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Director of Social Services  
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Dear Director,

## **Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) – Assurance Check 2021: Isle of Anglesey County Council**

This letter summarises the findings of our assurance check on 14 to 18 June 2021. The purpose of this assurance check was to review how well local authority social services continue to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being.

### **Overview**

In March 2020, CIW suspended its routine programme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable local authorities and providers to focus fully on responding to the challenging circumstances. A revised programme of assurance checks recommenced in September to provide assurance about how people are being safeguarded and well-being promoted during the pandemic. We considered safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services, the safety of services they access and the safety and well-being of people who work in services. 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, Partnerships and Integration, Well-being.

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## **Our focus was on:**

1. How well is the local authority discharging its statutory functions to keep people who need care and support and carers who need support, safe and promote their well-being during the pandemic?
2. What is the local authority 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?

## **Summary of findings and priorities for improvement:**

The local authority has continued to deliver upon its statutory duties during extremely challenging circumstances. There has been strong leadership from senior officers who have made good use of Welsh Government guidance to assess working practices and direct amendments as required.

**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. While also balancing the recommendations and requirements made by Public Health Wales and Welsh Government to limit the spread of COVID-19?

People are consistently offered the opportunity to communicate in their preferred language. People's views are sought and captured and where needed, contact with people has continued throughout the pandemic.

Practitioners and managers consistently report how well supported they are by leaders and the senior management team, and spoke positively about the training and support they have continued to receive from managers and colleagues.

In a complete change to how social workers previously perform their duties; face-to-face contact is risk assessed with management support and oversight and in most circumstances has ceased in line with Welsh Government guidance.

Despite the challenges it is evident practitioners make significant efforts to continue to respond to people as individuals in unique circumstances. They have adapted quickly to new ways of working and through use of information technology (IT) have enhanced how they communicate with people who use services and other professionals. The intention is to maintain some of the new ways of contacting people and maintaining communication through IT even as more opportunities for face-to-face working returns.

Children directly benefit from increased knowledge, skills and confidence gained from relevant training provided to practitioners and parents. Practitioners have

recently received training in trauma informed practice and some parents have engaged in a domestic violence programme aimed at exploring the impact of domestic violence on children. This work has continued through the pandemic.

There is also growing expertise in adults services in the area of mental capacity and liberty protection safeguards within the local authority. Work seen during this assurance check, although limited, was of a very high standard and provides confidence adults who lack mental capacity can be safeguarded from unnecessary restraint on their liberties. Senior officers are supporting the sharing of knowledge and skills and will want to ensure all practitioners in adults and children's services are in a position to comply with the introduction of liberty protection safeguards and best practice across a range of issues.

Independent Reviewing and Safeguarding officers (IRSO's) are demonstrating their confidence to challenge and escalate any drift in practice or any practice not meeting expectations. They have a strong focus on ensuring children's voices are heard and using creative means to ensure engagement with children continues throughout ongoing challenges to service delivery. Their emphasis rightly remains on local resolution of deficits and ensuring best outcomes for children as individuals. The local authority will want to continue to build the confidence of IRSO's and recognise their strength and internal challenge as an asset.

There is an increase in numbers of people using direct payments on the island. However, the numbers of older people using direct payments remains low, there is some understanding this is partially due to geographic distances and the nature of flexible support required. Whatever the reasons, the local authority will want to ensure more people have real opportunities to use direct payments to manage their own care and support services.

Leaders have a line of sight on frontline delivery of services. They are creating opportunities to improve process and practice in line with recent changes in legislation and developments in information technology (IT). Initiatives include contributing to national drives to improve effectiveness of Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) through local trials and ensuring all practitioners and managers have opportunities to engage in training and review their own practice in line with the growing expertise within their own services. The local authority is able to demonstrate it is keen to learn from experience and remain open to new opportunities.

**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?

Promoting the safety and well-being of vulnerable people on Anglesey has been the key priority for the local authority during the past year. Practitioners are able to give a

good account of the multiple barriers to well-being some people face on a daily basis. We heard how difficulties of accessing education, training, and employment for some people is compounded by mental health problems and limited finances and how they have been further challenged by long periods of isolation through lockdown.

The local authority response was described to inspectors as 'all hands on deck', utilising officers from across directorates to meet challenges as they arose. Many challenges were faced and overcome and new working relationships built. The authority was particularly challenged by a lack of personal protective equipment at the outset of the pandemic; they worked hard to meet the challenge and now report they have since maintained a level of provision appropriate to local need.

Day services for adults, respite services, and other 'business as usual' services have closed or offered reduced services over an extended period. However, the local authority has worked hard to manage risk and tailor alternative support to specific needs. Positive examples include a domestic violence officer and healthy relationships officer have continued to undertake 1-1 work with children at risk of sexual exploitation and parents experiencing domestic violence.

However, we also heard of examples where people were facing ongoing and increasing pressure from a lack of respite from substantial caring responsibilities, isolation, and loneliness. The local authority will want to ensure it continues to review this position, mindful of the importance of respite services to carers and the challenges of keeping people safe during the pandemic. There are some examples of good practice developing in Wales and support could be sought from colleagues in all Wales heads of adults services.

Support services have continued to supervise direct contact between children and their birth families to comply with Court Orders. It was reported to us the local authority has received credit from the Courts for assessing families' situation on a case by case basis and avoiding a blanket policy of ceasing direct contact, and we saw evidence of this proactive work in practice.

The numbers of foster carers available on the island has recently increased through a targeted campaign, increasing the possibility of practitioners being able to match foster parents to meet each child's individual needs. The local authority offers a range of support for foster carers including free parking and reduced council tax, and throughout the past year has found ways of providing laptops and IT equipment to help overcome added challenges. Foster carers may benefit further if the variety of support offered became more streamlined in its delivery.

**Partnership and Integration - We asked:** To what extent is the local authority able to assure itself opportunities for partnership working are positively exploited to

maximise person centred planning and ensure integrated service delivery and service sustainability?

The local authority has demonstrated it recognises the importance of developing social capital on the island and has chosen to invest in community resources over a number of years with some success. This work is ongoing, building on community strengths, and creating new resources in the community including specialist housing provision for children and tailored transport options for those who could benefit.

Partnerships with independent providers of care and support we spoke with are good. They gave positive accounts of how support from the local authority and between providers had helped to share learning and ideas and offer support through what they are describing as an extremely difficult and distressing time.

Long-standing partnership working with the voluntary sector (Medrwn Môn) and community groups provided a platform from which the community response to the challenges resulting from the pandemic could be built. There are a number of positive examples of how partnership working is contributing to promoting people's well-being. An example included 37 area support teams set up, with over 850 volunteers who assisted people with tasks such as shopping and prescription collection. This partnership working extended into establishing guidance for safe transport of medication alongside colleagues from the local health board.

Working groups between the local authority, local health boards, and a range of service providers have increased and sustained throughout the year in an effort to make best use and prioritise resources. Current pressure to provide increased volume of care and support to adults in their own homes is very challenging in some areas of Anglesey as it is throughout Wales.

This problem is exacerbated by difficulties of recruitment and retention and an independent care sector who are struggling with maintaining services through what they describe as a traumatic period. There is acknowledgement of 'burn out' and fatigue, and a loss of workers to the National Health Service (NHS) and other local employers in the hospitality and retail sectors.

There are substantial waiting lists for occupational therapy services, meaning many people do not have timely access to practical support sufficient to support their well-being. The local authority has brought in additional agency OT capacity to work through the waiting list and are in discussion with the local health board regarding the provision of occupational therapy services. The local authority must address how a service can be provided in communities to prevent duplication of referrals to health and social care services and unnecessary deterioration in people's health and well-being.

Recruiting and maintaining a sufficiently trained and experienced workforce is a national issue. At a local level in Anglesey, where the critical mass of workers is relatively low, the issue is in some circumstances becomes significant very quickly. Alongside supporting a national effort to support improvement, the local authority must make every effort to ensure resources are used prudently.

**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?

The local authority has a good understanding of its role in safeguarding people who are at risk of abuse, neglect or harm. There is a good level of knowledge and skills within the safeguarding team and a willingness and confidence to provide professional intervention when necessary. Ensuring all teams make consistent use of the skills in the team could improve outcomes for people across adults services.

Similarly there was evidence of good understanding and effective implementation of The Wales Safeguarding Procedures in relation to children and young people at risk of harm. We saw evidence of statutory requirements being met, effective partnership working to safeguard children, and evidence of good analysis to assess the level of risk.

Most practitioners have responded well to home working and have taken pride in maintaining the focus of their work despite the challenges. The local authority's increasing levels of trust in practitioners and emphasis on outcomes rather than outputs has built cohesion and maintained a sense of purpose during a very difficult time.

There are some understandable gaps and delays in social work recording. It is expected as services develop into a 'new normal' there will be opportunity to refocus on areas of practice requiring modernisation and ensure timely recording in case files in WCCIS. At this time the local authority will want to continue to reflect on the positive progress already made.

There are positive examples of joint working between social services and housing, who through a shared corporate vision and intermediate care funding are delivering projects to support people to reconnect and remain within their communities. Building-based schemes include small group homes known as Cartrefi Clyd for children, the refurbishment of units in Ucheldre, and plans for a third extra care scheme. Peripatetic community services are offered via local area coordinators.

Ongoing challenges in systems and processes remain in adults services, including challenges external to the council from WCCIS and internal challenges of ensuring recording is timely, proportionate and relevant. All managers and practitioners will want to continue to update their practice, recognise their own strengths, and their

ability to create change in how and where they work for the benefit of service users, themselves and the local authority. Council members recognise and take ownership of their responsibilities to promote well-being in their communities, and lead, support and challenge the work of council officers. Their expertise is continuing to grow as ongoing training and development is offered, accepted and used.

Lead members and councillors on social care committees and across portfolios demonstrate a good understanding of the role of social services and a willingness to support the local authority to improve through positive challenge and engagement.

#### **Method:**

- we reviewed documentation supplied by the local authority
- we spoke with people who were receiving or had received care and support, including care experienced young people
- we reviewed 18 case files
- we held nine case tracking interviews with practitioners
- we administered eight surveys to; people who had experience of care and support, providers, third sector organisations, staff, safeguarding leads, police, education and healthcare professionals
- we spoke with practitioners, managers, providers, heads of service, director, elected members and partners

#### **Next Steps**

We have identified strengths and areas for improvement. We will review the progress of these areas through our performance evaluation review meetings with the heads of service 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 assurance check and to those people and staff who spoke with us.

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Yours sincerely,



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