

Powys County Council

Children's Services

Improvement Programme Report – 30th April 2018

Programme Summary

The purpose of the Programme is to ensure that children receive timely and effective services which safeguard them and promote their well-being.

The overall programme is set out in a framework document which describes:

1. What good looks like – our key improvement aims
 - Aim 1: To support families to stay together
 - Aim 2: To manage risk confidently and effectively when supporting families where children or young People are at the edge of care
 - Aim 3: To provide and commission a flexible and affordable range of high quality placements
 - Aim 4: To give children and young people clearly planned journeys through care
2. Our Improvement Model
3. Partnership Working
4. Governance and Leadership
5. Production of the improvement plan itself.

In keeping with our aims, we want to generate radical change across the whole pathway in children's services. This involves an absolute focus on professional practice but also work to reform and reshape a whole range of services across all the children's pathway.

The plan itself and this report is divided into the following areas:

- A. Corporate Parenting, Leadership and Governance
- B. Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance
- C. Workforce
- D. Reshaping and Reforming Services.

Programme Update for this period

Improvement and Assurance Board Bulletin – Edition 1

“Welcome to the first Improvement and Assurance Board bulletin which marks a significant change in the way the county council’s improvement work is managed.

The new Improvement and Assurance Board replaces a Social Services Improvement Board which has operated since last year following an inspection of the council’s children’s services. The new Welsh-Government backed board has a wider corporate improvement role with a strengthened membership. Joining the board are two new external members, Bozena Allen, a former social services director and a highly experienced social care practitioner, and Jaki Salisbury, a former president of CIPFA and highly experienced in financial management.

The board will continue to be chaired by Jack Straw and will include the Leader and deputy Leader of the county council and the Leader of the Opposition.

Under its new terms of reference the board will be looking at all areas of improvement, as recommended by Welsh Government advisor Sean Harriss, focussing on children’s services, corporate improvement and will take into account any findings and recommendations from the inspection of adult social care by the Care Inspectorate Wales.

A significant change to the board’s remit is that as well as continuing to provide advice and support it will provide ‘assurance’ that improvement will be delivered. It will be looking at improvement plans and making sure that key performance measures are being delivered.

It will provide regular feedback to the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government, Transformation and Partnerships, Alun Davies AM and the Minister for Children and Social Care, Huw Irranca-Davies AM, and quarterly reports to the county council’s cabinet.

The first meeting was told that some progress had been made in important areas including statutory visits, staff supervision but that there was more work to do.

Areas to be reviewed in preparation for the next board include detailed examination of workforce planning to make sure that the council has sufficient capacity and the staff required to deliver necessary improvements. It will also looking closely at early help, and safeguarding arrangements, as well as performance information and the internal improvement plan developed for adult services.”

Jack Straw

Improvement and Assurance Board Chair

Corporate Parenting, Leadership and Governance

- The Council has provided the Minister for Social Services with a second Quarterly Improvement Report, as required by the most recent Warning Notice.
- Delivering the Improvement Programme and Plan ensures that we continue to focus on providing the conditions which will allow our staff to do their very best for children and families across Powys. We continue to work closely with CIW, Welsh Government, Social Care Wales, regional and other key partners in pursuit of this goal. The Regional Safeguarding Board is now receiving most of the performance data it requires and consequently we have the benefits of comparative data from the other three local authorities. Our work with and support from CIW and Social Care Wales are highlighted later in this report
- The new Improvement and Assurance Board met on 25 April; a copy of the bulletin from the independent Chair is on page 2. The Board and its predecessor have been monitoring closely the improvement work being done. It has not hesitated to point out areas of concern and to encourage even more urgency.
- The Service and Financial Plan was presented to the Board, which acknowledged the amount of work done but sought greater detail. Members would like to see more narrative about what the council hopes to provide for families and children with the increased investment. 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 the improvement plans. The budget for next year includes investment of £6.172m for Children's 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.
- The new Director of Social Services, Alison Bulman, has taken up the post.
- Significant levels of activity is being generated through the Communications and Engagement Plan, including roadshows for staff and foster carers across the county, 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. A one page guide to the Improvement Programme and Plan 2017-2020 has been produced.
- The council has launched a corporate Performance Management Framework setting out its expectations for monitoring and evaluation of progress against commitments. Children's services key performance indicators are clearly set out within this report so the organisation as a whole can measure and demonstrate improvement. The Tracker and the Performance Report (with commentary) provided for the Improvement Board also goes to Children's Scrutiny.
- The Improvement and Assurance Board recognised that the performance information they have asked for previously has now been made available and that it is beneficial to see the narrative behind the information. A copy of the performance report is attached and further data development will take place. The links between the level of performance and workforce were discussed. As fieldwork teams now have more staff and their caseloads have been reduced, then it is reasonable to expect that performance increases in the short term. Average caseload is now 15 and the highest caseload is 24.
- 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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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. 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.

- The council has responded to the findings, in accordance with the addendum to the Follow-Up Warning Notice issued by the Minister on 16 April. The conclusions by CIW match our own. There are positive signs, indicators that we are on the right path. These are 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. Our work streams which focus on workforce planning and development and service reshaping and reform are making good progress. The Improvement Board has been pleased to see progress made in 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.
- This means that the changes which will facilitate long-term improvement are being put in place. 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.
- 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 overall focus on the rights of the child and further implementing the Social Services and Well-being Act across the council;
 - an improved support 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;
- better support to looked after children;
- a more responsive 'front-door' such as early help to families and an embedded Information/Advice/Assistance Service.
- The Leader, Deputy Leader, Portfolio Holder, the Leaders of other political parties, the acting CEO and other relevant staff have continued to attend fortnightly briefings. This provides opportunities to escalate issues without delay, seek resolutions quickly and ensure corporate ownership.
- We are working to ensure corporate oversight and support for the corporate parenting role. Members briefing sessions have been well attended. The Corporate Parenting Group, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, has met and it is developing a work programme which includes clarifying the 'offer' that will be made to children who are looked after and care leavers.
- 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.

Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance

- We have been especially concerned to secure greater compliance with statutory requirements and practice standards in the areas highlighted by inspectors. Audits are continuing to take place in respect of case work and practice in line with the Quality Assurance Framework. Findings and recommendations from completed audits are being considered at Senior Management Team to agree actions.
- Signs of Safety implementation plans are progressing well, in collaboration with Ceredigion and the Regional Partnership Board. Training is in place for: the Social Services and Well-being Act; Child Sexual Exploitation; Online Abuse and Grooming. The training calendar for Children's Services has been developed that includes workshop dates in April and May for assessment; case supervision; Quality Assurance Framework; Looked After Children; Child Protection policy; Leaving care and 'When I'm Ready'; care and support plans, and the Public Law outline.
- The number of children on the child protection register has decreased by one during the last month but trend data shows that the number has risen from 80 in April 2017 to 107 in March 2018. The average length of time on the Child Protection Register for those removed has reduced again this month from 222 days in February 2018 to 195 days in March 2018. This is also below the Welsh average of 245 days.
- Completion of Care and Well-being Assessments completed within timescale for April to date is 100% and this is also the case for S47 Assessments (with current year to date performance at 55.7%). To keep children safe, the service must ensure statutory visits are undertaken at the right time. At the end of March 2018, performance has increased significantly to 72% from 53% at the end of February 2018. Child Protection Statutory Visits for April (to date) is 84% and we have set a compliance target of 95%. Recording mechanisms have been amended to ensure that the electronic case management system (WCCIS) prompts workers in advance of statutory visit dates.
- The number of Looked after Children increased by 6 during the period February to March. For the year, the number has risen from 160 in April 2017 to 208 in March 2018. Looked After Children statutory visits for April to date is 89%
- A new form has been developed that enables Information Advice Assistance (IAA) to be recorded clearly. Staff levels have been increased in Powys People Direct (PPD) to aid in the delivery of IAA. There is also ongoing IAA training for all staff across the county. A programme is being developed to look at the delivery of IAA across the county and across Children and Adults team.

- An agreed process and procedure for Step up/Step down between Children’s Services and the Team Around the Family (TAF) Service is in place. 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 by managers.
- A review is underway to restructure patterns of working in the Emergency Duty Team EDT and to link Edge of Care and Early Help services within the out of hours service provision
- Practitioner, team and Senior Management performance and case management dashboards are now live in WCCIS.
- The pilot assessment team in the North of the County has proved successful and the model will be rolled out across the county.
- The IPPAS (Improvement Plan Policy and Systems) Group has developed a data validation and update process to ensure accurate information is recorded on the WCCIS system. Data Quality Clerks are working to support Social Workers in keeping records up to date and accurate. An escalation process to ensure this activity takes place has been put in place.
- Six members of the Scrutiny have visited a frontline team.

Workforce

- The Workforce section of the Improvement Plan has been divided into four Task and Finish areas in order to ensure that progress is made more quickly (Training; Recruitment and Agency; Future Workforce and Stabilisation; Retention). Leads and membership for each group have been established.
- Supervision performance is improving and recent figures indicate that 85% of workers are receiving monthly supervision.
- Recruitment of posts aligned to the Improvement Plan resource requirements has started. Implementation of the comprehensive Recruitment Strategy started in March and an open evening in Oswestry to recruit Social Workers has been held. Five newly qualified Social Workers have applied for permanent posts; these applications are being considered by relevant Team Managers and interviews have been scheduled. We are working with HR colleagues in preparing an advertising campaign to place in Community Care in the next two weeks. The advert will be run over a period of 6 months.
- 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 are still working to generate accurate data from which to make workforce decisions. 36 agency staff are currently in post. An agency staff reduction plan has been presented to the Improvement and Assurance Board. Following the CIW inspection in July 2017, Children’s Services increased their (predominantly) social work staffing by approximately 40, in order to reduce the risk to children and ensure that the backlog of cases were dealt with in a timely manner. The cost of employing the additional agency staff has been significant and it is unsustainable. As part of the improvement plan, additional funding (£3.4M) has been provided to the service to increase base establishment staffing by 37 posts. This includes recruiting 18 operational staff at various levels. We judge that the current establishment is sufficient to maintain a safe service for the short to medium-term, pending a whole service review.
- As at 1st April, there were 41 agency staff employed within Children’s Services at a cost of £10,790 per day. Eight of these cover permanent vacant positions. Given the vacancies and the plan to increase staffing, 18 of these posts are associated with the current agency cost and limit the service in terms of budget and recruitment. In addition to this, 15 agency staff are covering positions that are outside the increased establishment. It should be noted that, on average, each agency staff member is equivalent to 1.5 x the salary of an employee undertaking the same role. There is also further complexity in the fact that there are agency staff covering sickness absence (at a greater cost than the establishment budget for that position) while the council is also paying for the sick pay of the employee.

- If there was no action taken to reduce the level of staffing, the budget would be depleted to zero by mid-November. At this point there would be no available funds to employ any staff other than those in the base budget (except for the vacant posts current covered by agency staffing, although this will be over base budget due to the additional cost of each agency staff member). This would leave the service in a worse position than pre-inspection. Following the departure of all agency staff, there needs to be enough budget remaining to pay for the 18 new posts and permanent staff in positions currently vacant. The point at which the budget has been reduced to the extent where this is not affordable is 1st September 2018, assuming that 33 agency staff remain until all posts have been filled and without any overlap of posts. Given the service and financial risks, it is vital that we achieve a reduction in agency staff as soon as possible. A timeline has been identified and the budget implications are being assessed.
- Work is being done to establish appropriate caseload levels and then to review staffing levels in teams while deciding on a future structure. This work will be completed by June 2018. Significant changes to the current structure would require a consultation process which will be undertaken within the full process required by HR and agreements with Trade Unions. We recognise that there is considerable work required to recruit and retain a sustainable, long-term workforce once the baseline staffing structure has been agreed. Therefore, it is likely to take a minimum of 12 months to stabilise the workforce.
- A benefits package for Powys County Council employees is being finalised and it will be rolled out w/c 11th June. The Improvement and Assurance Board recognised the merits of this approach but regard flexibility and support for staff as crucial components in the overall workforce strategy.

Reforming and Reshaping Services

- A first draft of the principal Children's Services commissioning strategy and a placement strategy for looked after children are nearing completion. This will help us to make best use of the additional resources from the Council.
- 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 Area Plan). This also involves aligning Early Help/Child Poverty programmes in preparation for an integrated commissioning strategy. We are exploring models of early help hubs in places (such as those in Flintshire) to design an appropriate service for Powys.
- Action for Children has been commissioned to deliver a Family Group Conferencing Service.
- The Intensive Family Support Service is increasing capacity with the recruitment of two additional staff.
- We have agreed with the Office of the Children's Commissioner to work together in embedding a children's rights approach to the provision of services, especially for children who are looked after or leaving care. 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 developing our capacity for offering early help to families in need of care and support (e.g. additional staffing and lower caseloads to allow more time for direct work with families). This also includes creating a Powys People Direct/Family Information Service outreach post. 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.
- We are committed to increasing the number and range of local fostering placements. 23 foster carers have been approved in the current financial year (9 Generic and 14 Connected Persons). 13 foster carer assessments are in progress. The Council's fostering recruitment strategy will set annual targets, complemented by regional recruitment work. We will explore 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. We aim to reduce inappropriate use made of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and clearly specify their role. 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.

- Residential care placements are needed for children and young people who may present especially challenging or risky behaviours or therapeutic needs. 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 are looking to agree a joint strategy with the Education Department and the Local Health Board, which also involves agreeing individual children who will be prioritised for returning to family-based provision. Four children have been identified to date.