

Joint Review of Gwynedd 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:

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Foreword

We are pleased to present this summary report of a Joint Review carried out by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate 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 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 hope 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 Gwynedd Council was carried out by a team comprising Sue Roberts, John-Llewellyn Thomas, Val Connors, Mike Palmer, Rob Gifford, Helen Keatley, Colin McKay and Jill Lewis with Gwyneth Thomas and Alice Jones as lay assessors. On-site work in the Council took place between April 2007 and July 2007. A presentation of the findings of this review was given to elected members in the Council in October 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.

The Council has been asked to produce an action plan in response to this report. Both CSSIW 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 website.



Rob Pickford
Chief Inspector



Jeremy Colman
Auditor General for Wales

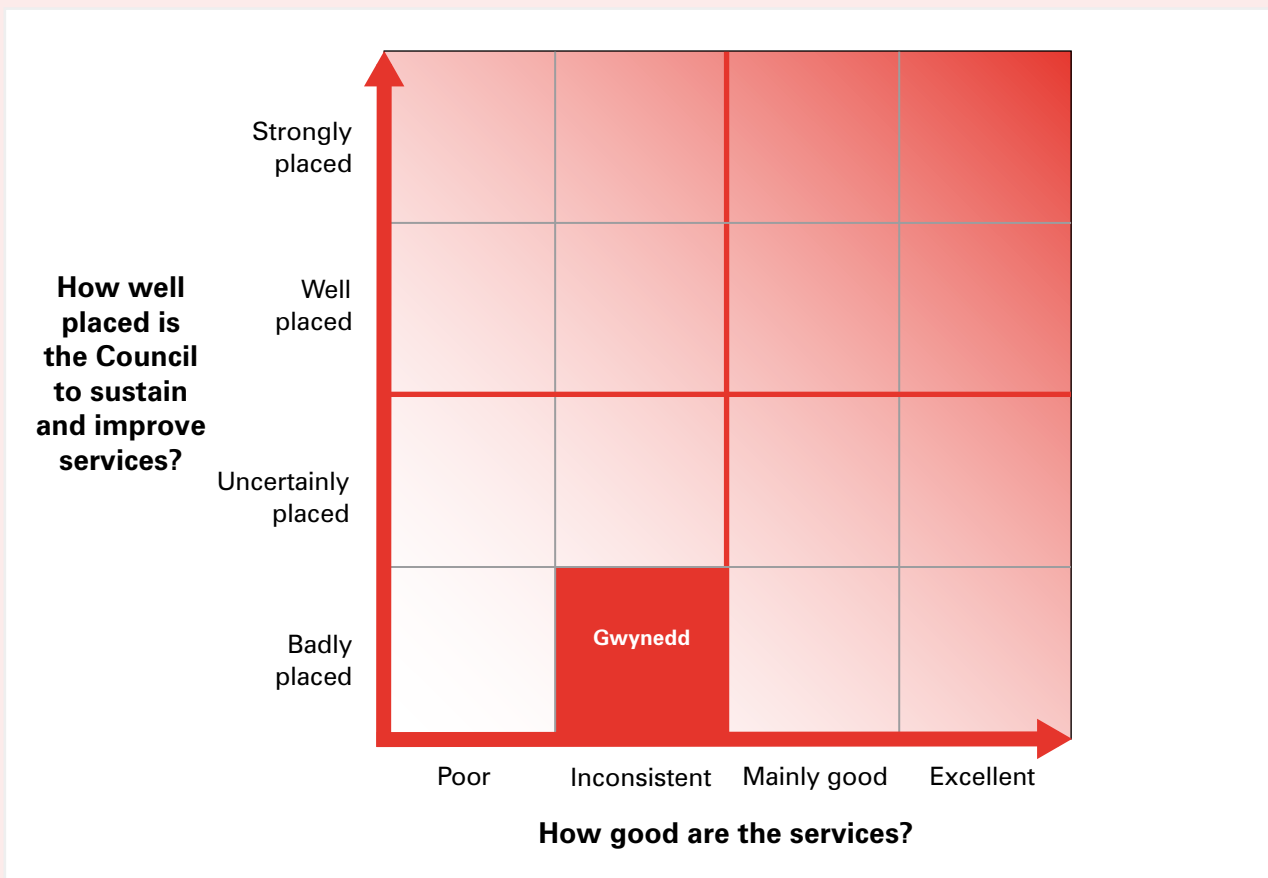
Overall Conclusions

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

The Council was judged as having inconsistent services, and as being badly placed to sustain and further improve services (Exhibit 1)

Exhibit 1: Gwynedd's position in the joint review performance matrix



The Council recognises that it is not yet delivering consistently good services. Most people in Gwynedd get help that is safe and caring but a significant number do not receive services that are sufficiently focused on enabling them to retain maximum independence and control. There are people who receive support which enables them to lead independent lives but such help is not consistently available to all service users who have considerable needs. Significant service gaps remain with problems in ensuring flexibility, choice and consistent geographical coverage. In a number of areas, the Council could not demonstrate that it is moving in the right direction to address these shortfalls.

Since the last Joint Review in 2001, the Council has undergone significant changes in its corporate and political structures. Restructuring has diverted management energy away from service improvement and this has resulted in inertia. Many of the good intentions voiced in response to the last Joint Review have not been implemented and opportunities for improvement have been missed. Progress has not kept pace with that made by many other local authorities in Wales. Councillors and staff in key positions expressed a determination to achieve the scale of change now required for Gwynedd to close this gap. If the people of Gwynedd are to get the services they need, then this resolve needs to be translated quickly into tangible outcomes.

Councillors and corporate officers need to drive forward strategic development and implementation of plans. In partnership with key stakeholders (including front line staff and service users and carers), managers in social services must begin to deliver sustained improvement. A better return from the resources invested in social services is required to ensure improvement in the range of services which support and promote independence. The Council now needs to demonstrate that it can address an increasingly challenging agenda and develop an effective response to the concerns raised during the Joint Review.

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

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"> • Good arrangements for initial responses to enquiries in many services • People generally satisfied with the services they receive • Growing range of children's services provided in partnership • Supporting some people with complex needs in the community • Improving picture in Social Services work with child protection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently delivering all care management and assessment processes for both adults and children • Expanding service options to address key gaps and issues of coverage, flexibility and choice across all service areas • Implementing national guidance on Unified Assessment for adults • Improving the approach to the assessment and management of risk

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive work with partners in protecting vulnerable people • Good performance on ensuring timely discharge of adults from hospital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and improving adult protection processes in terms of skills, process and procedures • Making sure children who are looked after have their needs met • Improving outcomes and service availability for all Children in Need and for young people who transfer from children to adult services • Radically shifting the pattern of services in areas such as learning disability and older people's services • Applying systematic quality assurance systems across all services • Involving service users in quality assurance and service design • Broadening the range of services available for carers

Adult Services

The Review Team did not find an adequate range of modern services that enable vulnerable people to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Access to adult services is by variable means and numerous duty systems are in place across the County which take up a considerable amount of care management resource. Management information systems are not yet fit for purpose and, as a consequence, the most basic data required to measure performance is not available.

Although care managers are working hard to deliver a service which is valued by many service users, major shortcomings remain:

- the Council has not yet implemented the Unified Assessment process other than as a pilot in one area team, despite Section 7 guidance which required this to have been in place for older people from April 2002;
- there is no agreed quality assurance framework and the lack of applied practice standards has resulted in inconsistency across adult teams and, in a significant number of cases, unsatisfactory practice;
- there is no uniform approach to risk - assessments are not consistently focused on outcomes, care plans do not provide adequate details to ensure

the appropriate delivery of a service, and a backlog of reviews has built up in services for older people; and

- there is inadequate administrative support for teams and solutions, such as laptops for care managers who cover a large geographical area to complete their paperwork, have not been developed.

The Review Team found that partnership arrangements for the Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA) were well established. However, although procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse are now in place and being used, the quality of practice seen at the front line was variable. For example:

- the post of adult protection co-ordinator had only recently been filled, and Gwynedd was the last authority in Wales to appoint such a co-ordinator. The Council also did not have a dedicated managerial lead for this area;
- the Council has been slow to implement aspects of the revised North Wales POVA procedures, such as record keeping and use of appropriate documentation;
- the quality of work seen in the case files was inconsistent;
- the ability to respond to national requirements for monitoring is not yet satisfactory; and
- not all staff expressed confidence in their practice in relation to POVA.

The balance of services is only slowly shifting away from residential care towards community focused and inclusive options. The services people receive are generally safe and caring, and some people receive services which enable them to enjoy increased independence. However, there are concerns about the pace of change. Reviewers found that insufficient progress has been made in re-designing services to meet the modern agenda of prevention, rehabilitation and promotion of independence. Whilst there have been some positive improvements, major gaps remain and the Council is still working to extend the coverage of services across the County. Progress has been slow and more needs to be done to ensure that services such as reablement, crisis response and supported accommodation are readily available. Many of these risks and issues have been identified by the Council, in some cases over many years, but have not been tackled robustly.

There is therefore an urgent need for a more radical shift in service patterns and delivery in relation to adult services. This should include:

- the rationalisation of direct and external service provision, to help ensure that staff skills and resources are targeted on enablement and the delivery of support for people with complex needs;
- focusing on reducing the dependence on residential care, through the effective implementation of the plans for the reconfiguration of residential care - Building for the Future - and re-investment in community based options;
- improving the provision of respite care for all client groups;
- providing, in partnership, a wider range of services to support people with dementia and their carers. There is an immediate shortage of specialist day care, residential and nursing care placements and specialist community support;

- ensuring a consistent county - wide response from Community Mental Health Team's and addressing identified gaps in mental health services;
- developing and implementing strategies for learning disability services. Staff and families are concerned about the lack of progress, which is reported to have stopped because of staffing issues;
- developing a strategic approach to services for people with sensory and physical needs. Whilst the development of separate teams has improved the assessment model for disabled people, the lack of accompanying resources has often resulted in poor service options for this group of service users; and
- strengthening arrangements with partners to help deliver this agenda.

Children's Services

Since the last joint review children's services were subject to external scrutiny and there were concerns about performance. As a result the Council focussed attention on improving aspects of practice and services. The Review Team found evidence of some progress at the time of the Review. The system for receiving referrals had improved and children and families generally received a better response. At the point of referral the processes for screening, prioritising and agreeing eligibility, although not always documented, were generally sound. However, these improvements are not yet underpinned by consistently good assessment and care planning, and Reviewers had less confidence in the ability of managers to demonstrate compliance with guidance and standards in these areas. For example:

- the analysis in assessments is sometimes of poor quality and often incomplete;
- practice does not always comply with guidance;
- case file management is poor, with important information often recorded in contact sheets and/or assessments updated in case conference notes; and
- there is inconsistent practice in relation to the assessment and management of risk.

The reasons for these shortfalls varied between teams, but reviewers found that there was generally a lack of effective systems to support day to day practice. Most staff were operating under considerable pressure. This was compounded by the relative inexperience of many social workers and their managers.

There was no doubt about the commitment of staff and their desire to ensure people received the services they needed, but their efforts were not accompanied by effective systems to support them in their work. For example, performance management arrangements did not provide robust information across the system and quality assurance was underdeveloped in most teams.

At the time of the Review the Council had established better arrangements for safeguarding children in Gwynedd. However, practice is still not consistent across all aspects of the child protection process. The Review Team found positive progress in some areas:

- child protection procedures are being followed more consistently by social workers;
- there is increased monitoring and more effective quality assurance focused on improving performance; and
- multi-agency arrangements are now established and leading to more effective partnership working.

Nevertheless, significant improvement is still required in child protection practice, to ensure that:

- core assessments are completed where necessary, and their quality and timeliness is improved;
- risk assessment and management are strengthened to ensure a consistent approach; and
- there is improvement in the performance standards of case conferences and the effectiveness of core groups.

The Council has invested in a growing range of services for children. Many of these were developed in partnership with other organisations, such as Barnardos and NCH. However, some areas of the County remain poorly serviced. As a consequence there are major issues and acknowledged gaps in the provision of some key services for children, including:

- **Family support services** - although there has been some service development in recent years, the approach to this has been un-coordinated and lacks strategic direction. An overarching early years prevention strategy has been recently produced.
- **Services for Looked After Children** - there has been a significant increase in the number of looked after children placed out of county, but there is no current placement strategy to ensure that children who are looked after are provided with the best and most appropriate care. Looked after children in Gwynedd experience a relatively high number of placement breakdowns.

Services for disabled children and those who have challenging behaviour or specialist needs - whilst there is evidence of partnership working and some service development, there is a need to drive this forward at a quicker pace of change, particularly in respect of respite care. **The Council's decision to integrate Children's Services into the Development Directorate presents both opportunities and risks.** In taking this forward, the Council will need to ensure that:

- the reorganisation brings significant added value to the most vulnerable children and young people;
- the professional social care agenda in children's services is safeguarded; and
- there is an ongoing agenda for further service improvement which demonstrates the added benefits of integration.

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

- Increased spend on social services
- Hard working staff keen to provide quality services
- Evidence of good joint working and improved planning in some services areas
- Some positive changes in children's services with improving commissioning arrangements
- Recent introduction of a corporate approach to project management
- Growing political awareness of social service issues

Areas for development

- Ensuring a management infrastructure that drives change and ensures accountability
- Improving the quality of leadership to ensure that a clear vision and direction is developed and communicated within the directorate
- Improving the capacity of the Council to reshape patterns of service delivery and ensure positive outcomes from increased investment
- Developing an effective performance management framework so that the council knows what is happening and the culture of performance management becomes embedded at every level

Strengths	Areas for development
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing medium term financial plans to tackle overspends and ensure best use of resources • Providing a strategic steer and clarity about responsibility for commissioning at the highest level • Integrating strategic and financial planning with performance management and activity data • Ensuring planning groups are empowered to deliver change • Improving working between different corporate bodies to ensure better outcomes for the people of Gwynedd

The Council is judged as being badly placed to sustain and further improve services

Gwynedd Council is judged to be less well placed to sustain and improve services than it was at the time of the last joint review. There has been a lack of progress despite significant additional expenditure. Past and current restructuring has diverted the management energy away from the tasks in hand and this has resulted in inertia. As a consequence many of the good intentions voiced in response to the last joint review have not resulted in positive actions.

There is much more to be done to ensure that all the essential elements necessary to shape and deliver social services are securely in place.

- There needs to be a strong focus on ensuring the development of a broad range of modern service options which provide good outcomes for people using social services.
- Political and corporate leaders need to lead, challenge and support managers at every level of the organisation.
- The systems needed to drive progress, such as for planning, commissioning and performance management, need to be improved, with progress being regularly reported, scrutinised and supported.
- The need for and direction of change needs to be communicated to staff, who need to feel they understand and are involved in taking forward the vision for Gwynedd into the future.

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

Progress in developing an adequate range of services, to meet the needs of a modern social care agenda, has been far too slow. This is particularly the case in adult services and many of the changes planned following the last joint review have still not been implemented. Examples include the reconfiguration of residential care and the review and reconfiguration of services provision for people with a learning disability. In children's services, the reconfiguration of residential provision has been delayed.

Whilst there are some high level corporate strategies which present a clear picture of future direction, social services within the Care Directorate has lacked the strategic management to lead, develop and support the planning arrangements that adequately drive service change. In children's services there are signs of an improved strategic direction and clearer planning structures, although it is too early to say whether this will deliver the changes required on the ground.

In general, service development in children's services has been more grounded in partnership working than in explicit commissioning strategies. Operational partnerships tend to work well to deliver positive outcomes for service users, but the planning and commissioning arrangements are not yet driving the strategic partnerships to either develop a clear strategic vision or to deliver that vision.

There is a lack of clarity within social services about where the responsibility and strategic steer for commissioning lies. This confusion is also apparent among partner organisations. As a consequence of this fragmentation, key commissioning strategies have not yet been developed. In addition, those which are in place are not yet complete and lack many of the elements necessary to ensure they are more than mere 'wish lists.' Arrangements for contract monitoring are slightly better than at the last joint review, but they remain inadequate to deliver a robust commissioning service.

There has been a significant increase in the expenditure on social services since the last joint review. Levels of spending on social services have increased from £37.8 million in 2004/05 to £45.9 million in 2006/07. Much of the additional investment has been used to meet overspends, particularly in children's services. Although the Council's overall financial position is generally sound, with healthy levels of corporate reserves, there are increasing budgetary pressures and the need to make cuts of over £12 million over the next three years.

The Review Team concluded that the recent investment has to date, not been used to best effect. The rising demand for social care and increasing expectations about service quality make it 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 made more aware of value for money issues;
- commissioning strategies across all service areas are developed and underpinned by financial information; and
- more effective use is made of service reviews to ensure resources are being used efficiently and effectively.

Delivering social services (workforce; performance management)

The authority has worked to improve staff recruitment and retention, but the position remains fragile. Overall the Review Team found:

- that staff are committed to delivering, and are working hard to achieve, good quality services;
- there was a positive approach to general training and, overall, staff were satisfied with the training programme. However, training is not always strategically planned or supported by the staff appraisal system which was inconsistently implemented;
- efforts to recruit social workers, particularly in children's services, have been effective and support has been given to new staff. However, the position remains fragile – some staff felt under pressure, and large caseloads and highly complex cases were some of the issues newly qualified staff faced;
- staff do not feel sufficiently informed about change and, whilst they all spoke well about their team meetings, higher level consultation and information networks were not seen to be working effectively; and
- although there is an established workforce partnership, not all partners felt fully engaged in it.

Reviewers found that there are fundamental weaknesses in measuring and challenging performance across the whole of social services. Better progress has been made in introducing performance management systems into children's services but, overall, many of the core mechanisms required to manage the business efficiently and effectively are not in place.

One of the main reasons for this significant lack of progress is that the Council has struggled to effectively manage its ICT for social services through the DRAIG system. Poor project management in implementing DRAIG has resulted in management information that is of poor quality and is unreliable. The consequences of this are very serious, as it means that:

- the Council is not sure how well staff are doing their jobs;
- it is difficult to change service patterns to meet needs; and
- the Council is unable to use the most efficient and effective means of specifying and delivering services.

Other key elements of performance management are also weak. Quality assurance is underdeveloped and the drive to improve performance through service planning, team business planning and individual staff appraisal remains at an embryonic stage.

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

Recently the political leadership has demonstrated an improved understanding of the issues and the need to take difficult decisions and drive the change required to ensure the people of Gwynedd receive social care which is fit for purpose. This has not necessarily been the case in the period since the last joint review. A legacy of an unwillingness to take difficult political decisions and a lack of understanding about key social service priorities has left major issues which the Council needs to address, and a significant increase in expenditure has not delivered the service improvements required. At the same time the lack of corporate action to deal with the causes of inadequate performance in some areas of social services has equally contributed to the overall lack of delivery of the progress to which the Council aspired after the last joint review.

Major barriers to improvement remain:

- there is a lack of strategic direction and confused accountability - some partners said that 'social services is impenetrable' in terms of decision making;
- current structures present enormous challenges rather than supporting a culture for change. The role of Statutory Director of Social Services, held by the Head of Adult Services, is at a third tier level within the organisation. This makes it difficult for the post holder to exert an appropriate level of influence;
- while some corporate and senior managers were able to articulate a vision for social services, this was not widely shared with frontline managers and the staff responsible for delivering services;

- the contribution by the corporate centre to support social services needs to be strengthened, not least to improve the overall quality of information provided to Councillors to enable them to provide effective scrutiny

Overriding features of those councils which deliver high quality social services are the strength and quality of leadership and direction throughout the organisation, and a management infrastructure which drives change and ensures accountability. All of these elements need to be in place and connected. There needs to be both a clear vision and direction from the top of the organisation which is then translated into clear priorities for staff and communicated well throughout the organisation, with clear support systems to enable staff to do their jobs well and ensure the delivery of consistently good frontline services on the ground. These features were noticeable by their absence in Gwynedd.

1.3 Priorities for action

On the basis of their work in Gwynedd, the Review Team has identified the following priorities for action as especially important to ensure further improvement. Some aspects of these are already incorporated in plans made by the council.

Great importance should be attached both to the action plan that the Council has been asked to produce in response to the Joint Review and also to the way in which it is implemented. CSSIW 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.

1. Translate increased political commitment and new corporate frameworks into effective outcomes which demonstrate sound corporate management and political leadership of change for social services

The Council should:

- clarify the overall shape of service provision and make explicit decisions around the priorities for investment and disinvestment with specific objectives put in place indicating how and when changes will be made;
- ensure executive and scrutiny arrangements provide consistent policy direction and establish clear links between strategic aims, improvement priorities and key success factors; and
- strengthen corporate management arrangements for social services.

Senior managers should:

- assist Councillors to set a clear direction for social services through defining priorities which are based upon robust analysis of need; and
- provide Councillors with reports that help secure effective scrutiny and well-informed decisions and implementation plans.

2. Develop effective leadership within social services and improve the management of change across all service areas.

The Council should:

- adopt a more coherent approach to delivering change through specifying consistently the actions to be taken and establishing who is responsible and accountable for delivery; and
- make senior officers accountable for delivering the agreed programme for change and scrutinise the extent to which objectives are achieved.

Senior managers should:

- improve the management of individual projects and make effective use of service and business planning;
- improve leadership and decision making capacity at all levels; and
- develop a culture of management competency, supported by training that validates this.

3. Ensure the needs of children and families who are in need or who are looked after by the council are met.

This will involve a programme for ensuring high standards of practice by staff who have case management responsibility and developing and implementing commissioning strategies to ensure appropriate services are in

place to meet need and to improve the use of resources.

The Council should:

- ensure that through partnership working there is an increase in the range of services available to children and families in community based support and improved placement options for children who are looked after; and
- through effective scrutiny of the transfer of children's services to the Development Directorate, ensure positive outcomes for children in Gwynedd.

Managers in social services should:

- set a clear direction for children's services through the development and implementation of effective commissioning strategies;
- ensure that systems are implemented to secure compliance with statutory requirements;
- improve the standards of casework practice through putting in place more effective systems for assuring quality - clear targets, regular reporting, file audits etc; and
- ensure an improved experience for young people transferring from children's services to adult services through implementing clearer transitional guidelines.

Practitioners in children's services should:

- contribute to improving quality, consistency and timeliness in assessment, care management and review and take responsibility for their own professional practice.

4. Set a clear direction for adult services which improves services for adults and emphasises independence and choice.

This will involve a structured programme of change to ensure that unified assessment is implemented; a better framework for the identification and management of risks; a programme for ensuring consistently high standards of practice by staff who have care management responsibilities and that commissioning strategies are developed and implemented for all service areas which contribute to the development of a range of community based services which allow people to live independent and fulfilled lives.

The Council should:

- agree with partners how to deal with service gaps and reshape services for adults in order to provide a co-ordinated range of services to promote enablement and independence;
- through effective scrutiny ensure the pace of development is increased and maintained; and
- encourage a corporate and whole public sector response to issues caused by a dispersed population.

Managers in social services should:

- implement the national guidance for Unified Assessment across adult services;
- improve the quality of adult protection through:
 - ensuring processes are implemented;
 - skills are improved through more advanced training of staff; and
 - implementing stronger management oversight of the implementation of adult protection procedures;

- strengthen systems and processes to support robust risk management;
- support and guide practitioners to deliver care plans that more consistently focus on outcomes;
- ensure care management and review standards are met; and
- improve the experience for young people transferring from children's services to adult services through implementing clearer transitional procedures.

Practitioners in adult social services should:

- contribute to improving the overall quality of their own assessment and care management practice and, through identifying their training needs, ensure they have the necessary skills to use information systems once established.

5. Ensure that resources are used effectively by providing or purchasing services which are responsive to need and provide value for money.

The Council as a whole has a sound financial base and there has been significant investment in social services. It needs to be able to demonstrate that resources are wisely invested demonstrating the link between financial investment, service planning and quality assurance.

The Council should:

- agree a realistic longer term programme of funding, based on agreed direction, about the future shape of services and/or value for money principles;
- tackle high costs and overspends more rigorously; and

- hold managers in social services to account for delivering services within the resources made available.

Managers in social services should:

- clarify budget delegation and ensure clear budgets and cost controls are in place.

6. Managing performance

Social services currently have inadequate systems in place to ensure effective performance management.

The Council should:

- provide sufficient support and capacity to help implement and operationalise systems;
- ensure that scrutiny arrangements oversee the extent to which priority actions are delivered on time to prevent drift with delivering key service developments; and
- evaluate the ability of partnerships and planning frameworks to ensure the delivery of good outcomes and real improvements.

Managers in social services should:

- ensure the implementation of projects within timescales to deliver IT systems which meet the needs for social services;
- develop a systematic approach to the availability and use of performance information across adult and children's services;
- make greater use of targets in improving the extent to which standards are met;
- set a clear direction for adult services through the development and implementation of effective commissioning strategies;

- ensure that plans at all levels link into the commissioning strategies and link more closely service, team and individual objectives; and
- ensure that there are effective mechanisms to provide support and oversight to staff in carrying out their responsibilities, including implementation of the corporate appraisal system and effective business planning.

Practitioners should:

- work with managers to implement performance management processes and use performance management as an aid to improve performance in their work.

Further copies

Further copies of this summary are available from:

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