

Introduction

We are pleased to present this summary report of a joint review carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales and the Wales Audit Office. 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 summary report sets out the overall conclusions from the review, the main findings and the priorities for action. There is a full, published report setting out the review team's detailed assessment of the Council.

The joint review of social services in Carmarthenshire County Council (the Council) was carried out by a team working on behalf of the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (SSIW) and the Wales Audit Office (WAO). The review team comprised Val Connors, Philip Evans, Gwylfa Evans, Sue Roberts and Margaret Wearing, with Amanda Wiggan, Patricia Rannard and Mervyn Jones as lay assessors. On-site work in Carmarthenshire took place between August 2005 and November 2005. A presentation of the findings from this Review was given to groups of Councillors, staff, service users and other stakeholders in December 2005.

It is our hope that this report will:

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

The Council has been asked to produce an action plan in response to the report. Both SSIW and the WAO 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 web-site or from SSIW.



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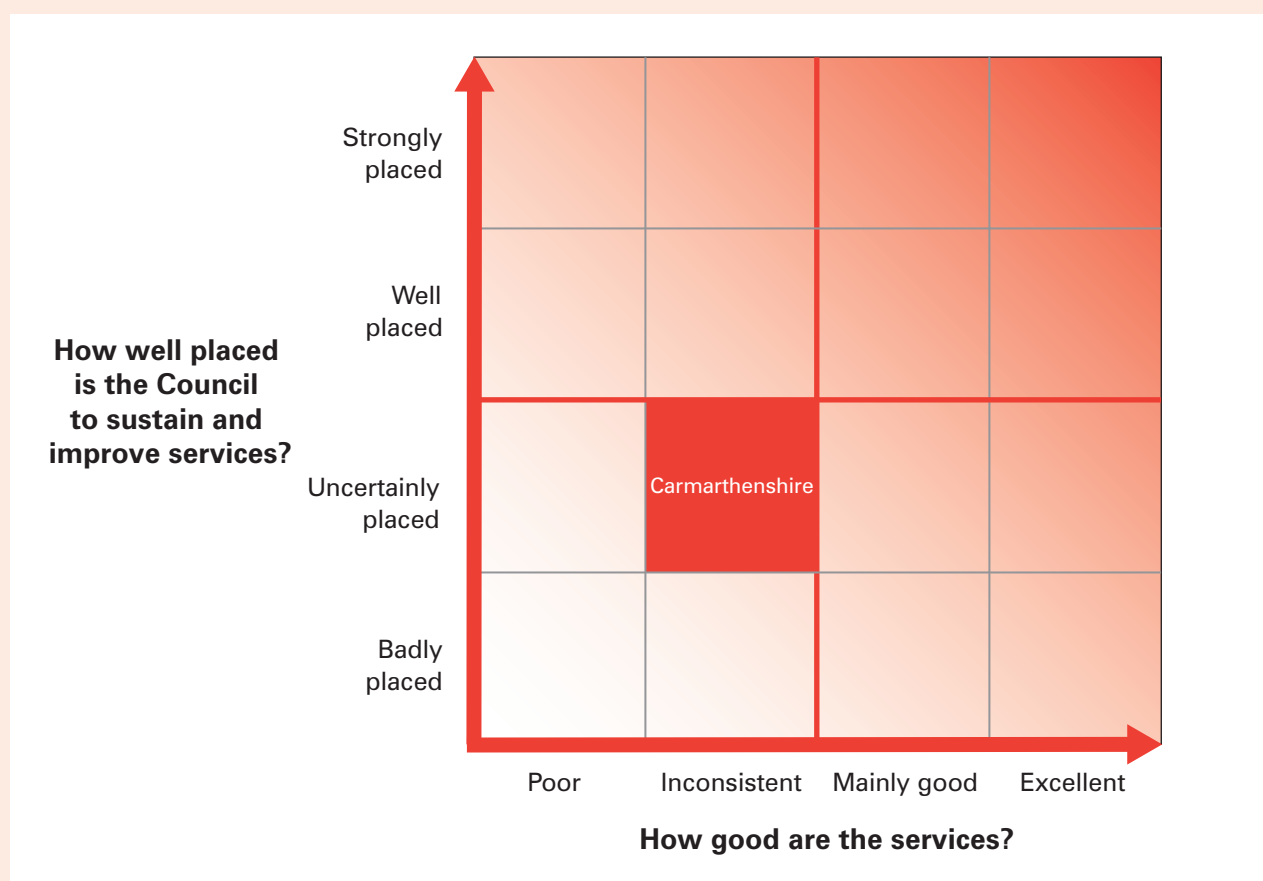
Overall Conclusions

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

Carmarthenshire County Council is judged as having inconsistent services and as being uncertainly placed to sustain and further improve services.

Exhibit 1.1: Carmarthenshire's position in the Joint Review performance matrix



In reaching this conclusion, the Joint Review team recognises that children's services are mainly good, with a clear focus on safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. However, some areas of adult services are poor, especially in managing risk to vulnerable people. This has affected the overall judgement made about the Council's social services.

An improved corporate framework has yet to bring about consistent improvement in social services and the picture in Carmarthenshire continues to be mixed.

Since the last Joint Review in 1999, the Council has undergone significant changes in its corporate and political structures. These have provided a better framework for joined up working and a more structured approach to delivering the overall work of the Council. The corporate approach has provided some benefits for social services based on the recognition that the challenging social care agenda needs to be tackled on a cross cutting basis and given a higher political and corporate priority.

The improved corporate framework, however, has yet to bring about consistent improvement in social services and the picture in Carmarthenshire continues to be mixed. This is an organisation of contrasts. While services for children and families have continued to improve over the last five years, progress in dealing with the significant changes required in adult services has been slow. Some of the fundamental problems identified at the last Joint Review, have not yet been tackled and, as a consequence, there are a growing number of vulnerable adults who are poorly served through a lack of appropriate support.

Children and their families are able to access a wide range of good and improving services.

In taking forward the agenda in children's services, the Council has demonstrated a good track record in addressing key weaknesses identified in the last Joint Review and subsequent inspections. As a result, children's services are mainly good with a focus on safeguarding children and promoting

their welfare. Effective management arrangements are in place which deliver:

- timely responses across most services;
- good quality assessment and case management practice;
- robust risk management; and
- services which are centred on meeting the needs of children and families.

Child protection procedures are mainly effective with well established multi-agency arrangements, effective monitoring and good relationships with partners. There is an impressive range of services which focus on providing for the whole spectrum of need, from prevention to accommodation and which make good use of the funding available. However, some key gaps still need to be addressed such as ensuring consistent quality of foster care and better matching of placements with children's needs.

The improvements in children's services have been achieved within the context of a resource base that is lower than the Welsh average. To their credit, managers and staff have been creative and innovative in the use of the available funding. Nevertheless, resources in children's services remain a risk area and there are considerable pressures on finances. In taking forward the planned integration of children's services with education, the Council will need to ensure that:

- the reorganisation brings significant added value;
- it undertakes a comprehensive analysis of costs, benefits and risks;
- it safeguards the professional agenda in children's services; and

- it provides a framework in which services can be improved even further.

Less progress has been made in adult services where there is still a long way to go to achieve an adequate range of modern services that meet the needs of vulnerable people.

Adult services present a different picture and there are many more concerns about the pace of change and improvement needed to create modern social services. When people do receive services, these are generally safe and caring and some people also receive services which enable them to enjoy increased independence. However, there is an increasing number of vulnerable people whose needs are not being met and who are at risk in the community and in hospital, because services and funding are not available.

Moreover, too many entrenched problems and barriers to improvement have not been adequately dealt with. In consequence, insufficient progress has been made in re-designing adult services to meet the aims of a modern social service agenda covering prevention, rehabilitation and independence. More specifically, a number of key risk areas have not been tackled.

- Despite additional investment in recent years, the Council is still struggling to establish effective ways of managing significant budget pressures. Its approach is focused on financial control at the centre rather than financial management at the frontline.
- There is a need for better information about costs and trends and improved links between financial and service planning to avoid the need for short-term crisis management.

- Commissioning and contracting arrangements are underdeveloped. The Council has not used the opportunity of Best Value reviews sufficiently to promote change in mainstream services and to examine issues of cost effectiveness, efficiency and quality of service.
- There are fundamental weaknesses in measuring and challenging performance and there is a lack of reliable information available about how many people are receiving services and the quality of those services.
- The key strategic partnership for driving forward Health, Social Care and Wellbeing is not operating effectively and partners are not signed up to the same agenda or solutions about what is best done where and by whom.
- Many staff have been frustrated by a lack of clear direction, visible leadership, a focus on the most critical issues and systems which connect strategic management with frontline services.

The Council recognises that it now needs to move quickly to address this challenging agenda for adult services. There is a strong corporate and political commitment to improving services as a matter of priority, demonstrated by the response to concerns raised during the Review. Managers and frontline staff are also eager to demonstrate that they can meet the challenges ahead, with a firm commitment to delivering high quality services which consistently meet the needs of people in Carmarthenshire.

These are encouraging signs. However, there is still a long journey ahead in turning real political interest, strong commitment and an improved corporate

framework into a coherent and sustained programme for improving adult services. In the short-term, the Council may need some additional help to improve its capacity in areas such as commissioning, project management and financial and service planning, which will allow quick progress to be made towards delivering this considerable agenda of change.

1.2 Key findings

The Review sought to answer two key questions:

- How good are the services? (see Exhibit 1.2.1)
- How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services? (see Exhibit 1.2.2)

Exhibit 1.2.1: 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"> • Better public information • Sound assessment and care management practice in children’s services • Effective risk assessment and risk management processes in child protection and learning disabilities • A good and developing range of services for children and families • A unified approach with other agencies in children’s services which is based on a preventive ethos, with a strong emphasis on social inclusion • Some innovative service developments that show a developing focus in adult services on supporting people in their own communities and promoting independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significantly improving care management in adult services, including the systematic use of reviews and developing more outcome-focused care plans • Tackling the increasing numbers of vulnerable adults (both in the community and in hospitals) who experience long delays before services are provided • Expanding the range of service options in adult services to address key gaps and issues of coverage, flexibility and choice • Increasing the pace of change particularly in older people’s services and mental health services • Improving the range of services available out-of-office hours and on weekends • Addressing the key gaps identified in children’s services including an increased range of placement options for some groups of children and ensuring the consistent quality of foster care • Improving the experience of young people who transfer from children’s services to adult services

Exhibit 1.2.2: How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services?

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

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced, well qualified and loyal staff who demonstrate sound values and commitment • Strong corporate drive for improving the Council's services • Renewed political priority given to social services • Improving consultation with service users and carers • Effective workforce planning, training and development • Good business support services • Good relationships with many partners and providers • Sound management of children's services, including work with partners and a systematic approach to monitoring quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an effective performance management framework so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Council knows what is happening to service users; and - there is clear accountability for this agenda across the directorate. • Providing management information which enables effective monitoring and management of performance and the use of resources in adult services • Mending and developing the strategic partnership responsible for driving forward the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing agenda including re-shaping adult services • Developing better commissioning and contracting arrangements • Addressing the perceived prejudice against an increasing role for the independent sector in the provision of social services • Ensuring that resources are linked to strategic direction and service plans and that value for money is achieved • Finding effective ways to manage budget pressures, including a review of the panel mechanisms established to control budgets and prioritise who will receive services • Improving the quality of leadership in adult services, ensuring that a clear vision and direction is developed and communicated • Increasing the capacity to manage change by improving project and business management

1.3 Priorities for action

During the second phase of the Joint Review fieldwork, six principle improvement themes were identified covering key risk areas to the Council. The themes were:

1. Dealing with the growing crisis around waiting lists

The Council should:

- reassess the current distribution of resources between different service user groups; and
- ensure that Councillors are informed when statutory responsibilities to provide services are not being met.

Managers in adult services should:

- review urgently existing high priority cases to ensure that people are properly safeguarded and put in place a systematic approach for scrutinising cases where people experience delays;
- consider whether current arrangements for delegated decision making are fit for purpose;
- plan to make available a sufficient range of services to meet identified priority needs; and
- ensure that practitioners in adult services are able to contribute to improving quality and consistency in assessment, care management and review.

2. Setting a clear direction for adult services which emphasises independence and choice

The Council should:

- develop a clear vision and sustainable strategies for all

adult services which are properly resourced and communicated; and

- re-examine the appropriateness of the balance between institutional care and community based services.

Senior managers in social services should:

- translate strategies into priority actions which are communicated and supported throughout the organisation.

3. Using increased funding effectively by providing value for money, quality services

The Council should:

- promote a mixed economy of social care services using, as appropriate, all the different sectors (private, not for profit, voluntary and statutory).

Managers in social services should:

- develop effective and costed commissioning strategies and business plans for core services, ensuring quality and value for money are built in.

4. Mending and developing key strategic partnerships

The Council should:

- seek to improve its working relationship with the Local Health Board to support the implementation of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy and other strategic plans.

Corporate managers should:

- make social care partnerships and planning frameworks better able to:
 - deliver outcomes and improvements quickly;

- deal with key service gaps; and
- improve the quality of collaborative working.

5. Strengthening arrangements for monitoring performance and for ensuring accountability, to improve the pace of change

The Council should:

- increase the capacity for project and business management in social services.

Managers in social services should:

- provide Councillors with reports that help secure well-informed decisions and implementation plans and effective scrutiny; and
- ensure that accountability for performance management in each service area is clear.

6. Ensuring the proposed integration of children's services with education brings significant added value in terms of improved outcomes for children in need and their families

The Council should:

- require from officers a coherent and robust implementation plan for this major change; and
- consider a comprehensive analysis of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed changes.

Corporate managers should:

- engage with all relevant stakeholders (including children in need and their families) to establish clear goals for the proposed structural changes.

Managers in social services should:

- plan how to ensure that the new arrangements properly safeguard the professional agenda in children's services.