

# Joint Review of Ceredigion County 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](http://www.joint-reviews.gov.uk)** or from:

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# Foreword

We are pleased to present this summary report of a joint review<sup>1</sup> 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 main 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 National Assembly for Wales 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 the Government of Wales Act 1998 (as amended) enables the Auditor General for Wales to participate.

The Joint Review of social services in Ceredigion County Council was carried out by a team comprising of Kevin Barker, Adrienne Woolfe, Helen Keatley, John Llewellyn Thomas, Rob Gifford and Julia Phillipson, with Alice Jones and Phillip Williams as lay assessors. On-site work in the Council took place between October 2006 and January 2007. A presentation of the findings of this Review was given to the Council in February 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 Ceredigion.

The Council has been asked to produce an action plan in response to the full 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

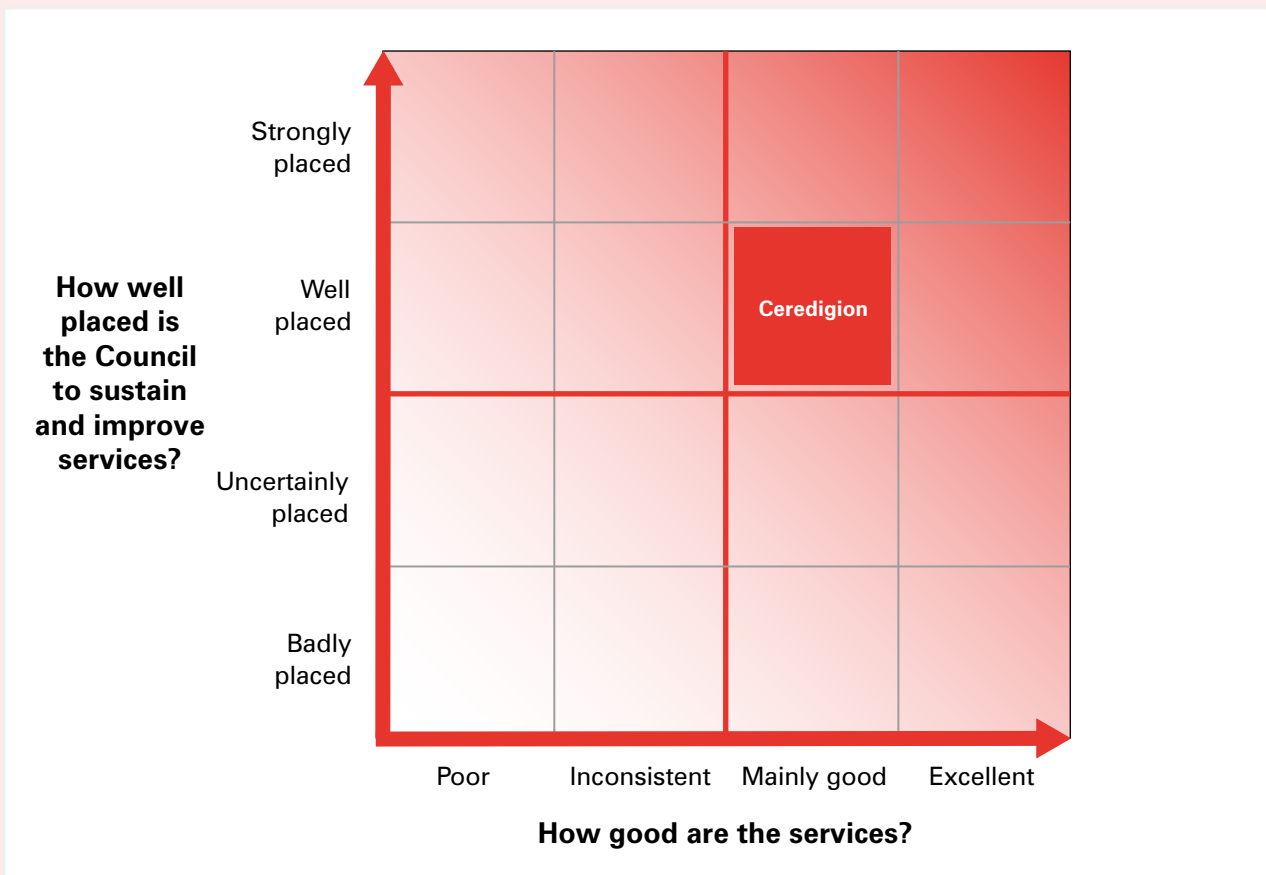
# Overall Conclusions

*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

Ceredigion County Council is judged as having mainly good services and as being well placed to sustain and further improve services (Exhibit 1).

**Exhibit 1: Ceredigion’s position in the joint review performance matrix**



The services that the Council provides to vulnerable people and those in need have improved significantly since the last Joint Review. There are more people being helped to live safely at home and included in their community. Most people find it easier to make contact with social services and they generally receive a prompt response. These improvements are not yet underpinned by consistently good care planning.

The Council has increased its investment in social services and good operational partnerships with partners have helped to secure a number of new, sometimes innovative services. Systems for commissioning and performance management are developing and some significant progress has been made in recruitment and retention of staff.

There is more to be done to ensure that all the essential elements necessary to shape and deliver social services are securely in place. This will require a stronger focus on ensuring good outcomes for people using social services, with systems to measure and monitor the extent to which they are achieved. There is a clear sense of direction for social services. The Council needs to support this with a more business-like approach if its aspirations are to be delivered. Stronger links between care planning, commissioning and contract monitoring will help the Council to convert its plans into purchasing intentions and provide more choice for service users.

## **1. The Council is providing mainly good services**

### **Adult services**

There is a wider range of services available to meet the needs of adults than existed at the last Joint Review.

- More older people are being helped to live at home.
- Use of direct payments has increased.
- People with learning disabilities now have access to several new and creative services.
- A significant year on year reduction in the number of people unable to leave hospital at the appropriate time (delayed transfers of care) has been achieved.

Gaps remain and the Council is still working to extend the coverage of services across the county. More needs to be done to ensure that services such as reablement, crisis response and supported accommodation are readily available. Nevertheless, reviewers do recognise that there has been significant

progress since the last Joint Review and that the balance of services is shifting in favour of community focussed and inclusive options.

Arrangements for assessment, care management and review are inconsistent. Assessments are not consistently focused on outcomes and a backlog of reviews has built up in services for older people. Care planning for people with learning disabilities needs a tighter focus on putting the person at the centre of the plan and stronger managerial leadership to guide and support staff. Arrangements are stronger in services for people with mental health needs, where the quality of assessments was particularly good, showing clear evidence of user involvement and good analysis of the issues.

Vulnerable adults are protected from abuse and the quality of practice seen at the front line was good. However, there was also evidence that the arrangements for protecting vulnerable adults were coming under pressure.

- Staff reported increased levels of stress; and
- Some key individuals felt that support arrangements were insufficient for the increasing volume and complexity of the work in this area.

### **Children's services**

Children and young people receiving help from social services get a timely response. Eligibility criteria are applied consistently. More needs to be done to increase the involvement of other agencies in initial assessments and the use and content of core assessments. The analysis in assessments is often poor or incomplete. A relatively inexperienced assessment team needs help to achieve good practice more

consistently. There is good compliance with timescales for looked after children care plans. The system for reviewing cases is sound. There are successful panels for managing admissions to accommodation, permanency planning and complex needs.

The Council needs to pay particular attention to improving the arrangements for child protection. Social workers are working hard and children are protected in terms of a sound response to initial concerns. A more systematic approach to assessing and managing risk in the later stages of child protection work is needed. The Council was only introducing a systematic process for risk assessment during the Joint Review. A decision to undertake a formal child protection investigation did not always trigger a core (i.e. detailed) assessment. The focus on outcomes after the child protection case conference was poor. The way in which core groups are chaired and managed needs to improve. There was insufficient evidence that social work practice is of a good enough standard for reviewers to be confident about the outcomes for all children and young people.

The child protection case conference system is good. The transition from Area Child Protection Committee to Local Safeguarding Children Board has been timely and well managed. This should enhance interagency work to protect children.

The Council has started to develop a multi agency family support strategy but, on the ground, family support services are quite small-scale and relatively uncoordinated. The family placement service has improved and there has been a big reduction in the number of looked after children placed out of county. The social services department has invested in its fostering service to improve the options for

children who are no longer able to live with their family. However, it is still having difficulties in accommodating appropriately those children who have challenging behaviour or other special needs. There is good contact and support for young people leaving care. The Disabled Children's Team has made sound progress in response to an earlier inspection and offers a strong example of effective, multi-agency partnership working. Direct payments within children's services have increased.

## **2. The Council is well placed to sustain and further improve services.**

### **Shaping services (use of resources; planning and partnerships; commissioning and contracting)**

There is an improving range of services, which provides good evidence for the progress made with partnerships and planning. Operational partnerships work well to deliver positive outcomes for service users. Arrangements for contract monitoring, while only able to deliver an annual review for most services, are still significantly better than at the last joint review. Monitoring arrangements need to be better linked to intelligence from care plan reviews, complaints and adult protection data. The department's commissioning strategy is new, untested and lacking in detail about purchasing intentions.

There are positive features in the way in which the Council uses its money and assets. Investment in social services has been increased and the department has managed the budget effectively from the centre. Action has been taken to begin to tackle the problem of declining reserves at a corporate and departmental level. Rising demand for social care and increasing expectations about service quality make it even more essential that the Council focuses more

on making best use of the resources available. To do this it will need to ensure that:

- all staff are more aware of value for money issues;
- commissioning strategies across all service areas are underpinned by financial information, including the resources available; and
- decisions about resource allocation are linked to priorities set out in strategic and service plans.

### **Delivering social services (workforce; performance management)**

The Council has introduced better arrangements for performance management, which are beginning to be applied in social services.

The new system is sound and, within the department, builds on previous arrangements to monitor performance against a range of indicators. In practice, the use of good performance management information to bring about improvements was variable. Clear reports at the front line about performance in relation to assessments, care plans and reviews were inconsistently applied in adult services. The appraisal system that formally holds staff to account for their performance has only recently been introduced in an improved format. The previous arrangements were not robust and relied too heavily on informal mechanisms for delivery.

Great strides have been made in improving staff retention, achieving nationally recognised qualifications and developing training opportunities for staff. The preponderance of part-time staff and number of secondments means that, at times, this progress has been at the expense of staff continuity for some service users and carers.

### **Providing direction (leadership and culture in social services; corporate and political support and scrutiny)**

The Senior Management Team in social services is motivated, mutually supportive and accessible to staff. Together, they have promoted an inclusive culture with a focus on delivering a caring service. The organisation of social services has mostly been clear and stable. There need to be more rigorous arrangements in place to review and challenge services and performance. The senior leadership in the Department needs to demonstrate more consistently that the use of business management techniques, such as effective project management, can sharpen performance and speed up evidence-based change.

The increased investment in social services in recent years demonstrates a raised profile for the department within the Council. There are examples of good partnership working at a corporate level to deliver social services objectives, which are included in the corporate strategy. There are strong and knowledgeable lead members for social services and for children. However, the arrangements for scrutiny have only recently become focused on performance information. Reviewers judged that there is a need for the Council to adopt more coherent approaches to delivering large scale change if it is to meet the considerable challenges involved in delivering social services that can satisfy rising expectations.

## 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)

### 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			•	
Arrangement to protect vulnerable people		•		
Success in promoting independence and social inclusion			•	

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A wide range of good quality information about services</li> <li>• Efficient and effective referral and access arrangements using the contact centre</li> <li>• The use of the Framework for Assessment and consistent application of eligibility criteria in children's services</li> <li>• An expanded range of services for adults offering more options for support in the community</li> <li>• Recruitment of foster carers leading to a reduction of out of county placements for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving the content of assessments (including risk assessment) in children's services</li> <li>• Improving the timeliness and quality of assessments in adult services</li> <li>• Developing more outcome focussed care plans in both adult and children's services</li> <li>• Improving child protection practice, including the use of core groups and core assessments</li> <li>• Improving the timeliness of reviews in adult services</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good quality services delivered with respect for people’s needs and their individual circumstances</li> <li>• Good practice in adult protection with a focus on outcomes</li> <li>• Contact and support for young people leaving care</li> <li>• Relatively high numbers of people using direct payments</li> <li>• Good performance in achieving a year on year reduction in relation to delayed transfers of care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening the preventative focus in family support services, including better coverage and linkages between the range of services available</li> </ul>
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**Exhibit 3: How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services?**

**The Review Team’s Judgements**

	<b>Badly placed</b>	<b>Uncertainly placed</b>	<b>Well placed</b>	<b>Strongly placed</b>
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"> <li>• A strategic approach to workforce planning and improved recruitment and retention of staff</li> <li>• Established structures for planning, partnerships and joint working</li> <li>• A readiness to review and change arrangements for service delivery</li> <li>• Supportive and accessible managers</li> <li>• Positive staff morale overall</li> <li>• Increased investment in social services since the last joint review</li> <li>• Clear links between social service's objectives and the corporate strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting the most from management information and developing the links between planning, accountability and performance management</li> <li>• Developing detailed commissioning strategies across all areas</li> <li>• Improving arrangements for contract monitoring</li> <li>• Improving the links between financial and service planning</li> <li>• Establishing more effective scrutiny arrangements</li> </ul>

### 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:**

- ensure that thorough assessments with a good analysis of information are completed in order to inform the decision making process in children's services;
- ensure that timely core assessments are completed when needed in children's services;
- improve the timeliness of specialist occupational therapy assessments;
- support and guide practitioners to deliver care plans that more consistently focus on outcomes across both adult and children's services;
- ensure that there are timely reviews of care plans in adult services.

#### 2. Protecting vulnerable people

**Managers in social services should:**

- in child protection services ensure better use of:
  - risk assessment and risk management;
  - core assessments;
  - core groups;
- provide leadership for the protection of vulnerable adults, helping the area committee to drive forward a strategic approach to adult protection in the County.

**The Council should:**

- monitor the effectiveness of the Local Safeguarding Children’s Board in meeting its stated objectives;
- review the arrangements for protection of vulnerable adults to take account of increasing volume and complexity of the work.

**3. Developing strategic partnerships****The Council should:**

- focus the partnership with the Local Health Board and NHS Trusts by developing common targets and performance measures in pursuit of shared objectives and aspirations;
- seek to improve the coverage and availability of a widening range of services for adults and children.

**4. Getting the most from the resources available****The Council should:**

- develop the linking of financial and service planning through the further development of the commissioning strategy for social services;
- consider the risks for social services arising from declining departmental and corporate reserves and draw up a plan to mitigate those risks.

**Managers in social services should:**

- ensure that a consistent approach to business planning is implemented across the department, including meaningful involvement of practitioners and other staff;
- complete the commissioning strategies to include:
  - detailed plans to show how services will be reshaped;
  - financial information including the resources available and unit cost of services; and
  - consideration of the scope for joint commissioning with the NHS.

**5. Managing performance****The Council should:**

- ensure that there are effective mechanisms to provide support and oversight to staff in carrying out their responsibilities. This includes:
  - implementation of the corporate appraisal system; and
  - regular file audits in adult services.

**Managers in social services should:**

- develop a systematic approach to the availability and use of performance information across adult and children’s services; and
- further develop contract monitoring so that all potential sources of information about performance are considered.

## 6. Leadership of social services

### **The Council should:**

- improve the scrutiny arrangements for social services so that there is a rigorous examination of performance;
- ensure that the views of service users and carers receive proper consideration at both cabinet and scrutiny level; and
- adopt a more coherent approach to delivering change through specifying consistently the actions to be taken, establishing who is responsible and accountable for delivery.

### **Managers in social services should:**

- increase the pace and scale of change in areas where there are substantial obstacles by adopting more business like processes such as:
  - using programme and project management techniques to achieve intended outcomes; and
  - systematically monitoring and improving performance.

## Further copies

Further copies of this summary are available from:

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