



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

Performance Evaluation Report 2014–15

Monmouthshire County Council
Social Services

October 2015

This report sets out the key areas of progress and areas for improvement in Monmouthshire County Council Social Services for the year 2014–15

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014 - 2015

Local Authority: Monmouthshire County Council

This report sets out CSSIW's evaluation of Monmouthshire County Council's performance in delivering its social services functions.

1. Summary

- 1.1. The council is making good progress with a transformation in practice agenda and is well placed to meet the requirements as set out in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBW Act). The council has concentrated on moving forward an ambitious agenda in adult's services. This has been more difficult in children's services where the department has been working hard to deliver on the post inspection action plan. This was developed to address the recommendations in the inspection undertaken by CSSIW in children's services in November 2014 where a number of areas of weakness were found. The action plan also identified the areas for improvement set out in last year's Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF).
- 1.2. Progress has been made in a number of areas to date. In particular the council has made improvements around statutory visits to looked after children and the timeliness of reviews for children in need as well as recruitment to permanent posts. However, there is still a journey of improvement that children's services will need to continue over the next year.
- 1.3. The council works well with partners across both adult and children's services to deliver better outcomes in the most efficient and effective ways. In adult services, partnership arrangements with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) are mature at both strategic and operational levels. However, although work is progressing sometimes this needs to develop at a faster pace with renewed energy and clear objectives. The mental health integration work around the Listen Engage Act Participate (LEAP) project across the whole council is an example of this.
- 1.4. Performance in adult services has improved further in a number of key areas in particular in relation to delayed transfers of care which have decreased. Ongoing progress in reablement services is evident and is working effectively in the hubs where they have been implemented. However, whilst headway has been made, the pace of change to roll out

services overall more systematically across the whole council needs to increase in order to recalibrate services in an appropriate and timely way.

- 1.5. There is significant support corporately and from members who have a good understanding of the challenges facing social care. This is evidenced by the protection of budgets in Social Services in 2014-15 and the agreement reached for additional funding of £1.2million in children's services in order to deliver its statutory functions and safeguard children effectively. However, this will become more difficult in the future when there is a need to make significant savings across all services within the council.
- 1.6. The council acknowledge that whilst its citizens have high expectations of public services in the future services will need to be provided in a different way and not necessarily by the council. Greater emphasis will be placed on support being provided through community networks and localised support.

2. Response to last year's areas for improvement

Identified improvement last year	Progress in 2014-15
Take action in response to the areas for improvement highlighted in the looked after children inspection.	A post inspection action plan has been developed and is subject to ongoing monitoring at three monthly Head of Service (HOS) engagement meetings with CSSIW.
Work with health colleagues to ensure that children and young people with mental health needs receive appropriate CAMHS services to meet their needs.	Progress has been made in this area with a refreshed approach to working together which has strengthened the partnership arrangements between both organisations.
Put in place systems to evaluate the impact of work undertaken by the safeguarding and quality assurance unit to improve safeguarding arrangements in education.	Overall improvements have been made and safeguarding training has been delivered in education. This work is ongoing.
Review structure and practice in the Family Support Team to ensure concerns are picked up and addressed in a timely manner.	This is being progressed as part of the action plan developed in response to the children's services inspections undertaken which is subject to ongoing monitoring.
The council should improve performance in relation to looked after children statutory visits.	This has improved from 65% last year to 83% where looked after children are having statutory visits in accordance with the regulations.
Review practice in and performance in	A training programme has been

relation to looked after children and take appropriate action to improve in this area.	developed and is being rolled out to staff and regular audits are undertaken.
Ensure a Personal Educational Plan (PEP) is in place for all looked after children who require one.	The PEP's performance indicator has improved from 58% to 87% over the past year
Further improve on the completion of children in need reviews in accordance with the statutory timetable.	Reviews undertaken have improved significantly and have risen to 86%.
Ensure the council has good understanding of the level of needs of vulnerable and at risk looked after young people and its corporate parenting responsibilities.	The council has recruited two care leavers who job share as apprentices and are represented on the Corporate Parenting Panel. A Child and Care Council is planned.
Implement the corporate parenting strategy.	The council shows commitment to the role of Corporate Parenting which now has a higher profile within the authority. There is now a better understanding of roles and responsibilities of the group.

3. Visits and inspections undertaken during the year:

3.1. Site visits provide CSSIW with an opportunity to speak with people who receive services, their families and staff who manage and work in the services. During 2014-15, CSSIW undertook the following site visits, observations and engagement opportunities:

- South Monmouthshire Mental Health Team.
- Awayday, developing a new commissioning approach- "Turning the World Upside Down".
- Visit to FC4FC (Foster Carers Group).
- Attendance at Foster Care Panel Meeting.
- Meeting with Care Leavers Group.
- Meetings with Multi Agency providers.
- Attendance at Core Groups and Child Protection Conference.
- Attendance at three Children and Young People Select Committees.

- 3.2. CSSIW also met with senior officers of the council throughout the year to review Social Services performance and discuss progress with the areas for improvement identified in last year's performance evaluation. The council was helpful in its engagement with CSSIW and readily facilitated access to enable site visits to take place.
- 3.3. CSSIW undertook an inspection in children's services in November 2014. This was as a result of weaknesses found during a national themed inspection on looked after children and care leavers earlier in 2014. Inspections of regulated services run by the council and by independent operators were undertaken. This included reviews of the in house fostering service. Details on these are contained in published reports and available on CSSIW's website.

4. Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year:

- 4.1. A number of specific areas for improvement have been identified in the body of this report. The council's progress in relation to these will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year. Specific areas for follow up will include:
 - On going monitoring of the post inspection implementation plan in children's services.
 - Visit to the contact team to consider front door services.
 - Visit to the Raglan Project to consider outcomes for people with dementia.
 - Visit/ meet with service users with a learning disability who are part of the My Day-My life Project.

5. Inspection and review plan for 2015 -16

- 5.1. CSSIW is also undertaking the following thematic inspections and services in Monmouthshire which may be selected for fieldwork:
 - National review of domiciliary care.
 - National review of services for people with learning disabilities.
 - National review of care planning for looked after children.

6. The extent to which the experiences and outcomes for people who need care and support are improving their wellbeing.

Adults

Overview

- 6.1. In adult services the council's key priorities is to promote independence to allow people to remain in control of their own lives through community based solutions, as well as providing more focussed integrated reablement services where necessary. The emphasis for this year continues with a move away from a deficit focussed approach in favour of concentrating on people's strengths and assets and finding joint solutions through partnership arrangements and family support.
- 6.2. The council has made progress in the way in which it supports older people with dementia to continue to live fulfilled lives within their own communities through the Raglan Project. It currently provides care to fourteen people in a rural area which promotes a relationship based experience of receiving care that is focussed on the individual and what matters to them. This has replaced the existing home care service and the project has recruited five full time enablement assistant posts which are salaried. This has been important to provide reliability and consistency. CSSIW spoke with a member of the team who talked enthusiastically about the feeling of empowerment and autonomy in being able to provide a flexible and bespoke service to the people whom she supports. This pilot has been very successful and has won a social services accolade. The council are working towards extending the project to other areas commencing in October 2015.
- 6.3. Changes in practice and new ways of working will lead to more autonomy and less bureaucracy in social care. This will have an impact on the existing models of service delivery and a change in culture for all partners. Work has already been undertaken in adult services via a series of workshops to raise awareness about future approaches to supporting people. This has been further underpinned by a care competency framework to ensure the workforce working on the Raglan roll out has the key competencies to deliver the new approaches to service delivery. Ongoing discussions with health partners and the voluntary sector will be key to its continued success.
- 6.4. A number of staff including the head of service have undertaken comprehensive training in dementia care accredited through Dementia

Care Matters and the University of Surrey which is being rolled out to other staff across the department.

- 6.5. The three year commissioning strategy which outlined the council's intention to explore further innovative partnership arrangements with providers who share the same values and aspirations has moved on. Earlier this year the council launched its proposals for a new model of domiciliary care based on the principles of empowerment and a person led approach building on the success of this way of working in the Raglan project. Workshops held over several days were well attended by both existing and new providers. CSSIW attended and will be interested in monitoring the progress on this over the next year.
- 6.6. Services for people with learning disabilities include the "My Day, My Life" project which provides evidence of better outcomes for a number of people. Twenty people in the Abergavenny area have been part of the programme which is based on an individual being assisted to access community based activities. This provides better and more meaningful opportunities for people at their pace rather than attending traditional day services. Although this is a resource intensive and lengthy journey, it creates independence and self worth and is innovative in its approach. It is anticipated that this project will be rolled out to the Monmouth and Chepstow areas this year.
- 6.7. Performance in completing annual reviews for 2014-15 has improved from 82% to 85% being carried out on time, and is above the Wales average performance. As part of the organisation's transformation in practice and in anticipation of the SSWBW Act, the emphasis is on engaging more effectively with people during reviews with the accent being placed on what is important to the individual who use services. Reviews concentrate on looking at the individual's needs and aspirations rather than a starting point of reviewing how the existing service meets the needs. Although this is more time consuming it is recognised that the quality of life and better outcomes for individuals will be achieved.
- 6.8. A number of improvements in the processes to safeguard vulnerable adults have been made including additional resources and reshaping of the team so as to ensure timely responses to concerns and investigations. It is recognised that further work is needed and a new safeguarding system is currently being developed which is planned to be fully implemented by March 2016. CSSIW has worked positively with the safeguarding team around a number of individual and service concerns during the year.
- 6.9. The Gwent consortium works in partnership with the five former Gwent

authorities that share the same boundaries as ABUHB who lead the independent deprivation of liberties (DoLS) team. Proportionate to their respective populations the council and health board each receive relatively low levels of applications although Monmouthshire receive a higher proportion than two other neighbouring councils within the consortium. In 2013-14 ten applications were received in the local authority (there are no figures available for 2014-15.) More applications were made from the council's social services managed care homes than from all the independent sector care homes with commissioned places. This suggests that the level of awareness of potential deprivations of liberty may not be consistent across all providers particularly with regard to independent sector care home owners. The council will want to consider how to address this in the light of the Supreme Court Judgement.

- 6.10. The number of best interest assessors (BIA's) has fallen although the level of work will undoubtedly increase as a result of the Cheshire West judgement. This will need to be managed in order to meet the requirements of the legislation. Also, the local authority does not have any BIA's located within their assessment and care management teams which may be an opportunity lost as an expert resource to raise awareness of the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) and DoLS to ensure it is embedded in assessment and care management.
- 6.11. The council should consider ways in which it can assure itself that DoLS and MCA is fully embedded in everyday practice. In addition the council should consider examining its management arrangements to ensure there is no conflict of interest between its supervisory body and managing authority functions.

Key National Priorities (adults)

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.12. The national policy focus on preventative and early intervention services sets a number of challenges for the council where there are ever increasing numbers of older people who have complex needs and onset dementia and who wish to remain in their local community. In Monmouthshire, there is a greater emphasis on promoting the wider community networks through community coordinators and a lesser dependency on statutory services unless specific support is required. This has led to a change in the way in which people are helped in surroundings that are familiar and important to them. One example of this is the development of services for people with dementia overall as well as creating a number of area based community networks such as the Friends of Raglan and Dingestow to support people locally.

- 6.13. Progress is being made in this area and this is confirmed by performance indicators which shows that Monmouthshire per 1,000 population have the lowest number of people living in care homes in Wales. In addition the number of people over 65 years per 1,000 population supported in the community decreased this year from 57 in 2013-14 to 53 in 2014-15 and is well below the Welsh average. In addition, the council report that 54% of people are returned to independence after reablement and can have their needs met through wider community opportunities. Feedback from service users about this service is very positive. It is important that progress continues to be made and independence supported.

Integration of health and social care services for older people with complex needs

- 6.14. Monmouthshire has well established integrated health and social care teams delivering integrated services. The frailty agenda has been incorporated into the integrated service model and this continues to focus on early intervention and helping people to remain independent. Integrated assessment is delivered by health and social care staff within these integrated teams. Training on outcomes based assessment and care and support planning has been delivered to some staff within these teams. As an example, Mardy Park continues with step up and step down support being applied in both the residential accommodation which is downsizing and within the wider community. Performance data indicates that the integrated model of service delivery continues to have an impact with less people requiring support in the community. In addition fewer people were delayed in being discharged from hospital with the rate of delayed transfers of care (DTC) reducing from 1.8 in 2013-14 to 1.4 in 2014-15. The rate of people per 1000 population supported in care homes remains stable at 11 compared to a Wales average of 19.
- 6.15. The Mental Health and Learning Disability Partnership Board was established to oversee and direct the development of mental health, learning disabilities and specialist services across Gwent. Strategies were developed for adults with learning disabilities and mental health services in consultation with service users, their families and staff. The strategy set out a future direction for services focused on integrated person centred services that promote independence and inclusion. Local areas in Gwent are engaging different options and timescales and awaiting the outcome of the learning from the second phase before roll across the five local authorities. Overall progress towards implementation of these strategies has been slow and requires renewed energy in order to re calibrate services in an appropriate and systematic way.

- 6.16 This year CSSIW undertook a short review of mental health services in the south team and found that the Mental Health Measure has been fully implemented. Staff provided evidence of the effectiveness of arrangements for joint working with health and care and treatment plans that demonstrated a clear focus on improving outcomes for people. The approach to service users emphasises empowerment alongside of providing appropriate support even where the needs are very complex.
- 6.17. Social Services make a strong contribution to the implementation of secondary services within the Mental Health Measure but do not directly support the local Primary Mental Health Support Services. Managers consider that the skills of the team are best targeted towards people with more complex needs. The implementation of the Social Care and Well-Being legislation with its requirement to offer or arrange earlier intervention and advice is likely to challenge this.
- 6.18. Quarterly performance audits are undertaken but the process is hampered by separate IT systems. The audit has highlighted issues about the way support to carers/family members is defined and prioritised. Assessments of strengths and needs are initially focussed on the individual referred to the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT). It appears that discussions on confidentiality which occur early in the process can result in family members not being defined as carers, and not being offered a carers' assessment.
- 6.19. Data provided by the council indicates that all carers are offered an assessment in their own right but only 14% had assessments undertaken. This represents poor performance and is amongst the lowest in Wales. This year's budget indicates that additional funding was set aside to implement the carer's strategy fully. Consequently the council state that they are confident that all carers are supported appropriately and data recording is inaccurate.

Areas of progress

- Support for people with dementia and their families through the overall development of local services.
- Commitment to training for all staff in Dementia Care Matters.
- Ongoing support for people with learning disabilities through the "My Day-My Life" Project.
- Engagement with the sector around the proposed transformation in

domiciliary care provision.

Areas for improvement

- The pace of change in rolling out the Raglan Project and the My Day–My Life project to other community hubs identified throughout Monmouthshire.
- The council should ensure that DoLS and MCA is fully embedded in everyday practice within assessment and care management.
- Data recording in relation to carers support from the council needs to be reviewed so as to ensure that carers are being appropriately supported.

Children and Young People

Overview

- 6.20. Overall the council's performance in relation to children's services has not been consistent across all key areas. Two separate inspections by CSSIW found no widespread or serious failings which left children being harmed or at risk of harm. However, management oversight of practice was insufficient and a number of recommendations were made.
- 6.21. There was evidence that staff at all levels and council members were committed to improving outcomes for children. Children and young people who are, or who are likely to be, at risk of harm were identified and protected particularly where safeguarding was in question. However, where there was no obvious indication of significant harm decisions to progress contacts to a referral were not timely. There was a risk of lengthy delays to children and families who were not always being offered help early enough.
- 6.22 The level of referrals in children's services is comparable with last year. Initial assessments performance has remained steady and is consistent with the average levels across Wales. Eighty five percent of core assessments were carried out in a timely way and exceed the Welsh average figure of 81%. Whilst this is slightly lower than last year's performance the council attribute this to the complexity of some cases. This year 200 of the total of 482 referrals were made as a result of substance misuse and/or domestic violence. The council are considering specific training needed in order to respond effectively to these particular issues. Where core assessments take longer than thirty five days the council has worked hard to minimise this and have significantly improved their own performance in this area.

- 6.23. During our inspection of children's services, we found that whilst assessments overall were timely and contained appropriate information from a range of sources the quality of assessments was not always consistent. The quality of recording throughout the assessment process was found to be poor and as a result failed to evidence the depth of enquiry that had been undertaken. This is an area that the council are addressing by undertaking a review of the quality of referrals as well as undertaking training both internally and with partner agencies.
- 6.24. In response to the inspectorate the council have developed a detailed post inspection action plan. Key performance indicators are reviewed and monitored closely and progress is reported to and monitored by the children's services leadership team. This in turn is reviewed at the engagement meetings and separate head of service meetings with CSSIW managers.
- 6.25. Whilst the level of children in need has decreased across Wales by 4% overall there has been an increase of 26% increase in Monmouthshire which equated to 79 children. In addition, following a sharp fall in 2013-14, the number of children on the child protection register has risen significantly by 38% and represents an increase from 37 to 51 children. This is in stark contrast to the Welsh average which is down by over 6 % this year. It is suggested by the head of service that this may be as a result of an increased focus on safeguarding awareness raising and training and the work undertaken by the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit. However, a further review is planned to consider whether prevention is targeted effectively. CSSIW will monitor this over the coming year as part of our engagement.
- 6.26. During our inspection, CSSIW found that where there was an obvious indication that a child or children were at risk or had suffered significant harm a prompt decision was made. In these instances progress to referral and effective action was taken in all cases the inspectors reviewed. Child protection investigations were undertaken by suitably experienced social workers and decisions taken were appropriate.
- 6.27. Delays in accessing specialist mental health services for children via Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) was identified in the national thematic review. There has been an over dependency on social services by health to provide both funding and resources to assess and meet therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leavers. This had an impact on team resources and has now been addressed with some success. Agreement has been reached with the local health board that there is monthly access to a CAMHS worker to formally discuss the best way forward on individual cases. The council report early signs that having this new arrangement is improving

outcomes for children and young people. Whilst there is evidence of an improving picture this remains a challenge.

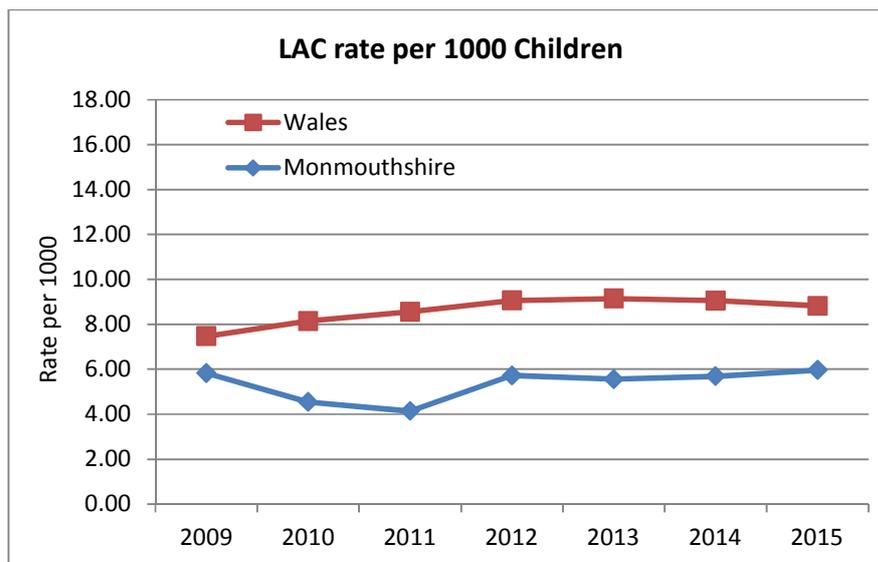
- 6.28. The council is a member of the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) which covers the five Gwent councils and was set up in April 2013. The council uses the SEWSCB allegations policy which provides a comprehensive approach to managing allegations but is still in the process of developing a specific local policy.
- 6.29. Safeguarding is given a high profile within the council with the Chief Executive chairing the safeguarding group within the authority. Following two concerns raised by CSSIW around recruitment practices and safeguarding concerns in children's services the council undertook work to improve its policies, procedures and plans on safeguarding. There is now an overarching Monmouthshire Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy in place that provides guidance for safeguarding and child protection and training has been provided.
- 6.30. The council has mechanisms in place for listening and consulting with children and young people. Over the past year teams in children's services have received training in play therapy and have focussed on increasing the time spent with children and young people to ascertain the views, with emphasis on those who are looked after. More recently the council was successful in recruiting two part time care leavers as apprentices who will have a pivotal role in ensuring the voices and aspirations of care leavers are heard.
- 6.31. Staff within the supporting children and young people team have developed a young people's football team and other opportunities on a one to one basis to elicit feedback in an informal atmosphere. Further work needs to continue to ensure the voices of children and young people is sufficiently captured and used to shape future service development.
- 6.32. The inspection of children's services report published in February 2015 highlighted that performance management and quality assurance arrangements needed to be more effectively embedded so that managers at all levels have timely, relevant and accurate performance and quality assurance information to enable managers to be more effective in their roles and to deliver improvements. This is being addressed through the action plan.

Key National Priorities

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.33. The council has identified the need to strengthen the Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF) arrangements to ensure children and their families have access to early help. Although the council has up to date policies, procedures and guidance in place more needs to be done to understand thresholds between partners and statutory services. A JAFF coordinator has recently been recruited and training events for staff has been undertaken.
- 6.34. A recent decision by the council to reposition the strategic arrangements for JAFF into the policy and partnership service alongside other families' first initiatives with direct links with the Local Service Board (LSB) has been positive. This decision has the potential to create more effective joint service planning for children and families in need of help and support in the council. Work has commenced on developing a preventative pathway to enable support at the earliest opportunity. Continuation of this early intervention work will be key to deliver a successful early prevention agenda.
- 6.35. The council identified the development of a joint children and adult's disability service in last year's director's annual statutory report. Other priorities during the year have taken precedent therefore no progress has been made to date in this area.

Looked After Children



Numbers of LAC as at 31 March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Monmouthshire	111	86	78	106	102	103	108

- 6.36. The above chart illustrates the seven year trend in the numbers of looked after children (LAC) per 1000 population across Wales and in Monmouthshire. Overall, the number of children and young people looked after by the council has increased slightly during 2014-15 (by 5 children from 103 to 108); thus the rate of children looked after is 5.97 per 1000 population which is amongst the lowest in Wales.
- 6.37. Performance on the number of school placement changes indicate that school placement stability has weakened with an increase from 12% in 2013-14 to 21% this year. This relates to 15 children. A number of changes are linked to the outcomes of court cases where children moved to long term placements and a number of high risk young people were placed out of county through necessity. The head of service reports that these changes were managed appropriately and the moves were planned to link with end of school term dates. The complexity of some of the cases has required specialist placements which are often not available near to home. Long term the council should consider what action needs to be taken to promote commissioning specialist placements locally.
- 6.38. The inspection of the fostering service found good progress had been made with greater clarity around the focus of the team. Compliance in all areas had been achieved. It has been recognised by the council that there is an additional burden on the placement and support team particularly in relation to family carer assessments required by the court. New foster carers are being recruited to meet demand.
- 6.39. The level of special guardianship orders (SGO's) has increased significantly over the past two years from two in 2012-13 to 21 in 2013-14. No figures are available for this year. The council has highlighted the need to have a more robust structure in place in order to meet its statutory duties to appropriately support this type of family carers and have presented a business case to council for additional resources to cover the increased workload. Longer term, the authority has identified significant savings that can be made where a child enters the system via an SGO rather than the provision of an in house foster placement.
- 6.40. In response to the improvement notice issued by Estyn in 2012 the council utilised the recovery plan as a catalyst to drive improvements around safeguarding across all service areas. It was confirmed during monitoring by Estyn in April 2014 that the foundations were in place for improving safeguarding arrangements. Social services and the

education department can evidence how they have delivered better educational outcomes for children who are looked after. The performance in relation to Personal Education Plans (PEPS) has improved considerably from 67% in 2013-14 to 87% this year which is significantly above the Welsh average figure of 70%. Performance around the allocation of personal advisors is in line with the national performance for this indicator. Closer joint working between education and children's services has contributed to this improvement.

Areas of progress

- The council has taken forward actions to address the recommendations arising from the inspection in November 2014.
- Progress with access to CAMHS services.
- Creation of two apprenticeship posts to ensure care leavers are appropriately represented on the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Areas for improvement

- The increase in the level of children on the child protection register requires a better understanding of whether thresholds levels are accurate.
- Progress work to improve transitions for children with disabilities to adult services.
- Take forward post inspection implementation plan.

7. The extent to which leadership, governance and direction for the council is promoting improvement in outcomes and wellbeing for people who need care and support.

- 7.1. The council's leadership and governance arrangements comply with statutory guidance. The current structure promotes leadership and direction. The director is part of the corporate team and there are clear lines of accountability through the senior management team, divisional meetings and team meetings. At the time of writing this report the director of social services had resigned his post. There has been confirmation from the council that this post will be replaced. This change within the senior management team means that social services will require additional support at the highest levels within the council to ensure the priorities across services can be taken forward by a newly established leadership team.

- 7.2. In adult services the workforce is longstanding and stable overall. Conversely, over the past few years the children's directorate has seen significant turmoil at both managerial and operational levels with significant numbers of agency staff and high turnover. A new head of service was appointed to the post in April 2014 and has provided stability to the role and is well respected both by members and staff at all levels.
- 7.3. Significant improvements have been made to stabilise and develop the workforce including a review of existing pressures to ascertain current and future resources to meet the demands of the service. A number of new posts and a reduction in the use of agency staff has raised the morale of staff who now say they feel well supported. This also contributes to better consistency in practice. The accredited training in dementia care alongside continuing professional development and effective supervision and reflection of practice will allow staff to promote the principles of the council of "doing it differently – doing it better".
- 7.4. The council has developed its Corporate Parenting arrangements more robustly. The two apprentices referred earlier in this report will represent the views of children and young people on the Corporate Parenting group. One of the priorities in the next year is to establish a 'Children in Care Council' to ensure that the focus remains on the issues that are important to looked after children as well as the opportunity to influence service design and strategic thinking. In addition the council are committed to developing employment opportunities for care leavers and looked after children within the council.
- 7.5. The council has increased its capacity for monitoring the quality of the services it commissions. New quality assurance processes have been introduced to direct services and commissioning. CSSIW work positively with the team and have undertaken a small number of joint inspections particularly where there is evidence that a service is under performing, has been identified as a service of concern or is part of the escalating concerns process. Commissioning strategies in other areas of service demonstrate a clear understanding of the council's priorities and the direction of travel for the future.
- 7.6. Over the past two years the adult services directorate has been in an underspend position due to the way in which demand has been managed and practice change. Whilst there has been a significant increase in the funding for the frailty and independent living programmes this has been set against a backdrop of savings made in other areas including mental health and residential care where fewer placements were made. This is in keeping with delivering the council's

independence agenda. Overall grants to voluntary sector organisations this year has decreased by 20%.

- 7.7. In contrast, in children's services there has been an overspend. This is due to a number of factors including a small number of expensive out of county placements for children/young people with complex and challenging behaviours. In addition, the department had to utilise agency staff extensively to ensure statutory functions were met. This position is improving. Recently a successful business case was made to the council's select committee for additional funding to resource the service appropriately to meet demand and strengthen the stability of the workforce through recruiting to permanent posts.
- 7.8. During 2014-15 CSSIW observed three select committee meetings. Members were well sighted on the issues being discussed and provided a high level of constructive challenge to both senior officers within Social Services and CSSIW officials.

Areas of progress

- Ongoing work with health and social care strategic partnership and relationships with the health board.
- Increased capacity and responsiveness corporately in relation to recommendations to drive improvements required and meet demand.
- Strengthening of the Corporate Parenting arrangements to ensure voices of care leavers are heard and drive strategic thinking.
- Level of challenge and understanding of Select Committee.

Areas for improvement

- Consider how children continue to be safeguarded in light of financial pressures faced by the council.