



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

Performance Evaluation Report 2014–15

Rhondda Cynon Taf County
Borough Council Social Services

October 2015

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

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014 - 2015

Local Authority: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

This report sets out CSSIW's evaluation of Rhondda Cynon Taf's performance in delivering its social services functions.

1. Summary

- 1.1. The new director of social services took up post during 2014-15 and there have been changes in other senior appointments this year and during 2015-16. This, and the challenges of the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBW Act) presents the council with an increased opportunity to modernise services. The director is aware of the need to fully engage in a public and political debate around the level of direct services provided for people within the authority. Levels of residential care for older people, looked after children and child protection registrations are high. There is a significant challenge for the council in safely reducing these figures by promoting independence and alternative accommodation options for adults and increasing the impact of prevention and earlier intervention services to reduce the need for compulsory interventions with families.

- 1.2. There is a clear governmental imperative for social services and health to integrate services where possible. There is room for improvement here for both agencies to improve operational lines of communication, agree shared thresholds and assessments and pick up the pace of change. We have identified concerns with the operation of adult safeguarding arrangements during the year and we will be following up with the council the progress it has made in this area. We are pleased to note the intention of the director to introduce more robust quality assurance and performance management systems, such that the council can better assure itself that services are being run efficiently and to maximise positive outcomes for service users. This is particularly important in times of financial austerity. There have been improvements noted in children's services during the year. We have recommended continued monitoring of the policy of using staff who are not qualified social workers to case manage looked after children, since this is not a policy followed by other Welsh councils.

2. Response to last year's areas for improvement

Identified improvement last year	Progress in 2014 – 15
Continue to advance the integration of care and support with health services and other councils.	Some progress has been made. The director wishes to increase the pace of integration.
Ensure there are sufficient numbers of experienced qualified workers within teams and looked after children in particular.	The council does not plan to increase its proportion of qualified social workers further.
Continue to review communication channels and workforce issues.	Consultation with staff on the remodeling of children's services.
Progress with plans to achieve greater involvement of service users in training.	Some progress made; young carers devised materials for social work training.
Improve systems for the quality assurance of assessment and care management.	We are informed this is priority area and some progress has been made this year.
Ensure adult care plans are reviewed within statutory timescales.	Further reduction in performance this year.
Review interagency procedures in adult safeguarding.	This continues to be an issue and was referred by the council to the adult safeguarding board (CTASB)
Seek to increase EMI nursing capacity via commissioning.	Joint commissioning strategy due for publication.
Review the impact of preventative and early intervention services on statutory interventions with children and families.	Ongoing. Reductions in looked after children and child protection registration.
Increase assessments of adult carers.	Some progress made but continues to be a priority for the director.
Further develop an outcomes based approach in adult services.	Working toward; increased focus on performance monitoring.
Increase joint commissioning of adult prevention and early intervention services and increase take up.	Some progress and work ongoing.
Increase the focus of children's services on early intervention and prevention services.	Revised operating model intended to increase access to early support.
Improve quality assurance of placements made via the 4Cs and increase its role in commissioning.	Some progress, completion of ongoing work in 2015-16.

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:
 - Adult safeguarding.
 - Support for carers.
- 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 us and readily facilitated access to enable site visits to take place.
- 3.3. During the year, CSSIW carried out a national thematic inspection of the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards in Wales, with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW). We also undertook inspections of regulated services run by the council and by independent operators. This included inspections of the in house children's homes, fostering service, domiciliary care services and adult care homes. Details of these are contained in published reports and available on CSSIW's website.
- 3.4. CSSIW participated in the Wales Audit Office (WAO) review: Independence of older people which will report during 2015-16.

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:
 - Adult safeguarding.
 - Mental health services.
 - Corporate Parenting.
 - 16+ service.
 - Meeting with scrutiny chairs.

5. CSSIW Inspection and review plan for 2015 -16

5.1. CSSIW is also undertaking the following thematic inspections and services in Rhondda Cynon Taff 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. The council supported less older people in care homes this year and has been successful in achieving a reduction of 6% which continues the downward trend of the last few years. However, the authority still has the greatest proportion of its older people in care homes than any other Welsh authority. The council has seen greater impact of its reablement services and put in place greater scrutiny mechanisms to ensure more people are provided with alternative supports. The council continues to maintain a high number of its own care homes. The director is considering if these 12 homes provide the type of accommodation most needed by older people with very complex needs and if more people could be supported toward a greater degree of independence. The director is conscious of the principles behind the SSWBW Act due for implementation and of financial restrictions.
- 6.2. It would not be appropriate for the number of the council's own residential beds to influence the size of its residential population, as this should be clearly based on individual need. Further clarity may be reached by reviewing thresholds for residential care in the authority. This would best be achieved in conjunction with the health board, to improve consistency of assessments for people leaving hospital and may result in less people entering residential care at this point. The council is working with an independent provider to establish an Extra Care facility and construction is planned to be complete in 2016. This is a significant initiative that could be replicated if regarded as successful and is likely to be considered as part of Social Service's Transformation Plans.
- 6.3. The authority continues to promote the 'Butterfly Project' in its own homes and support its development in the independent sector. This initiative is

designed to develop best practice in the care of people with dementia. We inspected all the council's homes in 2014-15 and identified some common areas where regulatory breaches were identified and we met with senior management to discuss. The council was not ensuring that staff in their homes were receiving sufficiently frequent supervision, which is important to monitor competency and learning needs. There were issues in some of the homes around revising care plans for residents and pre admission processes. We identified that the council should improve its own quality assurance processes in order for senior management to ensure matters are addressed promptly.

- 6.4. The greater concern in 2014-15 was with regard to quality of care in some residential homes in the independent sector. After considerable efforts to support the improvement of one home by the local authority and health board, CSSIW forced its closure due to the continued failure to care for residents safely. There was very good joint working between the statutory agencies to relocate the residents. There were identified care failures in several other care homes and the local authority multi agency operations group (MAOG) processes in the authority worked well to identify and share information. Chairing of these meetings transferred to commissioning within the year, which highlighted the central role of commissioning and contracts monitoring to the provider performance process. By the end of 2014-15, improvements had been achieved in the majority of the homes and we continue to work collaboratively with the council and share information from inspection.
- 6.5. Significantly more people from Rhondda Cynon Taf were delayed in leaving hospital in 2014-15 due to lack of social care support (DToC). The rate of people delayed in the authority is double that of the Wales average and double that of its own performance the previous year. It is now the 3rd poorest in Wales. We have discussed this with the director who explains social services and health do not share a common threshold for discharge or the need for residential care on discharge. Specifically in 2014-15, there was a hospital closure and a high staff sickness rate in adult locality teams. The council will wish to satisfy itself that fewer people are delayed in leaving hospital in 2015-16. We are informed that improvements are noted when social services staff are placed in hospitals and regular meetings with health are convened. We recommend that social services should seek to engage with the health board around establishing a shared threshold for residential care.
- 6.6. Although there has been a gradual decline over the last four years, the council provides services to a higher proportion of older people than most of the other local authorities in Wales (it is the 4th highest authority). This can be viewed as positive in that the council is providing a high level of support to older people. However, the council is aiming

to provide greater short term services to promote independence wherever possible and therefore reduce the need for ongoing services.

- 6.7. With regard to adults under 65 years old to whom the council provides a service, a higher proportion of these people are supported in the community than the Wales average, joint second highest. This is a positive figure, although the council acknowledges that its services for people with learning disabilities are due for review. The council will wish to satisfy itself that people are being offered the most appropriate services to support need and promote the greatest degree of independence.
- 6.8. The council maintains four of its own domiciliary care services which provide ongoing support or shorter term reablement to adults in their homes. All services were inspected by CSSIW during the year and were considered as providing high quality care for people. The reablement memory project supports families and carers who are caring for people with dementia/memory problems and is an example of good practice.
- 6.9. It is concerning that the authority's performance in providing timely reviews of people's care needs has deteriorated for a further year. There has been a downward trend from 81% in 2011-12 to 73% in 2014-15. This should be a matter of priority for the council and is in the context of a decreasing number of people to review. We are informed the council has increased capacity at the beginning of 2015-16 to improve its performance. Reviews are important to ensure people's needs continue to be met, resources are being allocated appropriately and all means to support increased independence are engaged.
- 6.10. Deprivation of liberty safeguards was subject to national inspection by CSSIW and HIW at the beginning of 2014. Generally, applications were found to be appropriate. There were some delays in identifying best interest assessors (BIAs), which the council and health board were seeking to improve. Some recommendations around increased structure and governance were made. It was recognised that partners had acknowledged the same issues prior to the inspection. Along with other local authorities in Wales, 2014-15 has seen a marked increase in applications as a result of the Cheshire West judgement. In Rhondda Cynon Taf, applications increased from 58 in 2013-14 to 834 in 2014-15. The authority has increased its capacity of BIAs and completed 251 assessments in 2014-15, with a view to increasing capacity further in 2015-16 and ensuring resources are used equitably across the authorities. A prioritisation tool is employed to manage a waiting list and ensure assessments are completed where the need is the greatest.
- 6.11. CSSIW completed site work in 2015 looking at support to carers. The authority has invested in dedicated carer support officers based at a

single site. A review of working and management arrangements to ensure capacity and efficiency is maximised was recommended. The local authority have created a specific post to support young adult carers, an identified area of need. Good quality written and online information for carers is available and accessible. The authority aims to provide good emotional and social support and commissions individual counselling for carers where required and provides a range of recreational and information sessions. The authority has created champions in primary care and across social services to increase professional knowledge and awareness. Overall we regarded the council as committed to supporting carers and providing good quality support services.

- 6.12. Performance indicators at year end shows that 50% of identified carers had an assessment of their needs; this is significantly above the Welsh average. However, the number of identified carers in the authority has decreased in the last four years, which is unlike what we know of national trends. The director wishes to improve the response to carers and is aware of a common recording issue that impacts on reliability of data. CSSIW spoke to several carers during the site work and all reported satisfaction with the support they were receiving.
- 6.13. The council has adopted a strong model of joint working by developing a multi agency safeguarding hub (MASH) with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, the Police and Cwm Taf University Health Board. The MASH completes the early stages of the safeguarding arrangements with regard to both adults and children and became operational for adult referrals in January 2015. It is hoped having key partners together on one site will increase information sharing and efficiencies. However, social work staff from the two councils operate separately within the MASH and it will be important that greater integration is achieved over time if the full impact of this initiative is to be realised.
- 6.14. The director identified adult safeguarding as a priority area for 2014-15. The performance indicator for managing risk in adult protection referrals is good, has increased for a further year and is above the Welsh average. CSSIW completed site work in 2015 around the adult safeguarding arrangements. As a result, several recommendations were made to the council. These included ensuring the reasons for decisions were clearly recorded and a greater use of quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms to guarantee robust governance. Capacity or organisational issues within the safeguarding team and within adult social services in terms of their ability to fulfil designated lead manager (DLM) functions were noted. Concerns were also raised about aspects of multi agency arrangements and these were referred to the Cwm Taf Adult Safeguarding Board.

- 6.15. The council produced an improvement plan and we recognise senior managers are seeking to address the matters raised. We will continue to liaise and consider if an inspection in 2015-16 is merited. The director's report recognises that planned strengthening of quality assurance processes within adult services as a whole has not been achieved this year. It therefore appears this may be a more general issue and we would agree that this should be a priority for 2015-16.
- 6.16. There was an increase of 37% in the number of complaints about adult services in 2014-15 compared to the previous year. However, the council notes that 2013-14 saw an unusually low number of complaints and the increase brings figures in line with previous years. It is positive to note that none of these complaints progressed to stage two, implying matters were resolved without further escalation. As in previous years, the highest number of complaints were received for assessment and care management locality teams. There has been an increase in complaints received for mental health and adults with a learning disability, the latter due to proactive efforts by the complaints unit to make people aware of their rights to raise complaints. There was an improvement in timely response to complaints, although further progress is indicated, which the council has identified as a priority.

Key national priorities

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.17. The director set the development of further preventative services as a priority for 2014-15. The plans and priorities arising from the strategy for older people's services across Cwm Taf is currently subject to a public consultation. Needs were mapped during 2014-15 and the council in conjunction with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, the health board and the third sector are proposing a three tiered model with a greater emphasis on the role of local universal services to support people and improve wellbeing. In addition, reablement services provide early intervention with a view to reducing the need for specialist services. While this is intended to prepare the authority for the SSWBW Act, the clear challenge is to prepare the public for the changes that will result from this legislation. The council will be considering the support it is able to give to community groups and the third sector to provide sufficient universal and targeted resources in the face of economic austerity. Rhondda Cynon Taf has the 3rd highest levels of deprivation in Wales, as measured by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). The council is also aware of the need to improve the availability and access to information, advice and assistance.

- 6.18. We attended a meeting of the older person's action group (OPAG), which represents the local 50+ forums within Rhondda Cynon Taf. We were impressed with the level of activity of the group and this is a strong point of contact for the council with older people. We also participated in the Wales Audit Office (WAO) review of the independence of older people which will report during 2015-16. It was evident that there are a range of active groups and individuals within the authority that can provide a wealth of advice and support to best promote the cultural shift that the SSWBW Act will involve.
- 6.19. Three quarters (75%) of people provided with reablement services in 2014-15 did not require longer term care. This compares favourably with an average figure of 71% across Wales, cited in the report of the social services improvement agency (SSIA) released in December 2014. The council has received positive feedback to suggest that reablement is a valued service and is viewed as effective by the people using it. The council also intends to use the reablement service to review adults who are receiving longer term support, to see if they could be assisted toward greater independence and this may be an innovative strategy.
- 6.20. Reablement services have offered support to significantly more people than last year and the council has established a single point of access intended to streamline referral processes. The provisions of aids, equipment and telecare services continue to be important to the promotion of greater independence for people in the community. The number of people waiting for assessments to be provided with such has reduced by 61% during the year, a positive development. Of those eligible, 13% of arranged their own care via a direct payment in the fourth quarter of 2014-15.
- 6.21. Rhondda Cynon Taf is on the 'Together for Mental Health' Partnership Board formed by Cwm Taf University Health Board. The partnership has supported a range of wellbeing work outlined in its latest annual report. This includes supporting Communities First and other agencies to deliver input combating loneliness, debt advice, alternatives to the use of anti depressants etc. The board has identified a range of priorities, including increased citizen engagement to better ensure community involvement to achieve high level and local outcomes.

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

- 6.22. The council is partnered with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and the health board in the production of a joint statement of intent (March 2014) with regard to older people with complex needs. The emphasis is on prevention and early intervention, as one would expect. Current

workstreams are outlined which include the frail elderly, a rehabilitation model and a plan to further develop the '@home' initiative, which has designed to allow for timely discharge by the provision of a reablement service. This will involve a greater role for health in the community and a further need to improve consistent and joined up working between social services and health operationally.

6.23. Strategically, further progress could also be made. Within social services, there is recognition that the pace of change is insufficient. Further opportunities should be identified to increase joint working in order to simplify access for people and achieve specific objectives such as reducing unscheduled care etc. The director recognises there are issues of professional communication and judgement that have impacted on effective joint working and swifter progress. We would agree this is an important area to address and seek to resolve at the highest levels within the agencies.

Areas of progress

- Reduction in numbers of older people in residential care.
- Co production of an extra care facility (2016).
- Strong provider performance process.
- Good in house domiciliary care/ reablement services.
- Good support for identified carers.
- Development of the MASH.

Areas for improvement

- Review of thresholds for residential care for older people in conjunction with health.
- Improved monitoring and quality assurance systems across local authority residential homes.
- To reduce delayed transfers of care.
- To increase reviews of people's care plans.
- Increased integration of council staff within the MASH.
- Quality assurance and monitoring of adult safeguarding.

- Increased pace of change to achieve intergrated services with health.

Children and young people

Overview

- 6.24. A restructuring of children's services was in development in 2014-15 and staged implementation began in April 2015 following a wide consultation. The council has a clear vision to increase the use of universal services and lower levels of intervention. A model with five levels of increasing intervention is outlined and there is recognition that greater definition of thresholds is required. A need for greater use of robust quality assurance systems by managers is also recognised. The revised operating model is designed to respond to the council's improvement priorities for children's services and make ready for the implementation of the SSWBW Act.
- 6.25. The service director is clear that this is not about making budgetary savings. Equally, no addition to the budget is being made, although temporary posts are now secured within the permanent structure. There has been some streamlining of the senior management structure and a reduction in the number of intake and assessment teams. MASH became operational for children's safeguarding in April 2015. While too early to evaluate, it is intended to provide a timely, improved, multi agency response to referrals in the safeguarding of children.
- 6.26. There has been a significant improvement in the timeliness of initial assessments in 2014-15, however there remains significant room for improvement. 60% of assessments in Rhondda Cynon Taff were completed within timescales, whereas the Welsh average is 76%.
- 6.27. Significant improvements have also been made with regard to the timely completion of core assessments; this is particularly positive as there has been a significant increase in the number of core assessments completed this year. 86% of assessments in Rhondda Cynon Taf are completed within the timescale, which is better than the average across Wales of 81%. When timescales are not achieved for initial and core assessments, delays can be lengthy and this area would benefit from particular attention. However, overall the authority has made good progress in assessments of children and families. It attributes this to a greater focus in the latter stages of the year on performance management and quality assurance.
- 6.28. Rhondda Cynon Taf has not decreased the numbers of children it is working with on a child in need basis in the last four years. Decreasing

this group of children as a result of prevention and early intervention services should be a priority for the council. The council is less likely to allocate a qualified social worker to children in need than other councils and it may wish to consider the potential relevance of this to performance. Allocation practice is discussed further in the section on looked after children below. Generally, the council considers caseloads of children's services staff are manageable. The director continues to believe that greater direct work with families and improved performance can be achieved within existing resources. The director believes there is room for improvement in the streamlining of business processes to ease pressures on allocated workers.

- 6.29. There was a reduction of 22 (5%) in the numbers of children on the child protection register in 2014-15. The long term trend for Rhondda Cynon Taf is high and has increased by 63% in 7 years. It has the highest rate of child protection registration in Wales. The council attributes the reduction in registration to increased monitoring by senior managers. The council will wish the impact of prevention and early intervention services to be a reduction in the risk of abuse to children such that registration and significant intervention with families is not required. Children are allocated a qualified social worker and they, and the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), do well in convening timely initial conferences, core groups and child protection reviews.
- 6.30. The Wales Audit Office (WAO) undertook a review of local authority arrangements to support the safeguarding of children. This review looked across the range of council functions and services. It proposed that Rhondda Cynon Taf develop a corporate safeguarding policy and elected members and relevant council employees receive regular training in safeguarding awareness. A survey found that fewer people than average in Rhondda Cynon Taf had high levels of confidence in the council's safeguarding procedures or believed that these had been communicated to them (for example, parents with school age children). We expect the council to be considering how its corporate safeguarding policy can be strengthened and communicated effectively to its population.
- 6.31. We were concerned about the authority's support of young carers in 2013-14 and were informed this was due to a temporary staff vacancy. The council has regained its performance in assessment of young carers and the support provided in 2014-15 exceeded the Welsh average. We completed site work during the year and heard of work in schools to increase awareness of young carers. We recommended the council consider if health professionals required further information about young carers. The council continued to commission Action for Children to provide services for young carers, although council carers'

officers undertake assessments and some direct work also. These arrangements are being reviewed in 2015-16 as the council considers taking the service back in house. We know young carers are often vulnerable and one quarter are involved in safeguarding or other aspects of children's services. It is therefore important the council's systems maximise positive outcomes by ensuring effective information sharing and joined up services.

6.32. The council placed 49 children for adoption in 2014-15. The Vale, Valleys and Cardiff adoption collaborative was in development during the year and is one of the five regional adoption services making up the national adoption service. Progress of the regional service should be carefully reviewed to ensure performance of the collaboration matches and improves on that achieved by the council alone. The Cwm Taf youth offending service (YOS) became fully operational in October 2014. This joint service with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council works across two sites. Rhondda Cynon Taf provides the line management. We understand the merger did not release any savings for the authorities.

6.33. Fewer complaints about children's services were received in 2014-15. All but one were dealt with at stage one. The majority of complaints were about assessment and care planning services. The council believes the new guidance on managing complaints introduced in 2014 has been helpful in producing early resolution via face to face meetings with managers. The highest level of compliments received was about the disabled children's team and early years services. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) and advocacy also raise issues on behalf of young people and these are monitored via the corporate parenting board. We have arranged to view a corporate parenting board in 2015.

Key national priorities

Preventative and early intervention services

6.34. The council has created a lead post for prevention and early intervention who reports directly to the service director for children's services. This post is intended to improve the structure, access, and impact of these services and to co-ordinate step up and step down arrangements between strands of service. The role includes responsibility for Families First and Flying Start. The authority has achieved reductions in looked after children (see below) and child protection registration toward the end of the year. The council will wish to be clear this is a direct result of the increased uptake and effectiveness of early intervention services.

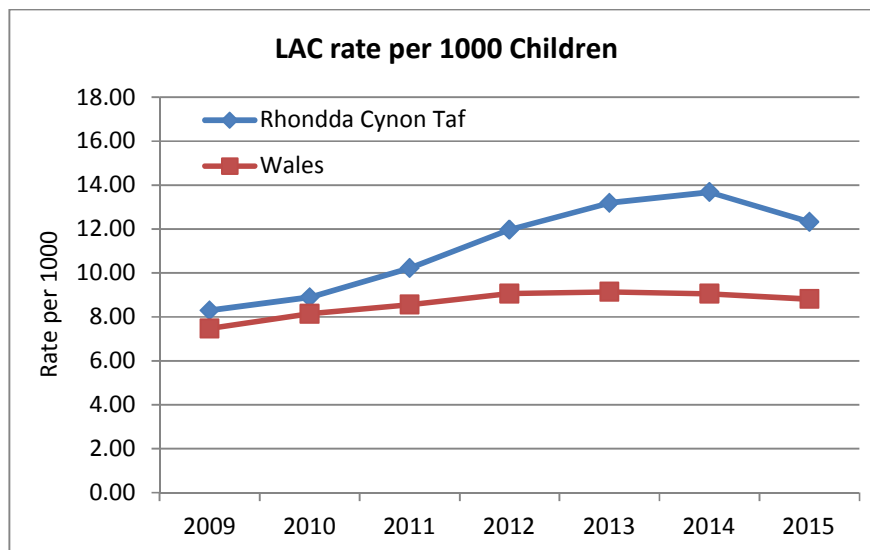
6.35. The council operates a range of services, including a joint Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) with Merthyr Tydfil County Borough

Council. There have been efforts to review the effectiveness and remit of the service during the year and to better demonstrate the outcomes of intervention. The potential for improvement was also identified with the Team Around the Family (TAF); this concerned making better use of multi agency resources and ensuring families most at risk were the ones receiving the service. A revised model is established for 2015-16. The council also operates a rapid intervention and response team to support young people at risk of becoming looked after.

6.36. We have considered the council’s childcare sufficiency assessment 2014-17. The authority believes it largely has enough childcare provision to meet the needs of most working parents. However, an increase in particular types of provision is identified as required; care for disabled children, childcare outside of the usual hours and daycare in specific local areas where this is insufficient. The council will be considering how best to promote development of these services.

6.37. Free nursery provision for three year olds will reduce to the state minimum of 15 hours from September 2015, following considerable public consultation and controversy. Flying Start services continue to support families with younger children in designated areas. Our inspections of Flying Start nurseries during 2014-15 have generally been positive and when issues have been identified, Flying Start has provided considerable support to managers to rectify matters raised.

Looked after children



Numbers of LAC as at 31 March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Rhondda Cynon Taf	419	446	512	599	660	684	616

- 6.38. The council has achieved a 10% reduction in the numbers of children in care during 2014-15 and has halted a significant upward trend. It remains the local authority with the 4th highest rate of looked after children in Wales. Timeliness in holding review meetings and visiting children in their placements is good. The reduction in the number of looked after children will have eased the pressure on placement resources to a limited extent, but the local authority continues to be challenged to offer all looked after children meaningful choice with regards to where and with whom they will live.
- 6.39. We are informed that children's services are managing the additional pressures of the public law outline (PLO) and the additional focus on timeliness is commensurate with the internal drive to speed up processes and prevent 'drift'. Although there has been a slight reduction in performance from last year, the authority continues to do very well in ensuring young people leaving care have a robust pathway plan and a personal advisor. Services for young people 16 and over has been an area of development through the year and we would wish to undertake a visit to the service in 2015-16.
- 6.40. There has been a significant drop in the timely establishment of personal education plans (PEPs) for young people in care, which is now below the Welsh average and school moves have increased, taking the authority above the Wales average. Attendance figures for primary and secondary are good.
- 6.41. While virtually all (95%) looked after children in Wales have a qualified social worker, only 63% of children in Rhondda Cynon Taff do so. The council states its confidence in the greater use of assessment care managers (ACMs) and the director has no plans to increase levels of qualified social workers in children's services. We accept ACMs may have considerable experience of working with children. However, we recommend the council continues to monitor this workforce strategy in light of all aspects of its performance. While it ensures qualified social workers are allocated to children on the child protection register, we query why this is not extended to looked after children who present with similar, if not greater, complexity of need and vulnerability.
- 6.42. We have inspected the council's own four children's homes this year and generally found them to offer a good service to children. The council has sought to maintain other children locally and commissioned a residential

unit from an independent provider. The council has a priority to place more of its looked after children with its own foster carers and to plan for permanency where appropriate. Rhondda Cynon Taf operates a relatively large fostering service and uses an external provider to recruit and assess foster carers. We are informed that although year one targets for recruitment were not achieved, the council is confident the target set for the end of two years will be met. Use of the independent provider has allowed greater resource to respond to requests for special guardianship orders (SGOs) and the council has embedded a separate strand for SGOs in its fostering service.

- 6.43. Local authority fostering services are not registered with CSSIW as are independent fostering agencies. However, we conduct yearly inspections and found not all foster carers had received their annual review. This is important to ensure quality of care and presents an opportunity for young people to express their view of their carers. In addition, visits to foster carers and kinship carers were infrequent in some instances. We advised the service director that this was in breach of the fostering regulations. We are informed staffing levels are now at their full complement and the authority is providing evidence that reviews are up to date.

Areas of progress

- Development of the MASH.
- Timeliness of initial and core assessments.
- Assessments of young carers.
- Development of a regional adoption service.
- Development of a joint YOS.
- Creation of post to oversee prevention and early intervention.
- Reduction in the number of looked after children.
- Improvements in reviews and visits to in house foster carers.

Areas for improvement

- Further improvements in timeliness of initial assessments.
- Increased impact of prevention and early intervention to safely reduce need for greater levels of intervention.

- Timely PEPs and reduction in school moves for looked after children.
- Review of use of unqualified workers for looked after children.

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 new director took up the role in September 2014, following a period of interim director cover. In addition, a new leader of the council, cabinet member for children's services and other significant council members came into their roles in 2014-15. Further changes in senior staff are anticipated in 2015-16. This, plus the impending implementation of the SSWBW Act, combine to present Rhondda Cynon Taf with a real opportunity for increased modernisation of services. The director embraces this opportunity although remains aware of the need to constructively engage council members, staff and the public in the process and consider the pace of change most likely to be readily accepted.
- 7.2. The Cwm Taf social services and wellbeing partnership board, in conjunction with an executive group, has been formed to ensure the effective implementation of the requirements of the SSWBW Act, informed by a self assessment exercise. This established 17 workstreams in which representatives of the council will participate or lead to ensure transformation in each specific area. The director is mindful of the financial constraints on the authority and is clear this will influence the pace of change toward alignment of services to the SSWBW Act. Considerable financial savings are to be made in 2015-16 and a substantial voluntary redundancy scheme will impact on the numbers and distribution of experienced staff.
- 7.3. There will be a further re shaping of senior management in 2015-16 with a streamlined structure that should offer a greater line of sight on performance management. The director is clear modernisation of services and improved delivery will be achieved by smarter deployment of staff and greater monitoring of outcomes achieved.
- 7.4. Improvements are noted in the operation of scrutiny in the last year and the structure has altered to offer a dedicated children and young people's scrutiny committee, alongside health and social services (adults). We intend to meet with the scrutiny chairs during 2015-16 to ensure they are fully informed of the work of the inspectorate.

- 7.5. We are aware of recruitment to children's services for social workers and senior practitioners at the beginning of 2014-15. We would recommend the workforce group continues to monitor and consider distribution of qualified staff, as discussed above.

Areas of progress

- Increased consideration of modernisation of services in line with new legislation.
- Plans for greater use of quality assurance and performance management systems by senior management.

Areas for improvement

- Ongoing review of workforce planning.