

**REPORT TO: POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL CABINET**

**REPORT FROM: INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE PCC IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE BOARD**

**REPORT DATED: JANUARY 2020**

## **1. Background**

The Improvement and Assurance Board was established in April 2018 with a clear purpose to 'assist the Leader in driving forward the required change and improvement in the Local Authority'.

This is the sixth report of the Independent Chair and should be read in conjunction with the previous report to avoid repetition. The report of January 2019 set out priorities, particularly for Social Care, that remain relevant today.

The Board's remit was extended in September 2019 to include Education Services, following an ESTYN inspection. Together with Education, the Board covers Adult and Children's Social Care, and all corporate and transformation activity.

This is a highlight report and does not cover all work undertaken; that level of detail is covered elsewhere, for example;

- monthly Board minutes, agendas and papers
- regular performance reports
- CIW and ESTYN reports and correspondence.

This report will highlight key issues at this point in time.

## **2. Corporate Matters**

### **2.1 Senior Leadership**

The Senior leadership team is now stable, with key individuals having been in post for a reasonable period of time. The benefit of having a dedicated Director of Social Services should deliver both increased pace and sustainability in relation to the Social Services improvement agenda.

The appointment of a Director of Resources and Transformation has allowed this vital work to move forward with enhanced structure and pace.

The Chief Executive has made appropriate interim arrangements in relation to Education Services. The interim Chief Education Officer is supported by

experienced and specialist advisers to ensure that the improvement programme following inspection is actioned at pace.

The strategic and policy framework, corporately and for Social Services, is in place; the challenge over the next six months is to drive forward the required changes.

Following the recent ESTYN inspection, work is underway to determine the strategic framework and policies in relation to the Education Service. This needs to be completed promptly so that the issues highlighted in the inspection can be addressed within a standards-driven improvement programme.

## **2.2 Vision, Finance and Service Strategy**

It remains the case that delivery of the key identified improvements in Social Care will ultimately deliver the minimum cost option. The financial pressures in the Social Care Service will only be resolved by concentrating on implementing new service and practice models.

The recent provisional financial settlement will, most likely, ease the cost pressures faced by the Authority, not eliminate them. The outcome-based budgeting approach that is being adopted will take time to implement; the settlement will help, but the required culture change remains pressing.

As indicated earlier, the development of a new strategic framework for Education Services, including schools, is now an urgent priority with major steps needing to be taken in the next three to six months.

## **2.3 Performance Management**

A performance management culture continues to develop. In response to the recent ESTYN inspection, an extensive range of information has been collated and analysed, which will assist in developing options for the future, that will be demonstrably evidence-based. The Board continues to oversee progress in developing the Quality Assurance approaches that are a vital element of performance management beyond the hard data.

## **2.4 Political Leadership and Scrutiny**

The Board continues to support the member development work being led by the Chief Executive. Elected Members continue to be active in the Board, and the Leader continues to oversee the improvement work via the in-house Board Sub Chairs.

Elected Members will need to positively contribute to future discussions with both ESTYN and CIW, identifying the importance and impact of the improvement activity across the Authority.

Elected members will be required to take important decisions in relation to future school organisation aimed at driving up standards, the ability to deliver such decisions will be the key determinant in term of education improvement.

## **2.5 Children's Services**

### **Workforce**

This remains the single greatest risk to the sustainability of improvements. Despite a range of initiatives, the reliance on agency workers remains stubbornly and unsustainably high. A revised and comprehensive workforce plan has recently been adopted. The plan incorporates a range of proposals from 'grow your own' to foreign recruitment. It remains imperative that this strategy, together with an incentives-based model is pursued at pace.

### **Practice Framework**

Signs of Safety continues to be driven as the practice model. Evidence is emerging of positive impact on the experience of individual young people. If there is to be no further inspection in the near term, it will be necessary for the Authority to consider how it obtains assurance of the impact at the individual case level. The Board can oversee the policy and practice framework, but detailed examination of individual cases is needed to verify the real impact. Consideration of peer review or independent practice audit is worthy of consideration.

### **Top Five Performance Indicators**

These remain much improved since the Board was established. Statutory visits and child protection visits, for example, are currently maintained at reasonable levels. Supervision remains of concern, and needs to be prioritised in light of the workforce strategy.

### **Looked After Children**

Numbers remain relatively stable, though at a higher level than benchmarking would suggest. Delivery of the safe reduction plan is a key task in the next quarter.

## **Further Children's Services Matters**

Recommissioning of high cost provisions and relocation of Out of County placements has shown limited progress and remains a priority to be vigorously pursued.

Developing early intervention and prevention work is providing some evidence of impact and will need to receive continuing support and attention in the coming months.

### **2.6 Adult Services**

CIW have notified the Authority of an improvement conference on 17 February. This follows on from the last inspection, and is an opportunity to review progress against recommendations, and the improvement journey more generally. Following the conference, the Authority will be able to revise its plans in light of the outcomes.

The work with the Institute of Public Care is progressing and needs, with partners, to be converted into specific actions aimed at improving the whole system's work in relation to hospital discharge policy and practice.

Having adopted a specific plan for dealing with delayed transfers of care and shortage of domiciliary care capacity, the Authority is seeking to deal with the pressures in the system at present. Close working with partners and the implementation of the transformation plan are both pre-requisites to improved performance.

Adult services are seeking to implement a strengths based approach, this requires significant attention and development in the coming period. It also requires effective joint working with Health partners.

All aspects of the service will be reviewed in the improvement conference and my next report will highlight required actions.

## **2.7 Education**

### **Post Inspection Action Plan (PIAP)**

Following the recent ESYTN inspection, a draft PIAP was produced. This plan was reviewed at an ESTYN Improvement Conference on 28 November. The formal ESTYN response is awaited; once received, any necessary amendments will be made.

The Board has provided its observations on the Plan and advised the need for simplification in some areas. The balance between the PIAP and internal action plans needs to be reviewed, in light of the formal feedback.

### **Board Priorities**

The Board recognised the vital importance of the PIAP, and the need to deliver it at pace. The Board will monitor progress at each of its future meetings. However, as well as monitoring progress across the extensive range of necessary improvement, the Board in its work will prioritise three areas;

1. Developing and implementing a vision for school organisation, driven by standards.
2. Driving improvements in provision for Special Educational Needs/Additional Learning Needs (SEN/ALN).
3. Leadership, both corporately and in schools.

### **Education Progress**

The draft PIAP has been developed, implementation commenced, and governance established.

Engagement with stakeholders in relation to the vision for schools has commenced.

Cabinet will shortly be considering the vision for Education, driven by standards and based on guiding principles. This will lead to a consultation exercise, proposals from which need to be promptly adopted. A comprehensive review of SEN/ALN provision is underway, and again, must lead rapidly to specific improvement plans.

The Board has agreed with the service necessary governance arrangements to oversee this vital work.

## **Conclusion**

The Senior Management Team, together with Members, have established the strategies and policies needed to deliver improvement in both Corporate Services and Social Care. Work is underway to establish the same for Education.

Improvements have been made, particularly corporately and in Children's Services. That said, there remains much to be done and the challenge in coming months remains 'delivery at pace'.

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