



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

# Performance Evaluation Report 2014–15

Torfaen County Borough Council  
Social Services

October 2015

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

# **Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014 - 2015**

**Local Authority: Torfaen County Borough Council**

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

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. The council has continued to work towards a change agenda and the development of new models of service delivery, in line with the expectations of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWB Act). This has been within the context of significant financial challenge as well as increasing demand. There is a clear understanding of the challenges ahead which include the target of saving £45 million across the whole council in the next three years. There is also the challenge of managing increasing demand whilst ensuring existing services are provided in a way that ensures better outcomes for people. The eligibility threshold was raised to critical or substantial so that resources are directed to only the most vulnerable and in need. The council is beginning to refocus ways of working to identify and support strengths rather than focusing solely on deficits, building individual resilience and that of the local community.
- 1.2. In adult services, performance has deteriorated in relation to delayed transfers of care and reviews of care plans. While fewer people were eligible for council services, those that did receive support had more complex needs which increased demand and pressure on resources because of the increased numbers of reviews undertaken due to changing need. The need to build community resilience and resources that can support people earlier is recognised and while this work is being taken forward, the pace of change needs to increase.
- 1.3. The council has plans to test out an outcomes framework with service users to measure the impact that a care package has on improving their quality of life. The challenge for the council will be how to ensure that these positive service developments grow and prosper in the future, given the financial climate it faces.
- 1.4. In children's services, performance in relation to initial assessments and statutory visits for looked after children are weaker than other comparable local authorities and the Wales average. In contrast to this, there has been improved performance in initial child protection conferences and looked after children (LAC) reviews. High numbers of

children who are looked after and on the child protection register has placed significant pressures on resources, resulting in an overspend in children's services at year end. This highlights the importance of a successful prevention and early intervention strategy that ensures early support for children and families, thereby reducing demand for more intensive services. The strategy has been developed during 2014-15 with governance arrangements in place to take this forward.

- 1.5. The council collaborates well with partners to deliver better outcomes in the most efficient and effective ways. In adult services, partnership arrangements are well established with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) delivering frailty services. Work with the third sector is also developing further via the Torfaen Voluntary Alliance, although this will need to progress further and be strengthened in order to meet the requirements of the SSWB Act. The South East Wales Adoption Service is an example of collaborative working with neighbouring local authorities in Gwent. However, although work is progressing, sometimes this needs to develop at a faster pace with renewed energy and clear objectives. The learning disabilities and mental health integration work is an example of this.

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

Identified improvement last year	Progress in 2014-15
Make more progress on the proposed integrated mental health service	Work is ongoing to take this agenda forward but the programme is being implemented on a staged basis in agreement with partners across Gwent. The authority has agreed the broad scope for a system pilot to include inpatient admission and discharge and interface with mental health teams and third sector.
Consider why the levels of looked after children remains high	The numbers of looked after children continues to remain high, at 291 but numbers are reducing slowly.
Review and make a decision about the future of Family Focus	An independent review was undertaken in October last year with a number of action points which have been addressed. The service has been successful in securing recurrent funding from April 2015.
Improve connectivity of Flying Start with the preventative agenda	An early intervention strategy was launched in March 2015 and the importance of Flying Start has been recognised, although it is too early to

	comment on impact.
Review the level of referrals in children's services that did not proceed to initial assessment	Work is ongoing and performance has improved from 28% to 23% in 2014-15. It is expected that the number of enquiries received will not result in initial assessments being undertaken as they will not meet thresholds and will be signposted to other agencies.
Review the level of support and information to carers and consider the impact of reduction in service	Carers are not as well supported as they have been previously. Increase in eligibility criteria means that fewer carers are eligible for an assessment.
Progress work in relation to strategic commissioning in children's services based on identification of unmet need	The council has developed a commissioning strategy and a market position statement.
Ensure appropriate information, advice and support is available for carers in the light of changes to eligibility criteria	Public information leaflets have been replaced with more cost effective downloads off the internet. Information is also available via phone or email.
Improve performance around Disabled Facilities Grants	The council has made significant progress in this area and has improved from 269 days to provide equipment in 2013-14, to 166 days this year.
Ensure the accuracy of management information in relation to children's safeguarding matters	Performance at year end in relation to initial child protection conferences has increased from 49% in 2013/14 to 83% this year. However, Torfaen still remains one of the poorest performers in Wales although there has been a significant improvement due to improved systems and business process changes.
Take action to ensure the uptake of direct payments moves at a faster pace	Nine fewer people received direct payments in 2014-2015 than the previous year.
The council should closely monitor the financial pressures it faces and the affect on its ambition to drive forward the integration of health and social care services.	This is an ongoing challenge to the authority and has impacted on the council moving forward at the pace necessary for real change. Savings have needed to be made resulting in the planned loss of a head of service post amongst others.

### **3. Visits and inspections undertaken during the year**

- 3.1. Site visits provide CSSIW with an opportunity to speak with people who receive services, their families and staff who manage and work in the services. During 2014/15, CSSIW undertook the following site visits, observations and engagement opportunities:
- Family Focus Team
  - Ty Nant Ddu
  - Scope, Disabled Cycling Group Cwmbran
  - The Wednesday Warriors Club
  - Alzheimer's Group
  - Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 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. During the year, we undertook inspections of regulated services run by the council and by independent operators. This included a review of the in house Fostering Service. Details on these are contained in published reports and available on CSSIW's website.

### **4. Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year**

- 4.1. A number of specific areas for improvement have been identified in the body of this report. The council's progress in relation to these will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year. Specific areas for follow up will include:
- Thresholds and response to safeguarding in children's services
  - Implementation of the early intervention strategy
  - Visit to carers support group
  - Progress on integrated mental health services
  - Progress in domiciliary care around dynamic purchasing.

## **5. CSSIW's inspection and review plan for 2015 -16**

- National review of domiciliary care
- National review of services for people with learning disabilities
- National review of care planning for looked after children.

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

### **Adults**

#### **Overview**

- 6.1 In April 2014 the council introduced a higher threshold for eligibility in order to manage demand. This change brought the thresholds in Torfaen in line with the majority of local authorities in Wales and means only those with an assessed critical or substantial level of need will receive services. A 'fair access to care' review team was established to engage with people currently receiving services to review their needs and ensure they remained eligible for council support. This also included a focus on reablement and promoting independence, and a move away from a deficit model to a strengths based approach. This process has enabled the council to 'right size' a number of packages of care leading to savings and more focussed support to those with complex needs. The fair access to care team continues to deliver a number of learning events to all teams within the department to ensure resources are appropriately targeted. Although the team has been re-structured into operational teams, the learning and good practice is being operationalised in all adult teams. CSSIW will continue to monitor this work via our engagement meetings over the year.
- 6.2 The Chief Officer reports that the focus on this work impacted on performance in the review of care plans which has reduced from 87% to 82% in 2014-15, although this remains above the Welsh average. The timely review of care plans is important to ensure people are receiving the right level of support and can also contribute to preventing the need for further services.
- 6.3 Despite a change in the eligibility criteria, the council has continued to experience increasing contact from people requesting information, advice or support. The older adult's duty pod has been expanded to become a 'one stop shop' for most adult services. This team screen and prioritise contacts. As the team includes social workers and

occupational therapists, people who contact social services are offered the professional advice they need immediately or alternatively are signposted to a third sector or universal community support. This should assist the department to respond in a timelier manner.

- 6.4 The head of adult services reports that while the change in eligibility threshold has resulted in fewer new referrals, there has been an increase in the level and complexity of need of those people receiving care and support. This places additional demand and pressure on resources. In 2014-15, significantly more people experienced a delay in the transfer of their care (DTC) from hospital due, in part, to capacity issues in the market. The DTC rate rose from 3.59 to 7.12 per 1,000 population in 2014-15 and is now the fourth highest in Wales. The council took action to alleviate pressure and has reconfigured nine general nursing beds from an existing block contract into elderly mentally infirm (EMI) beds.
- 6.5. The council has continued to transform services for people with a learning disability with a focus on promoting independence. This has included nine flats at Cae Nant, an award winning development to enable people with a learning disability to live independently. There are also day opportunities supporting people with learning disabilities to have community day activities. CSSIW visited Ty Nant Ddu where a number of options are offered to both older people and people with a learning disability. The primary focus of the visit was to consider the opportunities for people using day services with an emphasis on people with a learning disability. We met with the service manager and those responsible for day to day management of the different aspects of the services, as well as a number of people who use the service.
- 6.6. The Wednesday Warriors Club had been identified in last year's Annual Council Review report as an example of a forward thinking project designed in consultation and partnership with male service users and their families. The programme is clearly centred on individuals with very different needs and is very much outcome focussed. The council support a number of young men who present with autism and Asperger's syndrome and this service fits this brief well. It promotes a culture which encourages both creativity and innovation and positive risk taking. People who use the service spoke very positively about how it affords them the opportunity to make choices in their lives that best suits them. The group had produced a film with support and input from innovative staff from different parts of the council who understand the diversity of people's needs.
- 6.7. CSSIW visited and observed a small number of adults who were part of a disabled cycling group. Whilst there was evidence that service users



were enjoying taking part this did not appear to be a regular activity at the centre. We noted that the centre has struggled to recruit and retain managers in the past and spoke with the newly appointed manager about the vision for the future. At the time of the visit there appeared to be little structure or sense of direction that reflected the wider Torfaen agenda to create independence and maximise potential, although it is still early days. As this is a newly commissioned service, mentoring support is ongoing. The council will want to monitor outcomes closely to ensure value for money.

- 6.8. Torfaen is a member of the regional 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.
- 6.9. There has been an increase in adult protection referrals where risk has been managed from 73% to 83%. The head of adult services reports that this has been reviewed and she is confident that in those cases where risk is recorded as 'not managed', this is because people have the capacity to make decisions not to proceed. While CSSIW has been advised that the Gwent-wide board has 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 greater consistency.
- 6.10. The council commissions a range of care services from independent providers for younger and older adults. These include domiciliary and residential care. CSSIW's inspections of these services found that while some areas for improvement were identified, people were receiving good quality care and service users' feedback was positive. The council has fully implemented a dynamic purchasing model of domiciliary care provision which is due to be implemented later this year. We will be interested in monitoring progress and the impact of this transformation on people receiving care and support.
- 6.11. Funding was made available to pilot the Butterfly project in one care home in the borough which received an award for its work around dementia. This is an innovative approach to improving the experiences of people living with a dementia using a variety of methods.

## **Key National Priorities (adults)**

### **Preventative and early intervention services**

- 6.12. The council articulates a commitment to preventative and early intervention services which is aligned to the principles of the SSWB Act. It is also essential in order to ensure people are supported to remain independent for as long as possible thereby delaying the need for more expensive statutory services. Performance indicators show that the numbers of people per 1,000 population supported in care homes has decreased over the last three years to 21 in 2014-15. This represents good progress, although this is above the Wales average of 19. The number of people over 65 supported in the community has decreased dramatically from 131 per 1,000 population to 62 in 2014-15. The council reports that this is due, in the main, to a data cleaning exercise which excluded people who should not have been included in the count as opposed to a reduction due to the change in the eligibility threshold. Therefore it is difficult to draw conclusions about the impact of the change in the eligibility criteria and the impact of prevention and early intervention services.
- 6.13. It is clear that success in managing demand will be dependent on the availability of community resources drawing on social enterprise, partners, voluntary sector and communities themselves to support people early and prevent the need for more intensive services. The council has been working with the Torfaen Voluntary Alliance (TVA) and some progress has been made, for example, the location of 'community connectors' within the TVA. This team seeks to support vulnerable people to connect with local networks and support mechanisms. However, there is a significant risk that the pace of development in community resources and resilience will not be sufficient to meet or replace the demand that has traditionally been met by social services.
- 6.14. The Gwent Frailty project is an important element in the prevention of hospital admission and early discharge. In addition to this an integrated health and social care team has been established to support people who need short term interventions, to regain or maintain independence and to facilitate discharge from hospital. The council's own domiciliary care intake team also works with people who require reablement services; the head of adult services reports that 67% of people who received support from this team no longer required a service or required reduced intervention as a result. The adult duty pod is providing people with early information, advice and signposting to support in the community.

- 6.15. A large extra care facility has been developed in Cwmbran, providing 41 individual tenancies for people over 55 years old. The council has also commissioned the Alzheimer's Society to deliver a day service providing respite services six days a week, for 12 people a day in Ty Nant Ddu.
- 6.16. Ensuring people receive the adaptation they need to remain safe and independent in a timely manner is an important aspect of preventing increased need for social and health care. The council has made significant progress in reducing delays in delivering disabled facility grants (DFG) which has improved from 269 days to 166 this year. This improvement is attributed to a number of key factors but the duty pod is playing a role as interventions by the occupational therapists within that team have freed up the time of community occupational therapists to respond to DFG referrals quicker.
- 6.17. Support and information for carers was the subject of a recommendation in CSSIW's 2013-14 performance evaluation. During 2014-15, pressures on the budget resulted in the carer's team within adult services being disbanded, with staff reallocated to other social care teams. In addition, the revised eligibility threshold has impacted significantly on the numbers of carers who are eligible for council support. The number of people identified as a carer, who is eligible for support, has reduced from 447 in 2013-14 to 152 in 2014-15. As a result of the reduction in the number of eligible carers, the number of carers who had an assessment reduced from 225 in 2013-14 to 65 in 2014-15. The council reports that these numbers may not be accurate due to recording issues. Carers represent the unseen workforce in social care and are essential to assisting the council to achieve its ambition to support citizens to remain independent. The council should assure itself that the strategy for information, advice and support for carers is in line with its objective to maximise people's independence, in order to meet the requirements set out in the SSWB Act.
- 6.18. Direct payments provide people with more flexibility over how their care and support is arranged and provided and gives them increased choice, control and independence. As a direct result of the changes the council made to eligibility criteria in 2014, there has been a significant reduction in eligible service users, with the corresponding reduction in direct payment users in Torfaen, with nine fewer people taking up this option in 2014-15. However, the council attribute this to a number of people no longer receiving care management support, including via direct payments and say that there are new people taking up this option. The head of adult services reports that the administration and bureaucracy for service users, of implementing the process of direct payments requires significant capacity and resource which many people find a

challenge to sustain. The council commissions a support agency to support direct payment users and is developing on-line resources to support personal assistants. However, a reduction in the use of direct payments is not in keeping with the policy direction nationally which is about promoting independence and choice for those who want to take charge of their own affairs.

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

- 6.19. The Gwent Frailty project continues to provide integrated health and social care services to frail people focusing on providing short-term interventions and supporting frail people to remain independent. This was reviewed independently by Cordis Bright in 2014 which reported that 'people are receiving a very good service, which is timely, responsive and helps them to achieve their aspirations for remaining independent'. The review highlighted the need to clarify the leadership of the programme, ensure a clearer delineation between strategic and operational decision-making, and put in place a multi-dimensional performance management system. A programme director has been appointed to take forward the actions from the review.
- 6.20. The council has recruited a complex care practitioner to ensure the right person provides the right level of care at the right time, and that services are appropriately coordinated as well as disseminate good practice. This post has been successful and has been extended for a further six months. This has brought greater clarity about health and social services responsibilities.
- 6.21. The Mental Health and Learning Disability Partnership Board was established to oversee and direct the development of mental health, learning disabilities and specialist services across Gwent. Strategies were developed for adults with learning disabilities and mental health services in consultation with service users, their families and staff. They set out a future direction for services focused on integrated person centred services that promote independence and inclusion. Progress towards implementation of these strategies has been slow and requires renewed energy in order to re-calibrate services in an appropriate and systematic way. However, following initial piloting in Caerphilly, Torfaen has agreed the broad scope for a further pilot in the borough. This will focus around inpatient admission and discharge and the interface with community mental health teams and third sector providers. There is a commitment to pilot a vanguard approach to learning disabilities. Implementation will need to continue at a pace to ensure that outcomes for service users are impacting positively.

## **Areas of progress**

- Improvement in timeliness of provision of Disabled Facilities Grants
- Extra Care facilities in Cwmbran
- Provision of additional EMI beds in response to identified need
- New post of Complex Care practitioner
- New accommodation for people with a learning disability.

## **Areas for improvement**

- The rate of delayed transfers of care
- Progress work to integrate mental health and learning disabilities services
- Support to voluntary sector in building community resources
- Ensure carers have sufficient access to information, advice and support
- Increasing choice and control through the use of direct payments

## **Children and young people**

### **Overview**

6.22. The council's performance across children's services has been mixed. Fewer initial assessments were carried out within statutory timescales of seven days, reducing from 70% to 67%. This is the context of reduced numbers of referrals that proceeded for initial assessment. The completion of core assessments has remained stable at 78% despite an increase in the number of assessment required, from 169 in 2013-14 to 236 in 2014-15. The number of referrals in children's services has declined with decisions being made within one day in 99% of cases. 23% of referrals do not proceed to initial assessment and the percentage of re-referrals in a year has remained static at 27% compared to the Wales average of 21%. The council will need to understand what lies behind these figures to assure itself that thresholds and access criteria are at an appropriate level within the authority.

- 6.23. Regional safeguarding arrangements are well established with the South East Wales Safeguarding Children's Board. This includes an accessible website and opportunities for learning shared regionally. In Torfaen, performance figures for the timeliness of initial child protection conferences have improved significantly from 49% in 2013-14 to 83% in 2014-15. There has also been improvement in the percentage of child protection reviews carried out within statutory timescales from 94% to 97%. The numbers of children on the child protection register reduced considerably from 135 in 2013-14 to 100 in 2014-15. It is difficult to say with certainty the reason for this, although managers suggest it may be in part due to change of style in conference chairing resulting in more positive risk taking.
- 6.24. During 2014/15 a review was undertaken by the Wales Audit Office to look at arrangements to support safeguarding within the council, which found that the council needs to strengthen its governance arrangements. Whilst there is an executive member for safeguarding identified, there is a lack of effective mechanisms in place to ensure he is appropriately briefed about issues of concern. This has been addressed by the council through the work of the Improvement Board which has placed safeguarding high on the corporate agenda. The report goes on to state that social services assures that policies and procedures are being followed through supervision and regular audits that take place within the division.
- 6.25. This year, three child practice reviews were undertaken. One in particular received national press coverage. The review highlighted some areas of weakness within social services. These were addressed as a priority within the council and processes and practice were improved as a matter of urgency.

### **Key national priorities**

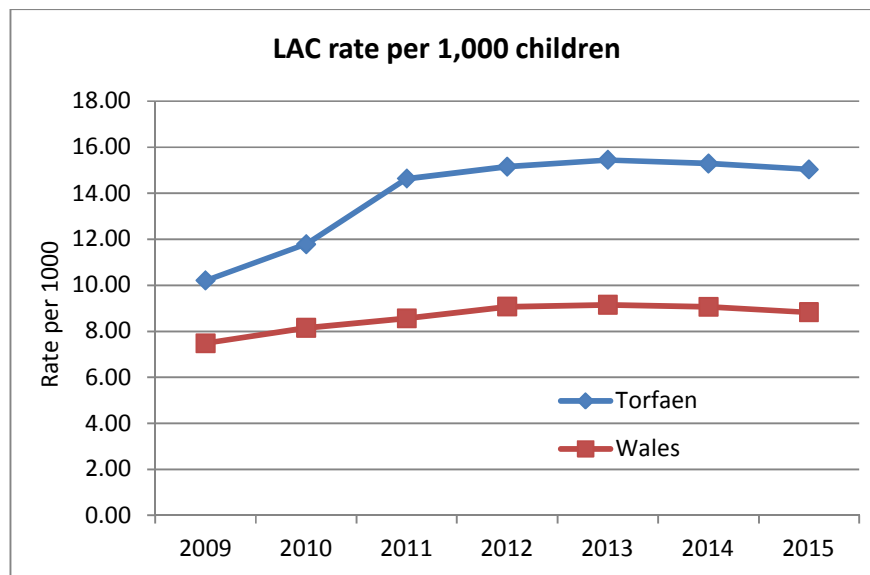
#### **Preventative and early intervention services**

- 6.26. In March 2015, the Early Intervention Strategy was launched. It sets out an ambitious change programme for all services for children to ensure vulnerable families are identified early and supported. The ethos of prevention and early intervention is being supported from a multi-agency perspective and partners are recognising their fit in the bigger picture. If implemented effectively, the strategy could have a real impact for children and families and help manage demand for statutory services. It has been a lengthy challenge to get this strategy taken forward, but the council is confident that through the leadership of the local service board, alongside the implementation of the Families First Panel and Flying Start, this will have greater impact in the future. It will

be important that the programme board maintains the momentum through the development of more detailed delivery plans and the pace of development continues. CSSIW will wish to monitor progress on this throughout the year.

- 6.27. The Family Focus Team represents an important element of Torfaen's early intervention provision. CSSIW undertook a site visit to the Family Focus Service during 2014-15 and spent time meeting with managers, staff team and two families. An independent evaluation of the service identified a significant number of areas for development and review. In response the council had drawn up an action plan to address the issues identified. The majority of actions identified had been carried out and managers felt that the service was moving in a positive direction. Lines of responsibility and accountability for case management had been reviewed following the independent review, and as a result there was a clear structure in place which families we met confirmed.
- 6.28. Parents spoke positively about the support they had received from the Family Focus Service and how the methods and the approach used had helped them to take responsibility and gain the confidence to make changes in their lives. Staff CSSIW spoke with had received training specific to this model of working with families and they felt well supported by managers. They were enthusiastic and motivated. Future long term funding for the service was secured in late 2014 to align with the authority's preventative agenda.
- 6.29 The local authority has developed some links with the Integrated Family Support Service but these tended to be informal. CSSIW discussed this with the manager who felt there was room to develop this but due to a lack of referrals to this part of the service, there is uncertainty about a hub office remaining in Pontypool in the longer term. It is not clear how this will be addressed, although the authority will need to make a firm decision on its future.

## Looked after children (LAC)



## Numbers of LAC as at 31 March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Torfaen	205	235	290	297	300	296	291

6.30. The above chart illustrates the seven year trend in the numbers of looked after children per 1,000 population across Wales and in Torfaen. It shows that rates of LAC in Torfaen are considerably higher than the Wales average and are the second highest in Wales. The numbers of LAC at year end 2015 was 291; of those, 50 were kinship carers and 42 were placed with parents under regulations. There are a further four children placed with parents under an interim care order. Therefore, although Torfaen has a high population of LAC, 96 of these are placed within their own family and are being supported by the local authority. High numbers of LAC place additional pressures on the council's resources in terms of high cost placements and case management.

6.31. The council's performance in relation to its support for LAC is mixed with 92% of first placements of LAC having a care plan in place and 100% having a plan for permanence in place by the second review. However, statutory visits undertaken have fallen from 92% in 2013-14 to 73% in 2014-15. Statutory visits are an important responsibility for a local authority to ensure the child's placement remains suitable, to check the welfare of the child, to provide support and to assist with planning for the future. A number of business cases have been made for corporate funding to strengthen performance, including programmes



around meaningful relationships, revoking care orders and psychological support. This is an area that requires renewed attention so that the council can be assured that it is fully meeting its statutory obligations for this group.

- 6.32. The council report the percentage of LAC experiencing three or more placement moves reduced from 14% to 8% in 2014-15, which suggests that placement stability has improved. The council's Multi-disciplinary Intervention Service Torfaen (MIST) service is delivering intensive support to a small number of LAC with complex needs to maintain them within their placements in Torfaen.
- 6.33. Adoption services are accessed via the South East Wales Adoption Service hosted by Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. This had been extended to encompass the five Gwent authorities with the addition of Newport and Caerphilly adoption services within the region.
- 6.34. The council's fostering services was inspected earlier this year. Overall it was found to be good. There has been an increase in the number of kinship carers to meet the needs of the looked after children profile referred to earlier in this report. Most foster carers felt that support and training was tailored to individual need and in addition to core training provided, some foster carers were able to access bespoke training which would enable them to positively support the child in their care. A small number felt unsupported which was discussed with the team manager at the time who agreed to address this issue.
- 6.35. The educational outcomes for children and young people who are looked after present a mixed picture. Whilst there has been an improvement at Key Stage Two in achieving core subjects this has not been replicated at Key Stage Three where performance this year has been poorer. More children had Personal Educational Plans in place this year although performance over the past four years has deteriorated overall. All looked after children who are leaving care in Torfaen have pathway plans and each child, where appropriate, has been allocated a personal advisor.

### **Areas of progress**

- Improvement in the timeliness of children protection initial conferences and reviews
- The work and future financial security of the Family Focus Team
- Launch of the early intervention strategy

- Response to lessons learnt following child protection reviews.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Completion of statutory visits in accordance with regulations
- Review the level of referrals in children's services that did not proceed to initial assessment
- The future of the Intregrated Family Support Service.

## **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 strong leadership and governance arrangements in place and a stable leadership team in social services. The chief officer who is responsible for social care and housing reports directly to the Chief Executive Officer. At the time of writing this report, the senior management of social services has been rationalised with the head of children's service leaving the authority as part of the budget challenges. These responsibilities will in future be incorporated into the role of the deputy chief officer post. The deletion of this post will mean change within the senior management team, where there will need to be further prioritisation within children's services.
- 7.2. There has been solid corporate support for social services with relative levels of protection from saving targets in the past. However, the department will still need to find significant savings in 2015-16 which will be a challenge. Savings to be made this year is protected, but there are expectations that there will be savings of more than £2.5m across housing and social care budget which is £41.7m (for 2014/15). There is an expectation that in addition to the £1.8m service area pressures identified, there will be a further reduction of between 2% and 10% needed across the board (which will include backroom functions) with the exception of education which is still under special measures.
- 7.3. Whilst there is strong financial management of budgets, social services ended 2014-15 with an overall overspend of £298,000 which was offset by a service specific reserve. This year there was a £500,000 underspend in adult services due to the implementation of budget mitigations, and some loss of posts, mostly involving people who wished to retire or take early redundancy. Within this there was an opportunity to create a small number of posts, including a post to support reablement and a complex care post.

- 7.4. The council has a stable workforce across both departments. Staff spoke positively about the open culture and style and the fact that they were well supported through supervision on a regular basis, as well as day to day responses from managers. Despite the impact that the budget has already had and will continue to have on resources, the council has still managed to be creative with some newly designed roles, although it is acknowledged that some skills have been lost. In December all staff moved from temporary accommodation in Police HQ to other offices mainly in Pontypool. This has been seen as a positive way forward.
- 7.5. Where possible Torfaen continues to develop collaborative arrangements and optimise opportunities with other organisations and neighbouring local authorities. As an example, the council has worked closely with Newport, sharing resources which brings benefits to both partners. The council works well with partners in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) where relationships are mature at both operational and strategic levels. This has helped to deliver better outcomes in the most efficient and effective ways and will be important alliances in the future.
- 7.6. The council has effective corporate parenting arrangements in place and these continue to be developed. Elected members have a good understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. The lead member sits on the fostering panel. The Corporate Parenting panel is frequently briefed by officers around key issues particularly where individual cases will attract media attention. The learning opportunity with Wales Audit Office around scrutiny challenge and raising awareness has enabled members to consider and reflect on their own practice.
- 7.7. Further steps have been taken by the council to improve performance management and quality assurance during the year. A data cleansing programme and review of the functionality of the authority's care management system was taken forward and the impact of that has been referenced elsewhere in this report e.g. sharp decline in numbers of people over 65 supported in the community and decreases in the number of carers. Data recording issues and anomalies in the reporting of performance indicator data have been ongoing for some time. Accurate recording of data will become even more of a priority, and have a greater reliance placed upon it in order to appropriately target resources in a continued challenging financial environment.

### **Areas of progress**

- Ongoing work with health and social care strategic partnerships and relationships with ABUHB

- Stable workforce across both departments and skills and experience of staff.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Ongoing demand on budgets particularly in children's services to ensure children are safeguarded
- Impact on those who require lower level support due to budget cuts
- Responsibility for social services and wellbeing needs to be viewed as a whole council priority and corporate responsibility
- Management information and recording and accuracy of data.