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Dear Director,

## **Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Performance Evaluation Inspection 2020-2021: Pembrokeshire County Council Adult and Children's Services**

This letter summarises the findings of our recent performance evaluation inspection between 28 September and 2 October 2020.

### **Overview**

In March 2020, CIW suspended its inspection programme in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the requirement for local authorities and providers to focus fully on responding to the challenging circumstances. A revised programme recommenced in September to provide assurance about how people are being safeguarded and well-being promoted during the pandemic.

The purpose of this inspection was to review how well the local authority continues to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being. We considered the safety of services, safety and well-being of people who work in services, and safety and well-being of people who use or may need to use services. We also completed our national thematic review of services for disabled children and their families.

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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.

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.

The inspection considered the application of these principles at three levels:

- individual
- operational
- strategic

### **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?

Practitioners we spoke with were positive about the support they received from management. The local authority demonstrated a commitment to learning and development and supporting formal qualification. This is significant, notably in supporting a number of newly qualified staff in the local authority and promoting a shared understanding across teams and other agencies.

The views of people who need care and support was central in most of the files we reviewed. Assessments and care and support plans mainly captured what matters to people and the outcomes people wanted to achieve.

In adult services, we found variation in quality and timeliness of reviews for some people and in carers' assessments. The best provided clear insight into people's individual circumstances and their ability to understand, retain and use key information to make informed decisions. Others lacked clarity of purpose, detail, were task focused and often occurred in response to a crisis or escalating need. As many people were not receiving a scheduled review, the opportunity was missed to address people's changing needs and prevent circumstances deteriorating. Senior managers were aware of these issues, recognising the need for improvement and are reviewing professional practice to drive up standards and maintain suitable staffing resources to ensure people's voices are heard at all times.

Plans for improvement in children's services include to develop a regular and structured programme of consultation with children and the need to consult with services and partners in the delivery of a strategy for reducing looked after children.

The local authority give regard to the rights of Pembrokeshire children to be offered the opportunity to take up advocacy. Our review of files evidenced the offer of advocacy to care experienced children. We received information via the advocacy provider, TGP Cymru that

during the COVID-19 lockdown period there had been over 200 referrals received from 100 young people, mostly in relation to care experienced children. TGP Cymru have been proactive in this period in contacting people and have used face time to safely communicate.

Positive views from care leavers were expressed in relation to their personal assistants. We saw examples of equality in partnership working; the parent of a disabled young person told us the social worker had been very child focused in discussing support, an assessment resulted in a befriender being sourced to work with the young person.

The disabled children's team is now integrated within the social services and housing directorate. Team members were positive about this change and expressed the significant benefits of working with other teams within the directorate to deliver a joined up service, improving safety and well-being outcomes for people.

This team currently work with over 100 children and nearly 40 are in receipt of direct payments. The local authority has a clear commitment to facilitating choice for families and personal opportunities were enhanced. Parents we spoke with were positive about how direct payments had provided them opportunity to develop bespoke care and support, but we were told about challenges in relation to the availability of personal assistants.

The local authority has an inclusive approach to involving people in planning, particularly for learning disabled people. For example, the Learning Disability Strategy and Learning Disability Charter was developed in partnership with learning disabled people. The local authority has employed learning disabled people as learning disability champions. Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) hosts one of the champions to focus on activities and services for learning disabled people within the third sector.

The local authority is committed and recognises the importance of delivering a service in the language of choice. Some assessments were undertaken through the medium of Welsh, however some inconsistencies remain.

**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?

People we spoke with were positive about the local authority's approach to prevention. Its pre-existing infrastructure and working relationships have helped develop the response to meeting peoples' well-being needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Community Hub is a collaboration between the local authority, PAVS and third sector organisations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This established a single point of access to respond to enquiries about peoples' well-being. Over 90 new community groups evolved quickly in direct response to the pandemic, with PAVS playing a key co-ordinating role. Other positive examples include the active and integrated role of Community Connectors, linking people to community resources. Recent activities have included supporting older people to develop their skills in digital technology.

The First Contact team have an important preventative role through its prompt responses to concerns about changes in people's well-being; signposting to support organisations and working closely with third sector organisations such as Hafal Crossroads and the Red Cross. The local authority has recently established a new intermediate care approach. Early indicators showed that staff were very positive about its responsiveness and about the effectiveness of different services working together. We found, however, variable hospital discharge practice. The best example demonstrated timely multi-agency hospital discharge planning, however, we also found poor planning in relation to reablement which was later addressed via further follow up at home.

In children's services we read about an example of a swift response to visit a parent of a child living with autism, this enabled a timely assessment of circumstances and care and support arranged. Prompt responses such as this ensure people are safe and enable opportunity to meet personal outcomes and avoid escalation of need.

We identified respite and short breaks for disabled children as an area for development, there is a need for the local authority to enhance this provision.

We identified examples where escalation of need was prevented for care experienced children, ensuring the best possible outcomes were achieved. This was illustrated in a file review which identified good multi-agency involvement, clarity in risk assessment and safety planning and needs being addressed through the support of Action for Children and the Edge of Care team.

We found strength in partnership arrangements between statutory and preventative services. There was clarity in step up and step down arrangements and good examples of utilising the Team around the Family (TAF) and youth outreach work to support young people. The local authority and its partners told us there had been a significant focus on organisation of summer activities, incorporating holiday hunger action and supporting children who may be vulnerable in addition to ensuring children remain safe during this pandemic.

Safely reducing the number of children looked after is recognised as a priority by the local authority. The local authority were actively working on a reduction plan that includes; addressing the use of Special Guardianship Orders, revocation of Care Orders and working with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass).

**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 degree to which people are equal partners in the design and delivery of their care and support was found to be variable. A good example we reviewed provided evidence of a good quality interaction in relation to a hospital discharge, with helpful and transparent communication which enabled the family to understand processes and make decisions.

Others lacked detail and limited evidence of participation of the person or carer and no focus on desired outcomes.

Many practitioners in Pembrokeshire engaged positively with children, adults and families and encouraged a partnership approach to enabling people to achieve what matters to them. Managers, social workers and partners maintained a strong focus on ensuring children and adults were supported to remain with their family and /or experience permanence at the earliest opportunity. Some social work staff pointed to challenges addressing the emotional and mental health needs of children, they described gaps in service availability and the local authority looked after children psychologist being utilised to fill the gap.

The local authority has a wide range of strategic partnership initiatives that indicated there was effective multi agency partnership working in Pembrokeshire. Responses from representatives from partner organisations corroborated the multi-agency approach was strong, with senior managers visible and contributing to partnership arrangements such as the Carers Board and the Learning Disability and Older People boards. We identified social workers playing an essential role in accessing and signposting to services and other professional groups. People told us the local authority was willing to accept changes and happy to consider innovative practice.

We found the Independent Reviewing Officer team worked effectively with social work teams; our findings indicated this team provided appropriate balance between challenge and support. The quality of the records of looked after children reviews were of a good standard, provided clarity in information and a focus on outcomes for children and young people.

Partners across Pembrokeshire were working to a shared agenda across health and social services, for example in the development of a regional complex needs panel process and close liaison with schools and the looked after children education co-ordinator.

**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?

People of Pembrokeshire can be assured their safety and well-being is promoted. Referrals and safeguarding practices were managed in accordance with statutory requirements and in an appropriate and timely manner. Analysis and critical thinking about family context, however, for example understanding wider impact about decisions, was not always evident coupled with a lack of management oversight. In children's services, gaps in some statutory visits undertaken by social workers were identified. The local authority must review how it monitors and addresses this particular practice area.

Safeguarding records reviewed evidenced coordinated care and support protection planning through core groups held virtually and child protection face-to-face visits undertaken by social workers. Some partners said communication with the local authority safeguarding service could be improved.

During the pandemic the local authority has sought to promote well-being of vulnerable people by creating opportunities for people to achieve positive outcomes and what matters to them. We identified examples of the local authority, in partnership with other organisations, supporting the well-being of young adults during changing circumstances in the pandemic period. One example was addressing the needs of young people transitioning from children's to adults services. A partner representative shared how a number of individuals were supported into independent living with a focus on their individual personal plans to access for example, college and work opportunities.

Interviews with families mostly highlighted positive working relationships with social workers. A family we interviewed described how the social worker worked to form a constructive relationship to deliver a child safety plan in respect of the young person's vulnerable behaviour. A risky behaviour strategy meeting and planning involved relevant professionals, timely development of the plan with clarity in timeframes and responsibilities. The youth service and education professionals were notably involved in the support for the family.

Disabled children's safety and well-being was addressed in a timely manner; for example we found child protection and looked after children reviews undertaken according to timescales. This is significant in terms of adapting care and support to changing need and risk. The safeguarding arrangements we reviewed had evidence of management authorisation and oversight. We saw risk described in harm statements and strengths of children and families considered. Social workers had a good understanding of the people they were working with; we found evidence of workers seeking the views and undertaking individual work such as the Three Houses.

The local authority adequately provides services to children with communication needs using a range of communication methods in order to share and gather information with and from young people. This includes British Sign Language (BSL), Makaton and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS).

We found regular recording of supervision and evidence of management oversight on most files reviewed. The local authority has quality assurance systems in place, this includes a system of peer auditing. This is significant for people as it means the local authority has a structure in place to monitor safety and well-being. Caseloads were described by staff and managers generally as busy but mostly manageable, although there was recognition of increasing complexity and numbers of care experienced children.

The local authority recognised supporting the well-being of its workforce is business critical and it has a clear focus on recruitment, retention and workforce development. All staff benefit from the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and careers. The local authority is ambitious to ensure people living in Pembrokeshire benefit from longer-term and trusting relationships with skilled and supportive social workers who understand their needs and how best to work with them to reduce risk and improve their personal outcomes.

**Method:**

- we reviewed documentation supplied in advance of our visit
- we spoke with 14 carers and 6 people receiving care and support
- we reviewed 30 files
- we held 28 case tracking interviews with staff
- we interviewed 9 other professionals
- we held 10 focus groups
- we administered a survey to social services employees
- we administered a survey to parent and carers of disabled children
- we administered a survey 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 service and director.

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

I 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.

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Yours sincerely,

**Lou Bushell-Bauers**

Head of Local Authority Inspection

**Care Inspectorate Wales**