



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

Performance Evaluation Report 2013–14

Wrexham County Borough Council
Social Services

October 2014

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

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013 - 2014

Local Authority: Wrexham County Borough Council

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Summary

The council is continuing to implement change and deliver services in line with its strategic direction and business plan. The focus is on prevention and on supporting people to use community resources whilst ensuring that the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults remains a priority. New service models have been introduced in collaboration with other statutory partners and between adult and children's services.

According to the latest available statistics, Wrexham spends slightly less per head of population on social services and employs slightly fewer staff than the average for Wales. The director's report and supporting evidence clearly refer to the need to reshape services to meet budget pressures. The heads of service are working to deliver the savings identified. Whilst children's services have continued to be afforded a degree of protection from delivering savings during this financial year, the council financial plans will require the service to make savings against a background of increasing demand for care and support during 2013/14 and for the medium term.

The director's report outlines areas of service development that anticipate the main features of The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.

The council has signed a joint statement of intent with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) about the integration of services for older people with complex needs. It has also agreed a plan with BCUHB for the development of intermediate care services. Whilst there has been some progress, the completion of partnership strategic plans with health (and their implementation) remains a challenging area for the council in common with other councils in North Wales.

The council has provided examples of good practice arising from the implementation of its engagement strategy. It recognises that overall its processes for consulting with hard to reach groups, collating unmet need and ensuring that intelligence informs service review and development, requires further development.

A ' More Than Just Words' strategic framework is in place and will be managed by the social services equalities Group. The council reports that the first year's objectives have been met.

There has been progress in the majority of improvement areas identified in last year's report. In children's services positive developments have included

improvement in the re-referral rate and in the percentages of children seen and seen alone during assessment and in actions taken to improve the quality of assessments as well as staff morale and stability.

There are areas of weak performance. The council remains in the lower quartile for the timeliness of initial and core assessments in children's services. This factor, in addition to the drop in performance with regard to some areas of the work relating to children who are looked after, may reflect pressure on staffing resources, despite some staffing and management increases in recent years.

In adult services performance in relation to reviews of care plans for service users is poor. Whilst this is identified as a priority in the Department's 'Reshaping Business plan for 2014/15' it is not highlighted or analysed in detail in the directors report or supporting evidence and the potential for further improvement is unclear.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

Three service engagement meetings have been held with the council during 2013-14. In addition there have been meetings between CSSIW and service heads in relation to specific service issues and between CSSIW and the Wrexham Adult Social Care Contracts Team.

National review of Commissioning in Adult Social Care July 2013 – January 2014
 Inspection of Safeguarding and Care planning of looked After Children and care leavers who exhibit Vulnerable or Risky Behaviours ('looked after children inspection') - May 2014.

Site visit to Wrexham Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub June 2014 (rearranged from April 2014).

CSSIW completed its scheduled programme of inspection of regulatory inspections including those directly provided by Wrexham CBC.

Response to last year's areas of improvement

Area for improvement identified last year	Progress in 2013 - 14
Mental health services strategic planning and service development.	Engagement with BCUHB to develop joint strategic planning overall is progressing but not at the required pace. There is some progress, as part of the integrated service developments for older people with complex needs, but this remains an improvement area for the council with its strategic partner BCUHB in common with other councils in the region.
Development of market position statements to support effective service development	Some progress but further development required. A market position statement methodology is in development but has

	not yet been put into practice.
Formal processes to consistently collect and collate service user feedback to improve services	Engagement activity and various service specific arrangements are in place. The council acknowledge that this needs to be further developed and consistently applied across service areas.
Access to assessment and intervention for mental health service users.	Performance information about access to assessment and intervention is now made available on a county wide basis by BCUHB. The contact and assessment team has been strengthened and a reduction in waiting times in 2013 14 is reported.
Timeliness and quality of initial and core assessments in children's services.	There is some improvement in the timeliness of assessments but performance (particularly in relation to initial assessments) remains poor. Increased audit activity and the introduction of a risk tool gives managers confidence that the quality of assessments has improved. The improvement in the re referral rate may reflect this.
Reviews of adult service user care plans.	Performance in relation to percentage of reviews undertaken was poor and this is the third year of deteriorating performance. This remains an area requiring improvement.
Increased housing opportunities available to vulnerable people.	There is some progress e.g. increased supported living, but there are also other areas where progress needs to be made. For example as identified in the Wrexham Older Person's Housing needs and Aspirations Study and in relation to accommodation for young people leaving care. this remains an improvement area for 2014-15
Placement stability for children who are looked after by the council.	The percentage of children who are looked after experiencing three or more placements within the year has improved, but it is still within the lower quartile for Wales and remains an area for further improvement.

Corporate parenting responsibilities with regard to health checks, placement planning and stability and personal educational plans.	Health assessments undertaken are now being reported but performance is below average for wales. In addition the percentage of education plans within 20 days of placement has deteriorated whilst the picture with regard to exclusions has improved. Overall this is an area where further improvement is required.
Development of young carers services.	A new young carers service has been commissioned to provide increased access to activities and support.
Management of adult protection referrals.	The council acknowledges that its response has not yet delivered evidence of improvement in practice. Improvement is still needed.
Improved practice in terms of assessment of and placement with kinship carers (action plan already being implemented).	The service was inspected by CSSIW in December 2013 and improvements noted.
Demonstrating effectiveness of business planning and performance management	Improvements have been made to performance management arrangements and to business plans. Further developments are in progress.
Achieve compliance with the statutory guidance in relation to the role of the director of social services.	CSSIW have been informed that following a review the council have assured themselves that the current structure (whilst not strictly compliant) enables the Statutory Director of Social Services to meet his accountabilities.
Pace of improvement in children's services (identified last year).	There has been continued improvement in children's services however the pace of improvement in some specific areas remains an issue. There has been deterioration in performance in some performance areas.

Communication between members and senior managers and front line teams.	The council have provided evidence of improved communication between senior managers and lead members. A programme of visits by members to front line teams is in place.
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Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

- Adult protection procedures and performance.
- Those areas of children’s services highlighted in the report as requiring improvement and where improvements have been made and maintained.
- Performance in mental health services strategic planning in partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health
- Continued progress in engagement with service users recognising the part played by the Council’s ‘reshaping’ programme in this agenda.
- Number of clients receiving a review of their Care Plan within timescale
- Council initiatives to identify and address the housing needs of vulnerable people

Performance

Shaping services

Adults

The key priorities within Adult Social Care (ASC) of ensuring the safety of vulnerable adults, promoting independence, supporting carers and giving greater choice and control, are clearly expressed in the Director’s annual report. The Older People’s Commissioning Strategy 2013-18 provides detail and an outcome focus. Partnership working in the commissioning and provision of services for people with complex needs and in preventative services is progressing. Commissioning strategies for people with a physical, sensory or learning disability are in place but are due to be updated.

The Director acknowledges that the updating of commissioning strategies has been informed essentially by the council reshaping agenda which in turn is influenced by budget reductions. The focus of the reshaping agenda will be on prevention and reablement and whilst the council seeks to offer a range of different choices it is acknowledged that choice for some people will be limited.

There is an extensive consultation process in place concerning the changes. Feedback in response to comments made by the public is reported on the council website. The council needs to ensure that consultations regarding the reshaping agenda form part of a cohesive picture with other consultation processes such as “We are listening” – ‘Understanding and responding to Citizens’.

Despite improved partnership arrangements between the council and BCUHB, progress in improving the strategic planning of mental health services has been slow. Progress is needed with the review of the formal Section 33 partnership arrangements for the community mental health team and the development of pooled budgets or improved joint funding commissioning arrangements. Formalising of Section 33 arrangements for the recovery services and substance misuse services are planned actions for 2014-15. It is acknowledged that progress will require commitment not only from Wrexham council but also from its strategic health partner

The council is a full member of the North Wales Commissioning Hub (NWCH) and experience of its work is influencing internal quality assurance and contracting practice. The 'value for money' aspects of the collaboration are monitored.

The framework for integrated services for older people with complex needs is at an early stage of development. A statement of intent and action plan has been agreed within this reporting year and these are consistent with service developments already underway.

Children

The strategic direction for children's services is expressed within the LSB Wrexham plan and the council plan. The council plan identifies key priorities in relation to children's services. The Families First Funding documentation also provides the direction for preventative services. Individual service developments are supported by individual plans and a draft commissioning strategy to integrate these plans, referred to in last year's report, is due for publication in July 2014. The council shows initiative in developing new approaches and service models some of which are grant funded. In this context, an overarching strategy has the potential to support medium to long term planning and promote sustainable services

There have been increased opportunities for the voice of children and young people to be heard. Young people have been included in reshaping agenda consultations, the numbers of children seen and seen alone during initial assessment has increased with the result that Wrexham were the best performing authority in Wales in relation to the percentage of children seen during initial assessment and in the top quartile for the indicator relating to the percentage of children seen alone. Feedback is routinely obtained from interventions such as the TAC service. The council acknowledges the need to increase engagement further to continue to consider the consistency of response to people who contact the service and to be more systematic in the use of feedback to shape services.

The council has continued to develop its collaborative approach to service development. Positive examples include the NWCH, the new sub regional contract for services for young carers with the third sector, and services to support care leavers and young offenders. The council has not always been able to establish the level of partnership working they would wish with BCUHB. Joint funding arrangements remain a particularly contentious area.

Areas of progress

- Continued reshaping of adult services to support reablement, support for independence and community involvement.
- Major development in partnership working to increase information sharing and improve decision making at the front door.

Areas for improvement

- Completion of overarching strategic plans in Children's services
- Strategic planning and implementation of service models in mental health services.
- Further improvement of engagement activity in service planning.

Getting help

Adults

The council have introduced a modernised and improved website which is responsive to a range of media devices. A wider range of information is available and the facility for residents to provide feedback and comment is included. This is still a developing project and its full benefits are yet to be achieved, though progress continues to be made. Other initiatives include a renewed contract with AVOW to compile a local directory of community services and a pilot using community navigators / village agents to stimulate development of local services and also to help people locate these. Results of an adult social care questionnaire for 2013-14 show an increase in satisfaction; with 91% saying it was easy for them to access support, advice and information.

A three-year project to enable people to use a range of health and social care services via 'one contact' is making progress. The contact and assessment team has been strengthened to improve access to social work interventions, reablement and community support facilities. More people have received an assessment than previously, reflecting the increasing level of demand. The council reports that measures to evaluate the effectiveness of reablement and community engagement have now been identified and will be used during 2014 -15.

The council has performed above the Welsh average, in relation to the delayed transfer of care from hospital to the community, despite a slightly poorer performance than last year. There has been a slight drop in the provision of both community and residential care to older people per head of population over the year, but a slight increase in the proportion of service users provided with support in the community. Viewed against an underlying increase in demand, the council feel the data provides evidence of the effectiveness of their strategic approach which includes an emphasis on increasing preventative services.

Performance information about access to assessment and intervention in mental health services is now made available on a county wide basis by BCUHB. This is

reported to indicate an improvement in waiting times in 2013-14, but an aim for the service must be to ensure that further improvements in access are made.

Two voluntary sector organisations are commissioned to provide services for visual and hearing impairment in Wrexham. A reduction in access to British sign language expertise, experienced during year, is being addressed.

The picture with regard to carers is unclear. In the annual survey of 126 carers who were in receipt of a service in 2013-14, 37% responded and 88% said that the service they received met their needs. Performance data shows, however, that there has been a big drop in the numbers of known carers which the council has explained in terms of data cleansing. The council point to the considerable variation in the statistics relating to carers across Wales which may be partly due to different counting methods being used. The council needs to be confident in its data to ensure that all carers of adults referred to ASC have access to assessment.

Children

The council website provides a wealth of accessible information for children and young people. This is a new website and the aim is to ensure that the useful information available is made more easily accessible.

The council records a relatively high number of contacts as referrals (compared with other councils in Wales). The decision about what constitutes a contact and what constitutes a referral affects reported performance. The underlying figures suggest that whilst the council reports a lower percentage of referrals being allocated for assessment than many other councils, a relatively high number of children about whom the department receives contacts are assessed.

Wrexham performs well in terms of the percentage of initial assessments where the child was seen. It also shows good performance for those assessments where the child was seen alone. Whilst the timeliness of decision making within 24 hours is in the lower quartile at 96.2%, the range of performance is at a generally high level for this indicator. Performance in relation to the timeliness of initial and core assessments, whilst showing some improvement, remains in the lower quartile. Only just over half of initial assessments were undertaken within the required timescales.

The looked after children inspection found that relationships with partner agencies facilitated gathering and sharing information about many of the potential risks posed by looked after children and care leavers. During 2013-14 the council has worked with the police and other partners to develop and introduce a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub. Implementation began in March 2014. Performance measures to enable future evaluation are still being developed.

The council has introduced additional management capacity and new risk assessment and management tools with the aim of improving the quality of assessments. There has been a significant improvement in the re-referral rate this year with the result that the council is very slightly above the Welsh average.

Areas of progress

- Re referral rate in children's services.
- Evidence that the child was seen by the social worker during initial assessment.

Areas for improvement

- Response to known carers of adult service users recorded as known to the service.
- Timeliness of initial and core assessments.

The services provided

Adults

The Council has a strategic equalities plan for 2012-16 which is being implemented in social services via an equalities group. In response to the National 'More Than Just words' action plan, in 2014-15 the focus will be on refreshing the commissioning strategies to include improvement in the capacity of services to be provided in the chosen language of the service user. The Council's Welsh Language action plan includes provision for staff training and confidence building.

The Council has continued to develop its community based services. Evidence has been provided of consultation and engagement with service users in respect of service developments. Some changes such as that concerning a sheltered housing scheme have proved to be controversial and the Council has reflected on its consultation processes. The council will need to consider how any future plans for reductions in subsidy for rural transport may affect its plans to strengthen community based services.

The Council reports that feedback from service users indicates a high level of satisfaction in general. Lower levels of satisfaction have been noted in relation to activities programmes in residential care homes; the consistency of the identity of the domiciliary care worker attending individuals, and the amount of time care workers were able to spend with people. The council is increasingly requiring the domiciliary care sector to work with service users in an enabling way.

Commissioning intentions with regard to double rooms in care homes have recently been reviewed. In future, the council will only commission placement in double rooms for individuals who have expressed a positive choice to share a room.

The contract monitoring team are responsive to concerns and have a clear methodology for quality monitoring. Following specific quality and regulatory issues being identified, the council has made its in house services subject to the same level of contract monitoring as externally commissioned services.

The percentage of reviews of care plans undertaken in respect of people who were in receipt of a care service fell during the year from 81.5%. to 61.8%. This is a third year of deteriorating performance. Performance varies between teams. The council

states that resources are being concentrated on those service users who receive complex, high-cost care packages. The result is that large numbers of service users are not receiving a timely review of their care needs. This has been identified as an improvement area for the council.

Wrexham Older Person's Housing Needs and Aspirations Study was published in 2013, and a council wide working group, has been established to take the recommendations forward. There has also been increased provision of supported housing schemes for people with a learning disability.

The council has formal processes for recording and reporting on complaints and concerns raised in adult and children's services. New data sets and performance reporting on RAISE has been developed, along with service user feedback arrangements, in order to improve its management of performance.

Children

The council continues to provide a range of community based services supported by Families First Funding. These include the Team Around the Child and parenting teams, services provided through the family information service and additional short breaks provision for children with disabilities.

There has been some improvement in consultation and engagement activity during the year. Young people participated in the development of the North Wales Regional Advocacy Service contract and in the development of the Children and Young People (C&YP) Commissioning strategy. The council reports that there is regular consultation on current service provision through the CYP's Care council which meets once a month. Young people are members of the corporate parenting panel.

An improvement action identified by the council for the last 2 years has been to gain service user feedback about the quality of experience of attending child protection case conferences. The C&YP in Care Council has now been approached to help develop and implement policies and procedures for this during 2014-15.

Performance in the percentage of children seen and those seen alone during the year has improved placing Wrexham as the best performing council in relation to the first indicator and in the top quartile in relation to the second. In addition the percentage of reviews taking place within statutory timescales has also increased, placing it above average in comparison with other Welsh councils. The council also performed well in relation to statutory visits to children who are looked after placing them in the top quartile for this indicator.

There has been an increase in the numbers of children who are looked after during the year. This appears to have had an adverse impact on the number of care plans in place at the start of the placement, with the council's performance being the worst in Wales. The council identified this poor performance at the end of the second quarter in 2013 and management action in response has been taken.

The percentage of children looked after on the 31st March who had more than three placements were 13.5%. Whilst this is an improved performance over previous years it is the second worst performance in Wales. A revision of the existing placement strategy is underway and due to report in July 2014. The council's objective is to expand the Wrexham Repatriation and Prevention Project (WRAPP) service which it feels has been successful in providing suitable cost effective placements for children within Wrexham. Attempts are being made to recruit additional therapeutic foster carers.

Services to support children in transition to adult services are in place and the council is making progress with plans to integrate their adult and children's disability service under the management of adult services.

Areas of progress

- Development and implementation of an equalities strategy and in particular the implementation of year one of the 'More Than Just Words' action plan.
- Quality monitoring arrangements for in house services.

Areas for improvement

- Performance in terms of review of care plans for adults in receipt of social care services.
- Placement stability for children who are looked after.
- Care plans in place at the start of a placement when a child becomes looked after.
- Quality of domiciliary care services commissioned in terms of continuity of carer.

Effect on people's lives

Adults

The Social Services 'Safeguarding People Team' was formed in November 2013 and became fully operational during the remainder 13/14). The designated lead managers (DLMs) have received training and the Adult Protection module of the RAISE IT system has been introduced to improve the council's ability to monitor and report on performance.

In adult safeguarding the council acknowledges the need for improvements to be made to the timeliness of strategy meetings; the clarity of outcome; and the development of a common understanding with statutory partners about thresholds.

Information provided by the council indicates that the Wrexham Adult Safeguarding Board is well established and provides opportunities for matters to be raised. The council is reviewing its methods for gaining service user feedback about the safeguarding process.

The council has continued to develop its reablement and enablement strategy. It has introduced step up, step down, facilities within an independent care home to

prevent hospital admission and support discharge and reduced waiting time for occupational therapy involvement. The council report there has been some increased take up of telecare.

Of those people provided with reablement, 42.9% required no ongoing paid package of care and 26.3% had their package reduced. Staffing within the reablement team and first contact team has been increased, training provided and new reporting requirements introduced. The aim continues to be on increasing the focus on improving outcomes for service users.

The council reports that its response to people with mental health issues has been enhanced by the completion of AMHP training by a number of social workers across the social work teams, including the first contact team. Substance misuse services provided in partnership with health and the voluntary sector by the Ty Croeso drop-in centre have increased.

The council has continued to develop work and day activities programmes for people with learning disabilities and has increased the number of supported living schemes available. Work underway to develop an assessment, review and outcomes framework is continuing. The need for increased use of risk assessment, in support of the promotion of independence for individual service users, has been identified by the council as has the need to improve performance with regard to reviews.

Children

The council has performed well with regard to the timeliness of Child Protection (CP), conferences (in which it has achieved the third best performance in Wales), CP reviews, statutory visits held within statutory time scales and the percentages of children who are allocated to a qualified social worker. The timeliness of core group meetings is around the Welsh average but with some potential for further improvement.

The percentage of young carers known to the council, who were assessed and provided with a service, has shown a considerable reduction from last year (as in Adult services). The council is in the process of retendering the service, in collaboration with two other councils, with the aim of providing an improved service to young carers.

The council is in contact with 92.9% of care leavers. While performance indicators are expressed in percentage terms the numbers of people concerned are small. They relate to the council being in contact with 13 of the 14 young people who fall within the reporting category (1 young person refused services). Performance in relation to those known to be in suitable non emergency accommodation is below the Welsh average at 76.9% and for those not in employment, training or education performance drops to 23.1%. This is below the average for councils in Wales. A recent CSSIW inspection identified that there were few apprenticeships made available to care leavers. Performance in relation to outcomes for care leavers is an area for improvement. On a positive note 100% of care leavers open to the leaving

care team are allocated a personal advisor and 95% have a pathway plan which is above the Welsh average

There are joint protocols in place between children's services and housing and also between the youth justice service and housing to assist young homeless people into accommodation. There has been a reduction in the numbers of young people in custody from 12 in 2012-13 to 8 in 2013-14. This is a positive development.

There has been a significant improvement in the attendance and exclusion rates amongst children who are looked after in Wrexham during the year. Performance in relation to the percentage of personal educational plans in place was disappointing for the year as a whole. This was identified during the year by the performance monitoring process and the council report a much improved performance for the later part of the year. 100% of care leavers were provided with a personal assistant. The council's performance in terms of health assessments undertaken was slightly below the average for Welsh councils.

The looked after children inspection found the corporate parenting panel to be well informed and knowledgeable. The terms of reference of the panel were revised during the year to accommodate the attendance of members of the Children and Young people in Care Council (CICC). A member of NYAS also attends the panel. The inspection found that advocacy services were available and known to children and young people, but were not always used as effectively as they could be to support children's voice to be heard.

Areas of progress

- Implementation of the reablement strategy.
- Development of community resources such as community living schemes for people with a learning disability.
- Development of the functioning of the corporate parenting panel.

Areas for improvement

- Timeliness and quality of POVA Strategy meetings.
- Establishing common understanding of POVA thresholds with statutory partners.
- Outcomes for care leavers.

Capacity

Delivering Social Services

The WAO annual improvement report published in 2014 referencing the councils 2012/13 performance refers to the council's development of a five year programme to improve efficiency and reshape services. A change programme has been implemented which includes a planned approach to reducing the workforce. The WAO has identified the need for the improvements being made to embed

workforce planning, to continue.

In adult social care, restructuring arrangements have involved some voluntary redundancy. Arrangements have also been made to strengthen the first contact team and to enhance the focus of services on reablement and prevention services.

In children's services management capacity in the CAFAT Team and the Family Support Team has been increased and an additional head of prevention post has been created. There has been a continuing need to employ agency staff to fill temporary vacancies due to maternity leave or sickness across the department and the council acknowledges some instability amongst agency staff during the year, The overall picture reflects improved staff stability, with children's services reporting that only four agency staff were employed in May 2014 compared to 21 in which include team meetings in Adult so2011. Reports to scrutiny have noted capacity within children's services as an issue in order to sustain continued improvement in timeliness of assessment.

The Social Services Workforce Development Strategy has been updated to incorporate the changes needed to respond to the council's modernising agenda. Qualification targets set in training plans are expected to be reached in all areas except Diplomas in Health and Social Care at Levels 2 and 3 for domiciliary care sector, reflecting the instability of this particular workforce.

The WAO annual improvement report for 12/13 refers to the council as a whole having achieved improvements to business planning, management and scrutiny although it is stated that improvements need to continue. Social Services business plans have become more detailed and centralised to the head of department, with control and monitoring mechanisms developing. A variety of quality assurance measures focussed on the corporate quarterly performance reporting cycle and which include adult and children's team meetings is in place. An objective is to develop greater consistency in departmental performance management workshops.

Improved performance management has been supported by increased reporting from the Social Services RAISE IT system. The need to introduce more performance measures relating to safeguarding in addition to feedback mechanisms for ensuring feedback to referrers involved in the Adult safeguarding process, was identified last year These have not all been fully implemented but the council report that progress has been made and they will be introduced in the 2014-15 reporting year.

The council report that the quarterly performance reporting workshops are less well developed in adult services than in children's services and have identified this as a priority for the next reporting year.

The introduction of the Integrated safeguarding team and the MASH have been a major service development during the year but whilst some performance measure were in place early in the project the performance reporting framework has continued to develop post implementation with implications for the evaluation of the development.

Areas of progress

- Business planning is more detailed and robust.

Areas for improvement

- More timely implementation of performance measures to evaluate new service developments
- Greater standardisation in performance management arrangements.

Providing direction

In Wrexham the organisational structure supporting the director to carry out his statutory role is complex. Following CSSIW's national review of the Role of the Director of Social services, undertaken in 2012-13, the chief executive officer reviewed the structure and concluded that changes to the structure were not required. Integration of service areas across adult and children's departments in areas such as in safeguarding and disability are taking place, and greater congruity in performance management and reporting is also planned which may have relevance for future senior management arrangements.

Clear direction has been given within both adults and children's services regarding the main departmental focus and priorities. These have enabled the council to demonstrate some improvements and service innovation. The department has embarked upon consultation with stakeholders concerning the proposed changes in service provision. These changes will result in changes in commissioning arrangements, staffing structures and eligibility for service. There remains a need for these to be supported by comprehensive engagement and consultation coupled with an understanding of unmet need and market conditions. The council recognises that further improvement in these areas is required.

Changes to the lead member role have been firmly established during the year with regular meetings, briefings and workshops between lead members and senior managers being held. A programme of member visits to frontline teams is in place. As the performance of children's services has raised particular issues in the past, arrangements have been put in place for children's services to report twice yearly to scrutiny committee. Whilst children's services have demonstrated improvement in some areas it is not clear that scrutiny arrangements have been effective in driving improvement across the range of service activity.

During 2012-13 the council introduced a new centralised performance and partnership service (PIPS). Social services report that the need to respond to the very detailed savings plans required by the council has limited their capacity to make progress against the social services business plan priorities.

The council continues to demonstrate continued involvement in the regional agenda. Partnership working between the council and BCUHB is supported by regular meetings between council members and health senior managers. There is lead member representation on the local service board. Nevertheless, in common with other councils in North Wales, there continue to be very significant challenges to the delivery of effective joint planning and working between the council and the health board.

Areas of progress

- Clarity of service strategic direction within financial climate.

Areas for improvement

- Pace of improvement in the aspects of children's services referred to in the body of the report
- Management capacity to respond to corporate and service priorities.