



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

# Performance Evaluation Report 2013–14

Blaenau Gwent County  
Borough Council Social Services

October 2014

This report sets out the key areas of progress and areas for improvement in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services for the year 2013–14

# **Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013 - 2014**

**Local Authority: Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

**This report sets out the key areas of progress and areas for improvement in Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Social Services for the year 2013- 14**

## **Summary**

Blaenau Gwent Social Services has seen considerable change at both corporate and departmental level in 2013-2014. Within the social services department the director has led the restructuring and development of services. The senior management team has seen the appointment of new heads of service for both children's and adult services. Internal appointments to these posts provided consistency at a time of potential instability. The year saw the impact of the planned restructuring of services, coupled with the need to make savings as required in the budget review.

Areas for corporate improvement were identified by the Wales Audit Office (WAO). This necessitated the provision of external support and input to drive improvement in governance arrangements and to secure a robust and consistent approach to budgeting and planning within the council. The director reports that social services managed to end 2013-14 with an under spend of £275,000. Further savings of £1.4m are planned for 2014-15.

Planned restructuring of children's services began early in the year. This included the development of new teams, following a consultation exercise, which provided opportunities to develop new working arrangements. These include clear links with preventative services which sit within the social service department. While some areas for improvement were found during the looked after children inspection, overall children's services maintained their good performance of the previous year

In adult services, the restructuring supported national and local objectives to enable people to be more independent. The reconfiguration of teams has begun, with a focus on collaborative working with health colleagues. Work has been undertaken to strengthen commissioning arrangements and improve the quality of commissioned services. CSSIW's inspection of commissioning identified further areas for improvement to provide a structured approach to measure outcomes for people.

The director's report provides a clear picture of the current situation within social services. It considers progress against the priorities from the previous year and

sets new objectives for the year ahead. This includes preparedness for the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 referencing current and proposed collaborative arrangements with health and other partners, as well as consideration of newer models, for example; social enterprise. The report discusses plans for integration of health and social care services for older people with complex needs and plans to make progress with this in 2014-15.

The director has considered and outlined the arrangements to support the provision of services in the medium of Welsh or other language of need. This includes references to local need, the council’s policy and staff training to underpin the implementation of More than Just Words - Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health, Social Services and Social Care.

The director’s report and evidence provided demonstrates that the council has based plans on local need and continues to consult on local people’s preferences and wishes, this includes feedback from people who use services. There is an awareness of areas that need development; this is reflected in the beginning of the restructuring of services.

Although there are mechanisms for quality review in place, these will need to be revised and strengthened to provide a framework that can be used to measure success in terms of outcomes for people.

**Response to last year’s areas of improvement**

<b>Area for improvement</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Consider methods to assess effectiveness of mechanisms to support independence in the community.	One manager was given responsibility for prevention and early intervention in Jan 2014. Surveys of existing service users and people who had received reablement packages were undertaken, evidence provided demonstrates the view that independence had been improved.
Continue to explore methods for engaging with carers	Funding was secured for a designated carers support worker. However, there have been delays in appointing to this post as the post was reconfigured in order to make it a full time position.
Develop methods for ensuring quality for out of county placements for people with a learning disability	The contract and commissioning report 2013-14 shows increased number of visits to in and out of county placements by the contract monitoring team. A quality monitoring feedback tool for social work reviews has been introduced within

	learning disabilities and plans are in place to roll this out across other client groups.
Continue to drive and sustain improvements in safeguarding arrangements with education partners	Safeguarding arrangements have been reviewed and strengthened at corporate and departmental level. Social services have been pivotal to this development.
Continue close monitoring of finances along with opportunities for collaboration	Finances were a key focus for the council during 2013-14. This has included restructuring and reshaping existing services to make savings, monthly reporting to monitor the financial situation, a focus on identifying opportunities for further collaboration and obtaining additional funding where available.
Continue to develop and strengthen scrutiny arrangements	The council has worked with peers to strengthen scrutiny arrangements, including training for officers and members and a review of reporting.

### **Visits and inspections undertaken during the year**

- National review of commissioning.
- Inspection of safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour ('looked after children inspection').
- CSSIW met with senior officers via quarterly engagement meetings to review performance and progress against areas identified in the 2012/13 ACRF evaluation.
- Site visit to the joint workforce development team.
- Site visit to the learning disability team.
- Meeting with carers groups.
- Attendance at local authority provider forums.

### **Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year**

- Progress and impact of support to carers and use of community connectors in supporting people.
- Progress of the development of systems to measure quality and outcomes for individuals.
- Monitor access to advocacy services.

- CSSIW will contribute to a WAO led review to examine whether councils are effectively supporting older people to live independently, including through joined up working across health and social care.

## **Performance**

### **Shaping Services**

The council and its partners have a single improvement plan in place for Blaenau Gwent which is supported by specific strategies related to social care. For both adult and children's services these reflect a move to preventative services and supporting independence.

### **Adults**

The council's long term strategy for older persons in the borough 'Living Independently in Blaenau Gwent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century' sets out the priorities based on local need and demographic change over a 15 year period. In the last year a 3 year procurement plan/strategy has been developed which underpins these priorities.

In adult services, two joint teams aligning older person's mental health and community care services have been established with plans to move to integration with health services on a local basis (district nursing). This also aims to place the council in a position of readiness for the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. Restructuring has also included allocating responsibility to one manager for prevention and early intervention and the appointment of community connectors to signpost people to alternative community services and develop local networks of support.

The director reports progress against the priorities within the procurement strategy. This includes the promotion of assisted technology supported by a member of staff with designated responsibilities for the service. Progress has been made, evidenced by an increase in the number of new telecare installations during the year, which increased 243 in the previous year to 257. A decrease in numbers of older people receiving support in the community in 2013-14 is interpreted by the council as suggesting success in achieving independence. Outcomes of intervention by the community resource team are provided by health with 13% of people having received support not requiring an ongoing service.

CSSIW's National Review of Commissioning for Social Care 2013 recommended that the council should draw up clear targets, milestones and outcome measures for the eight priorities set out in its strategy to drive forward and monitor progress.

In response to demographic change there has been a shift in care home provision for persons with residential/nursing needs, with increased specialist provision available for those with dementia care needs. Delayed transfers of care from hospital are a priority area for improvement as these have increased from the previous year and are higher than the national average. Actions have been taken to ensure that people with complex care needs receive appropriate care. This includes the appointment of a senior practitioner to the complex care panel. In addition, the council was successful in its bid for Welsh government funding to invest in intermediate care. This has helped to secure designated accommodation to prevent admission to hospital and assist with earlier discharge, as well as funding additional social worker posts to work in community resource teams and the continuing health care team. The council will need to monitor the success of this investment.

The council has continued to work closely and extend working arrangements with health partners from the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. This has included working with the four other regional local authorities to develop the mental health strategy for the region. Progress has been slow in implementing this strategy and partners have sought external advice/support to move the process forward and maintain momentum. Learning from this advice should be considered against other areas in which the council needs to make rapid progress in shaping services. In particular, the council needs to develop a coherent, financially viable plan for the commissioning of services for people with the dementia, it should reflect on how it can improve the timeliness of provision of specialist services to looked after children. Both of these objectives were areas for improvement noted in CSSIW's national inspections in 2013-14.

## **Children**

The year 2013-2014 saw significant restructuring of social services to both supports the development of preventative services and to manage financial pressures. This included further changes to the structure of children's teams which began in 2012-13 and was based on consultation with children and young people. Local teams have been aligned with preventative services directed at families and early years, with stronger links between social services and education in relation to safeguarding.

A childcare sufficiency assessment had been undertaken (March 2014) and this includes a gap analysis identifying areas for development, including preventative services and services for children with specialist needs. An action plan is being developed to take this forward.

The council has maintained and continued to develop partnerships with other councils in South East Wales. This includes shared projects and services for example the development of the joint workforce development team, the Youth

Offending Service with Caerphilly (this received a positive inspection in 2013), and developing quality standards for fostering team performance. In line with national developments, regional safeguarding arrangements for children have been established. The council leads the adoption service for five regional authorities (from April 2014) having built on the base of previous arrangements for three areas.

### **Areas of progress**

The council has:

- reviewed and evolved its services to reflect changing local need; and
- continued to work with partners to develop services.

### **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- develop formal systems to identify projected needs for learning disability services to inform commissioning;
- develop systems for monitoring effectiveness of additional resource to support hospital discharge; and
- devise a formal plan to measure progress of the eight priorities set out in the procurement strategy

### **Getting help**

The council continues to maintain and monitor a range of methods for ensuring the public can get information about the services available in Blaenau Gwent. A contact centre provides the main access point for the public within office hours with links to an out of hour's service and with the community resource team. Contacts via this number are monitored and these are reported to amount to a similar number as last year. The council's website provides a range of information and contact details for social services as well as signposting to additional services. The council also maintains a traditional approach, providing leaflets in areas used by the public, for example in libraries and GP surgeries.

The five authorities within the region (previously Gwent) have in conjunction with ABUHB developed a carer's strategy and produced carer's information packs for each council. In CSSIW's meetings with carers, not all had received this specific information (this could have been due to their recent production) and these should be publicised internally with staff. However, carers groups confirmed that, in the main, they had been able to get information regarding services. The council has endeavoured to improve its contact with carers maintaining the previous year's achievement of 100% of adult and young carers being offered an assessment.



## **Adults**

The director's report highlights a slight decrease in the number of referrals (50) to adult services. Performance in relation to reviews is similar to last year and is with slightly below the national average (77.8% compared to the national average of 81.1%). CSSIW's review of commissioning highlighted that, in adult services, care planning could be improved, with a need to move from a task and time orientated approach to focus more on outcomes. This is an area of improvement for the council.

Strategic plans describe a commitment to improving outcomes for people. There are quality assurance processes in place which seek feedback from people regarding the impact of the care and support provided to them. The responses to feedback questionnaires to people receiving reablement services included positive comments about the way the service had promoted their independence.

CSSIW's review of commissioning recommended that the council should review and revise its arrangements for contract monitoring and quality assurance ensuring, in particular, that all concerned, including care managers, make use of all the information available about outcomes for people receiving services. Subsequently the use of quality feedback tools when care plans are reviewed has been introduced in adult services. The department will need to consider how this information is considered in terms of evidence of outcomes and how services are commissioned and developed in response.

## **Children**

Referrals to children's services increased slightly from the previous year with a decrease in those progressed for allocation for initial assessment. While this statistic had improved on the previous years (4.4% to 9%) the council had not attained its own target. The re referral rate decreased and was well below the national average, this could indicate the success of referral to preventative services.

As last year the council successfully completed 100% of reviews for children in need and looked after children within the statutory timescale. It is notable that the number of children who were seen by unqualified workers had increased from the previous year by 7.9% points. The head of service report identified that allocations were dependent on the nature of the referral where overall, 99.5% of assessments have evidenced the child was seen by a worker in 2013/14. Quality assurance mechanisms in the new team structures should ensure that outcomes for children seen by unqualified workers are considered.

CSSIW's inspection of looked after children identified a commitment to ensuring children and young people's voices were heard at review. It also found that the

council should improve its ability to readily demonstrate the impact of challenge and feedback from Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

### **Areas of progress**

- Introduction of quality assurance to contribute commissioning.

### **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- publicise carers information packs with the staff to ensure this is readily provided;
- strengthen care planning within adult services to ensure an outcome based approach; and
- ensure that mechanisms are in place to monitor the quality of outcomes and evidence out comes in children's services

### **The services provided**

The director's report states that a designated manager has responsibility for Welsh language overseen by the council's equality officer. There is a three year action plan in place to support people in obtaining services in their language of need. Staff training and support for Welsh learners is available and this was evident at CSSIW's site visit to the joint learning development team. Bilingual information regarding services is available. The director reports states that no requests have been received as yet to receive services through the medium of Welsh. There is, however, evidence of people being supported in other languages of need.

### **Adults**

Restructuring of adult care management teams has been implemented to support a focus on promoting and maintaining independence in line with local and national policy. The council has continued to make progress with its focus of maintaining people within the community (the percentage of adult clients supported in the community aged 65+ in 2013-14 was 86.2%, an increase from 83.% last year). Reablement services have continued to develop, with additional staff appointment to the community resource team (CRT).

CSSIW's site visit to the learning disability team found a clear awareness of the growing complexity of peoples needs. The appointment of a designated lead for continuing health care has helped to ensure that individuals with complex health needs are identified and appropriate care (and subsequent funding) sought. This should improve outcomes for people with continuing health care needs. However,

the high number of people with growing complexity of needs on caseloads will need to be monitored to ensure that staff can work effectively.

The council retains minimal internal service provision for residential services and the last year has seen further externalisation of the homecare services. Commissioned services for adults are reviewed by a contract monitoring team. Work has been undertaken by this team to develop quality monitoring mechanisms. Our site visit to the learning disability team identified that a tool for quality assurance feedback from social work reviews had been developed and piloted and this is now being rolled out across adult services. In addition, joint visits had been undertaken by contracts monitoring officers with social workers to review out of county placements.

CSSIW's regulatory inspections have highlighted varying quality of care provision in adult care homes where care is commissioned. This includes services where the need for improvement has been identified (including breaches of regulation) as well as those that provide a better quality service. The council has worked closely with the regulator where concerns regarding standards have been raised.

Provision of further elements of the homecare service has been commissioned externally and CSSIW's review of commissioning found that people with dementia had mixed experiences of these services; with particular concerns about the consistency of staff. In addition, a recommendation was made that reports from the regulator needed to be considered in the commissioning process with care homes. Discussion with people using services and their carers during this review (and in CSSIW's meetings with carers groups) demonstrated that services commissioned for carers were providing positive support to enable people to carry out their caring role.

## **Children**

In children's services, additional capacity for foster care has been achieved through recruitment to the council's fostering services. CSSIW's inspection of the service was positive.

In preventative services, the Flying Start provision within Blaenau Gwent has also been increased with additional funding and further services developed. Regulatory inspection of these services provided a positive picture of the services provided. Close working arrangements between preventative services and education, along with the actions developed from the council's childcare sufficiency assessment, and should contribute to strengthening services and cross working with internal and external partners. Methods for monitoring progress of this should be included within the broader quality review framework.

The new structure of children's services has been implemented. The intention is to provide continuity of social workers and support for children and young people. This is a positive step as consultation with children and young people found this to be an area they would like improved. The new structure had been in place for a relatively short time at the time of the looked after children inspection. Its impact will be discussed at CSSIW's engagement meetings with the senior management team in 2014-15. Development of the 14 plus service was seen as a positive development by young people during the looked after children inspection. The team manager, staff and contracts/commissioning were very aware of the growing complexity of peoples needs.

CSSIW's site visit to the learning disability team found that links between children's and adult teams for transitional arrangements were in place. There was opportunity for improved communication between the social work team and commissioners to identify projected needs for services at an early stage.

### **Areas of improvement**

- The council should monitor caseloads to ensure that staff numbers and skills reflect people's needs.

### **The effect on people's lives**

#### **Adults**

Local arrangements for adult safeguarding are established with clear pathways for referral. Adult safeguarding has also moved to a regional arrangement with the setting up of a Gwent wide adult safeguarding board. The current sub groups of the board have provided a drive for training staff across five local authorities as well as in the independent sector. The board has undertaken a review of its terms of reference, structures and membership. It should be a priority for the council to make progress with the actions arising from this review. Doing so should provide a firm foundation to support new safeguarding legislation from Welsh government and drive forward the development of new opportunities for shared learning between partners and promote consistency.

An increased uptake of Direct Payments indicates continued pursuit of the strategy to increase independence and allow people choice and control in how their needs are met.

#### **Children**

The council has policies and procedures in place for safeguarding adults and children. On a regional basis the South East Wales Safeguarding Children board

(SEWSCB) has been established for over a year and has a comprehensive strategic plan. A website has been developed providing public and professional information and resources for professionals. Locally, a learning and review group links directly to the SEWSCB, this is chaired by the head of children's services.

In response to the recommendations of the Estyn inspection in 2013 the council has reviewed children's safeguarding arrangements. Subsequently the head of children's services has been designated as lead for safeguarding and a new Education Safeguarding Officer post has been agreed and recruited to. This post will be based in social services facilitating joint work between the two departments. National performance indicators demonstrate that the council performs within the upper quartile in Wales in the timely completion of initial child protection conferences and core group meetings. However, CSSIW's inspection of looked after children - which focussed on young people exhibiting vulnerable or risky behaviours - highlighted that improvement could be made in making timely referral to specialist services for individuals.

A corporate child protection policy is in place and safeguarding is now included within the corporate risk register, with quarterly reporting commenced. Safeguarding has been added as a standing item on the corporate management team agenda and a member of the council has been given responsibility for safeguarding.

A review of progress by Estyn in July 2014 indicated that the council had made 'a good start' in improving safeguarding arrangements.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- The council should contribute to taking forward actions arising from the recent review of GWASB.

## **Capacity**

### **Delivering Social Services**

In the light of peer review and WAO recommendations there has been a focus throughout the year on budget management and financial planning. This has necessitated prompt action to implement change plans and reshape services. The result of this has been an underspend within social services of 275K (in the previous year there was an over spend of 465K). The director reports this is due to: staff restructuring; monitoring; reviewing and monthly reporting resulting in increased 'continuing health care' (CHC) funding; and success in securing additional income and grants. There has been an embargo on non essential spending. Plans identify additional areas for savings for 2014-2015, with a

framework to deliver further efficiencies in development for the following five years. New processes for business planning have been introduced.

The workforce within social services is relatively stable, with temporary cover for posts within both children's and adult services. The rates of sickness and absence increased slightly from the previous year and the heads of service are clearly sighted on this. During 2012-13, work was undertaken to improve the level of sickness absence and a working group remains in place.

CSSIW's national inspection work highlighted that financial constraints within the wider organisation had affected the timeliness of recruitment. This has the potential to impair the performance of children services. The department will need to closely monitor the effectiveness of its approach to improve sickness absence. It will also need to secure the prompt appointment to vacancies in order to maintain a stable and effective workforce.

The establishment of the joint workforce development team with Caerphilly has provided an opportunity to build a platform for staff learning and development for the full range of staff employed by social services, as well as providing support to the independent sector. CSSIW heard positive feedback from social work staff and external employees about education and training during our reviews and regulatory inspections. Development of the service based on training needs analysis was evident from site visits and provider meetings we attended.

Social services have pressed on with the restructuring and development of services designed to make them fit for the future. Evidence provided by the council demonstrated there are a number of quality assurance mechanisms in place.

CSSIW's visits found that staff were supported through team meetings, local practice development forums, performance management and supervision processes. Heads of service provide a range of reports and feedback to the director in regular meetings. Monitoring and quarterly reporting against national performance indicators is established and discussed at CSSIW's engagement meetings with the senior management team.

Feedback mechanisms were in place for commissioned services and to seek people's views through questionnaires and compliments and complaints processes. Additional outcomes were reported to be recorded through the DRAIG care management system, although how these are collated as a whole and contribute to service development was not clear. While systems for quality review and feedback are in place, there isn't an overarching framework that pulls together all the information to feed into the department's development plans. For example the procurement strategy focusses on the eight priority areas already set out in the commissioning plan and sets out intent for progressing this for 2014-2017. There was no evidence provided setting out how progress against the plan will be measured and monitored.

## **Areas of progress**

- The council has worked in partnership to enhance staff training and development opportunities.

## **Areas for Improvement**

- The council should develop an overarching framework for review which contributes to the ongoing development and planning of service provision.

## **Providing direction**

Social services has seen considerable change over the year with changes to the senior management team including new appointments to heads of adult and children's service posts. Arrangements for temporary cover and subsequent permanent appointments to both roles were made promptly.

The restructuring of services has been implemented over the year. Although this has meant relocation of teams and reallocation of caseloads, performance against national indicators does not identify any significant detrimental impact on either children's or adult services. During site visits and national inspections staff were, on the whole, positive regarding changes and the affect on their working arrangements and their ability to meet people's needs. The department will need to ensure that clear frameworks are in place for evaluating the new structures and the resulting outcomes for people.

Change at a corporate level has also affected the department. Social services has reviewed and developed its budget planning and management and been part of a corporate effort to strengthen the governance and scrutiny of council business. Progress in social services against the corporate action plan was reviewed by the council and seen to be positive. Social services have been, with education, an area of priority for the council and remain high on the corporate agenda. The director of social services remains part of the corporate management team.

Governance arrangements have provided a clearer structure for performance reporting, both within social services and to the wider council. This includes monitoring finance, performance and risk. Scrutiny arrangements have been strengthened with the development of an action plan. This includes training for officers and members as well as peer support from neighbouring authorities. Corporate parenting has been developed further with an internal review of safeguarding arrangements for children.

## **Areas of progress**

- There is greater stability in the senior management team within social services.