

Joint Review of the Isle of Anglesey 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** or from:

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Introduction

We are pleased to present this report of a joint review 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 summary report sets out the overall conclusions from the review, the main findings and the priorities for action. There is a full report setting out the Review Team's detailed assessment of the Council.

The Joint Review of social services in the Isle of Anglesey County Council was carried out by a team working on behalf of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and the Wales Audit Office (WAO). The Review Team comprised Pamela Shelton, Carol Caporn, Jill Lewis and Ian Hughes with Alice Jones and Sue Nott as lay assessors. On-site work in Anglesey took place between February and May 2006. A presentation of the findings from this Review was given to groups of Councillors, staff, service users and other stakeholders in September 2006. 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;
- secure better value for money in the provision of social services.

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 web-site.



Rob Pickford
Chief Inspector



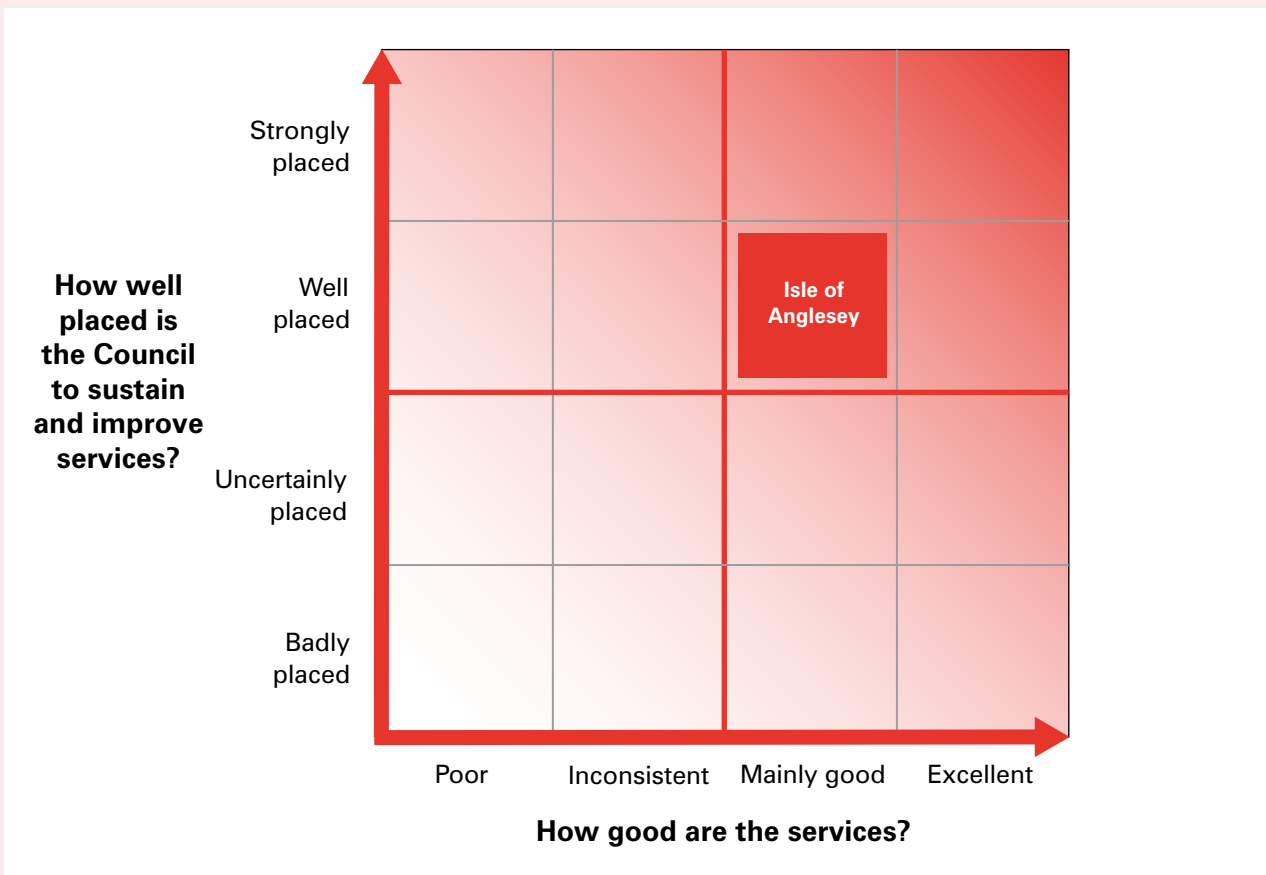
Jeremy Colman
Auditor General for Wales

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

Exhibit 1: The Isle of Anglesey’s position in the joint review performance matrix



Since the last Joint Review, the Council has improved the services it provides to vulnerable people and those in need. They often receive help and support that enables them to live safely at home and to be included in the community. There are still some gaps in the services available and Reviewers were concerned about the quality of some service provision.

The Council has continued to invest in social services. There are sound arrangements for financial monitoring and, within social services, opportunities to access new funding have been taken. Staff are working hard to deliver high standards of care. There are good relationships with partner agencies and the structures needed to plan services are well established. Within the Social Services Directorate, some progress has been made in providing better frameworks in areas such as performance management and service commissioning.

There is some way to go before all these systems are securely in place and delivering consistently a contribution to improving services. This will demand greater corporate support. The Council also needs to provide more effective leadership and a clear sense of direction for its work in shaping the future pattern of services. Insufficient links between longer-term financial planning and service developments are undermining the Council's ability to make best use of its resources. Stronger links are required between service reviews, planning and commissioning. This will ensure that the Council can tackle issues of sustainability, value for money and the pressures associated with changing needs and increasing demand for services.

Services are mainly good

Services for children and families

The Directorate is supporting families well with an appropriate range and amount of provision, except for children with disabilities where services are under pressure. The voluntary sector makes an important contribution to services for children in need. When children cannot live with their family, the Directorate generally succeeds in providing stable placements for them, but it struggles to meet the needs of young people with challenging behaviour. Young people who are leaving the Council's care do not have accommodation and employment or training opportunities.

While the referral and access arrangements are well managed, many families referred to the Directorate are not meeting the criteria for an initial assessment. This indicates a lack of clarity between agencies about the levels of need to which Children's Services will respond and when it should become

actively involved. Whilst decision-making is sound, it is not routinely based on thorough, timely, written assessments and clearly articulated plans. These shortfalls are potentially confusing and unhelpful for parents and carers.

The processes for young people who transfer from Children's Services to Adult Services are not being well managed and this is a source of concern and anxiety to parents and carers. This is in contrast to the experience of young people leaving the Council's care and moving to independence who benefit from an effective process and a good level of assistance.

Services for adults

The Directorate has improved significantly the range of services available to meet the needs of adults. Many people are being supported to remain at home and to maintain their independence. Reviewers were impressed by the creative use of support workers and by an assistive technology pilot project. Again, good use is being made of voluntary sector provision.

However, service quality is inconsistent; in particular, day services vary from satisfactory to poor. The situation is not helped by the rural nature of the Island and the demands this makes on transport. In the Mental Health Service, there is a well-used facility in the west of Anglesey that provides positive support for both users and carers, although it lacks appropriate facilities for younger adults. But the current centre for people with a learning disability is in a very poor condition. Plans to replace it with three new centres are now well advanced but will have taken many years to be fully implemented. This has left some service users in unacceptably poor provision, a situation that the Council has not adequately addressed.

The referral and access service is effective, and the standard of assessment and care planning is sound, including arrangements to protect vulnerable people. The exception is the Mental Health Service where the standard of casework is inconsistent, with little evidence that poor practice is challenged.

The Council is well placed to sustain and further improve services

The Council has worked hard to develop sound working relations with partner agencies and it has in place the structures needed to undertake service planning. An improving range of services provides positive evidence of progress. However, plans and strategies should link better to the stated priorities of the Council and its vision and aims for social services. Key stakeholders (including staff) indicate their understanding of the vision, aims and priorities for social services. There is no formal structure to ensure that staff and partner agencies are receiving regular communication about the progress of developments.

The Council has made some progress with providing a strategic framework for commissioning activity but not with turning plans for specific services into commissioning strategies that ensure value for money. Challenges to existing patterns of service delivery, on grounds such as excessive cost or under-use, have been too cautious. The Directorate does not have a range of commissioning strategies that matches information about current and future demand with the available resources, including financial provision and staffing. In the past, it has successfully completed Best Value reviews of some of its services but it has not built upon this experience by applying value for money principles to reviews of other services, particularly when planning new developments. Hence the Council

cannot be certain that resources are being used to best effect or that it is harnessing the potential contribution of other service providers.

Although the advocacy arrangements to support children and adults are good, the Council needs to take more notice of the comments and concerns of its service users and carers. There are not enough routine mechanisms for listening to the views of users and carers in respect of current provision and the future development of services. Despite the findings of the last Joint Review, the Directorate is still not recording all the complaints that it receives, thus limiting the potential to learn from them. In addition, it took a long time to answer concerns expressed about a lack of responsiveness on the part of the Out of Hours Service, provided in partnership with Gwynedd Council. Taken with the amount of time to improve the poor quality of some day service provision, this indicates a lack of adequate quality assurance mechanisms within the Council.

Providing direction and ensuring quality services

The Council has made significant investment in social services. Overall spending has been kept within allocated budgets. There are sound arrangements in place for budget delegation to operational managers and for financial monitoring. Within social services, opportunities to access new funding have been taken.

The Directorate has developed a strong community and preventative focus in the provision of social services.

The organisation of social services is clear and stable. The Isle of Anglesey benefits from having a well-trained and committed group of staff in social services who make positive use of the

good development opportunities available to them. Senior staff are accessible and approachable; they promote a strong caring ethos in the delivery of services. Staff understand the Directorate's aims and objectives and their own roles and responsibilities. The informal style of leadership within the Directorate has positive aspects. It has managed some service changes well and involved staff appropriately. Greater use needs to be made of more systematic approaches to management (including project and performance management), so that the pace and scale of change can be increased.

The Council faces some difficult challenges including:

- substantial increases in the number of older people and a decline in the young population;
- rising expectations of public services and an increasing demand for social services;
- the need for greater openness and accountability in managing its resources to best effect, with better links between longer-term financial planning and service developments;
- an ageing staff group and problems recruiting in some areas that calls for forward planning across the workforce;
- the need for a more systematic managerial approach as a means of anticipating problems, taking corrective action and maximising opportunities.

These challenges will require the Council as a whole to display leadership in articulating and delivering a clear vision and direction for social services.

However, since becoming a unitary council in 1996, the Isle of Anglesey has been beset by political instability, with frequent changes of group allegiances and leadership. It is a context that:

- creates uncertainty;
- diverts attention from the main business of the Council; and
- gives the impression that the Council lacks a clear sense of direction.

This is the situation that prevailed at the time of the last Joint Review and demonstrably inhibits effective decision-making and slows the pace of change.

Within the Council, strategic, business and performance management remain underdeveloped and do not complement the strong focus on day to day operational activity. The Council does not have in place a performance management system necessary to underpin a cycle of continuous improvement. These corporate shortfalls have some impact within the Housing and Social Services Directorate. The system that formally holds staff to account for their performance is not sufficiently robust and is not being routinely implemented. Senior managers and Councillors rely too much upon their informal contacts and networks to know what is going on. In addition, the Council is not analysing sufficiently the data now available to inform its management of performance.

On balance, the Council is judged as being mainly well placed to sustain and make further improvements to services. The Directorate has been able to make progress with its agenda, despite the difficult political and corporate context, because managers and staff have been working to deliver a shared sense of purpose and direction. However, in order to deal with the substantial challenges the Council still faces, a better approach to managing change is required at all levels - political, corporate and Directorate. It is essential that the Council's action plan in response to the findings of this Review demonstrates a coherent and collective approach to tackling this issue.

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"> • Well presented and accessible information about services • Efficient and responsive referral and access arrangements • An improved and appropriate range of services to support families and maintain children at home • Services that support adults to live at home and maintain their independence • Effective advocacy services for children and adults • Effective decision-making and risk management in Adult Services, although less clear in the Mental Health Service • Safe decision-making in Children's Services, with appropriate thresholds for intervention • Well managed transition process for young people leaving care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving users and carers more consistently in commenting on and planning services • Improving the timeliness and quality of assessments in Children's and Mental Health Services • Clarifying with partners the levels of need to which Children's Services will respond • Improving the experience of young people who transfer from Children's Services to Adult Services • Providing good quality day services for adults • Implementing a strategy to meet the placement needs of children who are looked after by the Council

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"> • Extensive investment in training and staff development, including trainee posts • Investment in organisational infrastructure • Effective arrangements for obtaining services through contracts with service providers • Established structures for planning and joint working • Positive relationships with partner agencies • Substantial investment in social services • Sound budget monitoring, including production of financial information • Effective implementation of new IT system • Stable organisation with good staff morale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turning plans for specific services into commissioning strategies, based on explicit needs analysis and on assessing outcomes for service users and carers • Using value for money principles in evaluating and planning services, to ensure more robust challenge • Providing a coherent corporate approach to assuring service quality • Implementing formal and robust systems for managing the performance of staff • Establishing more effective executive and scrutiny arrangements

1.3 Priorities for action

Reviewers have identified the following priority areas for action.

1. Improving care management and review, to ensure a greater consistency of practice across client groups

Managers in social services should:

- clarify with partner agencies the levels of need to which Children's Services will respond and when social services should become involved;
- ensure that timely and thorough assessments are completed in order to inform the decision-making process in Children's Services; and
- implement fully the Care Programme Approach in the Mental Health Service so that timely and thorough assessments are undertaken, including the re-assessment of risk.

2. Listening to service users and carers

Managers in social services should:

- produce and implement a strategy to ensure that service users and carers can routinely:
 - comment on information in leaflets and other formats;
 - provide feedback on the services they currently receive;
 - make suggestions about improvements to services; and
 - be assured that their comments, including complaints, will receive an appropriate response and inform future provision.

3. Assuring service quality

The Council should:

- have mechanisms in place in order to ensure that the quality of all provision does not fall below acceptable standards; and
- ensure that the plans to replace the current day centre for people with a learning disability are completed on time.

4. Managing performance

The Council should:

- put in place formal systems to ensure that staff receive appropriate support and oversight in carrying out their responsibilities. This includes regular supervision and an audit of files by senior managers, as required by the Climbíé Inquiry.

5. Making better use of arrangements for commissioning services

Managers in social services should:

- complete commissioning strategies that ensure the provision of all services is based upon:
 - an analysis of current and future need and demand;
 - information about the performance of services;
 - plans for service developments that link to the Council priorities; and
 - assessed outcomes of service delivery, to include comments from users and carers.

6. Getting value for money

The Council should:

- demonstrate that it has reassessed all of its services on the basis of efficiency, effectiveness and best use of resources, initially by:
 - reviewing its home care service;
 - reviewing its strategy for providing older people with residential care;
 - re-considering its relationship with the private sector in contributing to the provision of services; and
 - producing an asset management strategy.

7. Demonstrating effective leadership of social services

Councillors should:

- ensure that executive and scrutiny arrangements for social services:
 - articulate a strategic direction that clearly informs planning throughout the Council;
 - enable Councillors to become more business-like in their role of deciding social services priorities and overseeing implementation;
 - deliver timely decisions in the interest of efficiency and effectiveness;
 - improve political oversight of the way in which services perform; and
 - demonstrate that the views of service users and carers receive proper consideration.

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