

Joint Review of Powys County 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.

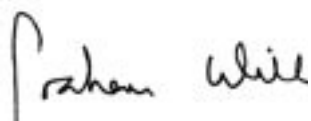
The joint review of social services in Powys County Council was carried out by a team working on behalf of the Social Services Inspectorate in Wales (SSIW) and the Wales Audit Office (WAO). The review team comprised Philip Evans, Shirley Williams, Steve Martin and Bryan Isaac, with Alice Jones and Merfyn Jones as lay assessors. They wish to thank everyone who contributed to the review by sharing their experiences and insights. On-site work in Powys took place between April and July 2005.

It is our hope that this report will:

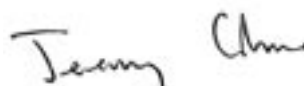
- tell the public how well people are being served;
- help these services to improve;
- safeguard the interests of service users and carers;
- get better value for money in the provision of social services.

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 or from SSIW.



Graham Williams
Chief Inspector of Social Services



Jeremy Colman
Auditor General for Wales

Improvements to adult services have been made. The approach to assessing need and planning care for individuals is becoming more systematic. There is also evidence of more integrated working with key partners in health and social care. Some recent service developments show efforts being made to:

- tackle the gaps in services;
- ensure that services are more responsive (by offering increased choice and better opportunities for people to feel included in the life of their communities);
- manage the way in which plans and investment strategies help to match needs and services.

In all these areas, the Council is at an early point on a long journey.

In children services², there are even more serious and fundamental concerns. The range of services available to meet the assessed needs of children and their families is very limited. The arrangements for getting access to help, assessing needs and care planning have been through a prolonged period of crisis. During this time, some professional practice fell seriously below expected standards. The Council has not been able to ensure that complex work is consistently undertaken in a timely fashion by staff with appropriate skills and qualifications. As a consequence, some potential strengths (such as the quick response to new requests for help and the good working relationships with other professional groups) have not consistently led to good outcomes for service users.

These problems have adversely affected the lives of vulnerable children and their families. There is evidence of recovery but it remains fragile and sporadic.

Social services in Powys are at a crucial stage. The positive changes made recently follow a long period when:

- social services as a whole were not given either the leadership from the corporate centre or the investment required for significant improvement;
- the Council relied too heavily on what it perceived as traditional strengths, such as staff loyalty and commitment.

When the Council subsequently agreed that its top priority should be improving Health, Social Care and Wellbeing in Powys, it also recognised that better approaches were needed to guide the way in which services are provided. There followed:

- changes in the arrangements for delivering social services;
- more political ownership;
- increased investment;
- a greater emphasis on partnerships.

² The term *children's services* refers to all the services provided by the Council for children, young people and their families in meeting need; this will include family support, accommodation, financial and other forms of assistance. *Children and Families Services*, with capital letters, is the management unit of the Council responsible for these services, within the Children and Community Services Directorate.

Alongside this new approach in social care, the Council also started to improve its overall approach to management and performance with more emphasis on priority setting, quality assurance and clear accountabilities.

These changes are not yet embedded and formidable obstacles to improvement remain.

- There is the legacy of problems resulting from poor decisions in the past - for example, when the Council changed the reporting structures for Children and Families Services without ensuring clear accountability or strong strategic leadership.
- Staff recruitment and retention in social services has improved but the overall position remains uncertain.
- The pace of change in adult services has been slow in terms of reshaping services to ensure that they can deliver the goals of a modern social care agenda - prevention, rehabilitation and independence.
- Much service planning does not take place as yet within a clear commissioning framework that matches needs, services and investment in ways that achieve the Council's priorities.
- Not all the key partners are fully signed up to a common programme of change.
- The Council has struggled to find ways of managing risks that meet the different needs of adults and children, although some good work has been done in using the formal procedures for protecting vulnerable people.

During the period of the Joint Review, however, new opportunities for improvement were being created. The Council Board agreed to prioritise social services for substantial new funding. It started to put in place some of the building blocks for sustained recovery such as more effective political and managerial arrangements, various recruitment and retention initiatives, increased business support, and the acquisition of additional help and expertise from outside the Council. Managers in social services were responding energetically to this change in direction.

Such factors clearly provide a better basis for improvement at present. It is important, nevertheless, to be realistic about:

- the scale of the challenge;
- the lack of any established record in Powys in delivering a sustained programme of reform in social services.

This new approach will have to be delivered and consolidated over many areas for a long time if people in the County are to get services that consistently meet their needs.

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"> • Services from a range of service providers that offer a safe and caring environment • Some good service developments in adult services, with a better focus in these on independence and social inclusion • More systematic approaches developed to assessment and care management in adult services • Increased integrated working with health professionals and other statutory agencies • Safer processes for protecting vulnerable adults and children on the child protection register • Improved arrangements for the statutory reviews of children's care plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the quality of casework practice in Children and Families Services • Increasing the range of services for children and families, especially family support and placement options • Developing better systems for understanding people's needs and joining these up with services that are responsive to those needs • Ensuring greater service coverage, flexibility and choice in adult services • Working with partners to deal with key service gaps such as the provision for respite • Producing more consistently an integrated approach to person-centred assessment and planning • Involving people in quality assurance and service design

Strengths	Areas for development
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the pace of change, especially in some areas such as mental health services • Ensuring better partnership working between families, fieldwork staff and service providers in children's services • Improving the experience of young people transferring from children's services to adult services • Managing risks to people in a more differentiated way (increasing the effectiveness of safeguards in children's services; achieving a better balance between protection and encouraging independence in adult services)

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"> • An established culture of staff loyalty and commitment, reinforced by training • Good relationships with other agencies and service providers • Increased political commitment to social services * Improved leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing engagement with and a focus on service users and carers, especially in scrutiny and service planning • Providing sustained political leadership, accountability and scrutiny (with budget setting based on the Council's new prioritisation of Health, Social Care and Wellbeing)

Strengths	Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater emphasis on quality assurance and improved performance information • Prudent approach to financial management and good financial information systems • Increased capacity for commissioning and contracting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing and delivering a coherent strategy for improving children’s services • Producing a corporate and whole public sector strategy for dealing with the challenges of providing services to a widely dispersed population • Making partnerships, plans and projects deliver good outcomes • Developing a more effective approach to helping staff do well (dealing with issues of location, roles, communication and operational plans) • Using the commissioning framework to encourage a more disciplined approach to locating services and focusing resources • Increasing the capacity for managing change, to deal with a very challenging agenda

1.3 Priorities for action

During the second phase of the Joint Review, four themes were chosen for more detailed scrutiny because they were felt to represent key building blocks in the challenging improvement agenda that faces Powys. These themes have been used by the Review team as the basis for providing the Council with priorities for action.

1. Work through the implications of the Council’s commitment to putting Health, Social Care and Wellbeing as its top priority.

This will involve developing better political leadership and management, to ensure consistent service quality and performance.

The Council should:

- set budgets based on its explicit priorities, ensure sufficient resources to fulfil social services obligations in all areas and focus these resources on critical areas.
- review its executive and scrutiny arrangements for the unified social services function, ensure that these provide consistent policy direction and establish clear links between strategic aims, improvement priorities and key success factors.

Managers with responsibility for corporate functions should:

- **assist the new Children and Community Services Directorate in dealing with areas where the Council experiences difficulties associated with staff turnover, with a focus on those posts where recruitment and retention issues have caused most problems.**

Managers in social services should:

- **provide Councillors with reports that help to ensure good decisions, implementation plans and scrutiny;**
- **identify the resources needed for improved management and business support, given the scale of the improvements the Council wants to make and the speed with which changes need to be made;**
- **improve the management of individual projects and increase the use made of business plans.**

2. As a matter of urgency, devise and implement a strategy for improving services to children and families.

This will involve better management of risks, considerable service developments and a programme for ensuring high standards of practice by staff who have case management responsibilities.

The Council should:

- **in working with others, increase the range of services available to children and families, especially in respect of family support and placement options for children who are looked after;**
- **require from officers a plan for ensuring that casework is done by staff with appropriate qualifications and skills.**

Managers in social services should:

- **secure compliance with statutory requirements in Children and Families Services, especially in respect of safeguards for children living away from home;**
- **implement a programme for improving standards of casework practice and put in place effective systems for assuring good quality casework (with a baseline for improvement, clear targets and regular reporting);**
- **improve the experience of young people making the transition from children's services to adult services.**

Practitioners should:

- **ensure that their work complies with statutory requirements;**

- increase levels of partnership working with families and with service providers.

3. Provide services for adults and their carers that increase opportunities for independent living.

This will involve extending the range and flexibility of services and also a more user-led approach to managing risk and a greater focus on enabling.

The Council should:

- make partnerships and planning frameworks better able to deliver solid outcomes and improvements more quickly;
- work more effectively with partners to deal with key services gaps and to reshape services so that they are better able to meet needs.

Managers in social services should:

- improve systems for understanding people's needs and joining up service responses;
- seek to increase the scale of joint commissioning and investment, especially with the Local Health Board in integrated services such as mental health and learning disability;
- use periodic reviews to underpin plans for improving the quality of services (by dealing with problems of location, coverage, reliability, flexibility and choice).

4. Deal consistently with issues about shaping the pattern and delivery of services in ways that meet the challenges of a dispersed population and workforce.

This will involve enabling users and carers to participate more in decision making, achieving a better understanding of different localities in terms of the specific opportunities and challenges in each area and allowing staff appropriate levels of autonomy in responding to these needs (where improved outcomes can be demonstrated).

The Council should:

- increase the opportunities for service users and carers to become involved in making decisions about priorities, service design, quality assurance and the way the new directorate will work with them to provide services they find helpful;
- encourage a corporate and whole public sector response to issues caused by a dispersed population, such as access to services.

Managers in social services should:

- develop an organisational structure and approach that encourages appropriate autonomy at all levels and helps staff to do well (through

improved business planning, increased use of performance management, better communication and the appropriate location of staff);

- **use the commissioning framework to encourage a more disciplined approach to locating services/focusing resources but also to allow commissioning at a locality level;**
- **allocate the right work to the right people.**

Case example

The consequences of inconsistency: similar needs, different outcomes

Among the eighty cases seen by the Reviewers, there were two that offered especially graphic and contrasting examples of how the quality of life experienced by service users with disabilities and their carers can be affected in a very profound way by differences in the availability of:

- person-centred services;
- skilled social work intervention;
- multi-agency partnership working.

With severe disabilities since birth, **Alun** is now in his mid 20s. He is unable to move by himself, has no speech and little non-verbal communication. He lives at home with his parents and attends a day service for adults with learning disabilities. He receives short breaks in a residential unit; there have been some difficulties in providing this service, partly because of limited choice.

A qualified social worker is responsible for assessing and planning Alun's care. The manager provides good support. Alun has received a detailed assessment from an occupational therapist. Staff in the day centre have devised a programme that enables him to experience sensory stimulation and to take part in as many activities as possible, inside and outside this setting. There were problems in agreeing with health service staff how to manage risks involved in moving and assisting him during hydrotherapy sessions. Good work on the part of staff from the day service and from the social worker has helped to overcome these problems.

Multi-agency partnership working has not always been easy but there has been a commitment to focus on Alun's needs. Once reluctant to engage, his parents are now willing to talk with the social worker about plans for his future accommodation and care.

Bethan is in her mid teens, has a similar range of disabilities and attends a local special school. She lives with her parents. Some potentially helpful work has begun with the Young Carers Service to assist her younger siblings. The family spent some time without an allocated caseworker.

Bethan is currently receiving a limited amount of short break/respice care in a hospice environment, though neither her parents nor professionals regard this as ideal. She has been unable to access any family based respice for some time as there is no agreement with health colleagues about some issues (how the risks identified in her moving and handling assessment should be managed; how equipment should be funded). Multi-agency partnership working remains a problem, partly because of perceived differences in the status of the practitioners involved. Although able and anxious to find the right solutions, her current worker does not have a social work qualification. For a significant period of time, this was true for all the staff in the Children with Disabilities team, which also had no frontline manager. There is some likelihood that only a residential placement will be seen as able to meet Bethan's needs, probably at some distance from her home.