

Joint Review of Torfaen 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** 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.

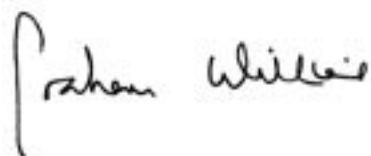
The joint review of social services in Torfaen County Borough Council was carried out by a team working on behalf of the Social Services Inspectorate in Wales (SSIW) and the Wales Audit Office (WAO). The review team comprised Hester Ormiston, Carol Caporn, Val Connors and Bryan Isaac, with Jenny Cooke and Penny Evans as lay assessors. They wish to thank everyone who contributed to the review by sharing their experiences and insights. On-site work in Torfaen took place between April and July 2005.

It is our hope that this report will:

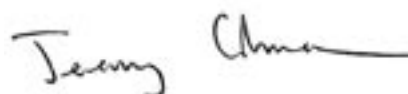
- tell the public how well people are being served;
- help these services to improve;
- safeguard the interests of service users and carers;
- secure better value for money in the provision of social services.

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.



Graham Williams
Chief Inspector of Social Services



Jeremy Colman
Auditor General for Wales

processes would be further enhanced by the development of a full commissioning cycle and an effective, coherent framework to measure quality. This approach should include improved mechanisms for including users and carers in service planning and review.

1.2 Key findings

The Review sought to answer two key questions:

- How good are the services? (see Exhibit 1.2.1)
- How well placed is the Council to sustain and improve services? (See Exhibit 1.2.2)

Exhibit 1.2.1: 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"> • Arrangements for information, access and checking eligibility • User involvement in assessment and care planning • Sound assessment and care management systems for children • A range of well managed community services • Safe child processes for protecting children and vulnerable adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistency of standards and process in adult services • Costing care plans and service developments • Poor transition for children with disabilities • Fragmented support for carers • Some gaps in service • Cultural sensitivity

Exhibit 1.2.2: 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"> • Good staff development and training • Strong performance agenda • Established planning framework • Evidence of cross boundary services • Partnerships in children's services • Good financial management • Investment in social services • Strong leadership • Political commitment • Effective scrutiny 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a learning culture for complaints • Stronger partnerships for workforce planning • User and carer participation in service planning • Coherent framework for quality • Clarity of vision • Inclusive and outward looking leadership • Consistent standards across all services • Commissioning cycle • Budget setting based on revised corporate priorities

1.3 Commentary

At the time of the previous Joint Review in 1999, the social services department was described as having 'weak political and managerial leadership'. There was 'a reluctance to anticipate and grip significant issues (which) resulted in social services being buffeted by mounting pressures in a way that deflected scarce managerial capacity'.

In 2005, there is a very different picture.

- A stable senior management team has been in place since early 2000.
- Councillors have understood the priority and investment needed to provide for vulnerable children and adults.
- There has been a strong shift to community based services supporting people in the community.
- There are safe protection systems for adults and children.
- There is good financial management.
- Quality has been introduced into services and procedures.
- Training targets are being met.
- There is a stable and committed workforce.
- Shortfalls in key service areas are being addressed.
- There is an emphasis on sustainability.

'Having experienced the last Joint Review and reflecting on how I felt about the Department then as compared to now, I would ask myself "Have we moved on?" The answer is "yes, without doubt." staff member

The strength of these arrangements has contributed over the last five years to steady improvement throughout the organisation. Public information is good. Access to social services is through 'Call Torfaen' which has developed a systematic approach to inputting data on referrals, responding safely, and checking eligibility and priority.

Mechanisms for assessment and care planning throughout the directorate demonstrate the careful and successful involvement of users and carers, even where the messages are difficult for the user and their family to hear. The procedures in children's services are sound, with evidence of management oversight and consistency. There is more variation within adult services, where the procedures, although sound in themselves, are not adhered to as consistently.

Both child protection and protection of vulnerable adults procedures are in place. However, while risk assessment is an accepted part of care management, children's services make this less explicit than adult services. As key decisions are based on levels of risk, this should be remedied.

Since the last Joint Review, there have been large scale changes in services. Change is particularly evident in adult services, where traditional "building-based" services have developed into a range of supported community services aimed at promoting individual choice and independence. At the same time, a large proportion of the service has transferred from the Council to the independent sector. Grant funding to voluntary organisations enables many people to receive support without using statutory services.

There are some key gaps in the range of available services which need to be addressed:

- support for older people with mental health problems;
- a wider range of respite for carers of children and adults;
- more placement choice for looked after children;
- some longer-term prevention for families and vulnerable adults.

Although Reviewers found good links between adult and children's services in care planning in the case files, the transition arrangements between teams and the provision of good services for young people with disabilities as they become young adults are poor.

Demographically, Torfaen does not have a wide range of cultural diversity. However, some people whose first language is not English or Welsh are referred to the directorate. Although the Joint Review had limited contact with people with different cultural or religious needs, where there was evidence, it suggested further work is needed to raise awareness and to develop commissioning strategies which promote equality of access to culturally appropriate services.

Some of the difficulties in providing services relate to staff recruitment. These affect domiciliary care, as well as care management teams. There has been substantial investment in staff training, providing opportunities for staff development, achieving professional qualifications and improving management competencies. This is an integral part of the whole agenda to improve quality. Most other elements of quality are in place but have not been drawn together into a coherent whole system approach. For example, the directorate has not been successful in seeing the resolution of complaints as an opportunity to learn from mistakes. Also, the corporate planning framework is in place but is not used consistently throughout the directorate as a method of checking improvement or measuring the achievement of milestones.

Within the social services directorate, many staff told Reviewers they enjoyed working for Torfaen. However, a minority found the leadership style insensitive and unresponsive. If the directorate is to continue to build on its success, it will be important to improve relationships with these staff and their teams.

There are many services developed with partners and some good examples of joint working, as well as an extensive list of providers from the independent sector. However, there have been some relationship difficulties in working effectively with partners at a strategic level. These difficulties are mainly attributable to a need, following the 1999 Joint Review, to concentrate on improving internal systems and decision-making procedures. However, it has been at a cost of some poor relationships and delay in moving forward with joint services. A more outward looking and inclusive style of leadership, both within and externally to the directorate, should provide the opportunity to realise improved outcomes for the people of Torfaen.

There are encouraging signs that the partnerships in children's services, which are positive and productive, will inform more joint work through the Health, Social Care and Well Being Strategy and the Wanless Board. As these partnerships strengthen, it will be important to include users and carers in the dialogue. While relationships with users in individual planning is good, there are no routine, reliable mechanisms to gauge user views as part of the service planning, monitoring and evaluation process.

The lack of dialogue with users and carers also contributes to problems in the commissioning of services, the weakest area of performance found by the Joint Review team. In addition, other key elements of commissioning are not evident. In particular, costings are missing both from packages of support at an individual level on files and in overall plans which are intended to set out future service direction. The exception is within plans developed by the Children and Young People's Framework for Partnership.

Since the last Joint Review, the Council operated for lengthy periods with an acting Chief Executive, and had to deal with the long term illness of the previous Council Leader. In 2005, the new Leader and new Chief Executive set in train a process for the Council to agree new corporate priorities and to put forward revised organisational arrangements to help deliver the new agenda. Councillors and the Chief Executive recognise the achievements of the social services directorate over the last five years and are determined that they should be used as the basis for further development. Whilst the corporate priorities had not been agreed by the time the Joint Review fieldwork was conducted, supporting and protecting vulnerable adults and children are likely to remain near the top of the list.

1.4 Priorities for action

Eight priority areas for action have been identified by the Reviewers.

Care management and review

While processes for care management and review are well established in children's services, their application in adult services is less consistent both in comparison with children's services and in comparison between different adult services. Senior managers should take action to improve care management and review, including:

- undertaking a review of the community care practice guidance to ensure that standards and expectations are explicit;
- providing information which clarifies the standards for users and carers;
- introducing procedures that ensure that each team has in place a method of monitoring so that the care management and review standards are met;
- implementing processes that identify ways in which users and carers can comment on the service.

Range of services

There is a good range of service in most areas but, for some children and adults, a lack of service is contributing to higher levels of risk. Senior managers should set targets to improve placement choice for children who are looked after by the Council, care provision for older people with mental illness, and respite services generally.

User and carer engagement

There is good evidence of involvement of users and carers in individual assessment and care planning but scope for their increased participation in service planning. Senior managers should work with planning staff to provide greater opportunities for users and carers to:

- be involved in consultation on the running of the services they receive;
- have a role in wider consultation on the strategic direction of service development through forums and planning groups;
- continue the role they have in consultation but with greater participation in individual projects.

Needs of carers

The needs of carers have been better recognised with recent support for the Carers' Centre and development of the Carers' Strategy. Senior managers should now give more attention to:

- increasing the range and quantity of respite;
- ensuring carers needs are identified in care management;
- promoting use of direct payments to support carers.

Managing performance

There are a number of mechanisms for managing performance, with regular reporting and analysis at senior management team level. The Assistant Director for Performance and Partnerships should consolidate these mechanisms into a clear statement of performance which identifies:

- the standards expected, external and internal;
- the role of all staff in managing performance;
- how well services meet the standards.

Partnership working

Service change and some plans for greater integration provide evidence of the progress made with partners. However, with the emphasis on an improvement agenda (as set, for example, by *Making the Connections*, the Health Social Care and Well Being Strategy and the proposed National Service Framework for Older People), the Council must take a more robust approach to working in partnership.

Commissioning services

There has been wide-ranging change in service provision over the last five years. Senior managers should consolidate this work into commissioning strategies which link with:

- data on need and use;
- service plans;
- performance information;
- outcomes of service delivery.

Leadership

The current style of leadership has resulted in a significant improvement in services, for users and in delivering greater efficiencies. However, the change process has not been a positive experience for everyone. There have been some losers and some delay in establishing more productive partnerships. The Council should effect a change in leadership style which:

- maintains a focus on the individual;**
- listens to the views of others;**
- is more outward looking and inclusive.**