



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

Performance Evaluation Report 2014–15

Newport City Council Social Services

October 2015

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

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014 - 2015

Local Authority: Newport City Council

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

1. Summary

- 1.1. The council continues to face significant challenges in transforming its services in readiness for the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBW Act) during a period of budgetary constraint. Integration of service delivery with its partner agencies is key to sustaining progress and there have been some notable successes, including the more effective functioning of a social care hub based in the local hospital. This resulted in significantly improved performance in relation to delayed transfers of care DTOC and enhanced outcomes for people.
- 1.2. However the nature and scale of the required change, particularly in relation to adult services, is such that support and endorsement from all levels of the council is required in order to drive these forward. An action plan has been put in place following CSSIW's report into adult services for older people with more complex needs, which identified significant shortcomings. Successful implementation will require significant managerial energy and focus in order to help transform Newport's approach into one which is more able to be proactive in responding to people's changing needs.
- 1.3. There have been some significant improvements in the recruitment and retention of the work force, notably in children's services, which has facilitated the delivery of improved performance in some areas, including outcomes for looked after children (LAC). In contrast to this, there continue to be high levels of staff sickness amongst adult social employees, which have proved resistant to managerial attempts to improve. The re-shaping of in-house services continues, and it is important for the authority to maintain continuity and quality of service delivery during this period of significant and ongoing change.
- 1.4. Restructuring has seen appointments to two new overarching safeguarding and quality assurance posts during the year, which will be key to underpinning the council's significant programme of change. Cabinet members with responsibility for child and adult services take a proactive interest in their role, and corporate parenting responsibilities

are recognised and taken seriously. There is a developing awareness across the authority of the implications of the SSWB Act, but improvements in the role of scrutiny in overseeing performance and holding officers to account continues to be a work in progress.

2. Response to last year's areas for improvement

Identified improvement last year	Progress in 2014-15
Ensure that recently agreed changes to the Gwent Frailty project have positive outcomes for people using this service	Good progress has been made. Performance data confirm substantial improvement in DTOC rates, and improving reablement rates. High levels of satisfaction reported by people using the service.
Ensuring that initiatives such as MAPS combined with other workforce changes, result in improved outcomes for children, such as placement stability, and reduced re-referrals.	Progress has been made – placement stability and re-referral rates have both improved.
Exploration of alternative models of dementia care, in conjunction with partner agencies.	The implementation of new models continues to be a work in progress. However, there have been some good initiatives e.g. multi-agency dementia alliance; Butterfly scheme introduced to in-house provision and awareness raising via a council-wide dementia delivery plan.
The council should explore the reasons behind the poor uptake of support to carers, and take effective action to address this.	Some progress made. Carer's connectors introduced to facilitate and embed wider range of support service. However performance in this area still has room for improvement.
Ensure that care plan reviews for users of adult services are completed in line with statutory requirements.	Significantly improved over the year, resulting in completion figures close to the Welsh average. CSSIW inspections point to ongoing issues for some people in receipt of home-based care.
Ensure that key aspects of its services to older LAC, including pathway planning and the allocation of personal advisors are enhanced.	This has been achieved, as both pathway planning, and allocation rates for personal advisors have experienced significant improvement over the past year to 100%.
Take effective action to reduce delayed transfers of care (DTOC).	Achieved; significantly improving trend with the rate per 1000 population reducing from 12 in 2013-14 to 5 in

	2014-15.
Ensure timely and effective completion of assessment and care planning reviews for older adults, in order to inform the delivery of care needed to meet complex individual need.	Identified as an ongoing issue by CSSIW inspection during the year. An improving trend, with significant increase to 78% over last year's figure of 65%.
Enhance outcomes for children leaving care, following re-shaping of After Care / 16 + teams.	Progress has been made, although the small numbers involved mean that figures in relation to suitable accommodation, and education, training or employment need to be interpreted with some caution.
Ensure maintenance/improvement of outcomes for users during the on-going re-shaping of adult services.	Ongoing, in view of continuing roll-out of changes to adult services, as part of preparation for SSWBW Act.
Specific evaluation of work of disabled children's team.	Not progressed. A review of this service is due to be commenced.
Ensure that the resources identified for additional children's social work posts are effectively targeted at areas of most pressing need, including core group meetings.	Generally improving performance across many areas of children's services. With the notable exception of timeliness of core group meetings, and care plans being in place at the time of first placement for LAC.
On-going turn-over of staff in front-line social workers, and impact of NQSW on morale and outcomes for children / young people.	The council have implemented effective means of addressing staffing issues in relation to child-care workers, and anticipate a period of ongoing stability.
Effective alignment of I.T. implementation projects to priority areas such as POVA recording and financial oversight and management, as highlighted in the director's report.	New AIS module introduced at the beginning of the year is proving to be beneficial. Further consideration is being given to investment in other packages which will further enhance POVA recording and monitoring.
Role of scrutiny in overseeing some areas of performance, coupled with lack of challenge and rigour in relation to the setting and monitoring of internal targets.	Some development opportunities have been made available, but much still remains to be achieved in this area, as set out later in this report.

3. Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

- 3.1. CSSIW undertook an inspection of Newport City Council's adult services in December 2014, focused on older people with more complex needs.

- 3.2. CSSIW 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. During the year, CSSIW undertook inspections of regulated services operated by the council and independent operators. This included reviews of the in house fostering and domiciliary care services, as well as individually registered children's and adult care homes. Individual findings of these inspections are contained in published reports available via CSSIW's website.
- 3.4. CSSIW also participated in the joint inspection undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) into the council's Youth Offending Service (YOS) which was prompted by concerns over the sustained rise in re-offending rates, and high levels of first-time entrants.

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:
 - Effectiveness of the implementation of action plans in relation to adult services and YOS.
 - Impact of the newly created quality assurance and joint child / adult safeguarding roles.
 - Commissioning of services, including re-tendering of domiciliary care services.

5. Inspection and review plan for 2015-16

- 5.1. CSSIW is also undertaking the following thematic inspections and services in Newport 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. Newport's vision for its social services is '*Promoting the independence and well-being of citizens, their families and communities through a range of effective support services*'. Delivery of this in relation to adult services is via three different pathway elements: i) universal wellbeing and support; ii) prevention and early intervention; and iii) managed care. The trend of delivering in-house and commissioned services to a reducing number of adults over recent years has continued, supported by more uniformly applied Fair Access to Care (FAC's) eligibility criteria. A priority for 2014-15 has been the introduction of an integrated pathway for older people. This aims to deliver community based services where appropriate as an alternative to residential care, develop a continuum of multi-agency provision and enhance capacity for early intervention. Implementation of this was significantly influenced by outcomes from CSSIW's inspection of adult services in December 2014. Whilst it is too early to assess their impact, the successful roll-out of the necessary changes will be key to ensuring quality outcomes for people using services.
- 6.2. The director's report sets out the challenges arising in relation to recent budget settlements and anticipation of future resource constraints. Against this background, spending on adult services was slightly underspent in 2014-15, by 1.13%. The ongoing re-modelling of services has seen a reduction in the number of places provided in local authority residential and day care provision for adults over this period, coupled with a significant increase in the number of people receiving telecare packages. The overall progress achieved in promoting individual independence has however been compromised in some areas for example the removal of medication carousels in Extra Care housing, resulting in some people now receiving staff support for medication prompting. There have also been increases in people receiving direct payments to fund their care needs, although this growth is from a relatively low base. There has been a year on year reduction in the number of people receiving residential care from 20 per 1000 population in 2011-12 to 14 in 2014-15.
- 6.3. It is of concern to note that levels of employee sickness amongst the adult social care workforce continue at stubbornly high levels, despite managerial efforts aimed at addressing this. It is important that this is resolved over the next year, in order to ensure that these do not

adversely impact on the wide range of new initiatives being put into practice across adult services.

- 6.4. There has been a significant improvement overall in the undertaking of reviews of care plans within expected timescales, up from 65% last year to 78% in 2014-15, close to the Welsh average of 80%. However CSSIW inspectors continue to report that there remain particular issues in relation to some people in receipt of domiciliary care not receiving timely reviews. Improvement here is required to ensure that people are in receipt of care which is responsive to their changing needs. The restructuring of the in-house Reablement and Homecare service is underway, with the aim of enhancing the promotion of independence. The re-tendering of the domiciliary care service planned for 2014-15 has been postponed until next year to enable more careful consideration and implementation of detailed service-user outcome focussed criterion. A review of the Market Position Statement is also underway and it is important that the council makes effective use of these opportunities to underpin the progress made to date in meeting its obligations under the SSWBW Act.
- 6.5. The council has worked hard to improve and enhance the quality of its in house provision for dementia care with input from Dementia Cares and Age Cymru, and plans to expand on the accredited staff training schemes it has rolled out to date. Our inspection of these registered services in 2015-16 will enable a judgement to be made on the impact of these initiatives.
- 6.6. 2014-15 has seen significant developments in the delivery of services for adults with a learning disability with the introduction of the Outcome Focussed Integrated Assessment. This has led to all people in receipt of a day service having their needs reassessed, together with the majority of people in receipt of other services. This has resulted in less people receiving a service and a re-focussing towards community based provision following the closure of a council run day centre. The need to provide more support for people during periods of transition has been recognised, with a re-shaping and expansion of services for people in need of care and support during their transition into adulthood. The provision of respite services for this population is currently subject to review.
- 6.7. The significant additional levels of demand for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications has been responded to by enhanced legal training for staff. Care providers are being encouraged to make applications to a Pan-Gwent DoLS team. The volume of applications has resulted in many of these being held over and prioritised for 2015-16.

- 6.8. The need to enhance the capacity of approved mental health practitioners (AMHP's) has been acted on by ensuring that a minimum of two staff each year undertake the necessary training. The introduction of a Listen, Engage, Act Participate (LEAP) approach for mental health services in Newport is being considered for 2015-16, having being successfully piloted elsewhere in Gwent. This model of service involves social services working with health and third sector partners to provide responsive, outcomes based approach to people requiring support for their mental health needs.
- 6.9. Carers and other interested parties have been consulted by the council on a range of proposed changes, and the council recognises the value of engagement by providing direct support to many of these, including the Senior Citizens and Carer's forums.
- 6.10. Newport is an active and effective participant within the overall Gwent-wide adult safeguarding board, and in the last year a manager has been secured to implement the actions arising from the external review of the board's functions in 2013-14. Some progress has been made in terms of reshaping the sub groups of the board. The board will need to consider how this is further developed in relation to new powers and regulations in the future.
- 6.11. Safeguarding of adults is generally well-regarded and effective as reflected in the consistently high level of adult protection where the risk is managed at 98% in 2014-15 being marginally improved from last year and above the Welsh average.
- 6.12. While CSSIW have been advised that the Gwent Adult Safeguarding Board have undertaken training and work in relation to thresholds the difference in the percentage of referrals where risk has been managed ranges from 84% to 100% within the region. This is an area which partners on the board should explore to share learning and gain a greater consistency.
- 6.13. The council's contract compliance and commissioning team are increasingly effective in monitoring the quality of residential service delivery and this oversight has appropriately been extended to include its own in-house services.

Key National Priorities (adults)

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.14. Newport's approach to preventative and early intervention is underpinned by the foundation of three neighbourhood care networks (NCN's) covering the authority, which are co-terminus as far as is practicable with local health boundaries. This is overseen by an Integrated Partnership Board and supported by recently appointed community connectors whose role is to facilitate community and third sector input. Whilst it is too early to evaluate the impact of these posts, they will be critical to the longer term success of the strategy as the scope of their role expands. It is encouraging to note that two carer connector posts have also been created, to work alongside the community connectors. This is an innovative approach in responding to the identified need and recognition of the importance of those who provide support to family members and friends on an informal basis. However, there has been a significant reduction in the number of carers identified by the council from 713 in 2013-14 to 450 in 2014-15, and fewer carers went on to accept an assessment than last year (35 down from 96). It will be important for the council to ensure that carers are identified if the full impact of the arrangements it has put in place for carers are to be realised.
- 6.15. 2014-15 has seen some key successes, including the establishment of an effective social care hub at the Royal Gwent Hospital. This has brought about a commensurate and sustained reduction in Delayed Transfer of Care (DTC) rates which are now close to average for Wales, having previously been amongst the worst in the country.
- 6.16. Successful implementation of the first two phases of the integrated older persons pathway, 'information, advice and assistance', and 'well-being' will be critical to the development of an effective preventative and early intervention strategy. Further re-structuring of in-house services is ongoing to bring about alignment with this objective. The recently completed 'step-up / step down' provision in one of the in-house residential units is an example of this which has been supported by Intermediate Care Fund (ICF) funding.

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

- 6.17. Oversight of the delivery of health and social care programmes across the region are coordinated via the Greater Gwent Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Board. Membership of this is at an appropriately senior level, comprising cabinet members, directors, and the chair of the

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB). Each local authority has an Integrated Partnership Board (IPB) responsible for the local programmes being introduced in their area under this wider initiative. Partnership arrangements in Newport have recently strengthened, as evidenced by a presentation to scrutiny by senior ABUHB managers and more successful outcomes from the Gwent Frailty initiative.

- 6.18. A significant re-shaping of the pathway for older people is underway, in partnership with ABUHB. From the social services perspective this has focussed on the restructuring of teams and the introduction of revised procedures in order to support this approach. This process has been informed by a critical report into adult social services undertaken by CSSIW following up on poor outcomes for some people using in-house residential services last year. This had pointed to widespread issues in relation to care planning, management and review together with poor risk assessment and risk management particularly for those older adults with more complex needs. This also highlighted an ineffective initial contact point together with confusion and/or duplication of services provided, resulting in numerous hand-off's between teams and unnecessary delays. A comprehensive action plan was received in response to the issues identified and CSSIW will be monitoring the impact of the steps taken to implement this.
- 6.19. Preliminary indications early in 2015 pointed to improvements in relation to the initial contact point, and greater clarity and articulation of an overall strategic vision for older people which had previously been lacking.
- 6.20. The council, along with the ABUHB commissioned a 'midway progress report' on the implementation of the older people's integrated care pathway in February 2015. Undertaken by 'Peopletoo', this identified the combined approach by health, social services and the third sector as a particular strength in the implementation of the older people's integrated care. It also recognised the need to develop a proactive, rather than a reactive approach to the delivery of services for this to be effective and sustainable over the long term.

Areas of progress

- Integration of some services for older people, notably success in bringing about substantially improved rates in DTOC.
- Establishment of NCN approach and appointment of both community and carer connectors.

- Ongoing re-shaping of in-house day and residential services.
- Reassessment of the needs of adults with learning difficulties and enhanced support during periods of transition.

Areas for improvement

- Effective implementation of action plan submitted in response to CSSIW's adult services inspection report.
- Effective implementation of any re-tendering of domiciliary care planned for 2015-16, which provides an opportunity to re-shape services, focussing on improving outcomes for users.
- Address the continuing high sickness rates amongst the adult social care workforce.

Children and young people

Overview

- 6.21. The performance of the council in key areas in relation to children's services continues to be relatively robust, with high levels of allocations of social workers in relation to looked after children (100%), those on the children protection register (100%), and children in need (92%). This reflects positively on the council's relative success in retaining a more stable child-care workforce.
- 6.22. Overall, the percentage of referrals that did not proceed to allocation for initial assessment continued their significant downward trend over recent years, and are now in line with the Welsh average. This, coupled with significantly improving re-referral rates, point to more effective processes in determining appropriate access to services.
- 6.23. The numbers of children on the child protection register (CPR) remains relatively high at 184 in 2014-15. There have been significant rises in the number of initial assessments, from 1,119 in 2013-14 to 1,350 in 2014-15 and core assessments increasing from 810 to 1,214 in the same period. The Head of Service is exploring reasons behind these trends, which are not fully understood at this stage. Against this background it is concerning to note that, whilst performance in relation to the timeliness of initial child protection conferences, subsequent reviews, and completion of core assessments continue to be good, performance in relation to core group meetings has deteriorated further. The reasons behind the relatively high CPR rates over recent years, and

poor performance in relation to the timeliness of core group meetings, down from 66% last year to 56% in 2014-15, require exploration so that the factors behind these trends can be identified and addressed.

- 6.24. A new child sexual exploitation (CSE) senior lead has been appointed with initially encouraging results in overseeing and coordinating Newport's response in this area. It is disappointing to note that the scrutiny sub-group focussing on CSE was not able to complete its programme of work within the year as originally planned, and it is understood that this has been held over to 2015-16, due to other priorities being identified.
- 6.25. In response to an identified need for greater independence and challenge, the Children in Care Council, Junior Safeguarding Board, and Newport Youth Forum will be facilitated by Tros Gynnal.
- 6.26. Performance figures indicate that services provided to young carers were much improved, with significant increases in the percentage that were both assessed and provided with a service, now at 100%. The relatively small numbers involved mean that annual fluctuations in these percentages need to be interpreted with caution.
- 6.27. Significant shortcomings were identified in Newport's Youth Offending Service (YOS) following Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation's (HMIP) full joint inspection. This was triggered by a sustained rise in re-offending rates and high levels of first time entrants to the youth justice system. Some headline performance indicators for the year end, for example the number of first time entrants into the youth justice system are moving in the right direction, down from 139 in 2013-14 to 66 in 2014-15. However, significant challenges remain in relation to the sustained turn around required of the YOS service. Inevitably, this has taken up significant managerial energy and resource, including direct oversight of the management board by the Chief Executive.
- 6.28. The development of a comprehensive improvement plan in response to the issues identified has raised questions about the capacity of the service to respond to the scale of change required. It is understood that a further inspection of the service by HMIP is likely in the autumn of 2015.
- 6.29. Widespread changes to the management and oversight of the YOS have been introduced, and the need for more effective interface between children's services and YOS recognised. The need for more effective partnership working and challenge between the family support team and wider children's services was also identified in a concise child practice

review report, undertaken by the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB).

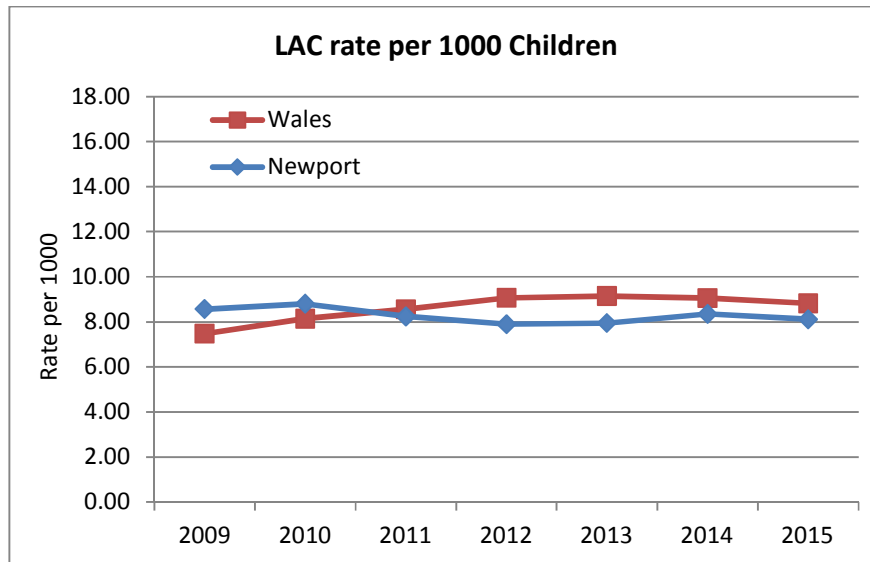
Key national priorities

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.30. The well established Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) continues to develop in response to identified and changing needs. One of the more recent initiatives is the establishment of a 'team around the cluster' (TACT) approach, which moves away from a city-wide approach and is aimed at aligning the delivery of services so that they are consistent with identified school clusters. Initially this has been set up in two clusters with four newly appointed education social workers, with a view to expanding this to eight clusters overtime, in anticipation of financial support from education services.
- 6.31. There has been an increase in the number of services operated under the council's Flying Start initiative. Inspections by CSSIW to date suggest that there are generally positive outcomes for children accessing these services, although a small number of settings have experienced difficulties in maintaining an appropriate environment.
- 6.32. Generally effective partnerships focussing on outcomes for children have been forged with health and education, as evidenced by the TACT initiative, although some pressure points such as access to CAMH's support are still being worked through.

Looked after children

- 6.33. The number of looked after children (LAC) has continued the gradually reducing trend seen over the past few years, dropping from 278 in 2013-14 to 270 this year.



Numbers of LAC as at 31 March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Newport	284	292	274	262	264	278	270

- 6.34. The chart above illustrates the number of LAC per 1000 population across Wales and in Newport over the past seven years. This represents a 5% reduction over the previous seven years. The council recognises that sustained effort is required to bring about continued reduction in LAC numbers, with Newport's rate per 1000 at 8.11 being close to the Wales average of 8.82. The council reports that LAC numbers currently include a relatively large cohort of 14 -17 year olds and it is anticipated that numbers will reduce over time as these young people progress to independence. There is a review of out of authority placements, currently numbering 13 children and young people, with a view to bringing as many as possible closer to home.

- 6.35. The introduction of the Family Justice reforms have resulted in some restructuring of teams and increased collaboration with legal services. Reduced timescales are reported for the securing of adoption placements following the introduction of the South East Wales Adoption Service (SEWAS), coupled with increased use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's).

- 6.36. CSSIW's national inspection of LAC exhibiting risky or vulnerable behaviour identified the need for a wider range of appropriate move on housing for young people leaving care. There were also shortcomings in relation to access to support for vulnerable young care leavers who did not meet adult thresholds. The council has indicated its readiness for the implementation of the 'When I'm Ready' initiative, enabling young people to remain in foster care after the age of 18, although the funding arrangements in place to support this were unclear.
- 6.37. The Matching and Placement Service (MAPS) aims to support placement resilience in foster placements. The 'Thrive' programme, aimed at promoting the social skills and emotional literacy of LAC in primary schools is a recent innovative example of their work, observed during our inspection of the fostering service.
- 6.38. Performance outcomes for LAC continue on a generally positive trend, as reflected in improved educational outcomes and increasing stability of placements, with 8% experiencing more than 3 placements. This represents an improvement from 11% in 2013-14, and means that the authority is now close to the Wales average. The fact that three LAC students secured a place at University this year was a cause for celebration.
- 6.39. Placements for some LAC with more complex needs have proved more difficult to identify and maintain. Some issues were identified by CSSIW inspectors in relation to planning, care management, and placement matching for some children placed in the authority's own residential provision. There has also been a significant drop in LAC with a care plan in place at accommodation from 98% last year, to 65%. The council will need to identify the reasons behind these trends and take action to improve performance in this area.

Areas of progress

- More effective processes in place in determining appropriate access to services.
- Successful recruitment and retention of child-care workforce, leading to improved outcomes for children and young people.
- Increased assessment and provision of services for young carers.
- Successful introduction of the TACT initiative.

Areas for improvement

- Effective implementation of YOS action plan.
- Quality of care management and planning to inform residential placements and matching for LAC with more complex needs.
- Investigate reasons for persistently high levels on CPR, and deteriorating timeliness of core group meetings, and take action to remedy.

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 has an extensive corporate change programme, 'Prospectus for Change' which makes it clear that Newport aims to be a commissioning authority. Underpinning this, the Right Skills, Right People, Right Place initiative is focussed on improving support functions and reducing managerial positions. In addition, the New Ways of Working strategy aims to reshape business processes. However, it is not always clear what impact these changes have had or are intended to have on the delivery of social services.
- 7.2. The relative stability amongst the social services senior management team over the past year has resulted in the embedding of initiatives and progression on a number of fronts. The head of adult services had recently resigned, and it is understood that a successor has been appointed and is due to start in autumn 2015. Two important newly created senior posts, the quality assurance lead and the joint safeguarding of adults and children post have been recruited to. In addition, a permanent appointment to the commissioning manager post has been made, which had been vacant for some time (albeit with significant support over this period from another authority that Newport has worked collaboratively with).
- 7.3. Performance monitoring has improved with the introduction of live performance dashboards for managers. This now needs to be translated into sufficiently detailed and robust reporting to members, so that scrutiny can develop a more informed understanding of performance and therefore hold officers more effectively to account in relation to outcomes. Increased rigour also needs to be applied to the setting and monitoring of internal targets that the council reports on, in addition to performance indicators.

- 7.4. The need to further develop partnership working in order to bring about the degree of change required under the SSWBW Act is recognised, and is being acted upon by the development of three distinct children, adults and learning pathways. The director recognises that children's services are currently better placed to meet these new obligations. The more recently introduced adult services pathway means that these services face greater challenge in ensuring readiness for implementation of the SSWBW Act.
- 7.5. Levels of sickness absence amongst the adult social service workforce remain stubbornly high, and initiatives to address this need to be refocused. CSSIW's report into services for older people with more complex needs identified the lack of a workforce-development strategy as a significant shortcoming in the council's forward planning.
- 7.6. However, an augmented approach to coaching and support offered to newly qualified child-care social workers appears to be paying off, with high levels of satisfaction reported in internal surveys. It is encouraging to note that the balance of child-care social workers qualified for more than two years has increased to the extent that these now represent a majority, a considerable improvement over the position in recent years.
- 7.7. CSSIW attended a number of scrutiny meetings over the year and it has been noted that scrutiny chairs are beginning to be more effective in keeping discussions focused on the matters in hand. As noted above, the need for member development in relation to challenge and holding the council to account continues to be flagged as an area for improvement. For instance CSSIW's national inspection of LAC exhibiting vulnerable or risky behaviours identified the need for members to provide more challenge, and to assure themselves about the extent to which strategic aims are being owned and translated into effective action.
- 7.8. The meetings held as part of the launch of the wider Gwent Scrutiny challenge were a successful starting point. It will be important for this work to be built upon in order to ensure continued improvement. It is understood that the overall programme of scrutiny is being reviewed and streamlined, with a view to focussing on areas of priority identified by the council.
- 7.9. A new Corporate Parenting Strategy has been developed, covering the period 2015-18; the need for dedicated officer time to support its objectives has been recognised and acted upon. Input has been sought and included from a variety of interested parties, including children and young people.

Areas of progress

- Recruitment to quality assurance and safeguarding roles in social services, together with long-standing vacancy in commissioning lead.
- Some key successes in delivering integrated services, which need to be built upon in 2015-16.

Areas for improvement

- Effective monitoring and oversight of re-shaping adult services and YOS.
- Member development in more effective oversight of performance and further understanding of the implications of SSWBW Act.