



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

# Performance Evaluation Report 2013–14

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough  
Council Social Services

October 2014

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

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

**Local Authority: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council**

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

## **Summary**

Overall the population in Merthyr Tydfil has remained largely unchanged since 2011. The authority has a quarter of its local areas in the most 10% deprived areas in Wales with a higher proportion of benefit claimants of working age in comparison to other authorities. The revenue outturn expenditure for social services per head of population is the third highest in Wales, which confirms the priority that the council gives to people who require support.

In line with its objectives set out in the Single Integrated Plan (SIP) 2013 to 2017 the authority aims to provide choice and encourages citizens to have control over decisions that affect them. Since 2012 there has been a gradual decrease in the number of people over 65 receiving community and residential based services per 1,000 population. It is the long term intention of the council to develop more preventative services working with third sector partners to maximise access to investment from other funding streams.

In adult services the council is already planning to further build on existing collaborative arrangements with health partners and neighbouring local authorities in order to move forward on integrated approaches to health and social care. The council in partnership with the local health board and Rhondda Cynon Taf commissioned the Institute of Public Care (IPC) to undertake a review of the work of existing partnerships. The IPC recognised the successes achieved to date and commitment to developing further in order to be better placed to meet the new challenges faced in the future. Overall the council feel that their commitment to partnership working places them on a sound footing to respond to the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

Meeting the needs of vulnerable children, remains one of the top corporate priorities and the budget has increased over the last 2 years. The increase reflects a restructuring of budgets where some looked after children costs had previously been met corporately and this resource has now been incorporated into the service budget. The council recognises the need to invest further in early intervention and preventative services and although it is early days the enhanced Children in Need service is showing how multi agency working and support can improve outcomes for families at an earlier stage.

The director's annual report provides an accurate and frank account of the

council's performance. Whilst it celebrates the council's achievements it also openly acknowledges the difficult decisions faced by the council in 2014-15, which included having to cut some services which impacted on people in receipt of the services. It also acknowledges the continued financial challenges faced by the council, and the consequences of the impending introduction of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 which it recognises will bring changes at all levels. In response to the Welsh Government's policy, "More than just Words", the director reports that the council has adopted a strategic framework for Welsh language services and there are staged plans to establish and develop an implementation group, appoint a Welsh Language champion and develop an action plan.

### Response to last year's areas of improvement

Area for improvement identified last year	Progress in 2013 - 14
Review of the IFST	This was identified as one of the priorities for 2014-15. The council is finalising the first year's report on this.
Review planning policies in relation to Under 8 day care settings	This is a corporate planning issue that affects child minders where more than three children are registered in a domestic setting.
Clarity with Cwm Taf Local Health Board around identification of roles and responsibilities to ensure timely discharge from hospital	This year there has been an increase in the levels of delayed transfers of care from hospital for social care reasons. This has risen from 3.4 to 6.4 per 1000 population aged 75 or over. The Local Authority and Health Board now meet on a monthly basis to look at issues around continuing health care. Clearer communication links have been established.
Ongoing progress in relation to adoption and fostering services	There have been improvements in the fostering service. There is a marketing, recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers and better management arrangements in place. There is also evidence of improvements in the adoption service.
Continued focus on Children In Need and preventative agenda	The council continue to make progress with Gellideg Family centre which now includes additional intensive resources

	to work with families.
Improved performance on Statutory visits for Looked After Children	Performance has increased from 73.3% to 93.4% of statutory visits due in the year taking place in accordance with the regulations
Carers to look at uptake of service	Carers Strategy Network Group are making progress in a number of areas and although all carers are offered an assessment the uptake of support remains poor in comparison to other Welsh authorities.
Financial planning and budget management	The MTFP has built in additional funding for children's services over the next 3 years. However this is balanced off with efficiencies so actual growth is limited.
Ongoing development re role of Social Services members	Improvement made, but this needs to continue. The level of understanding varies.

### Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

- Visit to Carers Network Meeting.
- National inspection, safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit "vulnerable or risky behaviours", ('looked after children inspection').
- National review of commissioning for social care in Wales.
- CSSIW met with senior officers via regular engagement meetings to review performance and progress against areas identified in the 2012/13 ACRF evaluation.
- Attendance at MAOG meetings, as well as involvement at adult and child protection strategy meetings .
- Regulatory inspections across all regulated sectors.
- Observation of Scrutiny Committee.

### Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

- 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
- The effectiveness of the enhanced children in need service in providing better outcomes for children and families.

- Progress in the level of support provided to carers.
- Impact of the significant changes within the senior management team.

## **Performance**

### **Shaping services**

#### **Adults**

The strategic priorities identified within the local authority are set out in the council's Single Integrated Plan (SIP) and focus on groups who are disadvantaged, vulnerable or at risk of becoming vulnerable. The Home for Life Strategy, 2006-2020 clearly sets out a vision for delivery and commissioning of adult services. It places an emphasis on maintaining independence where possible and providing appropriate residential accommodation where necessary. This strategy is well established, has corporate support and has led to a number of new initiatives and schemes, such as Gurnos Estate and Treharris care homes which were opened in December 2013 and are locally based.

The reconfiguration of adult services aims to reduce dependency on services, particularly residential care, and places more emphasis on early intervention and support. This year the council, in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf council, have reshaped their first response assessment and care management service to enable better focus on short term interventions to maintain independence. Additional therapy services are also now accessible as part of the integrated arrangements and this needs to continue to be developed.

There is a recognition that further work needs to be done to develop a more coordinated approach to delivering specialist services and explore step up, step down, dementia support in particular, alongside the continuing need to provide help to increasing numbers of people with complex needs. The new extra care facility which offers a high quality option for people with dementia is popular and has a waiting list for beds.

The use of the Shared Lives Scheme, where individuals live in a domestic setting based on a family model has increased, and is working well. It offers an alternative to residential accommodation for adults across all client groups.

#### **Children**

The Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan has a stated aim of focussing on poverty from a young age and the Flying Start programme is fundamental in helping to achieve this through identified child minders. Its 2014 report shows that significant numbers of children in Merthyr (934) benefit from this service. Half of all under 8's provision is made up of child minders who make a

very significant contribution of day care provision in the borough. Regulatory inspectors report that overall the quality of child care is good.

The need for an enhanced child in need service was identified as a priority within the corporate plan for 2013-14. The aim of the service is to provide additional and enhanced specialist intervention services for families by developing the resources based in Gellideg Family Centre as well as increasing the level of family support through family and contact hours. It is working towards developing a delivery model, in line with the Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) approach, to support families on a multi-agency basis. A review of the first year's performance of the service has recently been undertaken but has not yet been finalised. The work in relation to the outcomes framework undertaken in conjunction with SSIA will be useful in measuring outcomes for families. CSSIW will follow this up during 2014-15.

Good partnership arrangements in Merthyr Tydfil are based on size, knowledge, location of partner agencies but not necessarily based on formal strategic alliances. Partnership arrangements facilitate gathering and sharing of reliable information. The authority and strategic partners have formal and informal mechanisms in place that enable a good understanding of the individual needs of looked after children and care leavers. This facilitates resource planning to meet their needs now and in the future.

### **Areas of progress**

The council has:

- made significant progress in partnership with Rhondda Cynon Taf to reshape the first response assessment and care management service to enable better focus on short term interventions;
- opened two new care homes to accommodate older people with a different range of needs; and
- developed the Children in Need service to support families.

### **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- give further attention to developing specialist dementia services; and
- continue to develop the outcomes framework in measuring outcomes for families.

## **Getting help**

### **Adults**

People in Merthyr Tydfil continue to receive good and initial support from a comprehensive range of services provided through an integrated approach that reflects true partnership working. These services are provided from one location and focus on enabling independence whilst providing personal choice as to how this will be achieved. More recently, additional therapy services have been provided by Cwm Taf Health Board which complements existing provision. Telecare House and aids and equipment demonstration facilities, which has been relocated to Kier Hardie Health Park, provides people who may require aids the opportunity to “test drive” equipment to assess suitability. The council continues to commit significant capital resources to support Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG’s) which will help people retain their independence within their own homes.

Following reconfiguration of adult services and identifying pressure points within the service a dedicated team was set up to provide specialist support to adults with longer term and more complex needs. The team works closely with the initial support team to identify those people who require continuing intensive support or who are most vulnerable. This means that social workers can concentrate on delivering a service to those who are assessed as being most in need as well as ensuring that resources are appropriately targeted.

Regulatory inspectors report that the council’s existing home care services provide a good level of service that is responsive to service user’s needs and encourages people to contribute to how their care is provided. It reflects the strategic direction of the council in maximising independence. Service user feedback on how services are provided is extremely positive and is an important element of how quality assurance is obtained and acted upon. This together with the new extra care facility at Ty Cwm has provided better opportunities and choices for people who need short term residential care in response to their particular individual needs.

The number of people who the council support in the community has reduced and this is comparable with neighbouring authorities. More people than before are entering care homes with an increase from 20.1 per 1,000 population in 2011-2012, to 21.8 this year (2013-14). The council report that this is due to the increasing number of older people who have more complex needs that require twenty four hour care. Three out of four people receiving a service had their care plan reviewed this year. This is poorer performance than last year and is below the Welsh average.



## Children

The council's plan to develop the contact centre/one stop shop identified in the corporate plan has made progress and is now fully operational. Citizens can now have their initial queries responded to and, where appropriate, people can be signposted to more specialist advice around safeguarding and welfare matters.

Information is provided in a number of formats that are child and young person centered including "Merthyr Noise" and social media such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube. There is further development of a web based approach to sharing information through a Multi Intervention Assistance (MIA) website which is currently being developed. It is aimed at providing a range of information and guidance to families and professionals as well as promoting up to date news items. The Family Information Service (FIS) works well in delivering comprehensive information and is incorporating some aspects of the Welsh Language Act through the development of a bilingual parenting website. The Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children and Adult boards are in the process of developing a website in consultation with relevant community groups to raise awareness of the role of the wider community in safeguarding.

The council has provided evidence of sustained or improved performance in a number of the key indicators around access to services and effective case management. Decisions made on referrals are taken promptly and initial and core assessments completed on time remain relatively similar to last year, are comparable to similar authorities and exceed the Welsh average. However, further work needs to be done around performance in relation to completion of core assessments that were outside timescales. This year the number of days on average taken to complete an assessment outside the timescale has risen from 63 days to 67 days and is higher than the Welsh average. The council will want to understand the cause of the delays. Gellideg Family centre continues to expand and has had an increase in referrals this year. The interventions of the centre (which is recognised as being a centre of excellence by the British Standards Institute (BSI) award and International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001 kite mark,) continue to provide flexible and imaginative support to children and young people in the area. Feedback from families suggests that there is a high level of satisfaction with the service.

The inspection of looked after children undertaken by CSSIW found a significant gap in appropriate services to meet the emotional and psychological health and development needs of some children and young people, including those associated with risky behaviours. This created an over-reliance on social services. The threshold for access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) are high. This creates an over reliance on social services and as a result some children and young people are not receiving a service to address an assessed therapeutic need.

## **Areas of progress**

The Council has:

- developed a Multi Intervention Assistance (MIA) website which will provide a range of information and guidance to families and professionals;
- developed a new extra care facility at Ty Cwm; and
- continued commitment to driving the integration agenda forward by working in partnership with other key stakeholders in both adult and children's services

## **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- improve performance in relation to reviews undertaken in adult services; and
- work with health colleagues to improve access to CAMHS services so that therapeutic needs are met in a timely way.

## **The services provided**

### **Adults**

A review undertaken on behalf of Cwm Taf University Health Board, (CTUHB), Rhondda Cynon Taf and MerthyrTydfil County Borough Council by the Institute of Public Care (IPC) around existing arrangements supporting health and social care integration acknowledged the progress that had been made at a locality level. It recognised the commitment to progress even further and recommended that partner agencies should respond to the national integration agenda and build further on integrated arrangements. A Locality Partnership Board has been established to take forward the collaboration and integration agenda for older people and the statement of intent is clear both strategically and operationally about proposals for achievement over the next three years. Key to its success will be to work in partnership with the third sector as well as introducing pooled budgets and jointly commissioning services. Monitoring the impact of this will be important to ensure that the needs of people in Merthyr Tydfil are met appropriately as well as ensuring the effective of resources and to avoid duplication of services.

Service users and carers spoken to as part of CSSIW 's review of commissioning in adult social care felt that the staff from the local authority, independent sector providers and voluntary organisations were approachable and very supportive. However, they also expressed some concerns about access to primary care and information at and following a diagnosis of dementia. Dementia care is one of the areas identified for further development by all partners. It will be important to

include the views of service users and carers in service development and commissioning.

The council does not currently have an outcomes focused commissioning or well embedded contract monitoring approach. However, complaints and concerns are well managed and are seen as a mechanism for service improvement. The local authority uses independent investigators to undertake joint investigations with health when appropriate. Information on complaints is used to improve services and the department is developing a monthly report for members.

The quality of services for adults provided by the independent sector is mixed. This year CSSIW inspectors worked alongside commissioners and the safeguarding team to successfully manage the closure of a poorly performing care home in the area. This was dealt with sensitively with service users and their families and was achieved with little disruption to them. Where there are concerns around safeguarding or compliance issues regular Multi Agency Operational Group (MAOG) meetings are held to share information and consider the most appropriate action and best outcomes for service users.

The council's home care service continues to provide support to people in their own homes and the quality is reported by services users as extremely good. It is acknowledged by the council that in house services are costly to provide and the authority will need to consider whether the long term future of its own provision of care at home is sustainable.

## **Children**

Permanency planning remains a priority for the council and performance has improved overall. It was identified mid year that there was a recording problem with performance indicators around statutory visits and permanency planning, but the council are confident that work has been done to resolve this. It has a joint adoption and fostering team and both services have been subject to a regulatory inspection this year. The adoption service was found to have some gaps in terms of staffing which affected timely support and overall management of the service. However, the head of service reports that the new post holder has begun to address the issues and improvements which was evidenced in the subsequent fostering service inspection.

The authority has developed a marketing, recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers and has identified a gap in relation to recruiting foster carers for children over the age of 11. CSSIW's looked after children inspection confirmed that there was an insufficient supply of appropriate placements and 'move-on' accommodation. It was acknowledged by the authority that despite a range of foster placements available both within and outside of authority boundaries, there are still challenges in recruiting carers who have the skills to effectively safeguard

children and young people with complex needs and the most risky behaviours. The authority has also recently strengthened procedures in relation to reviews of foster care approval. Regulatory inspections found improvements overall, particularly in relation to the quality of leadership and management.

Partnership arrangements are mature and the size of the council affords good opportunities to know individual cases well and share reliable information both formally and informally. There are systems in place for strategic partnership working, such as the Multi-Agency Prevention & Permanency Panel and the Multi-agency Placement Panel, which maintains oversight of children and young people who are placed out of county and/or are presenting specific concerns.

Commissioning arrangements for children's services are underdeveloped. The size of the council means that a number of one off contracts are used to procure services. Where services have been commissioned, monitoring arrangements are generally confined to contractual matters rather than focussed on broader quality assurance issues and an outcome based approach. This requires further improvement to ensure that services are providing what is needed to children and young people. Merthyr Tydfil participated in a pilot where Children's Commissioning Collaborative Cymru (4C's) provided an individual placement tendering support service. Alongside this, managers have been involved in a review of 4C's which has resulted in a re-focussed plan to support local authorities across its commissioning and purchasing functions. This is an area that CSSIW will monitor during 2014-15.

### **Areas of progress**

The council has:

- good systems in place for strategic partnership working including the Multi-Agency Prevention & Permanency Panel and the Multi-agency Placement Panel;
- developed a marketing, recruitment and retention strategy for Fostering services and improved fostering services overall;
- commissioned an independent review of existing integration arrangements to ensure it is responding appropriately to the national integration agenda and build further on integrated arrangements; and
- provided good quality in house home care service

### **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- strengthen commissioning and contract monitoring approach in both children and adult services; and

- implement the recruitment and marketing strategy specifically in relation to foster carers who have the skills to effectively safeguard children and young people with complex needs and the most risky behaviours.

## **Effect on people's lives**

### **Adults**

Progress on support to carers remains a priority for the council. CSSIW undertook a site visit to the Carers Strategy Network meeting and found good representation from the voluntary as well as statutory sectors and carers themselves. Carers spoke positively about the support that they receive which helps them to continue in their caring role. A "pamper day" was reported to be a success which identified ten additional carers that were unknown previously. More training opportunities have been introduced for carers via Social Care Workforce Development Partnerships, such as dementia awareness workshops, with more planned.

A number of proposals are being progressed including a new single integrated assessment which will help to avoid duplication and streamline access. A carer's questionnaire is being developed which will be distributed to all carers annually in order to get feedback and target support more effectively. During the year all carers of adult service users were offered an assessment in their own right, the number of people who subsequently take up the opportunity of having an assessment has fallen to just over one third compared to 50% last year. The number of carers provided with a service continues to reflect last year's poor performance despite this remaining a priority for the council and being an integral part of its strategic direction.

Safeguarding vulnerable people is one of the priorities identified in the SIP and there are clear processes in place for referrals for vulnerable adults which are risk assessed at the point of referral. This year, the head of safeguarding reports an increase in the number of vulnerable adult referrals received, almost all of which (99% ) had outcomes that suggest that the risk had been managed appropriately.

All new staff and elected members receive awareness training so they are clear about their role in relation to safeguarding and can recognise triggers and refer on appropriately. A training programme is being developed in conjunction with the Cwm Taf Safeguarding Board (CTSB) and is being rolled out. A Quality Assurance sub group, as part of the CTSB, continues to develop good practice and carries out multi agency audits.

The level of Delayed Transfers of Care (DTOC) has increased from 3.4% in 2012-13 to 6.4% this year and is above the Welsh average. The head of service reports this was attributable to the planned closure of one care home with nursing and mental health provision in the area as well as reduction in the number of beds

across Cwm Taf. The council has good working relationships with the health board at a local level and meets weekly where appropriate with the discharge liaison team to review each person whose transfer is delayed. However, this is an area that will require continuing monitoring.

The number of direct payments has increased from 98 to 118 this year with higher levels of people with complex needs choosing their own support provider.

## **Children**

Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory overall. All children on the child protection register and 97.5% of looked after children are allocated to a social worker and reviews are carried out in a timely way. The timeliness of statutory reviews undertaken for looked after children is good. This year the council has seen a rise in the number of children on the child protection register from 115 to 134 in 2013-14. The CTCSB works well and has a range of systems in place to gather and share information in respect of looked after children and care leavers which underpin multi-agency working. The Board has developed and reviewed a range of joint protocols and policies that will enhance practice and has recently established a Risky Behaviours Task and Finish Group that is developing multi-agency risk assessments and plans.

Arrangements for supporting care leavers in their transition to adulthood are not ambitious. Opportunities to access and sustain engagement with available universal services and gaps in service provision particularly around appropriate supported accommodation hamper on-going engagement with young adults. The authority acknowledges this deficit and is participating as a pioneer authority in the Welsh Government's "When I am Ready" scheme as a positive commitment to improving the life chances for care leavers in future. Some additional supported accommodation has been developed this year in partnership with housing which will address some of the gaps for 16 -25 year olds in the borough although more is needed.

There should be a clear pathway in place to ensure that individuals have a well planned and coordinated transition from childhood to adult services and this is not apparent. Representatives from adult services need to attend Pathway Plan review meetings for care leavers likely to be moving to their service. This is something the council must address to ensure young adults requiring access to services have their needs appropriately met.

The council continues to engage well with young people and has provided evidence that it has undertaken consultation with families around a wide range of services, including experience of the early intervention and preventative services. There are mechanisms in place to seek the views and opinions of children and young people about their care, such as the Rainbow Group. This is a focus group

that represents the views of looked after children and care leavers. CSSIW found this group to have a good understanding of how corporate parenting works and the influence that they can have as some members of this group were delegates at the Corporate Parenting Board. They were also able to bring issues to the leadership team to inform service planning. It is important that this group is kept energized so that this work continues. The service to young carers in Merthyr Tydfil is now provided within the Families First programme and is generally pre- social services involvement. A young carer awareness e learning package has been introduced and will be rolled out to link teachers in all four comprehensive schools. During 2013-14, 33 young carers were identified by social services and referred to the young carers service. Of these, 12 young carers were assessed during the year and 10 receive a service as do other children and young people referred directly to the young carers service by other organisations.

### **Areas of progress**

The council has:

- participated as a pioneer authority in the Welsh Government's "When I am Ready" Scheme;
- mechanisms and opportunities for engagement of young people to ensure their voices are heard;
- delivered awareness training for members and employees around safeguarding; and
- developed accommodation for care leavers in the Borough.

### **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- improve its transitional arrangements to ensure young people entering adulthood have their needs appropriately met;
- understand the reasons behind the poor uptake of support to carers; and
- monitor levels of DTOC closely over the coming year.

## **Capacity**

### **Delivering Social Services**

The council continues to manage well despite the austerity measures that it faces. In approving its budget for 2014-15 it identified a number budget pressures on services for adults, particularly around the need to promote options to support people's independence in the community as well as responding to accommodation needs for the growing number of older people who have complex needs. In children's services there are increasing financial challenges around funding to

support the permanence agenda as well as supporting families who are most in need of additional services. Funding in excess of £1 million has been made available for children's services and included in the base budget.

Social services have always been regarded within the council as having priority status and there is a good understanding corporately about the ongoing and unplanned demands associated with social care. However, economic circumstances are affecting the council and those who require services and difficult decisions have had to be made to identify efficiency savings. This includes changes to the current meals on wheels service, decommissioning of the healthy ageing programme, as well as the application of service eligibility criteria for children with disabilities. This will affect some people who use these services although the council anticipate support will be provided through universal services.

The senior management team has a history of providing strong leadership and strategic direction and there is evidence of effective communication with the workforce at all levels. The retirement of the head of adult services in April this year provided an opportunity for further savings by not recruiting to the post. Instead, the head of safeguarding has now taken on this role. The head of children's services portfolio has been extended to cover all aspects of safeguarding. More recently the council has announced that the director of social services is leaving to take up a new post in a neighbouring authority. Such significant upheaval within the senior management team mean that social services will require additional support and leadership at the highest levels within the council to ensure the priorities across service areas can be taken forward by a newly established leadership team.

There is an experienced and competent workforce that is committed to multi agency working. There is evidence of a comprehensive workforce development programme that is focussed on the needs of staff. During the inspection of looked after children staff told CSSIW that managers are accessible and that they are regularly supervised both formally and informally. Supervision was reported to be of sufficient quality with a good balance between reflective practice and personal/professional development being achieved. There was evidence of a learning culture embedded and some staff were part of the Social Services Improvement Agency's (SSIA) work on outcomes.

### **Areas of progress**

The council has:

- provided strong leadership and support to staff at all levels;
- a long standing skilled and competent workforce; and
- increased the focus on outcomes within the council by working with SSIA to move this agenda forward.



## **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- continue its focus on delivering outcomes in both children and adult services;
- provide the necessary support and leadership to the management team until the new leadership team is fully embedded ; and
- closely monitor the impact of decisions made around withdrawal of services in response to reducing budgets.

## **Providing direction**

The council has thought through the strategic direction for the future of social care in its statement of intent based on expanding and promoting wider ownership of partnership working. There is a clear recognition and drive for a future which provides more cohesive working on a regional as well as local basis. It has well established successful links through existing relationships with key stakeholders to be in a position to achieve this.

Corporate parenting arrangements are well established with members understanding their role and responsibilities. Looked after children and care leavers are identified as a corporate priority and both members and senior officers' demonstrate ambition for looked after children evidenced by commitment to supporting achievements. The director is clear that although budget pressures are significant that the numbers of looked after children who need to be supported will get the assistance they need to help improve their long term outcomes.

CSSIW has attended scrutiny committees where there has been evidence of good oversight of social service policies as well as appropriate challenge. Regular briefings are provided to the lead member on issues of policy and he is kept informed of all high profile cases. All members, as well as all employees in the council, have had training in safeguarding and are clear about their responsibilities in relation to their wider role in protection.

## **Areas of progress**

The council has:

- strong corporate support for the work of social services; and
- good understanding of the role and responsibilities associated with corporate parenting.

## **Areas for improvement**

The council should:

- continue to drive forward the integration agenda in the borough; and
- maintain the focus on raising awareness around safeguarding and corporate parenting.