

Ein cyf / Our ref:

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Dear Director,

Improvement Check visit to Powys County Council Social Services

This letter summarises the findings of the Improvement Check to Powys County Council Adult and Children's services on 09 – 13 May 2022.

The Improvement Check focused on progress made in relation to the areas for improvement identified during our Performance Evaluation Inspection (PEI) in September 2020.

Areas of improvement identified September 2020	Progress identified May 2022
Ensure the voice of the person is evident in all people's social care records	Signs of improvement
Social work practice must lead to positive wellbeing and outcomes for people.	Signs of improvement
Ensure a seamless service is maintained when people are allocated different social workers or input from different teams.	Signs of improvement
Ensure waiting list for care and support for adults is managed effectively.	Signs of 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.

Summary of findings from Improvement Check May 2022

During the Improvement Check we found progress has been made in several areas. This has resulted in developments to practice and better outcomes for people. This progress has been achieved against a backdrop of the additional pressures and challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Senior leaders know their service well. A major strength within the local authority is the availability of a robust quality and performance management system. This information is scrutinised by senior managers, the Chief Executive and lead members, with relevant information tabled for Scrutiny and Cabinet consideration. At an operational level information is used to inform and develop practice areas which still require oversight and improvement alongside providing feedback to staff.

Both adult and children's services continue to experience considerable challenges compounded by a sustained and significant increase in demand and difficulties with recruitment and retention of staff. There has been progress since the previous inspection in addressing workforce stability, but challenges remain. "Senior leaders rightly recognise without workforce stability, consistent practice quality will be hard to achieve and sustain". As a result, the drive to attract, recruit and retain a skilled workforce continues.

The inability to consistently deliver domiciliary support services (DSS) in a timely manner is clearly having an impact on the delivery of care and support to some people in Powys. The local authority must continue to monitor waiting lists across adult services to have clear insight into people's individual circumstances, identify changes of need and evaluate levels of risk. Managers must ensure high quality supervision and management support across all service areas. Supervision should provide opportunity for personal and professional reflection, constructive challenge and direction setting. Wales Community Care Information System (WCCIS) poor system performance continues to be high risk to the service and hinders the ability of staff to undertake duties in assessing and updating information in a timely manner.

People

The local authority has worked hard to reshape and re-design its service with a focus on improving delivery of early intervention and preventative services. With effective partnership working, this enables children and families to benefit from intensive early help and support. The significant increase in demand at the front door continues to create unprecedented pressure on both adult and children's social care in Powys. Information dashboards provide managers with an overview of the work within their individual teams ensuring the focus remains on improving services and outcomes for people. The local authority must ensure clear management oversight and a consistent understanding of demand, capacity, and prioritisation of work to ensure outcomes for people are met, especially when changes are reported to people's presenting needs. The local authority must also review the way it communicates with people to ensure people are informed as to how the local authority is managing prioritisation as well as how people can contact the local authority should there be any changes in their circumstances.

We found most assessments and care and support plans reflected people's views, strengths and considered relevant risks. We saw within assessments the views of the

person are clearly recorded in their own words which is commendable as it can more accurately represent the person's views. This was an area of improvement from our previous inspection.

The quality of people's social care records was good, but care should be taken to ensure information is recorded consistently. In both adult and children's services completion of all relevant assessment areas was not routinely undertaken. We found in some social care records care and support plans were not updated promptly following changes in people's needs or their care and support.

We heard of adult services staff in Powys having open, honest conversations with people about the challenges of sourcing community-based care services. There is strategic commitment to promoting care and support at home, but assessments/persons social care plans were not always clear whether the persons wish had been considered before considering a placement in care.

We heard about the challenges of sourcing domiciliary care for people living in rural communities. We noted one person, whose preference was to return home following a hospital admission, moving to a care home on a long-term basis due to a lack of available services to meet their needs at home. The intention had been for the care home setting to be a temporary solution, pending the availability of a community-based care. We also heard of the challenge of moving people on from in-house re-ablement and bridging team services to longer term support. This affects people's progression to independence as well as limiting capacity within those services to support more people. Therefore, this is having an adverse impact on people's choice and independence. Whilst these challenges are shared with other local authorities in Wales Powys County Council must ensure robust arrangements are in place to monitor people's situation when eligible needs remain unmet.

The challenge for the local authority is compounded by its geographical location, available working population, increase in demand through its front door and the current state of the provider market. We heard of some domiciliary care providers being unable to continue providing care to people but were assured the local authority had been able to find alternative care arrangements. It does, however, add strain to already stretched resources. We found operational teams working alongside the brokerage team and Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) to undertake welfare checks for people still awaiting a package of domiciliary care. We were told how this is helping the local authority to identify if circumstances have changed.

The local authority has identified the risk of unmet need due to a backlog of adult assessments and reviews as demand is greater than the resource of staff available to complete them. It has commissioned additional services such as occupational therapy and implemented a plan of work to support the reduction in the volume of reviews outstanding by an external agency. A further impact on resource sufficiency to complete assessments and reviews was noted where staff had been redeployed to support the core quality assurance team with assisting practitioners regarding reviewing the status of forms on WCCIS to help move work in progress to completion.

When concerns for children are referred to children's services the response is timely and appropriate for most children. Careful consideration of children's histories, along with proportionate information gathering means most children receive the right help at the

earliest opportunity. However, we did see in some cases professional curiosity hampered by lack of time to reflect on the best way to support families, also copying information from one section of an assessment to another which limited the ability to ensure people's wishes and desired outcomes were reflected. These issues had already been identified by the local authority through audits and are being addressed by managers of the service.

The local authority is proactive in its approach to the active offer of Welsh. People's preferred language wishes are established during first contact with a social worker. In the same way the local authority must ensure assessment and reviews of care and support plans are consistently undertaken through the medium of Welsh in accordance with people's preference. For example, it was positive to see assessments being undertaken in Welsh where the person's first language was Welsh. The local authority may want to consider reviewing its ability to deliver all support services in Welsh once the initial assessment is completed.

People's individual identity needs are well understood, including sexuality and gender, the position of children within their family group, and in relation to culture, religion and language. We saw within children's assessments sensitivity shown regarding diversity issues and an understanding and commitment to meeting individual needs through partnership working with relevant bespoke services.

Prevention

In children's services, although a process was in place in relation to transition of children between teams and services, we found examples where the support for some families was too fragmented. This meant they did not always receive the right services at the right time. Further work is required to ensure seamless and co-ordinated services which prevent escalation of need and ensures the best outcomes for children and families.

We noted a new hospital discharge team, working in partnership with Powys Teaching Health Board (PTHB) had recently been established. This dedicated hospital team supports transfers from District General Hospitals and works alongside health partners to embed D2RA pathways in Powys.

This was one of the local authority's immediate priorities set out in its Adult Services Recovery Plan 2022 and aligns with one of its key strategic objectives to support people to transfer from hospital as soon as people are medically fit to do so. We noted further developments with extra care facilities throughout the county, aimed at meeting future demand and giving more choice to older people. They included, for example, an extra care housing scheme in Newtown and new accommodation being developed in Welshpool, Ystradgynlais and Brecon for older people. We were told of plans for two more extra care schemes being developed within the local authority. Practitioners saw these as positive steps in providing more choice for people.

The local authority has also invested in assistive technology in the community, such as robotics to promote people's independence and well-being at home. This helps reduce demand on care resources, freeing up capacity to allocate them to others in need, offering choice to people.

Well-being

Within adult services most of the assessments we reviewed were strengths based, focusing on what matters to the person and the outcome they wished to achieve.

Review of people's social care records and discussion with practitioners provided assurance of a timely and proportionate response to adult safeguarding referrals. In promoting safety at an individual level, we found practitioners seeking out the person's wishes and feelings. We found some good examples of practitioner analysis and rationale which evidenced an understanding of what was required to help individuals meet their personal outcomes. This was the case in both the adult and children records we reviewed.

At the previous PEI, we identified variation in the quality of Mental Capacity Act assessments, which we were assured senior management was addressing. During this improvement check, we saw good examples of mental capacity assessments and best interest decision making taking place in accordance with the principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and accompanying code of practice. This includes the use of independent advocacy to promote people's voice and considering least restrictive options during the assessment and best interest process, in collaboration with relevant parties. This is an improvement on the previous inspection.

There is a commitment to improving services for carers in Powys County Council. We heard about collaboration with Credu (Powys's strategic partner for supporting carers) to carry out wellbeing assessments for carers at first point of contact. This gives the local authority an opportunity to understand and respond promptly to the needs of carers and reduce the number of carers awaiting assessment. We saw evidence of carer's assessments being offered which reflect people's wishes, strengths, and desired outcomes.

Direct payments are offered in Powys to promote choice for people. We heard success, however, often depends on the ability to source personal assistants. Powys County Council has introduced a virtual wallet, for managing direct payments securely online, to make their administration more user friendly for people.

We saw examples of safeguarding practice in line with the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures. This included recorded strategy discussions, positive management of risk where the views of relevant parties were sought and clearly documented outcomes. An area of practice which adult services may look to consider is ensuring wider consideration of the person's context involving all key people, to inform the initial strategy meeting. We heard of the timely sharing of information with the police and a shared understanding of thresholds for risk. Within adult services safeguarding protection plans viewed were of a high standard.

We were told by senior managers and staff WCCIS has continued to prove problematic, leading to difficulties and delays in both inputting and accessing important data and information about people. We were given many examples of ongoing system failure, such as following a national upgrade in October 2021 resulting in the system being non-operational for more than two weeks. Staff across both services reported daily problems with the system running extremely slowly, being unable to view information and save work and being unable to access the system at all. Staff spoke of how these challenges have a

negative impact on their moral. These are a very real frustration for staff as they can sometimes hamper their ability to do their jobs efficiently and effectively.

One of the consequences of the high staff vacancy rates in teams is continued over-reliance on agency staff. Managers at all levels are spending a great deal of time managing the day-to-day prioritisation of work, matching limited social work resource to the most critical work. The Grow our Own Social Workers programme is helping to mitigate this situation. However, the large contingent of newly qualified social workers brings its own challenges. The local authority must ensure all newly qualified social workers are well supported and supervised.

The shortage of adults and children's social workers is acknowledged as a UK-wide challenge. Leaders have responded positively to the recommendations from the last inspection having secured additional funding to recruit to such areas as the Hospital Discharge Team and a continued focus on The Grow our Own Social Worker and Occupational Therapists programme. Despite these improvements senior managers are clear the journey of improvement across both services is still a major priority for the local authority. With the recent resignation of the statutory director and a new political landscape, corporate leadership and governance is key to ensuring the journey of continuous improvement in delivery of social care within Powys County Council.

Partnership

We found members of the Regional Partnership Board demonstrated ownership of and commitment to the collaborative approach to continuous improvement. This was characterised by strong representation and engagement from all statutory and non-statutory partners, as well as an interest in learning from each other.

We heard about effective partnership working with health professionals in relation to hospital discharge. This included virtual ward meetings. One practitioner, despite the challenges associated with hospital discharge, described feeling there was a *'together approach'*. The geographical positioning of Powys means it works with multiple Health Boards within Wales and across the border in England. This creates additional challenges because hospitals are widely dispersed. Partnerships between the Police and Children's services were described as very positive with a strong direction driven by the Regional Safeguarding Board. Child exploitation was a specific area where partners work well together to develop and implement practice change. We noted an area of good practice has been the development and introduction of the Powys Child Exploitation Strategy. Interviews with the Police and Health representatives spoke of a joint understanding of risk and their responsibilities to act to help protect children.

We heard about good multi-agency partnership working at the ASSIST front door service. We heard of effective partnership working with families, where staff maintained good communication links, ensuring families remained involved during the assessment and care planning process.

Within people's social care records reviewed we saw evidence of practitioners developing a professional working relationship with people built upon co-operation and shared understanding of what matters. We heard about creative solutions being explored by

practitioners to promote positive outcomes for people, which included use of assisted technology such as robotics to promote people's independence and well-being at home.

We undertook the following activities to inform our findings:

Fieldwork

Most inspection evidence was gathered by reviewing the experiences of people through review and tracking of their social care record. We reviewed thirty social care records and tracked a minimum of ten.

Tracking a person's social care record includes having conversations with the person in receipt of social care services, their family or carers, key worker, the key worker's manager, and other professionals involved.

We interviewed a range of local authority employees.

We interviewed a range of partner organisations.

We reviewed a sample of staff supervision files.

We reviewed supporting documentation sent to Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) for the purpose of the inspection.

Acknowledgements

CIW would like to thank staff, partners and people who gave their time and contributed to this inspection.

Next steps

CIW will continue to monitor progress against improvements required through ongoing performance monitoring and review activities.

Yours sincerely,



Lou Bushell-Bauers

Head of Local Authority Inspection

Care Inspectorate Wales