

Alwyn Jones
Director of Social Services
Wrexham County Borough Council
The Guildhall
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Date: 03 August 2020

Dear Alwyn Jones,

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 Wrexham County Borough Council's performance in carrying out its statutory social services functions from April 2019 - March 2020.

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

However, 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 strengths 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 Well-being (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:

Children's Services:

- performance review meeting, 10 April 2019
- improvement conference, 3 May 2019 to discuss progress made since improvement conference held 8 October 2018
- practice and performance review meeting, 21 August 2019
- focused activity in children's services, 24 and 25 September 2019 to review selected files and records. Interviews with staff at the Single Point of Access Team, senior managers and officers
- meeting between CIW and Director of Social Services, 18 December 2019, to discuss concerns and progress
- meeting between CIW and Director of Social Services, 9 January 2020, to discuss concerns and progress
- assurance and risk assessment review, 26 February 2020
- focused activity 22 January 2020, review of one specific case of concern

Adults Services:

- performance review meeting, 10 April 2019
- practice and performance review meeting, 21 August 2019
- inspection of Community Mental Health Team with Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW), 15 and 16 October 2019

During the course of the year we have been in discussions with the local authority during 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 the local authority.

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

Well-being

During the last year, CIW's concerns have escalated from serious to significant in relation to children's services. Wrexham County Borough Council's performance information over the last year has indicated that key areas of performance have declined across areas of safeguarding practice. At the improvement conference held in May 2019, CIW was assured that progress was being made through positive performance information, staff appointments, and reduced workload. This has not been sustained. A CIW file review of a vulnerable young person identified a number of areas of concern in relation to safety and well-being. It is positive to note that in October 2019 an Accelerated Improvement Board was established. The Chief Executive stated the aim of the board is to achieve tangible improvements and implement and review action plans. An improvement plan with key objectives is in place.

It is positive to note the HIW and CIW joint inspection of Wrexham Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) found evidence that the service overall provided safe and effective care.

People

In adults services, CIW has recognised a small but experienced senior manager group with a willingness to try new approaches. We have identified a commitment to safeguarding and deprivations of liberty safeguards practice and good joint safeguarding working with Wrexham Maelor Hospital.

CMHT staff feedback in relation to workload and the quality of management and leadership was mixed, and this requires further exploration by the management team. Most of the service users who completed a questionnaire rated the service provided by the CMHT as either excellent or very good, and nearly all said that staff treat them with dignity and respect. The CMHT inspection found that service users were involved in the development of care and treatment plans and relevant people such as family members or carers were also involved where appropriate. This is positive as it indicates the 2014 Act principles such as co-production and strengths-based practice are being considered.

Through CIW's performance evaluation activity we have stressed the urgent need for change in the culture of children's services to ensure transparency and accountability of all staff working in the service, ensuring children are at the centre of practice and decision making. CIW has recognised that in order to fully achieve this, the new statutory director and senior team in children's services will need to be appointed.

Wrexham County Borough Council has developed a new online recruitment portal that comprises a number of elements that will improve how the Welsh language is being used and reported in relation to workforce. The local authority has an up to date and accessible list of employees who are Welsh speakers. Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) ensures that staff are prompted to make the Active Offer of a service in Welsh and that this is recorded. There are plans to improve the level of information captured about the Active Offer on WCCIS and to ensure that people who contact the Emergency Duty Team (out of office hours) are able to receive a service in the language of their choice. CIW will review progress through performance evaluation activities in 2020-2021.

The local authority has addressed a backlog in Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) in previous years and continues to operate without a waiting list. This is in contrast to many other Welsh authorities and provides reassurance that people's well-being is being safely secured. The local authority has a dedicated Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Team, operates a weekly allocation meeting, and a clear process for authorisation and quality assurance. Our joint national report on DoLS will be issued in due course.

Prevention

The CMHT inspection identified delays in responding to people, from point of referral to when people's circumstances were assessed. This means that people with acute mental health problems may deteriorate or relapse and consequently their needs may not be met in a timely manner. This is a key practice area for Wrexham County Borough Council and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to address.

During 2018 our programme of work focused on 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 have 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 also hope local authorities will consider their own contribution to addressing these findings.

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. The local authority report care planning meetings and risk management meetings for children at risk of placement breakdown do take place.

Partnerships

In February 2020 senior officers and managers reassured CIW about Wrexham County Borough Council's commitment in taking immediate and comprehensive action to improve outcomes for children and families. CIW recognise this has already begun with additional budget allocation and increased capacity in senior posts. It is positive that the local authority has sought assistance from the statutory director in another local authority along with seeking support from other local authorities in the region, the regional safeguarding board and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). CIW's planned focused activity to qualify progress has been postponed due to the COVID-19 circumstances.

The CMHT inspection found that a multi-disciplinary, person-centred approach was in place for assessment, care planning and review, and that people and families were involved. Overall, the multi-disciplinary approach to provision of care was considered to be good.

CIW Performance Review Plan for 2020-2021

Our scheduled thematic inspection programme for 2019-2020 focused on prevention and promoting independence for older people, and for the current children's 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 people's 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, 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lou Bushell-Bauers', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection Team

Cc.
Audit Wales
HIW
Estyn