

Joint Review of the Vale of Glamorgan Council Social Services

Summary

This is a summary of a fuller report which is available on the website: **www.joint-reviews.gov.uk** or from:

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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 the Vale of Glamorgan 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 main review team comprised Hester Ormiston, Kevin Barker and Non Jenkins, with Jenny Cook and David Morgan as lay assessors. On-site work in the Vale of Glamorgan took place between January 2006 and April 2006. A presentation of the findings from this Review was given to groups of Councillors, staff, service users and other stakeholders in May 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.



Richard Tebboth
Acting Chief Inspector of Social Services



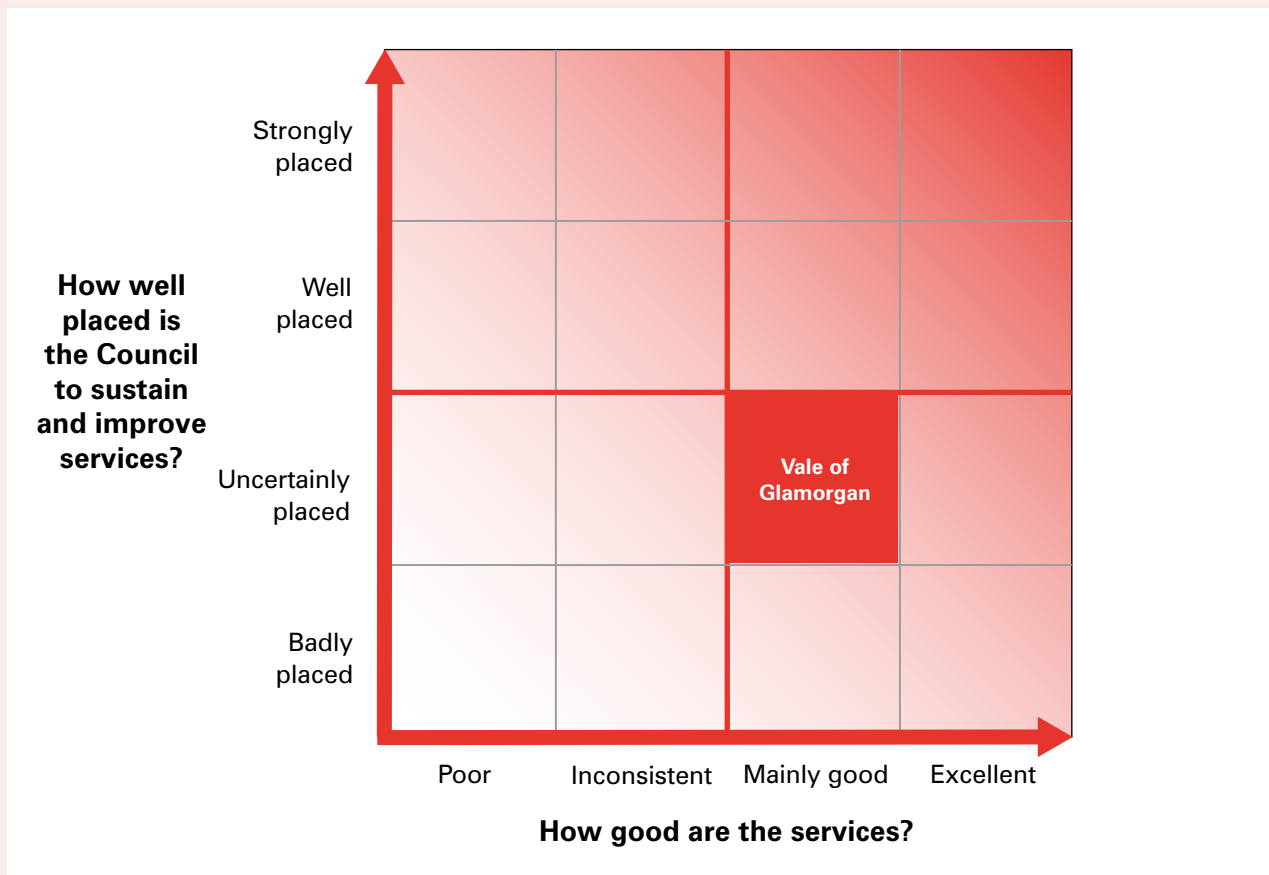
Jeremy Colman
Auditor General for Wales

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 Vale of Glamorgan County Council is judged as having mainly good services but as being uncertainly placed to sustain and further improve services (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1: The Vale of Glamorgan’s position in the Joint Review performance matrix



From the very low baseline described in the last Joint Review, the Council has made significant progress in providing better social services. Considerable work was undertaken in tackling a number of the serious problems identified in that Review carried out six years ago. Investment in social services, has enabled significant improvement to be made in the range and quality of services. Although Reviewers found strong evidence of increased political commitment and improved corporate frameworks, changes that are needed to ensure that the Council is well placed to sustain and improve services further have been held back by problems with:

- making difficult decisions about the shape and pattern of services;
- establishing clear accountability for implementing specific objectives for social services;

- **managing resources so that people in the Vale of Glamorgan get the best return and value for money from increased investment; and**
- **having a sustainable budget for social services within which the needs of service users and carers can be met.**

Services for children and families

The last Joint Review was especially critical of the services provided for children and families. The Council now makes available a good range of services, which are better focused on the key tasks of safeguarding children and promoting their welfare.

Many services have been developed in partnership with other agencies and with the voluntary sector. These range from specialist advice and guidance through to intensive support services that help to keep a child or young person with their family. Service developments have been especially effective when delivered within an agreed strategic framework and the Council's placement strategy (in respect of the services for accommodating children who are looked after) demonstrates that it is working to provide such a framework. Creating a specific team to work with the families of children with a disability has helped to improve substantially the services provided for them. However, there are still some gaps in services, such as options for respite care and support for families of children with disabilities (especially when young people are moving to adult services).

Longstanding difficulties in the management of referrals and of initial assessments are now being tackled. Advice, referral and initial assessment are undertaken within a well-managed system. At the same time, the Area Child Protection Committee has strengthened

its role in overseeing inter-agency responses in child protection cases. Reviewers found evidence that a more careful approach to social work practice is being established. Staff now follow procedures more routinely. However the quality of this work is not well recorded on many files, preventing an understanding of the plan and the progress made in achieving positive outcomes for the child and the family. The Directorate is making good use of data to monitor performance in the management of child care cases but this aspect of work still needs development and integration with other mechanisms for assuring quality, such as file audits. Improved recording of risk assessment and care planning for children is also needed.

A financial crisis in 2003 prompted the introduction of a placement strategy that has helped to prompt a more robust approach to:

- preventing inappropriate admissions of children and young people; and
- ensuring that placements in care are able to meet children's needs.

Managers and staff have become more aware of the relationship between service cost and service quality, but finance remains an area of significant risk for the children and family division in terms of sustaining and improving services. Its annual budget still depends on support from corporate funds. Delays in introducing a strategy for its family support services have made managing resources more difficult.

Services for adults

In adult services, there has been an increase in the range of services available, with a greater capacity to meet identified need. Steps have been taken to improve access to services in relatively isolated communities and more emphasis is being placed on promoting independence and supporting people at home. However, the overall approach to service improvement has been gradual, ad hoc and lacking in co-ordination and some of the difficulties identified at the time of the last Review persist.

The Council has gradually implemented changes to services for adults since the last Joint Review. As a consequence, there has been progress in areas such as supporting more people in the community and expanding the range of leisure, educational and employment opportunities available. Because of developments in areas such as investment in home care and re-ablement services, fewer people are unable to leave hospital at the right time. However, some significant gaps remain, including limited availability of services such as those that either respond to crisis and to the need for intermediate care or to provide support to carers. People may be at risk because they do not receive a timely response or appropriate help.

The Council has worked hard to ensure that care management teams in adult services are integrated or co-located with colleagues from the Health Service. There has been good progress in using the Unified Assessment Process and adult protection systems are in place, understood and being used. However, there are some groups of service users and carers who do not routinely receive a care management service that delivers:

- timely allocation and assessment;
- clear management of risk; and
- good outcome-based care planning, with regular reviews.

The Council anticipates further benefits for users from the next steps to be taken in implementing the Health Social Care and Well Being Strategy. However, this strategy has yet to produce substantial progress with agreed priorities for service development and commissioning that are acknowledged as being a necessary response to the major challenges facing social care in the Vale of Glamorgan not yet being delivered. While there are a number of developments with health partners, the Council works within a complex set of relationships. As a result, it has been unable so far to agree shared priorities with partners, which would allow a faster pace of development. A lack of clear direction has meant that services are still not:

- able to meet consistently the needs of users and carers;
- focused sufficiently on priority needs; and
- co-ordinated effectively across partnerships.

Providing direction and ensuring quality services

Since the last Joint Review, the Council has clearly demonstrated greater corporate and political commitment to social services. There have been improvements in the way that the Council manages its social services functions. Better corporate frameworks have been established for performance management and monitoring improvement, with positive steps taken in respect of workforce issues. There has also been substantial financial support for Community Services, allowing the

development of a good range of services which promote independence and safe systems for protecting vulnerable adults and children. However, Reviewers found that the revised political and corporate arrangements are not being used effectively enough by the Council to tackle emerging problems that threaten to undermine the improvements made to date and the capacity to make further substantial progress with a very challenging agenda.

On the basis of its Corporate Plan, the Council as a whole is beginning to contribute more coherently to delivering social services responsibilities. The corporate centre has provided a business planning and performance management framework for the Council. However, this approach has yet to achieve sustained improvement in social services, in part because of delays in providing a clear overall direction for specific services and an integrated approach to service development across the Directorate. The Council's efforts to shape services through effective planning, partnerships and resource allocation have achieved some positive outcomes. For example, corporate priorities provide a clear framework for service planning in the Community Services Directorate.

There is a range of partnerships across statutory, voluntary and independent organisations. However, although working in partnership with others has been used positively, it tends to deliver project based service changes rather than wider service redesign (which could draw on joint resources for delivery). Building on those elements of commissioning that are in place, together with improved contract monitoring arrangements, would:

- contribute to clarity of direction and to the delivery of better quality services; and
- increase the effectiveness of systems used for performance management, encouraging informed challenge and scrutiny.

Since the last Joint Review, there have been especially positive developments in the area of workforce planning and development. Recruitment and retention issues are being addressed, with a positive impact upon staff stability. Staff receive regular supervision. Efforts by Councillors, chief officers and managers to support and listen to staff have been very successful in improving morale. The Council has yet to secure all the potential benefits from its good approach to workforce development because staff do not have an explicit and prioritised programme of improvement to shape their team or service priorities. Much more needs to be done in social services to ensure that service planning, financial management and performance monitoring combine to provide a coherent direction.

The pace of improvement in social services has been slowed by lack of direction in respect of big issues and the need for better organised management of change. The biggest challenge is one of sustainability in terms of the resources available to maintain and develop services. As yet, it is uncertain whether there is the capacity for delivering some of the measures that are needed to avert a growing crisis such as:

- providing a clear direction for the shape and pattern of services that is financially realistic and sustainable;
- agreeing priorities for investment and disinvestment;

- establishing disciplined and sustainable ways of tackling overspends;
- monitoring properly progress made in delivering the effective use of resources;
- informed scrutiny and challenge; and
- realistic self appraisal.

Addressing these issues will require close involvement by Councillors in the action plans that are emerging and in tackling obstacles to change. In the short-term, the Community Services Directorate may need additional help in areas such as project and business management and service planning to make progress against what is becoming an increasingly challenging agenda.

1.2 Key findings

The Review sought to answer two key questions:

- How good are the services? (see Exhibit 2)
- How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services? (see 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"> • Improved access to services • Progress in implementing the Unified Assessment Process • Improved case management and review in children’s services • Increased range of services • Good quality services • Compliance with procedures and systems for protecting vulnerable people • Relatively few people unable to leave hospital at the right time because of a need for social services • Development of integrated teams with health staff • Increasing use of direct payments • Support to children and young people who are looked after by the Council with their educational and health needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enabling the Contact and Information Centre to become more responsive • Achieving a more consistent approach to allocation, assessment and care management in adult services • In adult services, further developing services and care plans that promote independence • Developing an explicit approach to managing risk • Improving the experience of young people transferring to adult services • Providing better support to carers

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"> • Increased investment in and greater political priority for social services • Strong corporate structure for planning and performance management • High staff morale • Good approach to workforce development • Well established systems for supervision and appraisal • Improved partnership working • Strong links to independent sector service providers • Increased emphasis on consultation and participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing a clear strategic direction and empowering staff to deliver better outcomes within this framework • Improving the capacity of the Council to re-shape patterns of service provision, where necessary • Using reliable data about service needs to establish a sound base budget for social services and making budget holders accountable • Improving the Council's ability to make difficult decisions, partly through more rigorous challenge • Improving the management of performance in social services and linking this with more effective plans • Developing and implementing commissioning strategies • Developing capacity for better project management within social services

1.3 Priorities for action

1. Providing more direction and challenge

Factors such as increased political commitment and better corporate frameworks have not always translated into a consistent strategic direction for social services and effective management of change in some crucial areas. Improvements in social services have been achieved despite a climate of uncertainty regarding available resources. There has been growing evidence that more clarity is needed around issues such as the overall shape of service provision and that explicit decisions are required about priorities for investment and disinvestment, with specific objectives put in place indicating how and when changes will be made. This will provide the environment needed to ensure that the Council is well placed to maintain and improve services.

The Council should:

- provide more specific objectives for social services, describing how these will help to improve the way in which it meets responsibilities for safeguarding people and for promoting independence;
- consider the implications for the way in which services for each user group will need to be shaped, including priorities for action;
- make senior managers accountable for delivering this programme and, if necessary, allocate additional help in areas such as project and business management; and
- scrutinise more effectively the extent to which the objectives are achieved.

Senior managers should:

- consolidate current approaches to project and business management, enabling them to deliver changes more quickly; and
- monitor and evaluate the impact upon service users and carers of decisions made.

2. Developing and delivering a sustainable base budget for social services

The Council as a whole has a sound financial base, with effective monitoring and budget controls. There has been significant investment in social services. However, the lack of clarity about planned spending has prevented effective resource management, making the Council's current position unsustainable.

The Council should:

- agree a realistic longer-term programme of funding which allows planning for invest to save developments based on agreed direction about the future shape of services and value for money principles;
- using reliable information about current and future service needs, determine a sustainable base budget for social services which enables statutory responsibilities to be met; and
- hold managers in social services to account for delivering services within the resources made available.

Senior managers in social services should:

- set a timetable for delegating budgets to service and team level, with proper budget and cost controls.

3. Developing commissioning strategies for services

There is a strong corporate commitment to planning and a sound framework in place. Some partnerships are delivering good outcomes. While many of the elements for effective commissioning are in place, they have not been drawn together into commissioning strategies that are applied in a comprehensive, consistent and coherent way.

The Council should:

- determine the extent to which current partnerships are delivering planned outcomes, especially in respect of the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy; and
- agree with partners how to deal with key service gaps and how to re-shape services within a planned and targeted programme so that they are better able to meet needs.

Senior managers in social services should:

- develop commissioning strategies for each service, based on the direction set for service redesign; and
- ensure that plans at all levels link into the commissioning strategies.

4. Developing quality assurance in social services

Although there is a corporate framework that provides a sound foundation for managing performance, the Community Services Directorate needs to do more work in helping managers and Councillors to measure and monitor improvement.

The Council should:

- ensure that Scrutiny Committees exercise real oversight over the extent to which priority actions are delivered on time, to prevent drift with delivering key service developments; and
- evaluate whether it has the capacity needed for ensuring that information from all elements of the quality assurance framework (including complaints) can be used for service improvement and service redesign.

Managers in social services should:

- make greater use of targets in improving the extent to which standards are met;
- make use of all relevant information about service quality to monitor and report performance;
- help staff to understand their role in making sure that performance management improves the quality of services;
- link more closely personal and team objectives with plans and performance monitoring;
- urgently develop a complaints procedure in adult services which meets statutory requirements; and
- implement in full consultation processes set out in the Public Engagement Strategy.

5. Assessment, care management and review

Performance in these areas has improved but remains inconsistent and the delivery of national frameworks for the work still requires a structured programme of change.

Managers in social services should:

- improve systems for allocation, assessment and reviews in adult services;
- in all services, develop care plans based on achieving specific outcomes;
- implement a programme for improving the standards of recording in care management in all services;
- develop more explicit methods of risk assessment and management;
- improve the experience of young people transferring from children's services to adult services; and
- ensure that all carers are offered assessments.

6. Supporting independence

There has been progress made in providing services that promote independence and in developing systems for protecting adults and children. On balance, the Council's performance has been mainly good. However, there are still key areas where further improvement will give service users and carers more support to thrive in the community.

Managers in social services should:

- improve systems for understanding people's needs and joining up service responses within commissioning strategies and service plans; and
- provide Councillors with realistic options for improving the extent to which services can be developed and co-ordinated to promote independence and choice.