

Joint Review of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council Social Services

Summary

Published information in respect of the joint review programme in Wales is available on the website: www.joint-reviews.gov.uk or from:

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Telephone: 01443 848483

Email: JointReviews@wales.gsi.gov.uk



ISBN: 978 0 7504 4771 3

CMK-22-11-032

© Crown Copyright July 2008

D1610809

Foreword

We are pleased to present this summary report of a joint review¹ carried out by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and the Wales Audit Office (WAO).

The review sets out to answer two key questions:

- How good are the social services that people in the area receive?
- How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services?

This report sets out the findings of the Review Team, based on thorough analysis of the evidence gathered in the course of the review. It is our intention that the report will:

- tell the public how well people are being served;
- help these services to improve;
- safeguard the interests of service users and carers; and
- get better value for money in the provision of social services.

Joint reviews are carried out in accordance with the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003, which gives the Welsh Ministers the power to conduct reviews of the way in which local authorities discharge their social services functions. The task of carrying out reviews is delegated to the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales and section 41 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 enables the Auditor General for Wales to participate.

The Joint Review of social services in Neath Port Talbot Council was carried out by a team comprising Kevyn Rice, Kevin Barker, Margaret Wearing and Nick Selwyn, with Jenny Cook and Penny Evans as lay assessors. On-site work in Neath Port Talbot took place between September 2007 and November 2007. A presentation of the findings from this Review was given to the Council in December 2007.

In the Review, we relied heavily on the support of the Council and other stakeholders. Many individuals and groups collaborated in planning and supporting the review process. The Joint Review Team would like to thank everyone who contributed by sharing their experiences and views.

There is also a full report which sets out in more detail the Review Team's assessment of the Council. It outlines the most important evidence gathered during the Review, setting out strengths and good practice as well as areas for development.

¹ Where the term *joint review* is used without capital letters, this signifies the overall programme in Wales. **Joint Review** with capital letters means the review carried out in Neath Port Talbot.

The Council has been asked to produce an action plan in response to this report. Both CSSIW and the Wales Audit Office will undertake further work to evaluate the progress made in delivering these actions and the outcomes for service users and carers.

Both the full report and this summary are available on the joint review website.



Rob Pickford
Chief Inspector



Jeremy Colman
Auditor General for Wales

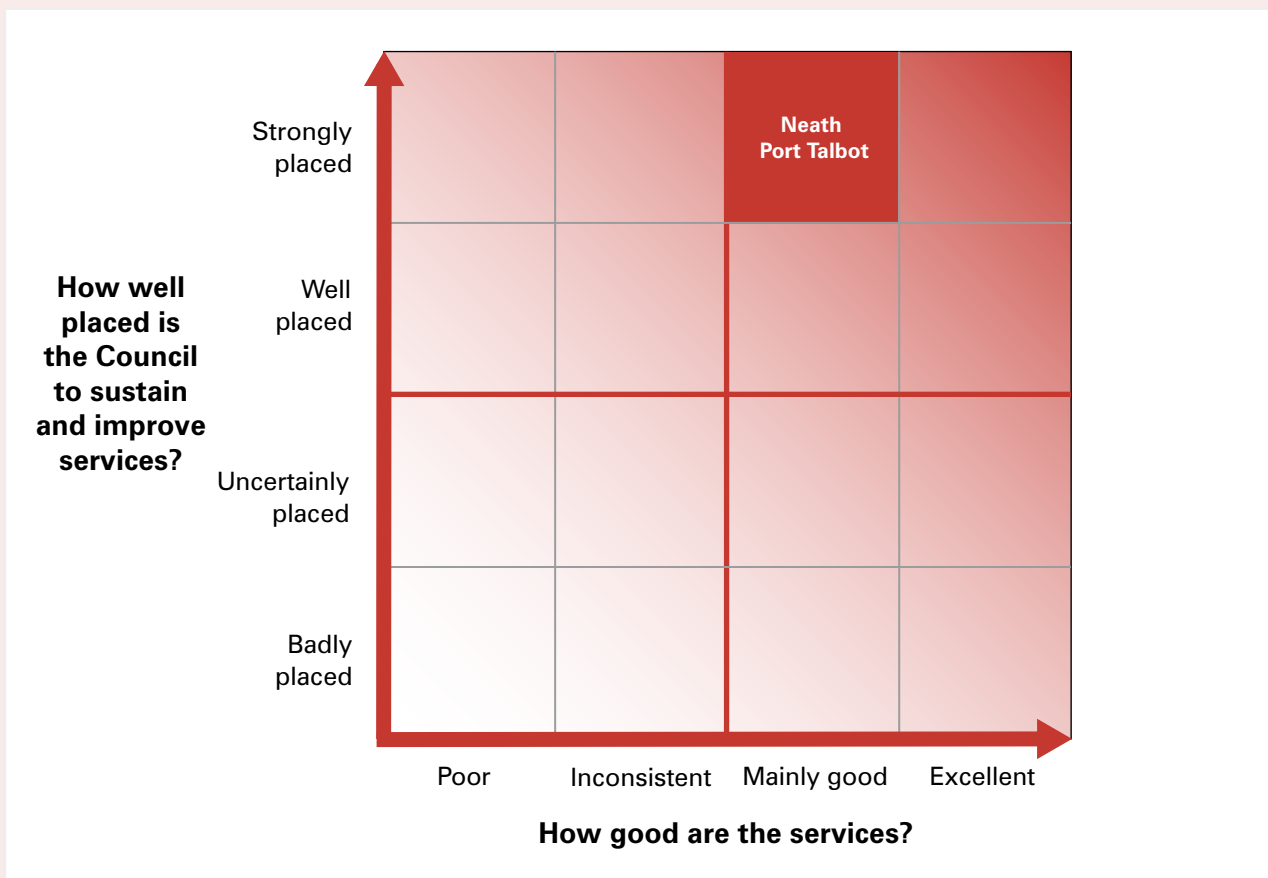
Overall Conclusions

This chapter summarises the joint review team’s overall judgement of the Council. It highlights the Council’s key strengths and draws out the priorities for development.

1.1 Summary

Neath Port Talbot Council is judged as having mainly good services and as being strongly placed to sustain and further improve services (Exhibit 1)

Exhibit 1: Neath Port Talbot’s position in the joint review performance matrix



The Council has strived to deliver social services which meet higher and changing public expectations. The Review Team concluded that Neath Port Talbot provides a very good range of services, and developments since the last joint review have continued to build upon the Council’s record of supporting people in the community and enhancing their independence. The services provided are generally high quality, and there is a range of quality assurance processes in place to ensure this continues. There are some known pressures and gaps in services, which adversely affect the Council’s ability to meet the needs of some service users and carers, and the Council acknowledges that change needs to gather pace to tackle these shortfalls.

The Council has identified social services as a priority and this is reflected in the level of additional financial investment that has helped to support progress. In particular, children's services has received significant investment, which has helped to meet the needs of children looked after by the Council, and to alleviate some significant difficulties experienced in providing an effective assessment and care management service.

On balance, the Council is judged to be strongly placed to sustain and further improve services given:

- There is evidence of sustained improvement since the last joint review.**
- There are strong strategic partnerships with other organisations.**
- They have demonstrated clear vision and leadership that is owned across the organisation.**
- They have demonstrated effective workforce management and planning.**

- There are good performance management systems, although some areas need development.**
- They have made progress in introducing an effective approach to commissioning.**

However, the challenge for the Council must be to continue to tackle areas where performance is less satisfactory, and to embed and sustain the progress it has made in a challenging financial climate. In doing so, it will need to ensure that it has the capacity to successfully manage some major projects and implement recommendations from a range of service reviews. It will also need to continue to develop its approach to commissioning social care services and longer term financial planning, and ensure that it secures value for money from all of its activities and services.

1.2 Key findings

The Review sought to answer two key questions:

How good are the services? (Exhibit 2)

How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services? (Exhibit 3)

How good are the Services?

Themes

1. Getting help (access to services; assessment; care management and review)
2. The services provided (range; quality)
3. The effect on people's lives (arrangements to protect vulnerable people; success in promoting independence and social inclusion)

Exhibit 2: How good are the services?

The Review Team's Judgements

	Poor	Inconsistent	Mainly good	Excellent
Access to services			•	
Assessment		•		
Care management and review			•	
Range of services provided			•	
Quality of services provided				•
Arrangements to protect vulnerable people			•	
Success in promoting independence and social inclusion			•	

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cases mainly allocated quickly • Clear eligibility criteria and application • Good progress in implementing Unified Assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the timeliness and quality of assessments • Ensuring costed care plans which are outcome focussed • Addressing known service pressures and gaps in services

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good arrangements for transferring cases • Improving performance regarding delayed transfers from hospital • Good range of services with an increasing focus on promoting independence and developing life skills • Good performance regarding the stability of placements and educational attainment of children looked after by the Council • Well developed range of quality systems in place, particularly for in-house services • Effective process for managing complaints • Implementation and focus of Local Safeguarding Children's Board • High priority given to Direct Payments with increasing numbers in receipt of these 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling the high number of older people supported in residential settings • Ensuring effective risk assessments and risk management planning in child protection • Promoting assessments and support for carers • Addressing the needs and support for people from minority communities

Theme 1: Getting help

The Review Team found that the Council is generally providing good quality information for the public. Contact arrangements recently introduced in children's services and for older and disabled people are working well. Services provided out of hours are regarded as satisfactory, and hospital discharges are managed effectively. However, in order to ensure that appropriate information is readily available for all those who need it, the Council needs to address capacity problems in supporting the service. There are some services where contact arrangements are working less well and there needs to be more clarity about whether the recently introduced arrangements will be expanded to these areas.

In both children's and adult services there is a consistent approach to the application of eligibility criteria and prioritising services. Cases are in the main allocated quickly but assessment practice overall was deemed to be inconsistent. Assessments in many service areas are not yet timely enough, or of a consistent enough quality to ensure that all of the people who are eligible for services are well served. This inconsistency is reflected across different services and more work is needed to ensure improved performance particularly in children's services and in respect of carers.

From the case files examined, reviewers were able to identify generally good performance in care management. Changes to team structures in the children's, older people and physical disability teams are being embedded and are starting to demonstrate benefits. Arrangements to allocate and transfer cases were working well and performance in reviewing cases was generally good. Additional investment in staffing in children's teams is helping to address the significant problems that were previously being experienced. This needs to be built upon in order to secure a fully effective care management system in the future.

Theme 2: The services provided

The Council provides a very good range of services in both adults and children's services, which has been expanded in recent years to meet changing needs and expectations. In particular, there has been a number of service developments intended to promote the independence of adult service users, and to support families to prevent the need for more formal intervention. The Council is increasingly developing effective services in partnership with others and staff demonstrated a considerable commitment to joint working.

However, there are some known pressure points and gaps in service that adversely affects the ability to meet the needs of some service users and carers. More improvements and developments are planned following reviews of some areas of service delivery and implementing these will be crucial to ensure that the Council continues to improve its performance in supporting people in the community.

The desire to provide high quality services is embedded throughout the Council, from the leadership to staff on the front line. This aim is one of the Council's corporate objectives, and is supported by a good range of quality assurance initiatives in social services. The Review Team found that most services were well regarded by service users and were impressed by the high quality of many of the services seen during the course of the Review. Complaints are well managed by the Council with a number of excellent features and effective quality assurance systems will help to ensure the future quality of services.

Theme 3: The effect on people's lives

Reviewers found that the Council's arrangements for protecting vulnerable people included appropriate use of multi-agency procedures and there was a good level of engagement from other agencies. A Local Safeguarding Children's Board has been established, with a strong commitment from partners, and is developing a broader focus for its work in safeguarding young people.

There is evidence of proactive management of cases on the child protection register, which are all allocated to a social worker. There is a low level of re-referrals, all reviews undertaken within statutory guidance, and there are effective arrangements in respect of core group meetings. However, management intervention is needed to ensure that some historical deficiencies in care management practice relating to assessment and risk management in children's services continue to be addressed and built upon.

The Council has a good track record of providing and continuing to develop preventative services, and supporting people in the community. Direct payments have been given a high priority, to provide more choice and enable a relatively high number of service users to increase their control of services.

Services which support independence and help to develop life skills have been developed. These include support for children who are looked after by the Council to prepare for independence. There is also good support for them when they leave care. There are improved opportunities for people with learning disabilities and for those with mental health problems and a drive to implement person centred planning.

However, there also remains a significant emphasis on more traditional forms of care and support, and some rebalancing in favour of services supporting independence will be necessary. The Council has recognised the need to give carers a higher priority and there needs to be a better understanding of the needs of people from minority communities.

How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services?

Themes

4. Shaping services (resources, planning and partnerships; commissioning and contracting)
5. Delivering social services (workforce, performance management)
6. Providing direction (leadership and culture in social services; corporate and political support and scrutiny)

Exhibit 3: How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services?

The Review Team's Judgements				
	Badly Placed	Uncertainly placed	Well placed	Strongly placed
Resources			•	
Planning and partnerships				•
Commissioning and contracting			•	
Workforce				•
Performance management			•	
Leadership and culture				•
Corporate and political support and scrutiny.			•	

Strengths

- Investment in children's services
- Solid financial base and good track record of managing within the overall budget
- Regular budget reporting and good support from finance team
- Strong partnership working
- A number of effective multi-disciplinary projects
- Business plans effectively linked to strategic plans
- Joint Executive Group overseeing implementation of 'Delivering Integrated Services' project
- Investment in capacity building, such as frontline children's teams, and commissioning and contracting
- Generally high staff morale
- Good performance in achievement of occupational qualifications and investment in training opportunities
- 'Grow own social worker' scheme to help with recruitment and retention
- Regular staff supervision and appraisal
- Embedded performance management systems, with regular management information reports
- Clear leadership from senior managers, and well represented and supported at a corporate level
- Generally good management of major changes in services
- Community engagement

Areas for development

- Developing longer term financial planning, linked to business planning
- Securing value for money in all activities
- Developing more integrated joint management arrangements
- Continuing the development and implementation of commissioning strategies, and linking these to resources
- Adopting a more consistent approach to needs analysis and market mapping across all services
- Developing a more strategic working relationship with service providers to improve market management
- Linking workforce planning to business planning and service commissioning
- Engaging staff more consistently in organisational development and change
- Continuing to develop the role of scrutiny committees

Theme 4: Shaping services (resources; planning and partnerships; commissioning and contracting)

The Council has identified social services, especially children's services, as a priority. This has resulted in the provision of significant additional resources for social services. There is a good track record of managing within budget with effective financial reporting, although a more consistent approach to the devolution of financial management responsibilities is needed.

However, with the onset of a tighter financial climate due to the latest financial settlement, the Council will need to ensure that resources are targeted and used effectively to respond to the expected demand pressures in social services and the need to continue to modernise services. The development of longer term financial plans would be beneficial in responding to this agenda.

There is a strong strategic planning framework which engages most major stakeholders, and the Council has developed strong relationships with many partner organisations. Service developments have been pursued in response to strategic plans, and there are also many examples of effective partnership working in projects at an operational level. The Council has developed some effective mechanisms to engage service users and carers in the planning and development of services.

The Council has made positive steps to build capacity in strategic commissioning and contracting through the investment of additional resources and bringing a team together under the management of the Head of Business Support. This has already started to demonstrate real benefits. However, more needs to be done to enable commissioning to become the conduit for delivering a range of cost effective services that meet the needs of the whole community. Currently, commissioning strategies are at varying stages of development, do not effectively link to resources and do not always demonstrate effective engagement with service providers.

Theme 5: Delivering social services (workforce; performance management)

The morale of staff in social services is high. This has helped to maintain a relatively stable workforce and has improved recruitment and retention. Staff can access well planned and good quality training and professional development opportunities. There has been a significant investment in the development of workforce plans for social services, and there is good information about the workforce.

The Review Team concluded that the Council has many systems and processes in place to support effective performance management, with an established and developing management culture which includes regular staff supervision and investment in new information systems. A more strategic approach to quality assurance is now needed, and managers need to ensure that information is used promptly and effectively to tackle areas that need to improve.

Theme 6: Providing direction (leadership and culture in social services; corporate and political support and scrutiny)

Senior managers have provided clear leadership for social services, providing a sense of direction which has resulted in the effective management of change in modernising service delivery, and there has been investment to build capacity to support organisational change. Managers have a sound appreciation of the major issues within their areas of responsibility, both strengths and where improvements are needed. However, managers do need to ensure that there is capacity to manage a significant programme of planned reviews and implement the changes to services resulting from these reviews.

Social services is seen as a priority at a corporate and political level within the Council, and there is a synergy between the aims of the Council and those of social services. Cabinet leads are engaged in the main issues facing social services and have demonstrated a commitment to build upon the quality and range of services provided. There have been improvements in the functioning of Scrutiny Committees, but further improvements are needed if they are to become fully effective in monitoring and evaluating the performance of social services. Corporate and political leadership will need to be further strengthened if social services is to respond effectively to the major changes managers have identified and planned within a tight financial environment.

1.3 Priorities for action

Reviewers have identified the following priority areas for action

1. Improving assessment, care management and review

Managers in social services should:

- tackle problems in allocating cases, and the capacity of some teams;
- improve the timeliness and quality of assessments;
- support and guide practitioners to deliver care plans that more consistently focus on outcomes across both adults and children's services, and cost the plans; and
- ensure consistency in the quality of reviews of care plans.

2. Tackling some weaknesses in the arrangements for protecting vulnerable people

Managers in social services should:

- in child protection work ensure better practice in relation to:
 - core assessments;
 - Risk assessment and risk management; and
 - quality of statutory reviews.
- address capacity issues regarding the protection of adults.

3. Improving support for carers

Managers in social services should:

- ensure carers assessments are offered and completed; and
- tackle shortfalls in services, particularly respite care.

4. Developing effective commissioning strategies

The Council should:

- ensure the potential of the Council's involvement in regional initiatives is maximised in order to develop commissioning opportunities;
- link commissioning strategies to available resources; and
- engage service providers more consistently in the development and implementation of commissioning strategies.

Managers in social services should:

- complete detailed commissioning strategies for all service user groups; and
- develop a more consistent approach to needs analysis and market mapping.

5. Ensuring that the needs of people from black and ethnic minority communities has a higher profile

The Council should:

- improve the availability of information;
- ensure staff are supported in meeting the cultural needs of users and carers;
- develop business plans and commissioning strategies to ensure services meet the needs of minority communities; and
- enable the Black and Ethnic minorities forum to become the focus for driving improvement and change.

6. Developing a more strategic approach to delivering value for money from all activities in the provision of social services

The Council should:

- ensure that investment in services delivers the expected outcomes, and is targeted at priorities; and
- identify all the financial implications of service changes.

Managers in social services should:

- link service planning and commissioning to availability of resources over the longer term; and
- identify, track and monitor unit costs

7. Ensuring that there is sufficient management capacity to deliver the change programme that has been identified

The Council should:

- build the necessary capacity to manage the significant programme of planned reviews and to implement the changes.

Further copies

Further copies of this summary are available from:

CSSIW
4-5 Charnwood Court
Heol Billingsley
Parc Nantgarw
Nantgarw
CF15 7QZ

Telephone: 01443 848483

e-mail: jointreview@wales.gsi.gov.uk