



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

National Inspection Safeguarding and Care Planning of looked after children and care leavers, who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours

Inspection of Powys County Council

August 2014

1.0. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of inspection findings in respect of: Safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour, within Powys County Council.
- 1.2. The inspection was carried out as part of Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) national thematic Inspection programme. The methodology for the review included three and a half days fieldwork in each local authority across Wales, between January and May 2014.
- 1.3. The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively:
 - Supports and protects looked after children and care leavers;
 - Identifies and manages the vulnerabilities and risky behaviour of looked after children and care leavers;
 - Promotes rights based practice and the voice of the child;
 - Promotes improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers;
 - Promotes compliance with policy and guidance.
- 1.4. Findings from the individual local authority inspections will inform a CSSIW national overview report to be published later this year.

2. THE INSPECTION

- 2.1 The inspection focused on the work undertaken with looked after children over eleven years of age and care leavers who were identified as being vulnerable and/or involved in risky behaviours, against defined criteria.
- 2.2 It is important to recognise that given this focus the case sample reviewed in each local authority encompassed some of the most challenging and complex case management issues and represented only a small cohort of each authority's wider looked after children and care leaving population.
- 2.3 As well as inspecting cases in respect of the assessment, care planning and review systems the inspection also considered the extent to which the corporate parenting, management and partnership arrangements acted to promote improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. Also how organisational structures including, workforce, resources, advocacy and quality assurance mechanisms impacted on the quality of care planning.

The inspection considered these areas against the following five questions.

A summary of our findings is presented below

QUESTION 1

Did the authority effectively discharge its corporate parenting roles and responsibilities promoting the stability, welfare and safety of looked after children and care leavers?

POSITIVES

- Children's services had been identified as a corporate priority for the authority. Members were well informed and evidenced strong commitment to support looked after children and young people. Corporate parenting arrangements were well developed, challenged performance, and had directly influenced outcomes for looked after children and young people.
- The authority had effective mechanisms in place to share information with partner agencies which could support joint planning for looked after children. Senior officers were well informed about looked after children's vulnerability and risky behaviours. Information available including that about 'out of county placements' was timely and comprehensive particularly in relation to performance and safeguarding. Systems were in place to support compliance with statutory responsibilities and senior officer oversight.
- There was clear leadership and a positive culture within the management team. The workforce was stable and retention of experienced staff had been effective. A comprehensive breakdown of workload and performance was available which outlined capacity to meet the needs of looked after children. Arrangements for delivering front line services were being reviewed and senior managers had identified the issues which needed to be addressed.
- The Children's Safeguarding Board (SCB) was in the process of moving to a regional footprint. The local SCB was linked in to the regional board but remained very proactive in collating data and planning for the identified needs. The business plan had prioritised vulnerable groups of children and young people such as those placed in Powys by other authorities. This had been identified as a particular issue as there have been a higher number of these placements in comparison to the authority's own looked after population.
- There is a proactive junior local SCB in place and children and young people's views are taken into consideration in evaluation and the planning and agreeing priorities.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- The effectiveness of service planning and the identification of gaps in provision would benefit from the availability of a profile of need, vulnerability and risk of the looked after population.
- Following a long period of stability, the senior children's services management team was undergoing a period of change which would result in a reduction in capacity and only one of the team remaining in the same post. There should be a timely review of these arrangements to ensure that these changes do not have an impact on effectiveness of management arrangements. While retention of staff is positive the corporate arrangements for recruitment into social services had hampered the timely replacement of social workers. This has been identified and was reported as being in the process of being addressed at the time of the inspection.
- Despite good working engagement the resilience of the authority's relationship with health services remain overly dependent on children's social services providing funding and resources to assess and meet the therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leaver.

QUESTION 2

Were care and pathway plans informed by relevant assessments, including explicit risk assessments, which supported a comprehensive response to the needs and experiences of children and young people?

POSITIVES

- Given the geographical challenges of working across Powys, children's services had developed good communication networks across the authority. Information sharing arrangements were effective between workers and teams, including the Youth Offending Service. This extended to include partner agencies and an ability to update and send out alerts in relation to any young person considered to be at risk had been a positive and effective development. Dyfed Powys Police and the Children's Safeguarding Board were actively introducing a 'Vulnerable Children Living Away from Home' (Missing – Pre- Placement Risk Assessment).
- There was a clear shared understanding and commitment from staff to safeguard young people and improve their outcomes. Core assessments seen were well completed, comprehensive, updated and well reflected in care plans.
- Pathway plans had been revised in consultation with care leavers, resulting in a format which was well designed and had promoted good engagement with young people. Pathway plans seen by inspectors were of good quality, clearly identifying outcomes, how they were to be achieved, and identified responsibilities and timescales.

- There was evidence of a good level of direct work being carried out and social workers were very optimistic about reclaiming the social work agenda. Care leavers were positive about the support they received especially from their personal advisors.
- Initiatives including 'collaborative communication' were underway with partner agencies working to improve common understanding of risk and access to services.
- Placement stability was well monitored and there was a high awareness of the small cohort of very vulnerable looked after young people who were experiencing these changes.
- Care leavers were empowered to have a voice and to engage meaningfully in decisions that influenced their lives. Pathway planning was a positive experience with a high level of participation in the process for young people from the outset.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Risk assessments could be strengthened to be more consistent especially in recording how the concerns identified could be managed and how they are shared with partner agencies. It was not evident that young people had engaged in the process or were aware that it had been completed.
- There was little availability of therapeutic services identified in care plans as needed to support young people. This was particularly an issue for looked after young people placed over the border in England.
- The range of placements available was not sufficient to provide for all young people with challenging behaviour and additional needs. This resulted in a relatively high number of out of county placements being made which impacted on the timely provision of therapeutic support services.

QUESTION 3

Were operational systems and procedures in place that ensured responsive coordinated action was taken to mitigate risk and achieve safe continuity of care?

POSITIVES

- Workers were clear that safeguarding was a priority and it was evident there was good identification and awareness of the risks to and vulnerability of looked after young people. There was a range of training and development opportunities which workers were encouraged to undertake. Staff had the opportunity to participate in quarterly multi-agency child protection fora and monthly peer reflective practice groups.

- Workers had access to relevant policies and procedures. Child protection processes were being used appropriately to manage risk in this group of young people. There was evidence that agencies worked well together with good working relationships with the police although there was not always a shared understanding of vulnerability. Partners confirmed effective working arrangements particularly with substance misuse and housing.
- Workforce arrangements supported the need of young people to have the opportunity to form good relationships with the social services professionals. The transition into the 16+ team was well managed to minimise the effect of the change in workers. Young people were very positive about these arrangements as they included a significant period of joint working between teams.
- There was effective and valued support for looked after children from both the designated education and health workers. This included those placed out of county and there was evidence of proactive intervention in relation to securing school places and additional health services. Over half of the looked after population has been identified as having additional learning needs and there is close monitoring of progress that was being made by individuals. The authority had identified the need to provide additional support for this cohort of children and young people, for example in promoting the improvement in timely and quality personal education plans.
- Social workers reported a high level of informal and formal supervision. There was a supportive team culture and group supervision was in the process of being rolled out. Direct access to senior managers is limited by the team's location. There was however a level of confidence in the senior management team and care plans were all signed off by the head of service.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Relevant risk assessment training for staff including carers would support more consistent practice in this area.
- Consideration should be given as to how the views of children and young people could be included in the recording of Section 47 investigations.

QUESTION 4

Did Independent Reviews and quality assurance arrangements promote safe care and best outcomes for young people?

POSITIVES

- The authority's independent reviewing arrangements were compliant with guidance. Reviews seen were timely and ensured that care plans were updated. I.R.O's were well informed and committed to ensuring that young people were involved in their reviews and had an opportunity to have their say. Pathway plans

were also reviewed by I.R.O.s and a high number of care leavers attended their reviews.

- Review reports were thorough and included consideration of the effectiveness of the plan. In cases seen by inspectors risk was re –evaluated at reviews and appropriate action planned. This was well followed up with relevant professionals and supported better outcomes for the young person.
- There are strong performance management arrangements in place. There are plans to extend the role of I.R.O.s in quality assurance to share the learning from cases on a multi-agency basis.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- I.R.O.s felt confident to challenge arrangements for young people and social workers and managers confirmed this was the case. However this was difficult to evidence, and inspectors saw examples of situations which had not been resolved despite the issues being raised especially around the lack of timely therapeutic services. Consideration should be given to how challenges brought by I.R.O. s could be evidenced and how outcomes are influenced. Arrangements to capture unresolved issues should include corporate reporting.
- There were some concerns expressed about a lack of timely planning for young people returning from out of county placements. Health workers were not always fully informed or invited to the relevant review meetings.

QUESTION 5

Did care and pathway planning effectively capture and promote the rights and voice of the child?

POSITIVES

- The authority's permanence framework recognises the importance of promoting continuity for looked after children and young people and outlines good practice and guidance. Social workers were supported to form strong working relationships with young people and to help them to understand their lives and the changes they had experienced.
- The authority has had a participation strategy in place since 2011 and made significant effort to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to give their views on the services provided by the authority. The 16+ team had been awarded the National Kitemark which focuses on participation standards. Care leavers reported that personal advisors were persistent in trying to engage with them and ensure that their views were taken into account.
- The advocacy arrangements were well developed and monitored. There was evidence that the service was discussed at each review. All young people seen

during the inspection were aware of the service and those who had used it were positive about the outcomes.

- The authority had promoted opportunities for young people to attain financial independence. A positive action traineeship for care leavers had been developed which gave the chance for four young people to learn skills and gain work experience with Powys County Council over a twelve month period.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Although the authority had set out its aspirations in relation to permanency for looked after children and young people, there was no specific placement strategy in place. It was not evident how the authority intended to improve the opportunities for children and young people to form supportive and consistent relationships with their carers.
- Care leavers reported a contrast to the very positive service they had received from the 16+ team with their previous experiences when they had many changes of social worker and appointments were often missed. Inspectors did not see enough young people who were being supported by the locality teams to determine whether this was still the case.
- While young people were supported to access sporting and leisure activities, there were some issues with timely consent for overnight stays.