

# Joint Review of Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council Social Services

Summary

This is a summary of a fuller report which is available on the website: **[www.joint-reviews.gov.uk](http://www.joint-reviews.gov.uk)** or from:

Social Services Inspectorate for Wales

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Telephone: 029 2082 6656

Email: **[JointReviews@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:JointReviews@wales.gsi.gov.uk)**

# 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 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough 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 Shirley Williams, Steve Martin and Sheila Booth, with Sandra Graves and Gwyneth Thomas as lay assessors. On-site work in Rhondda Cynon Taf took place between August and December 2005. A presentation of the findings from this review was given to groups of Councillors, staff, service users and other stakeholders in January 2006.

It is our hope that this report will:

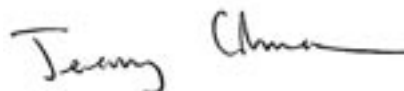
- tell the public how well people are being served;
- help these services to improve;
- safeguard the interests of service users and carers;
- get better value for money in the provision of social services.

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.



**Richard Tebboth**  
Acting Chief Inspector of Social Services



**Jeremy Colman**  
Auditor General for Wales

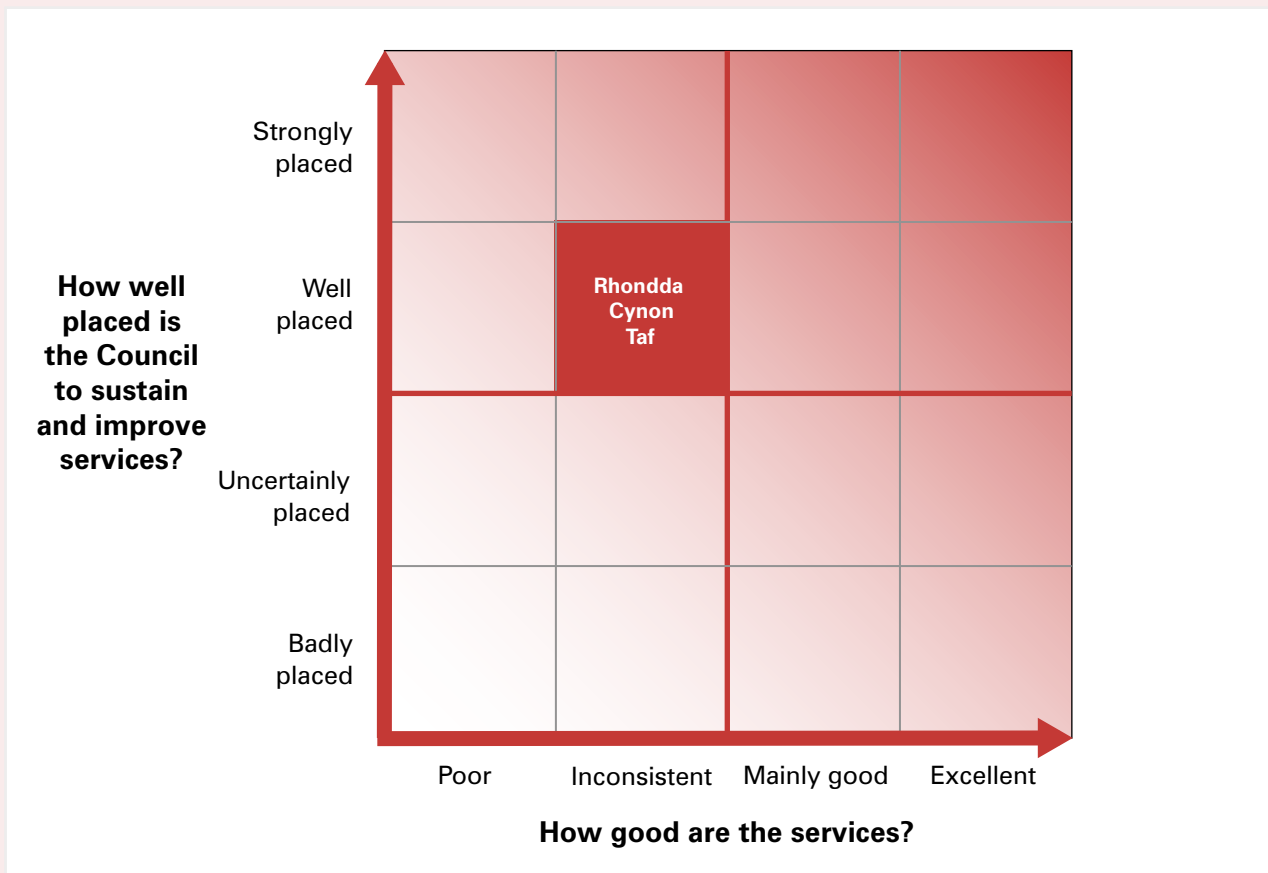
# Overall Conclusions

*This chapter summarises the 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

The Council is judged as having inconsistent services but, on balance, as being well placed to sustain and improve services (Exhibit 1).

**Exhibit 1: The position of Rhondda Cynon Taf in the joint review performance matrix**



**Adults who need support from social services in Rhondda Cynon Taf often receive a caring, prompt and competent service but the picture is a mixed one.** In many cases, practice is very good and people are helped to regain or stay in control of their lives because their needs are met in ways that suit them. However, there is much work to be done in making sure that all service users and carers receive this sort of help. Traditionally, the Council has made considerable use of residential care and 'building-based' day care, mainly providing these services directly through its own staff and establishments. This has restricted the number of people receiving help and the choices available to them. The position is changing, albeit rather slowly, with more people receiving support in their own homes and in community settings as the Council works with partners to develop more flexible services.

**Services to children and their families have caused much concern. The Council has taken action to tackle the problems and there is some evidence of improvement, but the position remains fragile.**

In the 12 months leading up to the Joint Review, the Council acknowledged evidence of serious, long-term difficulties in its children and family services.

A good range of services is available to children in need and their families, with many of them provided on the basis of partnership between the Council and other organisations (such as local and national charities). However, some vulnerable children and their families were not getting the help they needed at the right time, in part because the Council did not have enough appropriately skilled and qualified staff. Critical decisions were delayed and children could not be guaranteed effective protection or opportunities to develop.

The Review Team found that the Council had acted to bring about improvements in children's services, especially in assessment and care planning for children on the child protection register and for children in its care. Just before the Review started, there was a change in the management arrangements for the children and family services division. The division was moved from the Education and Children's Services Directorate to the Community Services Directorate, which is also responsible for adult social care and housing and is managed by the Director of Social Services. The Council significantly increased the level of political, corporate and technical support available to the children and family services division. Steps were taken to deal with workforce issues, the management of performance and the way in which resources were being used. Far more attention is now being given to ensuring that the services meet statutory responsibilities and provide

appropriate help for children in need and their families.

The Review Team found it difficult to gauge whether these changes will produce long-term benefits in terms of better outcomes for children and families. Social work practice was still inconsistent. However, there was sufficient evidence of improvement from other sources (including staff and key partners) to convince the Review Team that the changes are beginning to have a positive impact and to lay the foundations for delivering further progress.

**On balance and after considerable scrutiny of the evidence available, the Review Team concluded that the Council is mainly well placed to sustain and make further improvements to services.** The Review Team exercised great caution in reaching a judgement about future prospects for social care in Rhondda Cynon Taf because many of the improvements are so recent. Considerable work was undertaken to gather additional evidence about issues such as the leadership and management of change, the extent of political support and scrutiny, and workforce issues.

There have been solid gains made over the past year and the Council as a whole has shown a clear commitment to maintaining this trend. In a number of areas, however, the progress made by the Council since the previous Joint Review<sup>2</sup> has been disappointing.

- The Council has made the task of improving social care one of its key priorities and has demonstrated this commitment in decisions about budgets, but it has not yet moved from a position of ensuring sound financial control to one of delivering effective management of resources.

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<sup>2</sup> The report of the review was published in June 2000

- The Council's track record in translating plans for social services into commissioning strategies that deliver significant change is not good across most service areas, although work of this kind should be seen as a key element in achieving better outcomes for people who depend upon social services.
- Challenges to existing patterns of service delivery, on grounds such as excessive cost or under-use, have been too cautious.
- Recent work to ensure that providers deliver quality services and value for money should be speeded up and applied to directly provided services with more rigour.
- The Council needs to strengthen medium and longer-term financial planning arrangements in order to match plans with forecasts of needs, demands and resources.
- The partnerships the Council has developed for planning and delivering services have produced strategies and plans, but they are not delivering the necessary changes in all service areas.

In contrast, the Review Team found a number of areas where the Council can demonstrate improvement and a growing capacity for managing change to good effect. In power since June 2004, the current administration accepts that it took some time to understand the seriousness of the problems in children's services. However, the need for urgent action became obvious from the information gathered as a result of improving systems for scrutinising and managing performance.

**The Council responded vigorously. Dealing with the issues has involved:**

- realistically assessing what had brought about the decline;
- making significant changes at all levels of management throughout the organisation;
- providing better leadership for the workforce and for the Council's social services functions;
- appointing a Cabinet member as a 'champion' for children's services;
- understanding and accepting budget overspends on a temporary basis while the new management team gets to grips with issues about the safety of service users and the quality of services; and
- setting up new scrutiny arrangements to monitor the impact of the changes being introduced.

Revised structural arrangements for social services provide clearer accountability. Reviewers were impressed by the way in which the new children's services management team has approached its work. The management team has set in place an action plan that provides a sound direction and is being delivered energetically. The programme of reform commands widespread support from Councillors, corporate managers, staff and partners. Although there are continuing problems in recruitment (particularly to posts that require experience as well as a relevant qualification), the Council is working hard to:

- attract new staff;
- develop the skills of existing staff through a variety of qualification routes; and

- provide flexible working conditions and good training and development opportunities.

Despite the serious difficulties and recent changes in children's services, many staff reported that their work is valued by the Council, they enjoy their work and morale is generally high.

The Review Team found strong evidence that the Council as a whole is now contributing to improvements in social services. There is more direct involvement by Councillors and corporate managers have demonstrated their commitment to the programme of change. This is evident in the way they have applied the processes used by the Council in implementing the Wales Programme for Improvement, to focus resources and attention on social services issues. The Council is putting in place systems to use a wide range of information to monitor and evaluate how well services are meeting people's needs. At present, this is being done more effectively in adult services than in children's services.

Plans are being generated to increase the pace of change in modernising adult services. This is intended to ensure that the Council can deliver the goals of a modern social care agenda that is focused on prevention, rehabilitation and independence. There is a risk that the need to focus on improving children's

services will have a detrimental impact upon the Council's ability to deliver its adult services agenda. It is important, therefore, to ensure that the momentum of change is maintained across the whole of social services.

The Council still faces a formidable agenda, especially in providing services which consistently meet the needs of vulnerable people. Many of the organisational improvements made to date are not yet fully consolidated, and the Council needs to demonstrate that the changes are sustainable and that they will deliver the intended outcomes. Changes in political control have hampered efforts to formulate policies and then implement them over extended periods of time. However, decisive action has been taken over the past year and this provides a more solid platform for the improvements to services that are still needed.

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

| Strengths  | Areas for development   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well considered approach to providing information about services for adults</li> <li>• Improving arrangements in adult services for keeping in contact with users</li> <li>• Some good person-centred assessment and care planning for people with mental health problems (including older people) and people with learning disabilities</li> <li>• Good arrangements for protecting vulnerable adults</li> <li>• People being discharged from hospital at the appropriate time</li> <li>• Carers with good access to support</li> <li>• Advocacy and support services for most user groups</li> <li>• Good range and quality of services for most groups, including disabled children</li> <li>• Effective services for young people leaving care</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With partners, reviewing the levels of need to which children's services will respond</li> <li>• Improving the timeliness, quality and multi-agency ownership of assessment in children's services</li> <li>• Delivering consistent, good quality casework practice for children, especially those looked after by the Council</li> <li>• Reducing unacceptably long waiting lists for assessment and for some services, including those for disabled children</li> <li>• Improving initial access to out of hours services</li> <li>• With other Council services, developing a strategy for joined up access</li> <li>• In adult services, further developing assessment and service provision that focus on independence and user control</li> <li>• In adult services, providing better access to a range of services, including specialist services for physically disabled adults</li> </ul> |

### 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 |
| 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>• Good workforce planning</li> <li>• Good staff development and training</li> <li>• Sound technical management of finances</li> <li>• Investment in social services</li> <li>• Users and carers participate in service planning</li> <li>• Community Safety Partnership is disability/vulnerability aware</li> <li>• Developing commissioning frameworks</li> <li>• Use made of the Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) for managing performance</li> <li>• Good business support capacity and organisation</li> <li>• Recent focus on obtaining reliable information about performance</li> <li>• Good corporate support</li> <li>• Strong directorate leadership</li> <li>• Growing political commitment and understanding</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regularly and robustly auditing casework practice to identify any deterioration in arrangements for keeping children safe</li> <li>• Rolling out the scheme for staff appraisal</li> <li>• Auditing partnerships to ensure they achieve real change and improvements for users/carers</li> <li>• Improving integration between service planning, commissioning and implementation of change</li> <li>• Further developing and implementing commissioning strategies for all user groups with a focus on value for money in expenditure on social care</li> <li>• Developing an option appraisal approach for service change, to highlight value for money issues</li> <li>• Enabling front line staff to cost service packages, to ensure best value thinking</li> <li>• Developing scrutiny processes that are sufficiently challenging</li> </ul> |

## 1.3 Priorities for action

The Council is judged as being mainly well placed to sustain and improve services but progress is not uniform and there are many risks and challenges ahead. Although the Council is taking the appropriate steps needed to improve (from a relatively low baseline in a number of areas), the causes of the problems are long-standing. The programme of reform will need to be sustained over a considerable period of time to deal effectively with issues such as:

- the legacy of management and staffing problems in children's services; and
- the cautious pace of modernisation in adult services, with under-developed partnership working and comparatively high costs.

Councillors will need to maintain a high level of support, vigilance and challenge if vulnerable people are to benefit fully from the positive changes that have taken place and which are planned for the future. Great importance should be attached both to the action plan that the Council has been asked to produce in response to the Review and also to the way in which it is implemented. SSIW and the Wales Audit Office will carry out further work to evaluate the progress made in delivering the actions and the outcomes for service users and carers.

On the basis of their work in Rhondda Cynon Taf, the Review Team has identified five areas as especially important for further improvement. Some aspects of these are already incorporated in plans made by the Council.

### 1. Consistently providing children with services that help keep them safe, promote their welfare and support their families

#### The Council should:

- sustain its support to managers and staff in children's services;
- improve its ability to act as a corporate parent to the children it looks after;
- scrutinise the outcomes of the work it has already started by:
  - listening to the views of families, young people, staff, foster carers and other service providers; and
  - rigorously examining information about performance;
- review its current arrangements for safeguarding children, to meet the challenges involved in creating a new Safeguarding Board;
- with partners (especially health bodies), ensure an integrated approach to children's services as a whole, including completion of the joint commissioning strategy for disabled children; and
- with partners, review the levels of need to which social services will respond.

#### Managers in social services should:

- employ sufficient staff with the appropriate qualifications, skills and experience to meet statutory responsibilities for children in need and their families;
- improve assessment and care planning in children's services, especially for looked after children and children on the child protection register; and

- develop a broader range of local placements for looked after children and improve support for foster carers.

## **2. Developing leadership and the capacity for managing change across all service areas**

### **The Council should:**

- improve leadership and decision making capacity at all levels, taking fully into account the views of service users and carers when assessing the pace of change;
- scrutinise more rigorously the consequences of decisions made; and
- evaluate the ability of partnerships and planning frameworks to ensure delivery of good outcomes and real improvements.

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

- assist Councillors to set a clear direction for changes in services on the basis of robust risk analysis and defined priorities; and
- through effective business planning, ensure that this direction is acted upon at all levels.

## **3. Setting a clearer direction for adult services which emphasises independence and choice**

### **The Council should:**

- develop services which focus more firmly on outcomes that help all adult users to live as independently as possible.

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

- improve the assessment and care management service so that it:
  - focuses on user outcomes;
  - uses the Unified Assessment framework effectively (including self assessment where appropriate); and
  - ensures consistent and timely reviews.

## **4. Ensuring that social care services purchased or provided by the Council are responsive to need and represent good value for money**

### **The Council should:**

- develop the use of its framework for commissioning social care services so that all available resources are used to best effect, irrespective of whether services are provided in-house or externally;
- continue to strengthen medium and longer-term financial planning;
- fully cost decisions about who is eligible to receive adult services;
- establish stronger budgetary control and delegation for children's services; and
- tackle high costs more rigorously.

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

- more effectively translate plans into commissioning strategies that deliver real changes in services;
- improve partnership arrangements to support the agenda for reshaping services, in part by extending involvement with the independent and voluntary sectors;

- assist staff to understand service costs and to seek value for money solutions; and
- on the basis of risk and impact, decide priorities for work in developing these commissioning strategies.

## **5. Measuring and monitoring the impact of the Council's change programme for social services**

### **The Council should:**

- ensure that relevant and reliable information about performance is collected from a range of sources and analysed; and
- provide sufficient capacity and systems to help operational staff produce good quality data.

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

- provide staff with regular training on the use of data (for monitoring, business planning and improvement) and ensure they are able to influence the way in which information systems are developed to support good practice.