



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

Performance Evaluation Report 2014–15

Neath Port Talbot County
Borough Council Social Services

October 2015

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

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014 - 2015

Local Authority: Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

This report sets out CSSIW's evaluation of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's performance in delivering its social services functions.

1. Summary

- 1.1. During the course of 2014-15, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council has continued to reshape its services in response to both financial pressures and the implementation of the Social Services Well Being (Wales) Act 2014, which continues to drive change and provide the strategic direction for services. Social services have continued to transform with a firm commitment to prevention and early intervention with the aim of supporting independence and social inclusion and reducing dependence on services. Within adult social care the council's remodelling and transformation programme is integral to work to implement the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. It continues to deliver at pace with a focus on making real the shift in practice and culture. The council have also implemented an action plan which will support the underlying principles of "More Than Just Words".
- 1.2. The council remains realistic about the challenges posed by the need to deliver improving services within the context of reducing financial resources. The development of commissioning strategies and market position statements in children's and adult services has given greater definition to the strategic direction for service development. Corporate commitment to the needs of children and young people is demonstrated by this being a cross cutting theme in all council priorities. The safety, health, independence and well being of vulnerable older people are also key priorities in the council plan. The council has been proactive in driving the preventative and early intervention agenda in its contracts with the third sector and with independent providers.
- 1.3. Within children's services there is evidence of active leadership with the director, head of service and principle officers all providing a positive impact on setting clear priorities, which have included systems, processes and more importantly workforce stability. The senior managers have successfully introduced a culture of openness and challenge, with staff at all levels expressing support for the manner in which practice is now being delivered.
- 1.4. Neath Port Talbot's children's service was made subject to CSSIW's serious concerns protocol in November 2012. Since that time further

inspection and quarterly monitoring arrangements have been in place to assess progress made by the council in delivering its strategic improvement plan. CSSIW carried out an inspection in February 2015 focusing on whether sufficient progress had been achieved to improve the quality and consistency of services for children and young people in need of support or protection. Following sustained progress the protocol was lifted in May 2015.

2. Response to last year's areas for improvement.

Identified Improvement last year	Progress in 2014-15
The continued development and commissioning of alternative models of care and support to support the outcomes of the pathways to independence programme.	Increased accommodation options developed through Registered Social Landlords. Implementing outcome focussed planning which will influence market. Strong partnership arrangements with providers to develop progression based services. Developing pan disability and specialist provision.
The alignment of the modernisation programme with arrangements for assessment and review, in order to ensure that people's access to services meet assessed need and expectation.	'Peopletoo' has recently been commissioned to undertake work on practice improvement and cultural change. This work will encompass this area for improvement.
The harmonisation of thresholds work being completed by the 'think family' partnership should be defined and clearly communicated.	Thresholds have been defined and harmonised, so that interventions are at the appropriate level; and different services intersect effectively around families.
To develop commissioning strategies with partners to shape and support the delivery of services that meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people with complex needs.	Establishment of a common commissioning unit. A family support strategy has also been developed following consultation with staff, partners and a focused task and finish group.
To continue to monitor and evaluate processes in the community gateway.	Comprehensive review underway with 'Peopletoo' around sustainability resilience, digital inclusion and demand management

	at the front door, including linkages with community projects in primary care and expansion of the service.
To ensure that public information across all service areas continues to be reviewed and updated through the access to services corporate programme.	Development of the Website. Establishment of a digital inclusion project.
To develop a more effective communication format for use by carers.	Webpage comments Q&A being worked on. Promotion of central telephone number and e-mail.
Social workers need further guidance in the consideration of risk and how information collected is validated and recorded.	Further training on Positive Risk Taking Framework and implemented as part of practice review 'Peopletoo'. Evaluating effectiveness and positive risk taking framework through audit/QA. Risk assessment guidance has been introduced to staff in team meetings and formal training by an external specialist has been provided. Revised risk assessment tools have been used to evidence and measure progress against outcome focused care plans.
Urgently establish arrangements to audit contacts which do not proceed to referrals and referrals which result in no further action following initial assessment.	Recruiting local area co-ordinators who will divert and sign post pre-referral. Developing an activity system for looked after children. Created a dashboard which monitors activity. Monthly audit programme reflects arrangements to monitor contacts which do not proceed to referral and initial assessments that conclude no further action is necessary.
Maintain a strong focus on work to promote the consistency in the quality of assessments.	Quality assurance framework which audits all recording systems. The council has developed a suite of audit tools which encompass the range of services provide.
To ensure the review system reflects the outcomes of support packages in order to promote independence and identify	Remodelling review process based on geography and an allocated individual who is responsible for ensuring outcomes are delivered.

outcomes.	Piloting media based outcome systems.
The council should improve the delivery of timely assessments to determine eligibility for care and support from services for people with a learning disability.	Restructured to a pan disability approach. A dashboard has been developed to identify activity and timelines.
Ensure that all teams contribute to the quality assurance framework.	Quality assurance framework has been implemented. The council has established a performance, quality and practice development team, appointed a performance, quality and practice manager; complaints officer; engagement and participation officer.
The continued monitoring of the timeliness of assessments.	Priority framework for response has been developed. This will need to be trialled and reviewed in PDSA format. Linked into 'Peopletoo' review.
The closure of safeguarding investigations, ensuring that all agencies complete their actions within the agreed timescales.	Safeguarding investigations are not closed until all actions are completed. This is monitored through the audit process.
Increasing the awareness of deprivation of liberty safeguards under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 within the provider sector.	Programme of awareness training has been delivered and is a standing item on provider forums.
The recording of the offering of carers' assessments and recording what is delivered.	This information is collated within the database system. Plan to increase uptake of carers' assessment devised and new assessment process clearly collates this information and review.
The raising of awareness within children's services of the role of young carers and the service offered by the carers' service.	Joint specification developed with team around the family (TAF) to support young carers, with additional funds attached to support this initiative. The views and wishes of young carers are now being pursued through the performance, quality and practice

	development team.
To consider the impact of the current funding arrangements for the carers' service.	Current negotiations around service level agreement and longevity of funding stream from all partners in collaboration with the service.
The council, with its health partner, will need to consider the challenges facing its mental health service following the implementation of the Mental Health (Wales) Measure 2010.	Mental Health (Wales) Measure is monitored through audit information gathered by the Welsh Government in relation to part one to three. Monitoring groups established.
The consistency and quality of supervision in children's services.	Monthly audit programme reflects arrangements to monitor the consistency and quality of supervision.
To evaluate the effectiveness of staff training on work practice.	Monitored through supervision policy by team managers, through quality assurance panel and auditing. Learning and development opportunities in relation to child protection and care planning maximised and integrated into supervision and team meetings. Reinforced by annual individual learning plans completed for every member of staff to ensure service and personal training and development requirements are identified, analysed and met.

3. Visits and inspections undertaken during the year:

3.1. Site visits provide CSSIW with an opportunity to speak with people who use the services, their families and staff who manage and work in the services. During 2014-15, site visits were made to:

- Gateway team.
- Community networks.
- Contact team – adults'.

- Vocational skills centre.
 - Cilmla Hospital site.
 - Llys y Seren.
- 3.2. CSSIW carried out an inspection of NPT children's services in February 2015. During the inspection process we met with children, families, workforce partners and stakeholders. A number of practices were observed including, looked after child reviews.
- 3.3. The CSSIW inspection of NPT fostering service was positive, finding effective support provided by a stable and consistent team.
- 3.4. CSSIW has successfully undertaken its scheduled inspection programme of regulated services operating in the NPT area.
- 3.5. Quarterly engagement meetings have taken place with senior council officers. These have been used to review social services performance and discuss progress with the areas of improvement identified in last years report.
- 3.6. During the year CSSIW followed up the recommendations of the inspection of the council's safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours. Identification of 16 areas of good practice was evidenced with the council asked to consider 21 areas for improvement which have been developed into an action plan. The council has responded well, making good progress on actions identified in its plan.

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:
- The ongoing implementation of the services changes in readiness for the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act.
 - The collaborative work undertaken in relation to the Western Bay Health and Social Care Partnership.
 - Progress of children's services against action plan.

5. Inspection and review plan for 2015-16

5.1. CSSIW is also undertaking the following thematic inspections and services in NPT 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. The council provides consistent, equitable and timely response to referrals. The development of the integrated 'Community Gateway' team as a common access point for all adult social care and community health services is well established. The gateway utilises the integrated assessment process which allows staff from a range of disciplines to target services and provide appropriate response. Feedback from inspectors confirms user's satisfaction with the council's first point of contact arrangements. Evidence of the full integration of intermediate care services in the community resource team and integrated management of long term health and social care for older people within the community networks, is reflected in the improved performance figures for the rate of delayed transfer of care at 3.21 per 1,000 population for people aged over 75 years.
- 6.2. There is a continued emphasis upon strengthening prevention and early intervention opportunities for people to further maximise independence, promote wellbeing and enable self-determination evidenced through initiatives such as the 'Closer to Home' project, and Llys y Seren residential home in Port Talbot. This is a unit of 10 beds jointly commissioned by Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board (ABMU) to provide a residential reablement service. Site visits by CSSIW observed excellent joint working between partnerships which is enabling people to return to their own homes rather than move into residential care.
- 6.3. The council has strong strategic leadership and works well with the Western Bay Adult Safeguarding Board which has provided the council with effective governance and oversight to implement robust

safeguarding arrangements to vulnerable adults within NPT. Lessons learnt following an ombudsman investigation have been disseminated to both council workforce and key partner agencies, evidenced by CSSIW through attending the stakeholder meeting. Risk assessment tools have been embedded within practice with prompt and efficient responses to adult protection referrals and multi agency work continuing to be apparent. To ensure robust multi-agency assessment processes that delivers clear decision making, training has been provided to all designated lead managers (DLM) and the promotion of a holistic approach to safeguarding is undertaken using the local safeguarding forum. Inspectors confirm that the effectiveness and timeliness of the response to safeguarding concerns by the team has better protected vulnerable adults. This has resulted in the continuing practice of 100% of adult protection referrals where the risk has been managed.

- 6.4. As with other authorities the council has seen a dramatic increase in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications following Supreme Court judgement the 'Cheshire West' judgement from five in 2013-14 to 444 in 2014-15. The council is working with all providers confirming their understanding of responsibility as managing authorities, ensuring clear processes for reviews and managing applications from providers. The council has brought together its safeguarding and DoLS capacity into one team, which has proved beneficial in co-ordinating responses from these related functions. In addition effective advocacy services provided by Mental Health Matters have been jointly commissioned with ABMU.
- 6.5. Having commissioned the carers' service to undertake carers' assessments on behalf of the council, there has been a significant increase in the uptake of assessments. An increase from 20% in 2013-14 to 40% in 2014-15 evidences the positive relationship between the council and the provider. This has also been strengthened by embedding the carers' worker within the community resource team who ensures that assessments and support is both timely and effective.
- 6.6. It is acknowledged that the timeliness of reviews remains a challenge. The percentage of clients who had their needs reviewed during the year decreased from 82% in 2013-14 to 79% in 2014-15. Considerable work has been achieved in the quality of reviews and an action plan to address timeliness has been developed. This is an area which will be monitored by CSSIW in 2015.
- 6.7. There has been a rationalisation of management structures and implementation of electronic call monitoring within the councils in–

house domiciliary care provision. Currently the council provides 30% of its domiciliary provision in-house and 70% through externally commissioned providers. In the later part of the year the council faced a challenging situation following the failure of a large local domiciliary care provider. The council identified the problem, consulted in an effective and timely manner with its stakeholders and partners, and ensured the consistent and safe delivery of services to vulnerable people across the transition to a new provider.

- 6.8. A transition protocol has been developed to prevent delay in services for young people with care and support needs who are nearing adulthood. Cases are monitored by the multi-agency tracking and planning group to ensure no delay in allocation. The council is currently recruiting a consultant social worker to work between the adult and children's teams, managing the most complex cases as well as providing advice and support to teams. A major element of this post is the identification of young people needing to move through to adult services ensuring smoother transition with the targeted support being delivered to young people and their families.
- 6.9. People benefit from sound arrangements for the commissioning and procurement of services contracted on their behalf as the council has made positive progress in regional contracting and procurement of mental health and learning disability services. Along with this the council has been recognised by partner agencies as the lead authority for substance misuse commissioning. Through developing a common commissioning unit, there is close alignment between the social work review systems and service review, commissioning, contract and procurement, service development and review. Joint assessment and contract monitoring with ABMU nursing staff where appropriate is well established within the nursing homes. The council undertakes an active role in regional working through the 'Closer to Home' project which reviews and re-commissions services for people with complex needs, from residential to supported living. The head of community and commissioning within the council leads on care home quality improvement, escalating concerns across the region.
- 6.10. The council continues to implement a robust approach to managing its partnership with Grwp Gwalia with the first of four new care homes having opened in the summer of 2014. There is a formal contract governance board which meets quarterly to oversee work being undertaken by a number of sub groups whose work focuses on performance management and quality standards, the development of new homes, new services and operational issues. There is an agreed understanding that the long term residential care model is in decline, and a more flexible approach is needed. The council has undertaken

a formal contract review which includes development of focused assessment and more residential reablement capacity within the proposed residential provision.

- 6.11. The council has fully implemented its model of modernising day opportunities delivering a number of successful supported employment and training projects to support people into long term employment. CSSIW through site visits to social centres have observed new and innovative methods of delivery based on care and support and promoting independence where suitable. Although these provisions are now self-financing and independent, a model of alternative provision such as social enterprise is being actively explored during the coming year.

Key National Priorities (adults)

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.12. The prevention and early intervention service which is based at the Cimla Health and Social Care Centre includes community reablement, community occupational therapy, sensory support and nurse practitioner led clinical teams. The team prevents hospital admissions and facilitates earlier discharge through a four to six week reablement programme. There has been a considerable decrease in care home placements following the commissioning of a residential reablement unit, Llys y Seren, expansion of the acute clinical team and embedding the multi-disciplinary approach of the 'Community Gateway'.
- 6.13. Direct payments are promoted and supported across all areas of the service, allowing service users more control and flexibility over their choice of support and care. The council reviewed its direct payments contract resulting in the re commissioning of the service. A new policy for allocation of short breaks has been implemented to ensure equitable access across all service groups. In addition a new state of the art respite facility at Trem Y Mor is providing a service for people with mental ill health and physical disabilities as well as learning disabilities. The move to this model evidences the councils shift in culture and practice to a pan disability approach based on need rather than diagnosis. Inspectors who have visited the setting report positive feedback from service users, families and staff.
- 6.14. The council's review of social work systems and practice resulted in a new model of social work practice that promotes good relationships and strength based dialogue with people. This model allows the service to understand what skills and resources are available to

people which will allow them to reach their goals, these can include family, friends or community resources. In order for this model to implement significant changes in how staff undertake assessments, care management and review has to take place.

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

- 6.15. An area of considerable development by the council is its achievement in implementing a fully integrated intermediate care service which forms part of the community resource team.
- 6.16. Although the council has a good range of services in place for older people, within mental health services there remain shortfalls in some areas such as intermediate care for people with mild to moderate dementia. The council will take this into consideration as part their remodelling of intermediate care. The service has seen good progress in the uptake of assistive technology which supports independence for people with dementia, and a robust plan is in place to promote this service in the coming year.
- 6.17. Good progress continues to be made in developing a model of joint assessment between health and social care of older people's mental health. There will be further development with the implementation of care and treatment planning and care co-ordination in older people's mental health team.

Areas of Progress

- Improved delayed transfer of care performance.
- Development of the Community Gateway.
- Integration of early intervention and prevention services.
- Transition between adults' and children's teams.

Areas for improvement

- Improvements in review performance.
- Development of a revised model of day centre delivery.

Children and young people

Overview

- 6.18. Significant improvements in the delivery of children's services have been evidenced in the last year resulting in the council being removed from the protocol for serious concern. The Inspection of Children's Services in Neath Port Talbot report published in April 2015 can be found on the CSSIW web site. The council is fully committed to delivering on its Children and Young Peoples Services Development Plan and continue to use local needs analysis in planning and shaping services. There has been sustained targeted investment in the workforce and resources which have resulted in a much improved and consistent delivery of children's services.
- 6.19. Referrals to the service are managed through the intake team where performance on screening and decision making on cases within 24 hours is at 98%. The number of re-referrals has decreased from 22% to 15% which evidences more appropriate, targeted interventions. Child in need cases and their families benefit from being supported by the team around the family which enables their needs to be better understood and the provision of services more tailored with better handover from the intake team. The new arrangements are embedding, caseloads are more manageable and the processes are understood by all staff.
- 6.20. The council plans to improve access to this service through the 'Common Gateway', in addition a full range of "edge of care" services are being developed to prevent the inappropriate entry into the looked after system by children. This is an area identified by the council for development in the coming year. Further analysis of how the needs of families, particularly those with older children and young people could be supported at an early stage needs to be progressed. The council is in the process of producing a family support strategy and looking to re-model a number of current support services to address the matter.
- 6.21. Children and young people who are likely to be at risk of harm are identified and appropriate measures are put in place to keep them safe. The council has undertaken a comprehensive training programme with the workforce covering child protection, which has included risk analysis and multi agency core group training addressing individual needs in relation to work with vulnerable children. CSSIW has noted that although progress has been made in the quality of risk assessments they still remain variable and as such consistency across all services needs to be achieved. The council also identifies a need for more continuity and better information in

preparation for strategy discussions with partner agencies that are sometimes hesitant to agree to children's names being removed from the child protection register. Progress with this will be monitored during the coming year.

- 6.22. The council continues to make good progress in promoting participation for children and young people. Having reviewed its participation, engagement and advocacy protocol, the council has established a performance quality and practice development team to formulate and implement an action plan to deliver the protocol. An engagement and participation officer has been appointed who will work with children and young people, taking into account their views on all aspects of service delivery.

Key national priorities

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.23. The council has been working with partner organisations and other stakeholders over the past year to develop its approach to early intervention and prevention. A service mapping exercise has been undertaken which will be completed annually to provide the intelligence to guide the 'Think Family' partnership board in further service development.
- 6.24. The development by the council of a draft family support strategy (FSS) to assist in delivering targeted support services to children and families will ensure a joined up approach through the tiers of need. The council is looking to remodel a number of support services to deliver targeted support to the most vulnerable children, young people and families in need. The 'Think Family' partnership commissioning of 'Family First' services is in place and new contracts have been established by incorporating services which include family group conferencing, young carers support and counselling support for families.
- 6.25. The Integrated Family support service (IFSS) which is run by Bridgend County Borough Council on behalf of Western Bay partners has been operational since April 2013 and has recently been formally reviewed. Discussions are ongoing to have a re-focus on the strategic needs of NPT council's children's service. Regional arrangements have progressed well with the establishment of the Adoption Service commencing in April 2014, prior to the launch of the National Adoption Service in November 2014. This has resulted in a number of children being suitably matched and placed for adoption.

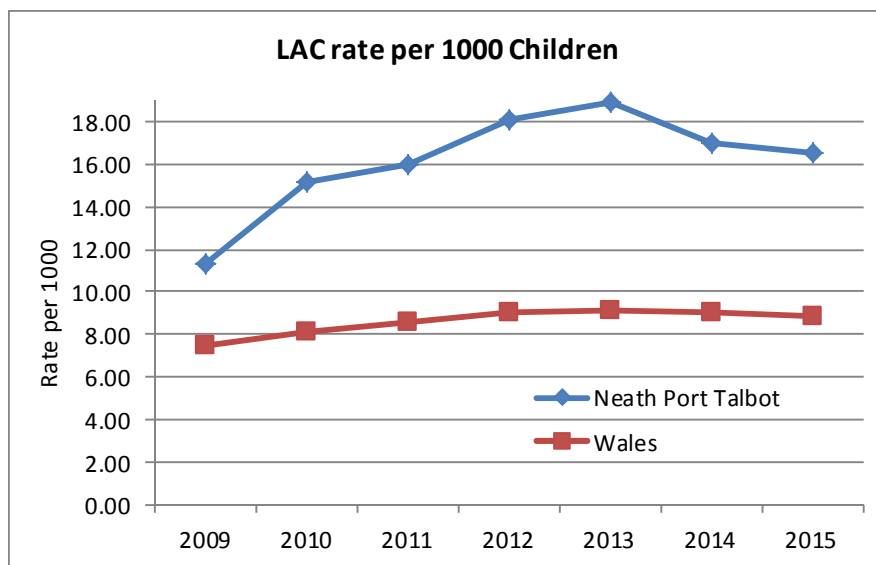
- 6.26. Performance management is well embedded across the service, with managers having good access to performance data. Monthly management meetings are held to analyse trends and identify and action “hot spots”. Staff have a positive view of the need for performance management and can see the benefits having seen an improvement in timeliness of performance over the last two years.
- 6.27. The council continues to implement its quality assurance framework which needs to achieve consistency across the service. A performance improvement group with membership from across the service is in operation, with outcomes from the group informing practice, leading to some progress in establishing quality and the consistency of service delivery.

Looked after children

- 6.28. The current strategy for looked after children should be reviewed to ensure there is more focus on supporting children to enjoy positive wellbeing and achieve potential. The council intend to further strengthen its procedures for admission to care and improve the support for those who are at risk of being looked after referred to as being “on the edge of care”. Commissioning arrangements of all support services are being reviewed, with work being undertaken with partner’s agencies to develop a better understanding of the strategic approach being used to reduce its looked after children population. This consists of two key elements, working to secure alternative permanency arrangements for those already in care, and “assuring quality family support and managing risk” to prevent children becoming looked after. However this will not reach its full potential until prevention services are fully operational later in 2015. CSSIW will monitor the implementation and efficacy of these services to achieve better outcomes for children and families.
- 6.29. The majority of looked after children cases are appropriately allocated with permanency being more effectively reviewed. Considerable work has been completed, better equipping the independent reviewing team to play a more active part in challenging the effectiveness of plans and to quality assure arrangements. This has resulted in an improvement in the timeliness of reviews; CSSIW observes good working relationships between social workers, families and young people in the reviews. Decision making around thresholds for instigating the Public Law Outline (PLO) is appropriate resulting in a reduction in care proceeding cases. The council attributes this to being well supported by legal services and appropriate advice.
- 6.30. The council is developing its foster care recruitment strategy in order to

ensure that fostering services are developed and structured in a way which can provide a choice of high quality, stable, local placements for children and young people, including those with specialist or complex needs.

- 6.31. Performance indicators evidence that all looked after children have a care plan in place, with 92% of statutory visits taking place within timescale, which is an improvement on last year's performance.



- 6.32. The council is fully aware that their looked after population remains high and is fully committed to reducing its looked after child population which has slightly reduced from 473 in 2013-14 to 461 in 2014-15. The council's approach is increasingly influenced through its looked after children strategy which sets out the intentions of the council to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, young people and their families. The strategy also sets out targets for safely reducing the looked after child population.

Areas of progress

- Achieving consistent and sustainable delivery of services that has enabled removal from the protocol.
- Participation and engagement with children young people and families.

Areas for improvement

- Access to children's services through the Common gateway.

- Development of the 'edge of care' services specifically for older children.
- Review the development of the family support strategy.
- Safe reduction in looked after children population and the use of alternative permanency arrangements.

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 intend to establish an outcome based framework to capture and act upon the views of children, parents, carers and professionals. The framework will complement the requirements placed upon local authorities in the Social Services and Wellbeing Wales Act 2014. The council has engaged with the Social Services Improvement Agency on developing this model.
- 7.2. The children, young people and education scrutiny committee has led the council in developing a model for excellence in public scrutiny. Working with The Centre for Public Scrutiny has developed a clear differentiation between ensuring that members have the knowledge needed to scrutinise and the scrutiny function itself. Evidence from attendance by CSSIW at scrutiny meetings shows appropriate challenge and support from members.
- 7.3. Children's services have made large advances in improving its practice, stabilising and developing its workforce, developing strong leadership and transforming its performance. Following a positive peer review in September 2014 commissioned through the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) it was agreed that the service would expand its aspirations to move from providing a good service to an excellent one. The council maintains stability by continuing to follow good people management and leadership practices such as timely recruitment, good induction, regular supervision, performance management, maximising attendance, minimising the use of agency workers, succession planning, effective two way communication between staff and managers and partnership working.
- 7.4. The council's decision to secure temporary contracts for agency workers within children's services to cover staff sickness absence rather than have vacancies has made a significant contribution to improvements in continuity and consistency of practice. Better induction, relevant training and staff guidance has supported positive workforce development and has benefited to improving staff moral. However some vulnerability has

been noted in certain teams, and a need to further support the development of the team manager group. These issues have been identified by senior managers and additional supportive arrangements are being put in place. While workers were much clearer about the roles and responsibilities within teams, there was inconsistency in these arrangements across the service. This could impact effectiveness of consistent supervision and decision making. At the recent inspection there was no evidence of the bullying and oppressive culture reported at previous inspections.

- 7.5. The corporate parenting panel continues to be chaired by the leader of the council and it has strong representation from cabinet and wider council. This has raised its profile across the authority and some progress in improving outcomes for looked after children have been made. Partner agencies are well engaged strategically and evidenced good understanding of the complex issues facing the authority. Whilst there were some inconsistencies between the effectiveness of strategic and operational arrangements in both areas, there was evidence of improvements being made in working together. Strong support was expressed for the commitment needed to ensure there would be a continuous improvement agenda. There is acceptance that the authority faces a challenging economic environment together with continued demanding levels of need and the legacy of having the highest looked after population in Wales.
- 7.6. Strong political and corporate support for the improvement plan was evidenced by the clear priority which had been given to its implementation. Elected members and the corporate management team demonstrated a common understanding of the direction and drive needed to ensure the service effectively supported improved outcomes for children and young people. Elected members were knowledgeable about performance and were able to identify areas which still required improvement. Scrutiny arrangements had been further developed and strengthened.
- 7.7. The council has effective and well managed budget settings and financial planning processes in place to deliver their medium term financial plan. Elected members are fully involved in the programme of planning, budget setting and budget monitoring and in the scrutiny of its delivery.
- 7.8. From August 2014 the council developed a new procedure for considering complaints and representations. The introduction of the new procedure provided the opportunity to train all staff and develop a new complaints data base which provides the council with performance and statistical information.

Areas of progress

- Stabilisation of the workforce in children's services.
- Corporate and political support for social care services.

Areas for improvement

- The establishment of an outcome based framework in children's services.
- The effectiveness of the councils revised complaints procedure.