



Children's Services
Second Quarterly Improvement Report
January to March 2018

17th April, 2018

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Summary

1. The Council fully accepted the findings in the inspection report published on 17 October and the subsequent warning notices issued by Welsh Government. It quickly acknowledged the need for urgent and sustained change which would demonstrate both a genuine commitment to safeguarding children in Powys and also deliver effective systems for helping them to achieve positive well-being outcomes.
2. The First Quarterly Improvement Report, submitted to the Minister for Children and Social Care in January 2018, set out the considerable activity that had taken place across the Council between October and December to secure greater compliance with statutory requirements and practice standards. The Council had acted to:
 - use the expertise and knowledge available within the Improvement Board to support change within key aspects of the improvement plan, such as fieldwork practice and fostering;
 - strengthen governance arrangements, including the introduction of a very strong independent Improvement Board chaired by a former local authority Chief Executive who has experience of leading a council subject to intervention;
 - engage the council's whole extended leadership team in this work;
 - recruit more social workers (going above establishment in frontline teams) and creating additional in areas such as Powys People Direct, the fostering and adoption services, quality assurance and business management.
 - put in place highly experienced senior leadership for children's services and social services as a whole;
 - develop plans for reshaping services with our partners;
 - improve HR, IT and performance monitoring systems;
 - produce a financial plan that incorporates a safe and sustainable budget for children's services;
 - agree a Corporate Safeguarding Policy, which sets out the steps that the Council as a whole will take to protect and safeguard children and adults at risk, and set up a Corporate Safeguarding Group chaired by the Chief Executive and including both the portfolio holders for social services;
 - demonstrate renewed commitment to engaging effectively with the Regional Safeguarding Board, the Regional Partnership Board, the Children and Young People's Partnership and structures for national working in areas such as fostering and adoption so that we can benefit more from partnership working and external accountability.
3. During the second quarter, this work has been expanded, consolidated and developed further. One of the key tasks was to produce, on time, the second iteration of the Council's children's services three-year improvement programme and plan. The improvement programme framework document describes: our overall purpose; what good looks like; the four key improvement aims; our improvement model; partnership working; and governance and leadership arrangements. It outlines the need for an absolute focus on professional practice but also work to

reform and reshape a wide range of services, both within the directorate but also at a corporate level. In keeping with the stated aims, we committed to generating radical change across the whole pathway in children's services.

4. These documents are regarded by the Council and the Improvement Board as an effective and comprehensive response to all the recommendations in the inspection report. Actions are:
 - specific and clear;
 - timely;
 - realistic and prioritised;
 - grounded in performance data, wherever possible;
 - resourced in terms of budget, governance and commitment;
 - sufficient and long-term enough to provide strategic direction;
 - attributed to staff who have the capacity and competency to deliver what is required.
5. The Chief Inspector responded to submission of the programme and plan as follows. *It is clear from the documentation provided that senior leaders understand the scale of the transformation required. It is positive to note the commitment of elected members, staff and partners to personal and corporate accountability for improving outcomes for vulnerable children and their families in Powys.*
6. The improvement programme and plan form the basis for a three-year programme of change. Our goal is to move Powys in that time from the position set out in the inspection report to a place of real strength and exemplary performance. We adopted an approach to planning which involves all parts of the Council working together. It sought also to define the contribution that can be made by the Children and Young People Partnership (CYPP) and other collaborative groups such as the Regional Safeguarding Board. We believe that this approach will encourage the collective and distributed leadership and ownership of the plan that will sustain our efforts into the long-term.
7. We recognise that delivering such an ambitious plan requires the Council to make this our top priority, not only in terms of work to make progress in children's services but also in taking corporate ownership of key well-being responsibilities for children and families. We are seeking improvements across the whole Council to ensure that the service can deliver its duties. For this reason, a corresponding and equally ambitious Corporate Leadership and Governance Plan has been produced. The Council has asked for and received additional support from Welsh-Government to coordinate and deliver improvements in this area. There is to be a new Improvement and Assurance Board, with a remit for improvement work across social services and the Council. It will provide constructive challenge and advise the Cabinet Secretary on progress made.

8. The arrangements for accountability set out in the improvement plans and being put into effect demonstrate that the Leader, Cabinet members, the Chief Executive, the corporate management team, staff and partners accept a personal and collective responsibility for ensuring that change does happen and that good outcomes are achieved. Children's services have been able increasingly to call on the strength of a wide range of corporate support services and partnerships. This includes changes in the way we all work together to support the delivery of front line services. Corporate partners have made a major contribution to progress in areas in areas such as performance management, HR, communications, Corporate Parenting and Corporate Safeguarding¹. A Performance Report for 2017/18 can be found in Appendix 1
9. The level of political and corporate support for Children's Services has been demonstrated especially by the level of additional financial support made available in 2017/18 and agreed for 2018/19 to deliver its improvement plans. The budget for next year includes investment of £6.172m for Childrens Services, an increase of 47% at a time when the overall budget for the Council is experiencing considerable pressures. This figure emerged from a structured and methodical approach to developing a safe and sustainable budget for children's services, including a costed Improvement Resource Plan which identifies the additional staffing and other resource requirements. An overall commissioning strategy for children's services is being developed, together with specific strategies in areas such as placements for children who are looked after.
10. As a consequence, the Council has been able to make considerable progress in delivering the actions set out in the improvement plans, on time and with demonstrable effects. These are set out later in this report under the four headings used in the improvement plan:
 - A. Leadership, Governance and Partnerships (Sponsor - Chief Executive)
 - B. Case Management, Practice and Quality Assurance (Sponsor - Director of Social Services)
 - C. Workforce (Sponsor - Head of HR)
 - D. Reshaping and Reforming Services (Sponsor - Director of Education)
11. We have been especially concerned to secure greater compliance with statutory requirements and practice standards in the areas highlighted in the inspectors report and in their monitoring activity undertaken in December last year. A letter has been received which summarises the findings of further CIW monitoring activity in March. The fieldwork focused on recent frontline practice and management oversight. The overall conclusions are as follows.
12. *We have increased confidence the local authority understands more fully what it needs to do to improve services and has taken tangible steps toward this. We found evidence*

¹ There have been significant difficulties in dealing with the need for a comprehensive suite of performance indicators, grounded in robust and timely data and helpful comparators. However, all staff have collaborated very well in the work needed to put this in place as quickly as possible.

of progress in assessment and care and support services for children. We also recognise increased corporate support for the improvement journey and appreciation of the importance of this for the safety and well-being of the most vulnerable children in Powys.

13. *We note investment in additional resources has reduced caseloads and increased senior management capacity to support the performance of individual frontline staff and managers. There is now sufficient performance information in most areas to provide a clear view of the service provided.*
14. *We saw evidence of the implementation of the quality assurance framework with comprehensive case file reviews providing much needed information on the quality of practice. People we spoke to, at all levels, were able to articulate what needs to be done, including a concerted effort to improve recording practice by frontline staff. However until staff have more confidence in the electronic case management system there will continue to be questions around the reliability of performance data.*
15. *While some performance indicators have improved, progress is still required in other key areas. Now there are reduced caseloads, it is vital the workforce is committed to quality and timely support for children and families and has the means to deliver on this. At this visit, senior managers were clear about the need to address any performance issues directly with individual staff through additional support and training.*
16. *We spoke to social workers who trained outside Wales who received very little induction into the Welsh legal context when taking up their contract. We are disappointed planned training on the Social Services and Well-being Wales Act has not yet occurred. The high turnover of staff continues. This prevents stability and security within teams and continues to impact on the children and families the authority is supporting.*
17. *The Head of Service is clear about planned work to review the efficacy of early help services and the quality of direct work being delivered by statutory social services. There are substantial improvements required in commissioning, quality assurance, multi-agency decision making and support of looked after children placed out of the area.*
18. *The conclusions match our own. These are the areas where progress often takes time but where the impact upon children and families is especially significant. Our own figures and the messages from the CSSIW fieldwork have demonstrated again that we were starting from an exceptionally low baseline. There remain key areas of professional practice where improvement has been slow (e.g. supervision, statutory visiting) and there are too many Powys children in out of area placements. Hence, the scale of the agenda is immense but absolutely necessary. Our work streams which focus on workforce planning and development and service reshaping and reform are*

making good progress. This means that the changes which will facilitate long-term improvement are being put in place.

19. Progress to date has been hard won but we have been able to maintain a strong coalition for change. The plan will continue to build on the strengths of our staff whose resilience and professionalism in the face of many challenges has been acknowledged by inspectors. Colleagues within the Council and in key partnerships have been working hard alongside us to deliver change and to show their commitment to the improvement plans. We are sure that they will all respond positively to the appointment of a permanent Director of Social Services; she will be taking up the post on 23 April.

20. There are many positive signs, indicators that we are on the right path. The Improvement Board has been monitoring closely the improvement work being done. It has not hesitated to point out areas of concern and to encourage even more urgency. Its Chair produces a monthly bulletin, summarising progress and ongoing issues. In February, he wrote as follows. *The Improvement Board are pleased to see significant progress for putting the necessary infrastructure in place with stronger leadership, finance and performance management. There are also early signs of progress with regards to HR systems, with recruitment of more staff, including more permanent staff. Supported, well qualified staff are key to the whole improvement agenda. Additional training to support staff is underway in areas such as 'Signs of Safety' and the Social Services and Well-being Act. There are some very early signs of improvement in social work practice, such as timescales for the completion of assessments, frequency of statutory visits and direct work with young people. However, it is the case that further substantial work remains in this area. Quality social work practice is key to improving the service and delivering the outcomes set out in the Improvement Plan. The plan outlines the priority actions needed, including an overall focus on the rights of the child. The journey to improvement will be long-term and requires many different elements to be in place and working together.*

21. We acknowledge that effective and sustainable change will require far more time and effort. The following areas are seen as being major corporate priorities that we are actively pursuing.
 - better engagement with children, young people and families to encourage co-production in service design and review;
 - an improved offer to specific groups, such as young people leaving care and foster carers;
 - coherent service commissioning strategies including: edge of care services/Integrated Family Support Services;, placements; support to looked after children; front-door responses such as the early offer to families and an Information/Advice/Assistance Service.
 - more inquisitive and effective scrutiny by elected members;

22. At the same time, the Social Services Directorate will focus on using additional resources placed in the budget this year and for 2018/19 to improve our capacity for:
- engaging the whole workforce in service redesign;
 - facilitating professional development in areas such as the Social Services and Well-being Act implementation, specialisation, practice champions, best practice seminars and links to institutions offering professional courses;
 - dealing with issues around operational structures, workload management, staffing needs (including urgent recruitment and filling vacancies on a longer-term basis);
 - adopting an even more robust and targeted approach to performance management and supervision.
23. The improvement plan focuses on ensuring that we have the right conditions to allow our staff to do their very best for children and families across Powys. Working together, we will deliver not only the priority actions set out in the plan but also sustainable improvement and good outcomes in the lives of our children and young people. We will continue to work closely with CIW, Welsh Government, Social Care Wales, regional and other key partners in pursuit of these goals.
24. Our overall position is that, as an organisation, we have been achieving important milestones – both those set for us and those we have planned. It has taken a considerable amount of collective effort. There have been real benefits to some children and families. However, it is still early in the improvement process. Some of our work to date has confirmed that we are seeking to make progress from a low starting point in important areas such as some elements of professional practice and corporate ownership of service priorities,. On the other hand, there have been encouraging signs about our capacity to deliver positive change at pace while dismantling some of the obstacles that could get in our way. We can demonstrate that children’s services are firmly established as a political and corporate priority and that good foundations are being laid. Again, this is tempered by realism about how far we need to travel.

Cllr Rosemarie Harris, Executive Leader

Cllr Rachel Powell, Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services

David Powell, Acting Chief Executive

Phil Evans, Interim Director of Social Services

Ian Budd, Director of Education

Introduction

25. On 17th October 2017, the Minister for Social Services and Public Health issued a First Warning Notice to Powys County Council under section 151 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. It was prompted by Welsh Ministers' concerns around the ability of the authority to adequately carry out its duties, arising from an inspection of children's services undertaken in July 2017. The inspection report highlighted a significant number serious concerns with regard to the performance, quality and delivery children's services compounded by instability in management, poor and confused direction and weak governance.
26. The First Warning notice cited the grounds and supporting reasons for intervention. It set out the following action required by the Council:
- (a) to end the current arrangements and to appoint an interim Director of Social Services to ensure compliance with section 144 of the 2014 Act;
 - (b) to appoint an Improvement Board to oversee the actions of the Director, to provide constructive challenge and strategic oversight of the Director's actions as regards all social services functions relating to children;
 - (c) to require the Improvement Board to provide monthly reports to the Leader of the Council with a copy to the Director of Social Services and Integration, Welsh Government 2;
 - (d) to require the interim Director of Social Services to draw up an improvement plan addressing the issues raised in the July inspection report;
 - (e) to agree the improvement plan with the Improvement Board including the timescales within which the actions and objectives should be achieved, and providing strong corporate and political oversight;
 - (f) to require the interim Director of Social Services to implement the improvement plan;
 - (g) during the improvement plan period, no additional organisational structures should be introduced.
27. In response to the First Warning Notice, the Council:
- appointed an interim Director of Social Services;
 - appointed an Improvement Board to oversee the actions of the Director, to provide constructive challenge and strategic oversight of the Director's actions as regards all social services functions relating to children;
 - ensured that the Improvement Board has provided reports to the Leader of the Council with a copy to the Director of Social Services and Integration, Welsh Government;

- delivered an improvement plan drawn up by the interim Director of Social Services to address the issues raised in the July inspection report within the 20 days required ;
 - started to implement the improvement plan
28. A follow-up monitoring visit by the Inspectorate in December identified early signs of improvement, some evidence of improved practice and many areas where the authority was putting in place new arrangements which had not yet had time to become embedded. The inspectors continued to be concerned about a range of issues including timescales for the completion of assessments and care and support plans, safeguarding practice issues and performance and quality monitoring. These issues were indicative of exceptionally poor standards of practice, in terms of process compliance and the quality of professional work undertaken. The second iteration of the Council's improvement plan has been designed to tackle all the issues of ongoing concern.
29. On 15 January 2018, after receiving the first quarterly improvement report from the Council for the period October to December 2017, the Minister for Children and Social Care issued a follow-up warning notice under the same grounds as the first. He recognised that the Council was on a journey of improvement and he was pleased that there were early signs of improvement, including some areas of practice. Further action required by Powys County Council, to deal with the grounds for intervention and period for compliance, was as follows.
- (a) To submit a revised Improvement Plan to Care Inspectorate Wales (formerly, CSSIW) and a copy to the Director of Social Services and Integration, Welsh Government no later than 7 February 2018. The revised plan is to include actions for improvement which the authority will achieve -
 - i. within 6 months of the date of this notice; and
 - ii. within 12 months of the date of this notice; and
 - iii. within a period which goes beyond 12 months from the date of this notice up until January 2020;
 - (b) The actions for improvement must address the findings described in CSSIW's letter and appendix one dated 4 January 2018 to the Interim Director of Social Services issued following CSSIW's monitoring visit in December 2017.
 - (c) Once the revised plan has been submitted, an addendum to this notice will be issued requiring Powys County Council to achieve the improvement actions within the time periods specified in the plan and these will be the relevant compliance periods for the purpose of section 151(2)(d).
 - (d) To introduce a quality assurance framework to improve consistency and standards of frontline practice across the county. The framework must be drafted by 31 March 2018 and the authority must be able to provide substantial evidence of implementation of the framework by 30 June 2018.

- (e) To continue to arrange for an Improvement Board¹ to oversee the actions of the Interim Director, to provide constructive challenge and strategic oversight of the Interim Director's actions as regards all social services functions relating to children. The Council had requested statutory support under the Local Government Measure 2009. The detail of this package was being developed and there was a possibility that this would result in a revised governance structure with implications for the Improvement Board. Any revised arrangements will be agreed with the Council.
 - (f) The Interim Director to provide monthly reports to the Improvement Board and Leader of the Council with a copy to the Director of Social Services and Integration, Welsh Government.
30. The Notice states that, if Powys County Council does not carry out the actions set out within the specified period satisfactorily, Welsh Ministers are minded to more directly intervene in one or more of the methods of intervention provided for under sections 152-161 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

Summary of Progress

A. Corporate Parenting, Leadership and Governance

- The Independent Improvement Board continues to meet on a monthly basis, with support activities spread over approximately three days. Activities include 1-to-1 meetings with key staff and politicians, formal Board Meeting and engagement activity with staff at all levels.
- We have adopted an approach to improvement planning which involves all parts of the Council working together. It has sought also to define the contribution that can be made by the Children and Young People Partnership (CYPP) and other collaborative groups such as the Regional Safeguarding Board. We hope that this approach will encourage the collective and distributed leadership and ownership of the plan that will sustain our efforts into the long-term.
- We recognise that delivering the improvement programme and plan requires the Council to make this our top priority, not only in terms of work to improve children's services but also in taking corporate ownership of key responsibilities (in areas such as prevention, safeguarding, edge of care services, looked after children and leaving care services).
- The improvement programme and the improvement plan have been approved by the Council and the Improvement Board. The arrangements for accountability set out in these documents and being put into effect demonstrate that the Leader, Cabinet members, the Chief Executive, the corporate management team, staff and partners accept a personal and collective responsibility for ensuring that change does happen and that good outcomes are achieved.
- The plan is very comprehensive, involving the whole council/its key partners. It is front-loaded because we cannot afford to take our time but it is important too that we do things in the right sequence. For each action, we've described expectations, outcomes sought, action to be taken, progress being made and key next steps (with dates).
- Children's services are increasingly able to call on the strength of a wide range of corporate support services and partnerships. We are seeking improvements across the whole Council to ensure that the service can deliver its duties. This includes changes in the way we all work together to support the delivery of front line services. The Improvement Board has been able to consider a comprehensive plan for improving corporate leadership and governance in the Council. The inspectors found that the council is focused on delivering corporate responsibilities for Corporate Parenting and Corporate Safeguarding.
- Since the inspection, extensive activity has taken place across the Council to secure greater compliance with statutory requirements and practice standards. There has been a rigorous process of self-assessment and we have listened to advice from a range of people who are experts in producing improvement in children's services experiencing severe difficulties. Consequently, Powys has developed a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development, further informed by the helpful recommendations made by the Inspectors and by the work of the Improvement Board.

- Further work is being done to align the Children’s Services Improvement Plan with the Corporate Leadership and Governance Plan and the Adult Services Improvement Plan, ensuring that the resources are available for implementing three major programmes at the same time.
- The plan is intended to provide an outward-facing overview of the key actions and progress towards delivering them. It is supported by a range of more detailed strategic plans and programmes including a Finance and Capacity Plan, setting out the significant cost and resource implications; the Start Well programme, to be delivered through the Children and Young People’s Partnership; and the Making it Happen programme, in respect of the leadership, governance and organisational issues which the Council is tackling.
- The projected outturn position for the service in the last financial year is an overspend against budget in excess of £5m. The overspend was caused by the service not being able to find savings of £1,100k originally included in the budget and expenditure in relation to Looked after Children (LAC) projected to exceed the budget by more than £3m. In its budget plans for 2018/19, the Council agreed significant investment in children’s services (£6.172m for Childrens Services, an increase of 47%), to fund the improvement programme and plan.
- Members Briefing Sessions (for areas such as safeguarding and resourcing) have been well attended. The Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children Services, has been meeting purposefully and its work programme will include clarifying the ‘offer’ that will be made to children who are looked after and care leavers. Steps have been taken to ensure that the voice of Looked After Children and care leavers is prominent within the work of the Board.
- Further work is being done to align the Children’s Services Improvement Plan with the Corporate Leadership and Governance Plan and the Adult Services Improvement Plan, ensuring that the resources are available for implementing three major programmes at the same time.
- The Council has appointed a Director of Social Services.
- The interim Director of Social Services and interim Head of Service continue to provide fortnightly briefings to the Leader, Deputy Leader, Portfolio Holder, the Leaders of other political parties, the acting CEO and other relevant staff. This provides opportunities to escalate issues without delay, seek resolutions quickly and ensure corporate ownership.
- We have clarified the roles and responsibilities of all the groups and work streams tasked with generating change and ensured proper governance arrangements. Evidence is being collated and recorded against each priority action in the plan
- Cabinet, Executive Management Team and Heads of Service from across the council have been involved in planning changes needed to Powys People Direct (PPD) and the Information, Advice and Assistance service. The Children and Young People Partnership has started testing how it can help deliver an Early Help Model and other elements of the Start Well Programme (part of the Powys Health and Care Strategy/Joint Action Plan.
- The communications and engagement plan for Children’s Services is being implemented, through road shows, news releases, staff recruitment material

(including web pages, film, social media and a Powys County Council Homepage carousel feature). A Children's Services staff suggestion/feedback scheme has been established on the intranet. The media response to publication of a Child Practice Review by the Regional Safeguarding Board was well managed. There is an update on communications activity provided to each meeting of the Improvement Board.

- As part of the improvement process, it is essential to identify, analyse and prioritise risks to ensure that these risks are managed effectively. There are significant risks to the Improvement Plan, including the Council's ability to deliver sustainable resourcing and workforce strategies. A programme risk register is maintained by the Programme Manager and reported to the Improvement Board.
- An Operational Group established and meets weekly to ensure corporate support is available as required. Terms of Reference for the Group have been agreed; an action log is in place; a risk and issues register is being maintained.
- *Improving Children's Services* is a standing item on the weekly Executive Management Board.
- A more inquisitive approach to scrutiny is being developed with a training and development programme being delivered by an external expert. A programme of work is in place in respect of member development training across all their roles (including Scrutiny and Cabinet). There is increased member participation in Children's Services scrutiny and corporate parenting events; offers of help from individual members have been received. A suite of five sentinel indicators has been developed which all elected members can access directly on a monthly basis. The dashboard developed for the Improvement Board will be used to report to scrutiny committee.
- Increased levels of engagement with partner agencies is increasing their understanding of the strategic direction and operational protocols for Children's Services but this needs to be consolidated.
- We have increased capacity in Powys People Direct, our contact and early screening centre. It both provides information, advice and assistance and also receives social services enquiries from the public and professionals. Concerns raised about people's ability to get access to PPD were addressed through a restructuring exercise. Supervision and support for contact officers have been increased and management oversight enhanced. The service has been re-located into county hall at Llandrindod Wells to meet more appropriately their accommodation requirements.
- Through PAVO, the Council has commissioned computer programmers to develop a link between InfoEngine and Dewis, the national well-being database, so that information from both systems is regularly shared and updated. (February 2018)
- Key next step is to ensure that all professionals understand and respect the role of Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA) and their responsibility for it in changing the way families can interact with organisations at an early stage of their involvement. The Children and Young People Partnership has made this a priority action, within the work being done to develop prevention and early intervention across all public services.

- Through their representative on the Improvement Board, the Children's Commissioner's Office has provided a proposal for working with the Council on embedding the UNCRC in service design and professional practice. We are awaiting final publication of the National Participation Charter by Children in Wales.
- The Health and Care Strategy (including the Area Plan) has moved into Phase 2, with an agreed Start Well Programme for Children's Services, to be overseen by the Regional Partnership Board

B. Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance

- The casework service has been focusing on the basics - ensuring that assessments are completed, statutory visits made within timescales, Case Conferences held promptly, plans developed and communicated with the family to ensure the child is protected and avoiding drift. Monitoring work indicates considerable improvement in some areas from a very low baseline but slow progress elsewhere.
- With improved 'whole council' working, performance management is becoming better organised and more robust as issues in respect of data quality, challenge and inputting are addressed. We are beginning to produce the dependable information around trends and comparators needed to set realistic but stretching targets.
- We are examining possible causes of inconsistency such as: team functions or location; management style or span of control, team composition and size, locality characteristics, staff training, performance management, etc. A Quality Assurance Framework has been developed and it is being implemented as planned. We have appointed to a Quality Assurance post. All QA tools are now available on the WCCIS system. An Improvement Plan Policies and Systems group (IPPAS) meets every fortnight to review all policies and processes. Further training events for Children's Services staff in respect of the regional threshold and eligibility document have been put in place. The document has been aligned with revised business processes so that practice expectations are clear.
- CIW have noted that performance dashboards are now in place for social workers and managers (on an individual and team basis) which means that outstanding work is visible and timescales are easily monitored. They also reported that roll out of the Quality Assurance framework is underway. All managers are expected to undertake comprehensive case file reviews, which include action plans to address noted deficits. Eighty were completed recently. The next stage is moderation to provide quality assurance in respect of the reviews. A Business Manager and additional Data Quality Clerks have been recruited so that teams and individual staff receive support and training (on a 1-to-1 basis, if necessary).
- Weekly meetings with team managers focus on performance. Team managers have been given targets to improve recording practice and tackle poor individual performance via formal procedures where required. Inspectors found some evidence that this is taking place. The Division's Operational Group meets weekly, with good representation from support services, to drive forward practice improvements.

- Two consultants have been retained to support senior managers to drive forward the improvement agenda and to assist with the professional development of line managers. There are plans to reduce 'spans of control' for team managers and assistant team managers are being trained to take on more responsibility.
- The Interim Director of Social Services is overseeing a more purposeful approach to the Council's relationship with and contribution to the Regional Safeguarding Board. The Board is now receiving the performance monitoring information and updates it requires. Attendance at key meetings has been sustained.
- CIW reports that progress has been made in the efficacy and impact of the PLOG (local operations group), which co-ordinates on a multi-agency basis (at the local authority level) the work led by the Regional Safeguarding Board.
- CIW reports that implementation of the Signs of Safety model is being progressed through a planned approach over the coming year. We are adopting the "Signs of Safety" model successfully used in other Welsh local authorities and beyond for achieving improved management of risk and a greater emphasis on the family's strengths and potential for change. This is an approach which can be understood and acted upon at all levels within the Council and in collaboration with key stakeholders. We will provide training for staff and partner agencies before we roll it out fully. We have been in contact with other authorities to learn and benefit from their experience of the model. The Director of Social Services from Swansea has held a masterclass/seminar in February to describe their improvement journey. In collaboration with Ceredigion and the Regional Partnership Board, a training programme for staff started in March.
- Cabinet has approved the new Safeguarding Policy for the Council and the terms of reference for the Corporate Safeguarding Group, to be chaired initially by the acting Chief Executive. All parts of the Council are represented. The group has started to meet and it is developing a programme of work, with support from an experienced former Director of Social Services. The Interim Director of Social Services is now the designated lead officer for safeguarding across the Council and all relevant departments/service areas have nominated a lead officer for safeguarding. The new Corporate Safeguarding Policy defines for all staff and elected members: the Council's expectations; roles and responsibilities; training requirements; guidance on how to recognise abuse of children; what to do if someone tells you that they or another person is being abused; confidentiality issues; procedures within the Council for reporting concerns; and the way in which the Council deals with allegations of abuse against professionals/those in a position of trust.
- Numbers of children on the child protection register, looked after or receiving care and support plans as children in need are beginning to stabilise, albeit a higher level than in previous years.
- Inspectors report increased confidence that assessments are allotted proportionate timescales and are monitored accordingly. There were improvements in the percentage of assessments completed on time, with a rise from 72% in January to 86% in February. One quarter of these were completed in 10 days. The target for 42 day assessments is set at 90% for March and it is

anticipated that this will be 100% in April and beyond. In March, there were increased rates of proportionate assessments within 10 days (25%). We anticipate that this rise will continue, with an agreed target of 45% for March and 65% thereafter. A pilot assessment team is functioning well and, if successful, this may lead to a remodelling of provision

- CIW have reported that there were 11 children without a LAC or CP care plan at the time of their monitoring visit in March but this issue has been investigated and the correct number is one. There is ongoing work with managers looking at the open children's cases (excluding LAC/CP) who do not have a care plan in place and the current position is now 80 cases but this is reducing quickly.
- The section 47 enquiries completed within timescales has seen a marked improvement, with a figure of 88% in February. This improvement will have an effect on the other timescales involving child protection in terms of case conferences and becoming the subject of an inter-agency plan.
- During February, our improvement work has focused on the emphasis has been on CP and LAC statutory visits and care planning. There has been no improvement in statutory visits to children subject to CP registration over the past few months. Just over half of children are receiving timely social work visits. This has clear implications for child safety. We believe that recording practice may be masking some improvement. The figures are reflective of monthly visits required as opposed to the national requirement of six-weekly. Where there are issues about visiting patterns, this is being addressed on a team by team basis to ensure compliance.
- There are similar issues in respect of visits to Looked after Children. Our current reporting methodology calculates all visits undertaken within a six weekly period. Some children do not require six-weekly visits where this is decided within a LAC review. These visits will appear as out of timescale within the current report. Work to amend the report definition are underway. However, it is clear that the quality of planning and support for these vulnerable children remains variable, especially in respect of care leavers and those placed outside the local authority area. There is insufficient evidence of direct work with children or effective co-ordination of support with health, education and other partners.
- Our own figures and the messages from the CIW fieldwork have demonstrated again that we were starting from an exceptionally low baseline. Many of the basics are only just being put in place and progress to date has been hard won. There is much work to be done and we are trying hard to assist as well as direct by introducing better support, reducing caseloads, improving practice and professional oversight, investment in audit capacity and administrative support.
- All cases are allocated. Agency staff continue to be deployed in the operational teams to provide cover for vacancies and sickness and offer additional capacity above establishment. Caseloads are being brought down to 20 or less per worker. Only 3 staff have more than 20 cases and the highest caseload is 26. Work is being undertaken within the Workforce area of the improvement plan in order to benchmark caseload numbers against those in other local authorities.

- Guidance has been provided regarding Safe Working Practices, the role of other safeguarding bodies and safeguarding under the Social Services and Well-being Act.
- We have reviewed the provision of direct work and support to children at risk of CSE and the use of debrief meetings when children go missing as part of our work to ensure that the Regional CSE Action Plan has been delivered effectively in Powys.
- We are examining possible causes of inconsistency such as: team functions or location; management style or span of control, team composition and size, locality characteristics, staff training, performance management, etc.
- A specialist in practice development has been recruited to provide a programme of work for exploring with staff barriers to good practice and producing an action plan. We have appointed to a Quality Assurance post.

C. Workforce

- There are 360 posts within the Children's Services establishment: 53% are permanent positions, 25% fixed term and the rest made up of casual by claim, contractor or agency. We have done considerable work in generating accurate data from which to make workforce decisions.
- A draft training and development strategy is being considered by the Children's Services management team. The document aims to cover how we can create a workforce with all the skills and behaviours needed to deliver quality social work practice and good outcomes for individuals. The document lays out the following information:
 - How to become a social worker and the secondment routes available to Powys County Council employees.
 - The steps required and support available to people who are training to become a social worker.
 - How to re-register with Social Care Wales following a career break.
 - Mandatory and optional routes available to staff once they become a social worker.
- It has been agreed that three additional places per year on Social Work degree courses will be available, alongside additional training opportunities at frontline and middle manager levels, including investment in ILM programmes. All Well-being Officers will be offered an opportunity to complete QCF level 5 training in order to meet the additional requirements of their post in relation to case holding and assessment. Progress is being made in adopting a more systematic approach to staff induction and an automated mechanism will be in place to record and report on induction.
- Work is being done to agree an acceptable caseload for social workers which takes into account experience, complexity, training, annual leave, information from comparator local authorities and caseload complexity. This will help to identify baseline staffing requirements. Managers are working to assess the impact of introducing Signs of Safety and other measures on demand for services and staffing capacity. They are developing a future operating model for Children's Services in Powys, which includes changes to the role of Powys People Direct. Proposals for additional staffing requirements have been developed following the outcome of the Council's budget-setting process.

- A comprehensive Recruitment and Retention Strategy was submitted to the Improvement Board and implementation started in March, with open evenings to recruit Social Workers in April.
- An initial staffing review has been undertaken. We have established the true level of vacancies and gone to advert. A dedicated job advert Facebook page has been created to ensure maximum coverage of jobs available and to promote the benefit of working in the county.
- 29 posts have been out to advert, with 17 appointments made. Rolling adverts are now running which allow individuals to apply for jobs at any point in time. There is no set shortlisting or interview date which enables immediate shortlisting and interview when an application is received. Agreement is in place to offer £8k relocation package and market pay supplement of £5k for certain posts. A corporate staff benefits scheme has been approved (including child care vouchers, bike scheme, discount card, personal lease car loans, savings, purchasing additional leave). It will be launched in April/May. A *Working in Children's Services* brochure is in draft. This document will describe the county, the work environment and employment package offer, along with quotes and comments from current staff. Recruitment open days have been held.
- We are reviewing and rewording job descriptions to make them more appealing to potential candidates. The recruitment end to end process is currently being mapped to identify areas where the process can be streamlined. A Corporate 'Work, Live, Play in Powys' video has gone live and it is re pinned on Social Media accounts. Specific social worker recruitment videos are being developed. All agency staff in Children's Services have been engaged in discussions about potential permanent employment and job application forms have been given to all who stated an interest.
- 17 staff have been appointed since November. Since January, 6 social workers have applied, 2 have been appointed and 3 are in the shortlisting/interviewing process. There are no vacancies currently in Fostering and Adoption, with 4 FTE Form F Assessors appointed. There are no vacancies for staff who do not have a social work qualification.
- Agency staff numbers have been increased to cover short-term needs and to support front line service delivery, with ten of them holding vacant posts and 30 over establishment. We have put in place regular monitoring of agency staffing levels. As part of the Improvement Plan, a target has been set to reduce expenditure on agency staff quarter by a quarter during the next financial year. Since November, 21 staff have left Children's Services, of whom 11 were agency workers.
- An updated Supervision Policy has been published along with a template for recording. An increasing proportion of supervision sessions are being recorded electronically on the HR system. We have secured additional management capacity to identify practice champions and develop mentoring capacity. We plan to undertake a staff survey to gather views on well-being and establish a better support package. An updated Supervision Policy has been published along with a template for recording. Performance management information regarding the number of supervisions undertaken indicates 54% at the end of February, although more work is needed to ensure that the information is

robust. Improved data cleansing and definitions have been introduced but the emphasis is also upon reinforcing the professional expectations of managers and practitioners in this area of work.

- In February, 15 staff (FTE) were absent because of sickness, with the loss of 108 working days. Sickness absence is reviewed by the Children's Services Management Team on a monthly basis. There has been 28 leavers since Nov 2017 of which 12 were agency staff. With consistent effort, we were able to secure a 46% return rate on exit questionnaires
- Inspectors reported that there is a clear supervision policy in Children's Services and considerable senior management focus on the importance of timely and good quality supervision. Management decision making was evident in supervision records they reviewed but improvements were required in setting timescales for task completion. They saw little evidence of follow up of tasks from previous supervision and there was a lack of consistency in documentation used. The regularity of supervision had not increased for social work staff overall, varying between 64% January and 55% in February.
- There is data about performance on an individual and team basis but ongoing problems in securing reliable data about the provision of regular supervision, with considerable differences between electronic systems and staff reporting. To address this issue, newly agreed definitions have been signed off and work is being done to re-configure the dashboards accordingly. Reports on non-compliance will be provided to the Children's Services management team.
- Supervision statistics are reported to the Improvement Board on a monthly basis and is identified as one of the key indicators contained within the Members' Tracker. The monthly Performance Report is also explored by the Children's Services management team who then provide commentary against the performance statistics.
- The existing Supervision Policy has been reviewed, to clarify managerial responsibilities and obligations in respect of undertaking and recording monthly supervisions. A step-by-step guide on how to record supervisions within the Trent electronic system was also incorporated into the Supervision Policy. It was disseminated to staff with a requirement that they familiarise themselves with the Policy and adhere to its content. Additional supervision training sessions have been commissioned and these will be rolled out from 1st April.
- Children's Services have employed an auditor on a temporary basis who is now auditing the quality of all supervisions undertaken and reporting this back to the Head of Service, particularly where there are concerns. Some managers have too many staff reporting directly to them and a re-structure of Children's Service is being explored.
- Although improved data cleansing and definitions have been introduced, improving performance in respect of monthly supervisions also requires that we reinforce the professional expectations of managers and practitioners in this area of work. Direct action is now being taken with any managers who are not performing to standard.
- A Staff Communication and Engagement Plan has been agreed by the Improvement Board. Three rounds of staff roadshows have been undertaken across the county led by the Portfolio holder, Interim Director of Social Services

and Interim Head of Children Service. Staff are provided with regular opportunities to meet with members of the Improvement Board.

- A survey of front line staff was undertaken in February (with a 32% response rate), followed by focused interviews. There were questions about caseloads, support, supervision, well-being and environment. Communications are in the process of producing a report s which will be followed by production of an action plan to improve the service based on the feedback received.
- The annual training needs analysis has been undertaken and the brochure published. A staff training programme is being delivered which includes assessment, staff supervision, the QA Framework, Looked After Children, Child Protection policy, 'When I'm Ready', Leaving care, care and support plans, and the Public Law outline. The full training plan will be published in April.
- The staff Induction programme and monitoring form have been added to Children's Services Intranet page. The manager induction programme now in place.
- Additional management capacity has been secured to develop Reflective Practice Forums and opportunities.

D. Reforming and Reshaping Services

- We have produced a draft overall commissioning strategy for Children's Services that will help us to make best use of any additional resources being made available by the Council. This is being done in collaboration with key partners.
- Range of other commissioning strategies Develop Family Support commissioning strategy.
- We have agreed with the Office of the Children's Commissioner to work together in looking at embedding a children's rights approach to the provision of services to children who are looked after or leaving care. This is intended to meet our key aims of i) providing and commissioning a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements for children who are looked after to meet the diverse range of their needs and circumstances; and ii) giving children and young people clearly planned journeys through care and into adulthood which remain focused on achieving care and support plans, prevent drift, enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system with good prospects for improved life chances.
- Work is being done to clarify the scope of and access to the 'Active Offer' for advocacy so that we can introduce measures to improve take up.
- We are committed to Increasing the number and capacity of local fostering placements. Efforts continue to be focused on recruiting and retaining new foster carers, to ensure the Council has enough families with the right combination of skills who are supported to meet the diverse needs of children and young people. It needs foster carers who can manage very challenging behaviours, provide placements for sibling groups or young people involved in the Criminal Justice System (including on Remand), provide parent and baby placements, placements for disabled children, and short term or emergency placements. It also needs to recruit carers able to offer short breaks and respite placements to support children and young people to remain living at home or within their family network.

- The Council's fostering recruitment strategy will set annual targets, complemented by regional recruitment work. We are committed to Increasing the number and range of local fostering placements. Resources have been found to increase capacity in the fostering team.
- 23 foster carers have been approved in the current financial year (9 Generic and 14 Connected Persons). 13 foster carer assessments are in progress. We are exploring the potential for reduced or waived Council Tax for foster carers and for their prior consideration in allocations of larger Council housing properties. A listen and learn exercise has been completed with Foster Carers; recommendations are being considered and implemented. A marketing strategy has been completed for the fostering service. We have met with current Powys foster carers to consult on Foster Friendly Powys and we are reviewing the support packages they receive. Phase 1 of a project to develop peer support for foster carers has been completed.
- Following the CIW inspection of the Fostering Service, a verbal report has been received and the council was advised that there are no issues of non-compliance. We are awaiting a draft report.
- We aim to reduce inappropriate use made of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and clearly specify their role. A successful recruitment strategy should aim to reduce the need to commission IFAs for new placements. Agencies can continue to play a role in complementing our in-house provision through targeted commissioning of more specialist provisions rather than being used because a local authority foster placement is not available.
- Mainstream residential care placements are needed for children and young people who may present challenging or risky behaviours. They may have experienced several placement breakdowns or they may be running away, misusing substances or be at risk of child sexual exploitation. They need the additional level of supervision and support that can be provided in staffed residential care. Specialist residential placements are needed for disabled children and young people with extremely complex and challenging needs, with staff who are experienced in providing the care they need. However, in principle, all children should have the opportunity to experience life in a family setting wherever possible. Therefore, we intend to make fewer mainstream residential placements and make them closer to home. Children's Services will look to agree a joint strategy with the Education Department and the Local Health Board.
- For young people between the ages of 16 and 21 years, we need to commission more independent or semi-independent living options such as supported housing, 'training flats' and supported lodgings, to support them at different levels of independence and to make a good transition into adulthood. We are establishing a multi-agency accommodation and placement work stream under the Children and Young People Partnership.
- Apprenticeships for care leavers was discussed at the corporate parenting group and an email has been circulated within the authority and to contracted partners.
- We are piloting an Edge of Care and Family Group Conference (FGC) service through Action for Children, with additional capacity added to the Integrated

Family Support Service on a fixed-term basis. The referral pathway has been agreed and implemented. FGC training for staff is scheduled. We are looking to develop a system whereby all relevant children have an opportunity to benefit from an FGC. Additional capacity added to the IFST on a fixed-term basis.

- Workshops have been held to establish an agreed process and procedure for Step up/Step down between Children’s Services and the Team Around the Family (TAF) Service. We propose to base a TAF Coordinator in Powys People Direct to help build knowledge and understanding of the Early Help Offer and to facilitate the referral process.
- Social Workers are now required to complete the “What Matters” document with the child/young person as part of all assessments. A booklet has been developed and it has to be completed before the Care and Support plan can be signed off. Training on use of the booklet is scheduled through team meetings in March. A multi-agency training needs analysis has been undertaken and a training brochure published.
- We are developing our capacity for offering early help to families in need of care and support (e.g. additional staffing and lower caseloads to allow time for direct work with families). This includes a Powys People Direct / Family Information Service outreach post. Work is ongoing to ensure that social workers are aware of the range of services available to support delivery of care and support plans, including information on referral processes.
- An Early Help model has been shared with the Children and Young People’s Partnership and the Improvement Board. This also involves aligning Early Help/Child Poverty programmes in preparation for an integrated commissioning strategy. A Children and Young People Partnership event is being planned to showcase the range of services available to support delivery of care and support plans, including information on referral processes.
- There is a commitment to using the “Start Well” components in the Health and Care as the way of ensuring maximum collaboration in developing family support services, including services for children with disabilities. We are exploring models of early help hubs in places such as Flintshire to design an appropriate service for Powys.
- A CAMHS Review has identified opportunities for alignment of key staff and services within an integrated model.