

'REVIEW PROMPTS MAJOR CHANGES IN POWYS SOCIAL SERVICES'

Weaknesses in Powys Social Services still need to be tackled, says review team

Powys County Council is starting to make progress in improving its social services but it has much work to do in meeting consistently the needs of vulnerable people. In particular, there are some fundamental problems in services for children.

These are the conclusions of a second round of joint reviews, carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (SSiW) and the Wales Audit Office (WAO). The review judges the Council as 'having inconsistent services and as being uncertainly placed to sustain and improve services'.

The reviewers found that the problems in children's services have adversely affected the lives of vulnerable children and their families. The range of services available is very limited. Arrangements for families to get access to help, to assess children's needs and to make plans for them all need to be improved. The Council has not been able to ensure that these difficult areas of work are always done by staff with appropriate skills and qualifications.

Efforts are being made to increase investment in social services, to develop partnership working with others in delivering health and social care services, and to tackle the gaps in services. However, reviewers were concerned about the slow pace of change in adult services and about the need to make sure that services focus more on helping people to lead independent lives.

- The report's recommendations include calls for the Council to:
- develop better political management and leadership;
- work through the implications of the Council's commitment to putting Health, Social Care and Wellbeing as its top priority;
- devise and implement a strategy to improve children's services;
- provide services for adults that increase opportunities for living independently;
- ensure that services are delivered in ways that meet the challenges of a dispersed population and workforce;
- enable service users and carers to participate more in decision making.

Chief Inspector for Social Services, Graham Williams, said today:

"The review team judged that social services in Powys are at a crucial stage. Improvements are needed urgently, especially in children's services. However, a new and purposeful approach appears to be emerging within the Council. It has responded immediately to deal with the issues identified by the reviewers. We will be monitoring closely the way in which these changes are delivered and the impact upon the lives of people who need help from social services."

Auditor General for Wales, Jeremy Colman, said today:

"Powys is starting to improve its social services but these are still early days and the outcomes from many of the changes remain to be seen. It is important not to underestimate the challenge ahead. The whole Council will need to be involved in delivering its action plan in a sustained effort if people in the County are to get services that consistently meet their needs."

Notes to Editors:

- This report is the second in a second series of joint reviews, a rolling five-year programme to assess the performance of individual social service authorities in Wales.
- Joint reviews are conducted jointly by the Social Services Inspectorate for Wales and the Wales Audit Office.
- The review of Powys was carried out between April and July 2005. The report will be published on 27 February 2006, to coincide with a presentation to the Council.
- Joint reviews are carried out in accordance with the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003, which gives the National Assembly for Wales the power to conduct reviews of the way in which local authorities discharge their social services functions.
- Joint reviews set out to answer two key questions: *How good are the social services that people in the area receive?* and *How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services?*
- Powys is a council controlled by independent councillors. It is geographically the largest of the Welsh unitary authority areas and is home to 129,300 people (4% of the Welsh population).
- Further information can be found on the joint review web-site: www.joint-reviews.gov.uk

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