

Neil Ayling
Director of Social Services
Flintshire County Council
County Hall
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CH7 6NB

Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Neil Ayling,

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Local Authority Performance Review April 2019 - March 2020

The code of practice for review of local authority social services in April 2019 outlines our intention to write and publish an annual letter for local authorities which will:

- provide feedback on inspection and performance evaluation activity completed by us during the year
- report on progress the local authority has made in implementing recommendations from inspections and/or child and adult practice reviews
- outline our forward work programme

This letter summarises our review of Flintshire County Council's performance in carrying out its statutory social services functions from April 2019 – March 2020.

We acknowledge, that due to the unprecedented circumstances relating to COVID-19, that we were unable to complete the annual performance review meeting.

We believe that there remains significant benefits in identifying and drawing the attention of the local authority and its partners, to the areas of both strength and improvements required. The letter is intended to assist the local authority and its partners to continually improve.

It follows the four principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and our increasingly collaborative and strengths based approach to supporting improvement.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The content of this letter is informed by the performance evaluation activity undertaken by the inspectorate during the course of the year. This activity included:

- meetings with senior managers June and December 2019
- focused activity in children's services in October 2019
- focused activity in adults services February 2020
- engagement activity with older adults
- review meeting - prevention and promotion of independence for older adults – November 2019
- assurance and risk assessment review – February 2020
- feedback /intelligence received
- review of performance information

During the course of the year we have been in discussions with you during all of the activity listed above and as such our annual performance letter content is an accurate reflection of our ongoing findings which we have consistently shared with you.

Summary of strengths and areas for improvement in line with principles of the Act 2014

Well-being

The local authority benefits from an experienced senior management team. Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled, well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision. There is a strong corporate and political support for both adult and children's service and a thorough and well developed understanding of strengths and current challenges.

During the year the local authority experienced challenges in securing appropriate placements able to meet the needs of some young people and it is of concern that children were placed in unregistered arrangements. However, the local authority demonstrated a focus on meeting the needs of the children and kept CIW informed of development throughout.

Senior managers are confident in developing a range of new projects and are using grant funding to create new models of care and support to improve outcomes for people. An example in children service is the work with regional partners to secure transformation funds to create a multi-disciplinary assessment and support Hub to facilitate placement reunification and long term placement planning. Whilst in adults service the local authority is actively looking at how to develop the local care sector and more latterly developed their micro-care enterprise.

People

Language is recognised as a key factor in building positive relationships and Welsh language use amongst local authority staff is a corporate commitment.

People in Flintshire are involved in service development, we heard how the Mockingbird and Development Project asked young people what they thought of the idea and what was

important to them to feature in the development. “I like that there are other foster carers that can support and listen” was a response from one young person. In respect of service development and embedded learning, the same project, used an analysis of disruption themes to help them shape the way in which support will be provided to children and carers.

In adults service the local authority and its partners continue to engage with local business and charities. Through such engagement, opportunities for people with a learning disability to be supported into paid work have been identified as well as new volunteer placements.

More people are managing their own care through the provision of direct payments allowing the person more control and flexibility with the care they receive. The local authority continues to look at creative and innovative ways of using direct payments and during our focused activity we heard of groups being awarded direct payment to enhance people’s independence and/ or involvement in community activities.

We consistently met with committed and dedicated professional staff. Discussions with staff, observations made, and case records evidenced staff’s understanding of the principles of the Act 2014, and their vigilance in ensuring that these are implemented in practice. Practitioners and managers told us they are happy and content working in Flintshire County Council.

We continue to monitor the implementation of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) which has identified the local authority, in common with many others in Wales, is unable to assure itself that people’s human rights are not being breached by being deprived of their liberty unlawfully. Our joint national report on DoLS will be issued in due course.

Prevention

Senior Managers are aware that access to early intervention is key to mitigating the need for statutory services.

In children’s service there is a strong focus on early help and support to build resilience and help prevent a families problems escalating. We visited the multi-agency early help hub and saw an emphasis on helping parents to develop their own abilities, their coping mechanisms and strengths to identify and manage problems. We saw community based solutions supporting families and a focus on keeping families together in a safe, supportive and stable environment.

In adults services there is a focus on building and promoting people’s own strengths and resilience in line with the principles of the Act 2014. During the focused activity we saw examples enabling people to maintain and develop skills, achieving greater independence and responsibility. Individuals are given the opportunity to take risks safely and assistive technology is used effectively to support increased freedom and independence.

We saw a focus on enabling individuals to develop and maintain social relationships and be involved in their community. We met with members of the Dungeons and Dragon group, established to help people’s recovery from mental health. We heard how the group helped with their recovery and provided an opportunity to develop friendship, interest and a reason to interact.

In June 2019 we published our national report on our work about care experienced children and young people. The [report](#) is published on our website. Key findings highlight areas for improvement in respect of profile, sufficiency, practice, partnerships, stability, governance and corporate parenting. Many of the areas we identified for improvement continue to be considered by Welsh Government's Ministerial Advisory Group on improving outcomes for care experienced children and young people and we expect local authorities to be considering their own contribution to addressing these findings. We will monitor with interest the development of much needed commissioning and market position strategy to map future demand for services and help shape the market.

In December 2019 we wrote to all local authorities asking for information about the Public Accounts Committee report following their enquiry into care experienced children, specifically recommendation 5 concerning the effectiveness and frequency of end of placement reviews.

In Flintshire County Council there are procedures in place to respond effectively to placement breakdowns and to placements where there are escalating challenges and indications that a disruption is likely. The voice of the child remains central throughout the process. Recommendations are formulated within the pre-disruption meetings and distributed to the service area with responsibility for the child to ensure this informs future practice.

Partnerships

The local authority continue to be actively engaged in local and regional partnership working. They currently host the North Wales Learning Disability Strategy and jointly host the North Wales Integrated Autism Service with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB).

Flintshire County Council is aware of the fragility of the domiciliary care sector and are exploring different options to address market capacity. They recognise the importance of working in partnership with providers and have extended their successful Progress for Providers Programmes for Care Home to the domiciliary care sector. There is recognition that recruiting and retaining of care workers is a significant challenge facing all home care providers. In an effort to reduce the turnover of care workers Flintshire County Council have learnt from others and adopted an innovative approach to recruitment, aiming to maximise retention by more careful approaches to recruiting the right people with the right values. Care providers told us of their positive working relationship with the practitioners and managers. The focus on working in partnership and supporting providers by investing in training and development of care staff can only lead to better outcomes for people.

Project Search is an example of the local authority successfully working in partnership with HFT, Pennaf Housing Group, Coleg Cambria and others to establish an employment support programme for young people with a learning disability. During the focused activity we met with some of the young people and parents and heard how HFT is further developing partnership with public, private and voluntary sector organisation to create new work, education and leisure opportunities for people with a learning disability.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2020-2021

Our scheduled thematic inspection programme for 2020-2021 focused on prevention and promoting independence for older people and for current children services thematic inspection the focus is on prevention, partnerships and experiences of disabled children. Due to the current emergency situation relating to COVID-19 we have paused the publication of our older people's report and paused all activity relating to the disabled children's review. We will advise you in due course when we envisage recommencing our inspections.

We hope to publish the older person national report in due course and want to take this opportunity to thank you for your local authority's contribution to this.

Due to the unforeseen circumstances we find ourselves in, we are currently reviewing and considering our work plan for the remainder of 2020-2021.

CIW worked together with HMI Constabulary (HMICFRS), HMI Probation, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) and Estyn to develop a model of joint inspection of child protection arrangements in Wales (JICPA). This approach was piloted during the autumn of 2019. This was a fantastic example of new ways of working across Wales and a real drive towards collaboration and integration in public services.

We continue to work closely with Social Care Wales to support improvement in social care services.

You will note that this letter has been copied to colleagues in Audit Wales, Estyn and HIW. CIW works closely with partner inspectorates to consider the wider corporate perspective in which social services operate, as well as local context for social services performance.

We will publish the final version of this letter on our website.

Yours sincerely



Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn