



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

Performance Evaluation Report 2014–15

Wrexham County Borough Council
Social Services

October 2015

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

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014 - 2015

Local Authority: Wrexham County Borough Council

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

1. Summary

- 1.1. During the course of 2014-15, Wrexham County Borough Council has continued to reshape its services in response to both financial pressures and the Social Services Well Being (Wales) Act (SSWB Act), which continues to drive change and provide the strategic direction for services. The social services department has continued to develop its services with a firm commitment to prevention and early intervention, with the aim of supporting independence and social inclusion and reducing dependence on services.
- 1.2. 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 wellbeing of vulnerable older people is also a key priority 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. Strategic plans in some service areas such as mental health and carers services need to be completed or updated and supported by implementation action plans.
- 1.3. Progress has been achieved in relation to most improvement areas identified last year. In some cases this continues to be work in progress and further improvement is needed. The council has introduced major organisational service changes in the access arrangements to adult services during the year, in preparation for the introduction of a Single Point of Access (SPoA) consistent with the integration agenda, and also to improve practice in relation to adult safeguarding referrals.
- 1.4. In children's services good performance has been sustained in many areas measured by performance indicators, and in some areas of weaker performance improvements have been made. The timeliness of assessments, though showing improvement during recent years, remains an area for improvement in comparison to other Welsh counties

and the rise in the re-referral rate this year is a disappointing development. Other factors such as the steep rise in the number of children on the Child Protection Register, the considerable fall in the numbers of children looked after, and the interface between statutory services and preventative services are areas the council monitors and is giving careful consideration to.

- 1.5. The council has worked hard to increase engagement with the public and service users. The engagement has been led by the 'Reshaping' consultations but there are also examples of the council using a variety of measures to gain feedback and input from service users and families. The council recognises that this is a progressive agenda and improvement needs to continue.

2. Response to last year's areas for improvement

Identified improvement last year	Progress in 2014-15
Completion of overarching strategic plans in children's services	Children and young people's commissioning strategy was finalised in September 2014.
Strategic planning and implementation of service models in mental health services	Met in part - further development and implementation of the strategy is required.
Further improvement of engagement activity in service planning	Engagement activity has increased with ongoing development.
Response to known carers of adults recorded as known to the service	Actions have been taken to increase the council's knowledge of carers and the services needed to meet their needs. This work is ongoing.
Timeliness of initial and core assessments	Some Improvement has been achieved with further improvement needed.
Performance in terms of review of care plans in receipt of social care services	Some Improvement has been achieved with further improvement planned.
Placement stability for children who are looked after	Improvement has been achieved.
Care plans in place at the start of placement when a child becomes looked after	Improvement has been achieved.
Quality of domiciliary care services commissioned in terms of continuity of carer	Not able to comment as there has been a re-commissioning of domiciliary care services following a tendering exercise. This has resulted in some change of providers.
Timeliness and quality of Protection of Vulnerable Adults (PoVA) strategy meetings.	Some improvement has been reported with actions taken to achieve further improvement.

Establishing common understanding of PoVA thresholds with statutory partners	Threshold document has been produced but arrangements to ensure understanding of this with partners still needed.
Outcomes for care leavers	Some improvement noted.
More timely implementation of performance measures to evaluate new service developments	This is a developing picture . Performance reporting for new and existing services has increased.
Greater standardisation in performance management arrangements	Performance management arrangements are continuing to develop with some standardisation of arrangements between adults and children's services being introduced.

3. Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

- 3.1. During the year site visits were undertaken to:
- Adult social care initial response team
 - Adult social care performance workshop
 - Children's prevention and social care performance workshop
 - Day and work opportunity businesses
 - Older people Shared lives and Community Agents projects
 - Supported Living projects
 - Wrexham Family Centre
 - Leaving care team.
- 3.2. CSSIW also met with operational managers and senior officers of the council throughout the year to review social services performance, and discuss progress with the areas for improvement identified in last year's performance evaluation. The council was helpful in its engagement with CSSIW and readily facilitated access to enable site visits to take place.
- 3.3. During the year, CSSIW carried out a national thematic review of the safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour, and also undertook inspections of regulated services run by the council and by independent operators. This included reviews of the in-house fostering service.

Details on these are contained in published reports and available on CSSIW's website.

4. Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

- Development of mental health strategy and service development plans.
- Performance in respect of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (PoVA)
- Review of services to carers.
- Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and Single Point of Access (SPoA) initiatives.

5. CSSIW 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. The council has continued to develop its information and advice services together with its initial response team, with the objective of ensuring that people receive a timely and effective response in line with the SSWB Act. Whilst positive feedback has been received from the council's survey of carers concerning the provision of information, only 33.6% of respondents to its Quality of Life survey conducted during the year indicated that they found it easy to access information and advice. This indicates the need for further development and evaluation of the provision of information and advice.
- 6.2. The council has reorganised the front line response services during the year to create an initial response team to respond to all new referrals to adult services. This development is consistent with the overall regional strategic plan to develop a Single Point of Access (SPoA) with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB). Staffing and management positions in the team have been increased during the year, including additional approved mental health professionals to improve the initial

response to mental health referrals. The phased introduction of the SPoA has developed alongside the Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) initiative. Implementation plans have responded to learning gained from each of these developments.

- 6.3. This reorganisation of functions has also included the establishment of a Safeguarding People Team which now sits within the Prevention and Social Care department, under the operational management of the head of service for safeguarding who also has lead responsibility for the MASH. Initiatives taken include expansion and development of the designated lead manager role and improved performance monitoring in adult safeguarding. Operational guidance and a threshold document have been introduced to support staff in decision making. The threshold document has not yet been used extensively to encourage understanding of the council's thresholds with statutory partners, but the council states its intention to do so. This will need to be reviewed in the context of new safeguarding regulations under the SSWB Act.
- 6.4. There has been some improvement in the timeliness of initial strategy meetings held. The council acknowledges that further improvement is also needed to the recording of strategy discussions, the quality of investigations, the chairing of safeguarding meetings and recording; further training is being provided. The council has identified the need for more case conferences to be held than the seven held last year, and has begun to involve the independent safeguarding reviewing officers from children's services in this role. Advocacy is reported by the council to be regularly used in the safeguarding process and that this will be monitored by the safeguarding people team during 2015/16. The need for the experiences of service users and carers in the safeguarding process to be obtained has been recognised as part of the improvements required.
- 6.5. The council has increased staffing in response to the increased application for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards authorisations, but has not yet been able to eliminate its waiting list. It has also taken action in relation to cases where individuals have been deprived of their liberty unlawfully, and there has also been an allied increase in court of protection cases. This remains an area where demand exerts pressure on resources.
- 6.6. The Quality of Life annual survey, which provides the council with overall satisfaction ratings against a number of aspects of adult social care and specific housing support services, reports that overall satisfaction levels remain high. 92.5% of respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the support they receive, 87.8% felt the waiting time they experienced for any assessment of their needs was acceptable and 89.3% felt that the waiting time they experienced for the provision of any service or

equipment (following assessment) was acceptable. Lower levels of satisfaction were expressed in response to specific questions regarding independence, social activity, community contact, health and wellbeing and accommodation needs.

- 6.7. The council has achieved an increase in the percentage of care plans reviewed within the required 12 months during the year, from 61.8% to 71.6%, due to the employment of additional resource. There continues to be variation in the timeliness and quality of reviews undertaken. The council has stated its intention to give further consideration to how reviews are undertaken during 2015/16.
- 6.8. The council has continued to experience difficulties in developing an implementation plan with health to support the regional mental health strategy. A local strategy has been produced in draft and shared with partners, but this has not yet been widely consulted upon and is not yet supported by a local detailed service development implementation plan. The council reports improved Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP) availability. There has been some extension to the community support services this year provided through the introduction of a recovery café supported by volunteers.
- 6.9. The uptake of direct payments has increased this year partly as a result of the retendering of domiciliary care service contracts. This has led to an increase of 83 older people deciding to opt for direct payments as a means of meeting their care needs. The council also reports an increase in the number of people with a physical, neurological or sensory impairment who received a direct payment, but notes that this may be due partly to a data cleansing operation undertaken when introducing a new data system.
- 6.10. Within learning disability services, a review of all work opportunity businesses commenced during 2014/15 and is ongoing with a view to developing more social enterprises. Consultation is taking place with service users and carers. When coupled with the development of more community based activities and enablement services, this initiative has the potential to promote independence and social inclusion in the future. The council will need to consider how to ensure that individuals continue to be provided with choice in the short to medium term. There are currently no placements or apprenticeships within the council.
- 6.11. The council is committed to improving the experience of transition from children's to adult services and a joint disability service is being developed. During the year, children's and adult services have worked more closely together, for example in the provision of a supported living scheme for two young people moving from children's to adult services

and has been successful in enabling some individuals to reduce the amount of paid services they previously received. A housing stock review has been undertaken with registered social landlords and a learning disability specific council waiting list is kept for supported living accommodation and other housing opportunities. Seven people previously living outside Wrexham have been enabled to return to the county and two more supported living schemes have been developed this year. The council recognises that there is potential for more schemes to be developed if land and development partners can be identified. Work to produce a draft housing strategy has now commenced.

- 6.12. A working group to take forward the recommendations of the Wrexham Older Person's Housing Needs and Aspirations Study has been established. Consistent with the Extra Care Housing Strategy a second extra care facility is in progress and development of a third under in discussion.

Key National Priorities (adults)

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.13. The council expresses a clear commitment to preventative and early intervention services. Senior officers have engaged in considerable consultation with stakeholders and the wider community about the council's 'Reshaping' agenda and the emphasis that this places on the provision of information and advice, the stimulating of community resources, and the increasing focus on prevention and early intervention services.
- 6.14. Re-ablement and intermediate care are now considered at the point of referral and reports indicate that, of the people provided with a re-ablement service, 41.6% went on to not need any further package of care and 35.6% went on to receive a reduced package. This is reflected in the performance data which shows that the numbers of people and the percentages of clients supported in the community decreased slightly for both 18-64 year olds and for people over 65 years. The council reports that a new more robust reviewing practice and changes to the way in which domiciliary care hours are calculated have contributed to the reduction in hours of support commissioned and allied cost savings. The impact of this on people using services and providers is an area for follow up by CSSIW. In addition there has been a reduction in the number of long term residential places commissioned by the council from 475 in March 2014 to 434 in March 2015. Intermediate care reports estimate considerable savings to health through the avoidance of inpatient care.

- 6.15. In recent years considerable progress has been made in reducing the waiting time for occupational therapy assessment, the delivery of equipment and minor adaptations. However, this year there has been a reduction in the supply of equipment and in the provision of minor adaptations which the council attributes to staffing shortages which have been addressed.
- 6.16. The council has continued to build upon and stimulate community strengths and resources. These include the implementation of a community agents pilot in partnership with community councils, a shared lives project and continued support to luncheon clubs throughout the borough. Small scale community based projects such as befriending and peer mentoring schemes are supported through the provision of a community small grants scheme. A project to develop community understanding of dementia has been delivered in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society.
- 6.17. The council approach to supporting carers has continued to develop with emphasis on the provision of information from both the council and the third sector, including a specialist service to people with mental health problems. The council has identified and made contact with 900 carers via a survey. This resulted in an increase in the number of carers recorded as known to the council from 463 last year to 1,364 this year. The survey included the offer of an assessment and of the carers offered an assessment in this way, fewer went on to accept an assessment than last year (365 down from 412) and from these 286 went on to be provided with a service. The results provided the council with useful information which will be used to update the carers strategy, which has not been updated during the year as intended. This is a priority for the coming year if the full impact of the considerable efforts made to provide an effective carers service are to be realised.
- 6.18. The number of nights of respite care has fallen over the year. The council attributes this to the increase in complexity of cases which require Continuing Health Care (CHC), rather than social care funding as a possible cause. As carers identified the need for more respite care to be available to them, the council needs to further interrogate this information and evaluate performance in more detail.

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

- 6.19. The council has taken forward work to integrate services for older people with complex needs through a series of initiatives devised in partnership with statutory, third and independent sector partners. These include enhancement of the intermediate care service, the development of a new 'Discharge 2 Assess' pathway, development of the SPoA, work on unscheduled care and development of community based preventative services. Services include specialist nursing posts at Wrexham Maelor hospital, increased staffing to enable seven-day working within the intermediate care team, the commissioning of 'step up, step down' beds from the independent sector and further development of the falls service.
- 6.20. The SPoA became operational from March 2015 with a third sector broker and a health worker incorporated into the team. Further development is envisaged although ongoing funding from BCUHB has remained an issue of concern.
- 6.21. Wrexham has developed an integrated services outcomes framework to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of the integration work programme and the Intermediate Care Fund initiatives. This framework has been adopted for use across North Wales with governance by the Integrated Services Board. Changes in the grant funding of these initiatives may impact on their sustainability in 2015/16.

Areas of progress

- Continued development of community based preventative services for older people
- Extension of supported living projects
- Implementation of reablement and enablement approaches.

Areas for improvement

- Performance within the adult safeguarding process
- Implementation of mental health strategy and action plan
- Carers overarching strategy and service provision (including respite care).

Children and young people

Overview

- 6.22. The increase in contacts to children's services noted in previous years has continued during 2014/15. The number of those contacts classed as a referral also increased, resulting in the second highest recorded number of referrals for councils in Wales. However, the number allocated for assessment fell, and whilst the resulting percentage of referrals not allocated for assessment (44.3%) was the third highest in Wales. Analysis of the numbers indicate that more children were seen for initial assessment in Wrexham than in all but two other councils in Wales. A decision within 24 hours was made in respect of 98.3% of referrals. The Children and Families Assessment Team received an internal council award during the year in recognition of continuous performance.
- 6.23. The council explains the low percentage of contacts classed as referrals as evidence of the impact of the Together Achieving Change (TAC) team and of the MASH where early exchange of information supports early decision making. The re-referral rate has however increased this year from 21.4% to 23.9%. The council had made progress in this area and this increase is concerning, and is an area the council needs to give attention. An audit conducted by the council concluded that the rise may be partly due to the new processes introduced with implementation of the MASH having not yet become fully embedded. On a positive note the council is now able to respond more effectively through the MASH and to better track and monitor performance.
- 6.24. Following the introduction of the MASH in March 2014 an independent evaluation of the project was undertaken. This resulted in a review of the project plan and a reestablishment of the team within a social services location, dealing with children's referrals only. Further development of the project will be progressed during 2015/16.
- 6.25. The council is the best performing authority in Wales in terms of the percentage of children seen during initial assessment. However, the percentage of referrals progressing to assessment and allocated to a qualified social worker has reduced from 66.71% to 55.06% and is significantly below the average of 73.2% for Wales. Performance in terms of initial and core assessments completed within the timescales improved over last year, but Wrexham remains in the lower quartile for both indicators. This is disappointing considering that this has been an improvement objective for several years. The council needs to reflect further on actions to be taken to secure the required improvement.

- 6.26. The council performs well in terms the timeliness of child protection case conferences and is on a par with the Welsh average for initial core group meetings. The numbers of children on the Child Protection Register increased during 2014/15 with the number on the register on 31 March 2015 at 172 compared with 132 last year. This represents an increase of 30.3% in contrast with a fall in the all-Wales total of 6.3%. The biggest increases are seen in the categories of emotional abuse and neglect. The council is investigating the reasons for this increase.
- 6.27. The council has made some progress in its engagement with children and young people during the year. Flintshire and Wrexham local safeguarding children board engaged an independent consultant to carry out research into the experiences of a small sample of children and young people in the child protection process. Some tentative observations were that most of the respondents felt that the safeguarding process had made a positive difference to their family, although this could be improved upon. The council introduced a guide to the looked after children review process for children and young people which promotes advocacy and seeks feedback from children and young people. This and the work started to introduce child friendly minutes for child protection case conferences is a positive development. The council has identified the need for further improvement to be made in the participation of children and young people and families in individual case conferences and reviews, as well as in service development.

Key national priorities

Preventative and early intervention services

- 6.28. The commissioning strategy published in July 2014 seeks to ensure that the council commissions good quality services that meet its overriding aims to provide early intervention and preventative services, whilst ensuring that children and young people continue to be safeguarded. The strategy is linked to the local service board's Single Integrated Plan (Our Wrexham Plan) and the council plan. It is designed to work alongside the looked after children (LAC) preventative strategy and to align with services to meet the anti-poverty agenda.
- 6.29. A number of family based services have been developed in line with the preventative agenda and the requirements of the SSWB Act. The Wrexham Family Information Service, Together Achieving Change (TAC) and the parenting team offer a wide range of preventative and support services which include multi agency support and assistance with accessing training and child care support. The Family Information Service which can be accessed in a range of ways received an increased number of referrals last year and organisational changes

have been made to ensure that the parenting team and family support teams provide an improved and accessible service.

- 6.30. The TAC team has now been integrated into frontline services to ensure a timely response to initial requests for support, providing a range of response options. TAC services can be accessed without a family being classed as a social services referral. The TAC service was the subject of independent evaluation in 2014 which found the service to function effectively and provide a good service valued by both families and partner organisations. The review reported that the team is well experienced and recognised its contribution to the development of the service regionally. However, it was observed that some families had experienced significant difficulties and challenges prior to the involvement of TAC at a more complex level than expected for a service focussed on prevention and early intervention. The council has stated that as part of the proposal to align TAC more closely with the children's first response service, it intends to review the threshold for children in need and all preventative services during 2015/16.
- 6.31. The council has introduced changes to the sessions of respite care being offered at its own in-house facility in response to the need to make savings. The measures taken by the council have meant that whilst the provision will now be available six instead of seven days per week, the number of sessions on those days have been increased.
- 6.32. The numbers of young carers known to the department rose last year from 57 to 96 and of these the council reports that 92 were provided with a service. This improvement is attributed to a change in the provider, with this service now being provided under a regional contract.

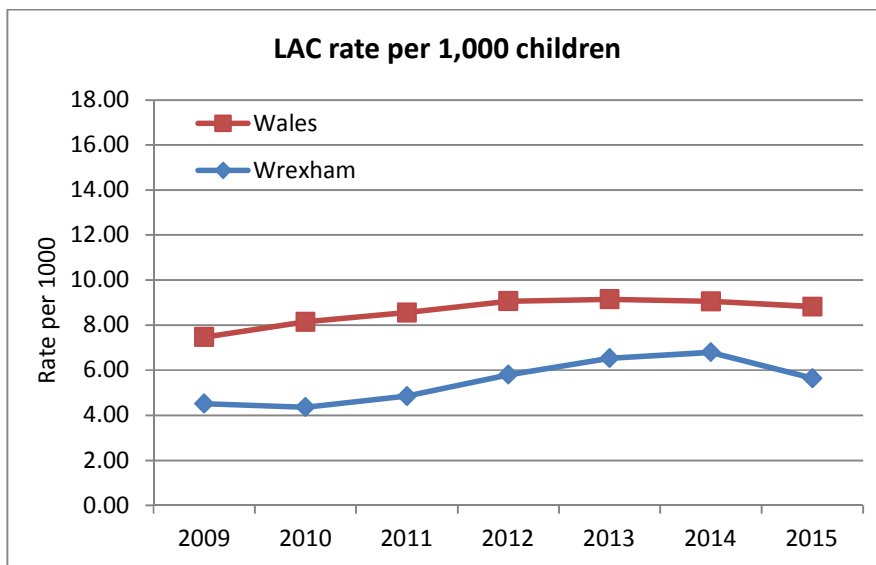
Looked after children (LAC)

- 6.34. The council has addressed the areas for improvement identified in the CSSIW thematic review of the safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour through a specific action plan which links to improvement areas, which were already being taken forward by the council. These include the development of a commissioning strategy, housing and transition arrangements, review of advocacy arrangements, consultation arrangements with children and young people, and training specifically in relation to children at risk of sexual exploitation.
- 6.35. Despite the fact that the long term trend of numbers of children and young people being looked after in Wrexham is upward, there was drop in the number recorded for last year, from 200 to 166. This constitutes

the biggest percentage drop recorded for Welsh councils. The council explain that was in response to analysis of the causes of an increase in looked after children numbers on 2013/14 and reports that reduction is due in part to the creation of an additional new post within the Leaving Care team to work directly with young people and families where the young person is at risk of coming into care, as well as the discharging of some care orders. Some young people aged 16 and over are now assessed as being more suitably supported as children in need than as children who are looked after. In addition 12 care orders have been discharged during the year. Further work is needed to enable the council to fully understand the reasons why there has been such a significant reduction in the number of children looked after. The council's approach is increasingly influenced by its work on developing a looked after children prevention strategy.

- 6.36. Performance as measured by the LAC performance indicators has shown improvement in the majority of areas including placement stability which the council reports has improved from 13.6 % to 7.9%. Although performance in terms of the timeliness of statutory reviews places Wrexham in the lower quartile in Wales, a percentage of 94.7 was achieved and this represents an improvement in performance over the previous year. Performance with regard to statutory visits is good and in the highest quartile.
- 6.37. The number of children who were in care on their 19th birthday and with whom the council is in touch is small. The numbers who are in education, training or employment and those in suitable non-emergency accommodation have increased which is a positive sign.
- 6.38. The council has taken action to improve their engagement with children who are looked after during the year. For example following a pilot undertaken just over 12 months ago all independent safeguarding reviewing officers (ISROs) now provide children with child friendly minutes of their review. Further developments include an introductory letter from the ISRO which is personalised with a photo of them, and the Children and Young People in Care Council will be asked for feedback. In addition there will be an ISRO pledge outlining the role. Wrexham reports that these developments are innovative in Wales and progress and feedback will be reported to the all-Wales ISRO group.
- 6.39. During 2014/15 the council reports that 13 children were placed for adoption and there were two foster carer adoptions completed. The number of children with placement orders and awaiting placement during the year was eight, with potential links identified for five of these children on 31 March 2015. Also during the year 26 children/young people returned to the care of their parents and seven went to live with

extended family members. The department reports that there has been increased emphasis on improving timescales for plans for permanency for children, subject to public law outline proceedings in line with the Family Justice Review. In addition considerable resource has been directed, where safe to do so, into discharging care orders, and working with parents of children in care to enable them to return home. The remit for therapeutic foster carers has been changed to allow children who are settled and happy to remain in that placement. To support this change, additional full time therapeutic foster carers have been recruited.



Numbers of LAC as at 31 March

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Wrexham	129	125	141	170	192	200	166

Areas of progress

- Stability of placement
- Engagement with children and young people in LAC process.

Areas for improvement

- Timeliness of Initial Assessment and Core Assessment
- Re-referral rate
- Understanding of changes of performance illustrated by the performance indicators

- The involvement of children and young people in individual case conferences and reviews

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 continues to exercise firm financial control. Both adults and children's social care returned a balanced budget for 2014/15 but are faced with having to make further savings during the next financial year. There has been wide spread consultation about the budget choices being considered under the 'Reshaping' agenda and the council plan, in which senior managers have played a leading role. The council has been able to provide examples of where responses to the consultations have resulted in some amendment or change to proposed actions. In some cases the consultations have been of a high level strategic nature with the need for this to be followed by further consultation on the more specific plans.
- 7.2. There have been some recent political changes within the council and the council has recognised the need to improve scrutiny functions. The Safeguarding, Communities and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee has continued to receive reports from children's services on a twice yearly basis in recognition of the specific areas for improvement that were identified some years ago.
- 7.3. There have also been some changes to the senior management structure with the designated statutory director for social services (head of adult care) now reporting to the strategic and performance director. As such, whilst the council has in place its accountability and communication framework, it continues to be non-compliant with the statutory guidance on the role of the director of social services.
- 7.4. The council is continuing to develop services to meet the requirements of the SSWB Act and there have been a number of awareness-raising sessions provided to council members, staff, and stakeholders to develop understanding of the Act, and ensure that new services and organisational structures being developed are consistent with it.
- 7.5. The overarching commissioning plans for adult and children's services, which are supported by market position analysis, provide a clear overall direction of travel. The council engaged in a major piece of work in 2014/15 with external providers to develop an understanding of the market dynamics applied to domiciliary care, and the commissioning of these services to support the reablement agenda. This resulted in a new more outcomes-focused domiciliary care contract. The council has a

well-established contract monitoring team but will need to further develop the skills and methodology required to ensure that outcome-focused commissioning in domiciliary and residential care delivers the benefits for the service users that is intended.

- 7.6. Further steps have been taken by the council to improve performance management and quality assurance during the year. The extent of performance reporting and the engagement of managers and staff in quality assurance and service improvement continues to be more well developed in some service areas than others. The integrated management of adult and children's safeguarding is supporting the development of reporting and performance monitoring in adult safeguarding using the experience of children's services. This remains an area where further ongoing development is needed.
- 7.7. The CSSIW national inspection of the safeguarding and care planning of looked after children who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours found that there was clear leadership and a positive ethos within the management team in children's services, and that corporate parenting arrangements were strong. Although it was noted that elected members had limited understanding of the potential for child sexual exploitation within the area, action has been taken to address this.
- 7.8. The council demonstrates initiative and ambition in the development of new services and projects, in collaboration with other statutory or third sector agencies. In some instances (the MASH project for example) the project management and partnership arrangements have had to undergo some major readjustments. The council has learned lessons from these issues and taken action to address them.
- 7.9. During the year the department has been engaged with corporate colleagues as well as government and statutory partners in considering the implications for social care of the establishment of a prison in Wrexham. Whilst this will bring economic advantages to the county, the planning has created additional work for social services management during the year and will impact upon social services' budget and staff and management capacity in future. Whilst consideration is being given to the possible additional costs of meeting the social care needs of individual prisoners, the extent to which the pressures on management capacity within adult services during the planning period have been recognised is not clear.
- 7.10. The council has in the main been successful in maintaining a stable workforce, with agency social work staff now used primarily to cover long term illness and maternity leave. Organisational changes have

resulted in managers holding a wide managerial brief and the effectiveness of these changes will need review.

7.11. The twice yearly meetings between members and senior managers of BCUHB established in 2013 have continued to provide an opportunity for the areas of common interest to be discussed. The council continues to experience difficulties in impacting on this agenda as effectively as it would wish.

7.12. The council states a commitment to a regional or sub regional approach where this has demonstrable benefits. The regional cooperation between councils has continued on a number of fronts: the establishment of regional safeguarding boards and in relation to the integrated services agenda. In addition, the council manages the North East Wales Emergency Duty Team and the regional adoption service. Relationships with BCUHB continue to be challenging in taking forward service strategic planning and service development in mental health and in establishing agreed Continuing Health Care thresholds. Joint developments around intermediate care have progressed well to date and have demonstrated some innovative and creative service development. The council needs to explore further whether there are additional efficiency opportunities to be gained through a more proactive approach to collaboration with other councils.

Areas for improvement

- Continued development of performance management arrangements in some areas
- Further development of partnership and collaborative working with other councils and statutory services.