with emergency contingency plans has increased.

A carers outcome framework has now been developed in consultation with individuals and carers organisations and the council. In response to feedback that access to information is a priority, the website is being further developed and an online self-assessment is being trialled. Work to develop an older carers plan, identified as a key priority last year, has commenced.

Wrexham has gained external accreditation for its approach to supporting employees who carry out a caring role alongside their employment. Work with corporate services to develop a strategy for support for carers working for Wrexham in consultation with carers is in progress.

The council has highlighted the work of their welfare rights unit as an area of good practice. It reports that the unit provides bespoke casework, advice, tribunal representation and training services which have resulted in overall estimated financial benefits of £7.7m.

A whole service review of adult safeguarding was carried out in 2012 and led to the proposal to develop a social services (children's and adults) joint safeguarding unit. In addition, the council will be implementing a MASH with the North Wales Police.

The desired outcomes are for improved efficiency, information sharing, risk assessment, decision making and a reduction of duplication.

During the year a new module has been implemented in the RAISE IT system to improve performance reporting. The role of the POVA co-ordinator has been changed with strategy meetings now being chaired by a designated lead manager. The council has identified a number of issues concerning the consistency and quality of practice in the current arrangements which have also been highlighted by CSSIW. Further training will be provided to designated lead managers in order to ensure that this leads to improved outcomes for service users. New policies and procedures are being developed in preparation for the new adults and children's joint safeguarding unit and the anticipated requirements of the forthcoming Social Services and Well Being legislation. Performance reports provided by the emergency duty team continue to indicate that this is a responsive service.

The number of DoLS notifications and authorisations continues to be low in Wrexham. This low level of activity is reflected in other councils in Wales and this low level of activity has been noted by CSSIW and will be a focus for more attention next year.

Children

The action taken by the council to increase the involvement of children, young people and their families in service development has been referred to earlier in the report. The involvement of individual children and families remains an area for further improvement.

The percentage of known young carers whose needs were assessed and provided with a service has increased but performance remains in the lower quartile when compared with other Welsh councils. The council reports that adult social care and children's services are increasingly working together to ensure equality of access to support for carers of all ages based on their individual circumstances. Work has commenced to develop information for young carers, to amend the Carers Commissioning Strategy to include young carers and develop a young carers' website. It is acknowledged, however, that this work is in development. The council expects to report on the outcomes of this activity in 2013/14.

The council reports increased numbers of children becoming looked after during the year which reflects a national trend. This has placed pressures on the council in terms of maintaining or improving performance as measured by performance indicators, and in some cases performance has deteriorated.

Performance in terms of stability of placement has already been referred to but the percentage of children and young people whose first placement was supported by a care plan being in place at the commencement of the placement has also deteriorated. The council's performance is in the lower quartile for the percentage

of children and young people with personal education plans (PEPS) in place within 10 days of placement . The council reports that action has been taken to address this with a co-ordinator for children who are looked after now completing all PEPS.

No data has been provided of children who are looked after receiving dental checks or being registered with a GP. The arrangements for BCULHB personnel to provide this information have broken down during the year but the council needs to ensure it has arrangements in place to provide this information as part of its corporate parenting responsibilities.

The inspection of the Wrexham fostering service during the year identified poor procedural practice in terms of kinship placements. The head of service responded to this and actions to improve assessment and care management practice in this area have been instigated.

The council has improved its performance in terms of the number of children who were formerly looked after with whom it is still in contact at the age of 19 and the percentage in suitable accommodation. The percentage who are not in education training or employment reflects a relatively poor performance however. There has been increased contact from young people with the integrated services contact centre which indicates this has been a positive development.

There has been a slight deterioration in the council's performance in terms of the number of initial child protection conferences within 15 days during the year. However, this remains at over 94% and needs to be viewed against a background of an increased number of case conferences held. The number of initial core groups held within 10 days reflects an improved performance placing Wrexham within the upper quartile when compared with councils across Wales. The number of reviews of children on the child protection register held within statutory timescales shows a deterioration in performance from the previous year, but Wrexham remains just above the Welsh average in this respect.

Reference has already been made to the multi-agency safeguarding hub being implemented under a grant funded partnership arrangement with North Wales Police during 2013/14.

Areas of progress

- Range of carers services.
- Service focus on reablement, independence and inclusion.

Areas for improvement

- Corporate parenting responsibilities with regard to health checks, placement planning and stability and personal educational plans.
- Development of young carers services.

- Management of adult protection referrals.
- Improved practice in terms of assessment of and placement with kinship carers (action plan already being implemented).

CAPACITY

Delivering Social Services:

The council reports that medium term financial planning is in place across the council and this is accompanied by detailed service efficiency programmes for each department. Exception reporting to scrutiny committees is now embedded in the council wide budget monitoring arrangements. Children's services have been supported by the council in previous years with an increase in budget in recognition of the level of demand. Analysis of current performance and activity levels indicates that this will remain a pressure area for 2013/14.

Adult social care continues to lead on the council wide Third Sector Project that aims to inject a more strategic/community benefit/value for money approach within funding for the sector. The council supports the development of the North Wales commissioning hub with the expectation that this will realise further savings on high cost/low volume care placements for adult social care and potentially for children's services. The council also acknowledges, however, that there needs to be ongoing consideration of the revenue costs of the scheme.

The success of the council in continuing to improve services and achieve its strategic objectives whilst meeting financial targets will be influenced by the effectiveness of its performance management arrangements. The council has referred to changes made to the performance reporting arrangements during the year and provided evidence which indicates that these continue to be better developed in some service areas than others. In general, performance reporting in relation to the priorities identified by the council plan is more detailed than other areas of service development. It is not clear from the evidence provided by the council if the social services business plan is consistently well supported by sufficiently detailed plans at an individual service level which are specific, achievable, measurable and where the responsibility for achieving objectives is sufficiently time targeted and attributable to individual managers. In some cases, objectives have not been achieved, in others it is unclear. This is an area in which the council needs to improve performance.

The council continues to take action to improve its quality assurance activity and, as has already been mentioned, is exploring and implementing ways to increase service users involvement in this process. This, as well as audit activity to support service improvement, is more well developed in some service areas than others and is an area where the council needs to continue to develop its approach.

The social care workforce programme is well developed and linked to strategic objectives. The social services department employs a high percentage of qualified staff and evidence provided by the council indicates that access to training is generally good, for in-house and independent and voluntary sector staff, and is responsive to operational needs. Previous issues in the stability of the workforce have been addressed. Wrexham performs well in terms of maintaining levels of qualifications within the independent sector despite a challenging environment.

A council wide review of administrative support has been undertaken. This resulted in reduced business support in some areas despite concerns expressed by the social services department that this would have an impact on front line performance.

Areas of progress

- Continued commitment to staff training and development which is responsive to changes in service models.

Areas for improvement

- Demonstrating effectiveness of business planning and performance management.

Providing direction:

The council plan articulates a clear “change” programme to be implemented across council functions. Specific strategic social services objectives are clearly represented in the council plan and in the scrutiny and reporting arrangements which enables members and senior managers to provide a sense of direction and purpose. The council needs to consider, however, whether the corporate support to children’s services is sufficient to enable the service to increase the pace of improvement which remains slow in some areas.

Following the local election in May 2012 the social service department has provided bespoke training for members in social care which both senior managers and members have felt to have been positive. The council leader, the two lead members for social services and the chair/vice chair of the education, safeguarding and well being scrutiny committee were fully involved in the CSSIW’s inspection into the role of the director of social services. They were also involved in the production of the director’s annual report.

The council recognises the importance of member scrutiny and involvement with key partnerships and receives regular reports of the work of the North Wales commissioning hub. Twice yearly meetings are held with senior managers of the BCULHB in recognition of the importance of this partnership and continuing issues regarding engagement, service development and joint funding arrangements.

The corporate structure provides for close alignment between the education and children's social care agendas. This has been particularly positive in the development of the TAC services. The leadership role taken by social services in third sector commissioning is reported to continue to have positive effect.

Social services has expressed some concerns about the centralisation of business process such as complaints management, performance and engagement being embarked upon by the council, in terms of the support that will be made available to frontline teams in the future. Although some structures to improve interdepartmental working are in place, this remains an area for further development.

The council has provided evidence of members undertaking rota visits and visits to frontline teams. The inspection of children's services in March 2013, and the councils own observations of the effect of changes to the previous communication arrangements between members, senior managers and frontline teams, indicates that these activities need to be further developed for them to achieve maximum effectiveness.

Areas of progress

- Scrutiny arrangements.
- Regional and sub-regional collaborative working.

Areas for improvement

- Achieve compliance with the statutory guidance in relation to the role of the director of social services.
- Pace of improvement in children's services (identified last year).
- Communication between members and senior managers and front line teams.