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Date: 04 November 2021

Dear Director,

## **Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) – Assurance Check 2021: Conwy County Borough Council**

This letter summarises the findings of our assurance check on 7 to 11 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.

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

### **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 with local authorities 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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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.

## **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:**

**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 have a strong voice and control over the support they receive with practice focused on what matters to the individuals, the outcome they want to achieve, and how they can use their own strengths and resources to promote their well-being.

The local authority is proactive in its approach to the Welsh language 'Active Offer'. At the beginning of the involvement information is captured on the individual's preferred language. We found assessments conducted through the medium of Welsh and English in accordance with people's wishes.

The need for advocacy is recognised. We saw evidence in the cases reviewed of people being supported by formal and informal advocates. We heard of the local authority's plans to introduce the Mind of My Own App to further improve communication and provide another means of communication for children and young people.

The local authority must ensure all mental capacity assessments are completed in accordance with statutory guidance. Practitioners take into account people's mental capacity to engage in their assessments, care and support planning, and safeguarding enquiries. However, in some of the cases reviewed we found when people are deemed to lack mental capacity the rationale for the decision was not always captured. This is an area for improvement already identified by managers during recent safeguarding audits.

People, including carers, were given the opportunity to tailor and manage their own care and support through use of direct payments. Evidence was seen of direct payments working well for individuals and carers to achieve their desired outcomes. Direct payments were used creatively during the pandemic as a means of providing alternative respite.

There was a recognition of the additional pressures experienced by carers during the pandemic. We found evidence of carers' needs being appropriately considered and supported alongside the cared for person. The assessments seen took into account the extent to which the carer is able and willing to provide and continue to provide care; the outcomes the carer wanted to achieve; as well as the extent to which support, preventative service or the provision of information, advice and assistance could assist carers in achieving identified outcomes. Carers and families we spoke to value the support they received from the local authority and were appreciative of the relationship established with individual practitioners.

The local authority has been proactive in its response to the challenges created by the pandemic. Systems were quickly put in place to support increased agile and remote working, where possible. Safe contact has been maintained with people throughout the pandemic. Where needed, direct safe face-to-face contact has continued, subject to a risk assessments and staff provided with appropriate levels of personal protective equipment (PPE). We saw examples of staff and providers working creatively as means of delivering their professional responsibilities.

Most practitioners who responded to our survey felt supported by colleagues and managers and regarded their workload as manageable. We found the workforce to be knowledgeable, dedicated, and focused on positive outcomes for people. Practitioners described feeling valued and said that managers were supportive and accessible. Learning and development has continued largely remotely and we heard about positive experiences in the induction and support for newly qualified staff.

Managers are engaged in quality assurance of work activities, and it was refreshing to see a clear approach to audit of casework and learning being disseminated.

**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?

Whilst the changing patterns of work in response to the pandemic has created challenges, Conwy County Borough Council continues to work hard to ensure prevention is an inherent part of their business. Drive for transformation and ensuring services can be sustainable in line with legislation and needs of the community has continued.

Senior managers are focused on identifying opportunities to use transformation funding to drive further integration, as well as to develop new models of care and support to improve outcomes for people. Work on developing the accommodation service has continued with for example, Bwthyn y Ddol Assessment Centre for children and Bron y Nant Respite Facility developed in response to the increase in people with disabilities whose carers need respite on a regular basis.

Overall our review of case files found timely and proportionate interventions to support prevention of escalation of need and risk, taking in to account individual wishes. Practitioners from adults and children's services told us of the availability of step down and community resources to support people's well-being and safety; this was evident in the cases we reviewed.

The local authority has designed an internet safety page focusing on supporting parents about risks and safety for children using the internet this is an important piece of work given increasing concern about this during the pandemic.

The local authority has a stable children looked after (CLA) population. Senior managers and officers have a good understanding and knowledge of the CLA profile. Conwy are strongly committed to the preventative agenda, and to the safe reduction of the CLA population. In partnership the local authority and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) invested in the Strengthening Families Team. We heard how the team identify the right support and intervention required to increase safety, resilience, parenting capacity and therefore prevent the risk of children coming into care. We heard about positive support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), working with young people and families to prevent breakdown. The local authority has also been working on enhanced support for CLA through clinical psychologist support and a focus on integration and co-working across services. This has resulted in an improved understanding about care and support across social services and CAMHS.

The importance of timely intervention and hospital discharge is understood and continues to be a priority for the local authority. The challenge of providing and commissioning domiciliary care for adults continues to be well-managed in Conwy. People are provided with reablement and packages of care and support in a timely manner. This supports their well-being and promotes people's recovery following a period in hospital as well as avoiding the need for some hospital admissions.

**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?

Partnerships were found to be working well at all levels and delivering an integrated sustainable approach to meeting need and promoting well-being in line with legislation.

We saw evidence of practitioners developing a professional working relationship with people built upon co-operation and shared understanding of what matters. An example being the resilience demonstrated by practitioners during adult safeguarding enquiries in working to engage people with complex circumstances in order to be reassured about their safety.

Managers and practitioners have well-established operational relationships with health, police, education, providers and the third sector. We saw a clear commitment to collaborative working. We heard how relationships had further developed during the pandemic facilitating a more agile response to changing support needs of children, young people and adults and their families. The increased use of digital platforms has meant agencies are contributing more effectively in statutory meetings.

We saw positive examples of a multi-agency approach to risk management and of practitioners and managers working together during the pandemic to share information and/or intelligence. This meant professionals were making a significant contribution to ensure need, risk and safety for people with complex needs was being addressed.

Providers spoke positively of the support they had received from the local authority during the pandemic. They valued the level of communication and the quality of the advice and support received.

The strategic approach implemented by the local authority during the pandemic facilitated targeted collaborative working across portfolios and services. In children's services we saw effective working relationship with education in identifying and making appropriate provision for the most vulnerable children during the pandemic. We saw partners working creatively using closed school playgrounds and Conwy Castle to provide activities for children and supporting families with limited outdoor access during lockdown.

**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 exercised its functions under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and ensures it makes a positive contribution to the well-being of people who need care and support and carers who need support. There is strong commitment and political support for both adults and children's services and a thorough and well-developed understanding of their strengths and current challenges.

The local authority has been proactive and innovative in its approach to promoting people's well-being. During the assurance check many positive examples of how the partnership responded to the pandemic were shared. This included promoting the well-being of people by loaning iPads to people in care homes to enable them to maintain contact with family/friends as well as to support links with primary and social care professionals.

Most of the assessments we reviewed were strengths-based, focusing on what matters to the person and the outcomes 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 practitioners.

At the time of the disabled children inspection in November 2019, ensuring recording templates and reporting formats reflected the requirement of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 was a priority for senior managers in preparation for the local authority adopting the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS). The transfer happened in November 2020 and in the cases we reviewed we saw evidence of significant improvement and recording templates now consistently reflecting the requirement of the Act. In most of the cases practitioner analysis was clear and focused with a good balance of information proportionate to the circumstances.

The timeliness and quality of statutory reviews seen were good. In children's services minutes and letters were written directly to the child, they acknowledge the child's wishes and explain in child-friendly language the outcomes and decisions of their review. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) contact children prior to the review and undertake midpoint checks on progress. Cases are escalated as needed but relationships between professionals support constructive resolutions. In adults services we found most reviews were timely, involving the right people, and were well recorded.

We found safeguarding enquiries and investigations conducted in line with statutory requirements with positive outcomes for people identified. Managers and practitioners expressed confidence that children in the authority were safe. This was evidenced in the files reviewed. Where children are at risk of significant harm, the response was timely and effective. The section 47 enquiries seen demonstrated good information gathering and there was evidence that children were see/seen alone as appropriate at the enquiry stage.

Review of case files and discussion with practitioners provided assurance of a timely and proportionate response to adult safeguarding reports. The reports are screened and most of enquiries we saw were conducted within statutory requirements with the analysis and determination clearly recorded. Safeguarding discussions and meetings involved the right people and evidence was seen of good working relationships with key partners including the police and the BCUHB Safeguarding Team.

#### **Method:**

- we reviewed documentation supplied in advance of our visit
- we spoke with carers and people who were receiving or had received care and support
- we reviewed 26 case files
- we held case tracking discussions on a further ten case files
- we held five focus groups
- we administered eight surveys

## **Next Steps**

We have identified strengths and will continue to monitor the local authority performance through our on-going performance evaluation meetings with the heads of service and director. 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lou Bushell-Bauers', written in a cursive style.

**Lou Bushell-Bauers**

Head of Local Authority Inspection

**Care Inspectorate Wales**