

Risk Based Inspection of Cardiff Council Social Services

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

This report summarises the findings of our risk based inspection from 23 November to 3 December 2020.

Overview

This risk based inspection was informed by concerns laid out in our letter to the Director of Social Services in 2019-2020. We reviewed how well children's social services has progressed on its journey of improvement, and how well social services continue to help and support adults and children.

We focused on:

- 1) How well local authorities discharge their statutory functions to keep people safe and promote well-being during the pandemic.
- 2) How well local authorities are providing early help, care and support and seamless transitions between services for disabled children and their families.
- 3) What are local authorities doing to prevent the need for children to come into care; and are children returning home to their families quickly enough where safe to do so?

We focused our key lines of enquiry within the four principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and have recorded our judgements and findings aligned to these: People - Voice and Control, Prevention, Well-Being, Partnerships and Integration.

Senior managers and lead members have introduced a new culture of raised expectation and standards in social care in Cardiff Council. The local authority is aware of the challenges this presents and is working hard with all stakeholders to support the safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services as well as supporting the safety and well-being of people who work in services. Cabinet leads for both adults and children's services are well informed, understand the changes required to ensure the sustainability of services, and both are focused on improving outcomes for people.

Partnerships are working well, the local authority is engaging with all of its departments and other relevant partners to help people to achieve their well-being outcomes. Strategic partnerships have developed with a shared ambition of maximising delivery of seamless and sustainable services.

Throughout our inspection and monitoring activity, we received very high levels of engagement and cooperation from all concerned which reflects the local authority's stated desire to do better for the people of Cardiff. We acknowledge the added challenges the local authority faces in managing services through a pandemic and thank everyone who participated in this work and made it possible.

People - voice and control

We asked - How well is the local authority ensuring people, carers and practitioners are having their voices heard, making informed choices, and maintaining control over their lives. How is this balanced with the recommendations and requirements made by Public Health Wales and Welsh Government. Can the local authority demonstrate learning is used to inform new ways of working?

There was evidence of practitioners taking a collaborative approach and working in partnership with people to ensure their views and wishes, and those of their carers' were captured in most assessments and care plans. There was an agreed understanding of how needs will be met and personal outcomes will be achieved.

Within children's services, Care and Support Plans are variable in quality. Better plans are explicit about expectations, with a mix of tangible and practical actions that support children and their families. Some of the weaker plans lack clarity of purpose and must include timescales for actions needed to support parents to understand what needs to be done in order to improve their children's lives.

People are positively involved in the planning and development of services. The Regional Commissioning Strategy for people with learning disability was co-produced with people with learning disability and their carers'. Disabled children and young people are engaged and consulted on the development of services with respite service being an example. Whilst the National Youth Advocacy Service supports the Bright Sparks Group attended by children looked after to engage in service and policy developments.

There was evidence of people being supported by informal advocates to participate in assessments and decisions that affect them. Some practitioners were aware of arrangements to commission formal advocacy whilst others were not. The local authority must ensure consistent consideration is given to both informal and formal advocacy as outlined in Part 10 Code of Practice for 2014 Act.

Opportunities for people in Cardiff to tailor and manage their own support through use of direct placements is inconsistent and must be improved. Good practice was identified in offering direct payments in children's services, however delivery is hindered by recruitment and retention of personal assistants. In adults services we found direct payments not routinely offered. The local authority must ensure people are routinely offered and supported to make informed choices about accessing direct payments and how the level of control they wish to maintain over their own care and support can be achieved.

Preferred language is positively recognised as a key factor in building effective relationships between people and practitioners and people are supported to communicate in their preferred language. When English / Welsh is not the first language of people, interpreters are actively sought and sourced to enable and encourage people, including children and young people, to fully understand what is happening and ensure their voices are heard.

Offers and uptake of carers' assessments fluctuate between teams. Many carers were offered carers' assessments and ongoing support during the pandemic. The Child Health and Disability Team (CHAD) complete some carers' assessments alongside the assessment of the child/young person. In adults services some carers were refusing carers' assessments wanting the focus to be on the needs of the cared for. Managers need to consider the variation in practice between teams and promote learning from its own areas of positive practice. The local authority must ensure carers are provided with the right information, advice and assistance to support them to continue in their caring role and prevent them from reaching a crisis.

Within children's services there remains a strong commitment to reduce the number of agency workers through a market supplement and the 'grow your own' approach. The local authority remains committed to this improvement, however, despite this effort its ability to recruit suitably qualified practitioners remains a challenge. The local authority must take steps to address the negative impact of persistent change of workers on team working and relationship building particularly with young people and families in addition to the financial implications for the authority.

Whilst there are indicators the local authority is starting to stabilise the workforce, some practitioners who responded to our survey and some we met during the inspection continued to be anxious and uncertain about further structural changes, especially to certain teams within children's services. Although consulted, some felt decisions on proposed changes had already been made. Senior managers should continue to prioritise and develop the ways in which they involve and engage with practitioners, particularly at a time when transformational change is happening at pace.

Most practitioners who responded to our survey felt supported by colleagues and managers and regarded their workload as manageable. Practitioners working from home stated they value the accessibility of managers and peer support from colleagues. Those practitioners who had to attend at the office stated they felt safe in work, have easy access to personal protective equipment, COVID-19 testing, and were positive on the advice and support provided by the local authority to ensure their emotional well-being.

Whilst many practitioners reported receiving supervision and support from managers, we did not see evidence of critical evaluation in the sample of supervision records we reviewed. Supervision should provide opportunity for personal and professional reflection, constructive challenge and direction setting. Managers must ensure high quality supervision and management support is evident across all service areas. Consistent and well-recorded staff supervision should be a priority for improvement.

Within children's services auditing of work is undertaken on a regular basis and is strengthened by a moderation system that gives the local authority a clear understanding of practice compliance. Actions arising from audits do not always focus sufficiently on outcomes for children, and this is a necessary step to help the move to good practice. The planned introduction of a framework for Quality Assurance for children's services has been delayed due to the pandemic. The local

authority recognises more work is needed to strengthen and embed its approach in adults services.

Prevention

We asked - To what extent is the local authority successful in promoting prevention and reducing need for increased or formal support from statutory agencies? Including taking all necessary steps to support the upbringing of the child by the child's family and supporting people with mental health issues before they reach crisis.

Senior managers fully understand access to early intervention and prevention is key to maintaining well-being and mitigating demand on statutory services. The reshape and re-design of services focused on its early intervention and prevention delivery. In Children's Services we heard of the development of the Early Help Hub and how existing services came together to provide the right support at the right time to people. In the same way in adults services, we saw how the Independent Living Service focused on ensuring people had access to a wide range of support to live as independently as possible.

The local authority has demonstrated the need to change and adapt services in order to reflect newly identified challenges during the pandemic. Services for adults have been strengthened through recognition of the need for mental health expertise at the front door of adults services. In the same way primary mental health posts have strengthened the multi-agency approach within the Early Help Hub in children's services.

The local authority is using new technology creatively to address loneliness and social isolation. For example, the Independent Living Services Engagement Officers supported people to use their smart phones or tablets to join social groups on Zoom and Microsoft teams. Whilst in children's services, we heard how virtual reviews using media platforms were attracting more involvement from young people.

The local authority is reviewing the provision of service available for disabled children. The Cardiff Parenting Service is being further developed to ensure all elements of the service are inclusive and supportive of children with special needs and their parents. As well as a focus on ensuring the workforce have the skills and competence to meet the increasingly complex needs of the children and their families.

Sufficiency of suitable accommodation for young people remains a challenge. The local authority is focused on reviewing commissioning arrangement to support the development of good quality services for care leavers. The Commissioning Strategy for Accommodation and Support for Children Looked After includes the development of a new regulated provision for 16-20 year olds, the development of emergency residential provision and an assessment (step up/step down) residential provision as some of the resources being developed to meet the needs of the most complex and vulnerable children in the authority.

As with many other local authorities in Wales, there is substantial pressures on capacity within domiciliary care market in Cardiff. There is an understanding of the increased demand caused by the pandemic in addition to the usual winter pressures. The local authority has been working effectively with providers in preparation to

recommission its domiciliary care service and managers from CHAD have been involved to ensure outcomes for disabled children are included in the specification.

Partnerships

We asked - To what extent is the local authority able to assure themselves opportunities for partnership working are positively exploited to maximise person centred planning, ensure integrated service delivery and drive service sustainability? Including reflection on opportunities to innovate at scale or to move beyond one-off funded projects

In most of the files we reviewed we saw evidence of practitioners developing professional working relationship with people built upon co-operation and shared understanding of what matters.

However some people who responded to our survey told us of difficulties in contacting the service. We heard of calls not being returned and of long delays before calls are returned. Concerns were raised about the attitude of some members of staff. We heard of delays in case transfer between teams and this was a particular area of concern raised by staff and young people where teams had a high turnover of staff. The local authority must ensure it has robust arrangements to communicate effectively with people.

During the inspection we heard and saw positive examples of multi-agency approach to risk management and of multi-disciplinary teams and managers working together during the pandemic to share information/intelligence to ensure they meet the needs and manage the risk of people with the most complex needs. Practitioners and managers working with disabled children told us how strengthening the multi-agency arrangements has enabled timely service response across health, education and social care.

Partnership are working well at most levels in the organisation. Relationships were described by Police, the Health Board, Education and third sector as good and effective at both operational and strategic level. Partners told us changes at senior management level within the local authority, have allowed the development of healthy strategic partnerships between health and social care services that can maximise best use of resources and deliver improved outcomes for people. We found leaders working together effectively to find solutions with a focus on the delivery of seamless and sustainable services.

Senior officers are able to demonstrate how the links between their different directorate responsibilities are supporting the social service agenda across the local authority. One example of the effectiveness of this partnership is the recognition of the importance of accessible housing to the well-being of older adults and care leavers.

Providers told us of the positive meetings with commissioners during the pandemic. Whilst most reported communication to be good, we heard providers are not always informed of changes to peoples' care and support plans and personal circumstances. It is of concern that this involved people discharged from hospital. This is an area the local authority should review as good communication with providers is key to ensure people's well-being and safety particularly following a period in hospital.

Well-being

We asked - To what extent is the local authority promoting well-being, ensuring people maintain their safety and achieve positive outcomes that matter to them. Including timely step down of children from local authority care, supporting older people to return home from hospital.

Both adults and children's services benefit from good political and corporate support, and a shared understanding of the direction and drive needed to ensure that services effectively improve outcomes for people.

The local authority has experienced changes at senior management level and following the departure of the director of social services at the end of September 2020, the role has been assigned to the Corporate Director, People and Communities. We were made aware of the intention to recruit to 2 new posts, Director of Children's Services and Director of Adults, Housing and Communities. The recruitment of qualified and experienced senior managers who understand the complexity and increasing demand within children and adult social care is essential. This is key to further embed the improvements as outlined in the Children's Services Strategy and ongoing work on the Adult Strategy.

The vision founded on a strengths based approach is understood by the local authority's workforce, with the collaborative communication practice framework increasingly becoming embedded in adults services. Most of the assessments we reviewed were strengths based focusing on what matters to the person and the outcome they wished to achieve. They were structured around the five elements of assessment and the product of conversation between the individual, carer/wider family and the practitioner.

Safely reducing the number of children looked after is recognised as a priority by the local authority. The restructure of children's services to include early help, intervention and preventative services along with a Signs of Safety approach is enabling social workers and support staff to maintain a strengths based focus when engaging with young people and families. Key to the safer reduction is the introduction of the Re-unification Framework which supports this strategy and includes increased kinship care arrangements, use of special guardianship arrangements and a pilot with Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service to accelerate discharge of care orders where parents are in agreement. Modernisation of the Fostering Service is ongoing with the aim to meet the needs of children and young people through building capacity to support Kinship Carers and Special Guardians. In addition the ongoing recruitment of foster carers has increased capacity and diversity of in-house placements.

Whilst the changing patterns of work in response to the pandemic has created challenges, the local authority has also been proactive and innovative in its approach. During the inspection many positive examples of how the partnership responded to the pandemic were shared with us. This included promoting the well-being of vulnerable homeless people by creating opportunities for people to achieve positive outcomes and what matters to them.

The importance of timely hospital discharge is understood and remains a priority for the local authority and partners. During the pandemic the local authority has sought to promote well-being of vulnerable people by creating additional capacity to facilitate safe discharges and to support people at home and therefore avoid unnecessary hospital admissions.

We found the local authority responded promptly to safeguarding concerns and appropriately prioritised risks to people's safety. When children need protecting, for the vast majority, decision-making is appropriate, and the response is swift and well-coordinated. Child protection strategy meetings provide effective forums for partners to share information that enables the right threshold decisions to be made for children who are at risk. In contrast, as plans were developed the focus on risk diminished, the teasing out of detail and drawing in support network of family and friends was not always evident.

When children's situations do not improve, the pre-proceedings element of the public law outline (PLO) is considered swiftly and comprehensively through an established legal planning meeting process. Pre-proceedings meetings with parents are well managed. Family group conferences are used carefully to identify additional family support in order to strengthen safety planning. These conferences appropriately consider the wider family network for children who cannot remain safely with their parents.

Further work is required to embed the key areas as identified in the local authority's Adult Safeguarding Audit Report in February 2020. We found examples in relation to adult safeguarding where peoples' safety and well-being was fully addressed. We identified, however, the need to strengthen and qualify information gathered during the course of managing safeguarding reports and undertaking section 126 enquiries. Partners, practitioners and managers told us they were supported by the Adult Safeguarding Team, they said there were recent improvement in practice with many linking the improvements to the additional leadership capacity created within the team.

Method

This inspection was carried out remotely.

- We selected case files for tracking and review. In total we reviewed 50 case files and followed 14 of these with interviews with social workers and family members.
- We reviewed 9 staff supervision files and records of supervision. We looked at a sample of 4 complaints, 2 from children's services and 2 from adults services
- We interviewed a range of local authority employees, elected members, senior officers and operational staff.
- We interviewed range of senior officers from statutory organisations and partner agencies
- We reviewed documentation supplied in advance of our visit
- 213 responded to the survey we administered to social services employees
- 65 responded to the survey we administered for parent and carers of disabled children
- 89 responded to the survey we administered to people who had experience of care and support

Next Steps

We have identified strengths and areas for priority improvement and we will review the progress of these areas through our performance evaluation review meetings with the heads of services and director.

We expect the areas of improvement we have identified to be included in the local authority's improvement plans.

We would like to extend our thanks to all those who helped with the arrangements for this inspection and to those people and staff who spoke with us.