

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013-14**

**COMMUNITY & CHILDREN'S
SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

28th JANUARY 2014

**REPORT OF THE GROUP
DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY &
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

Agenda Item 4

CSSIW Annual Council Reporting Framework Inspection Evaluation and Review 2012/13
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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Each year every Council in Wales is required to publish a Director of Social Services Annual Report
- 1.2 The exercise to inform the 2013/14 Director of Social Services Annual Report has already commenced within the Council workforce and a draft report will come before this Scrutiny Committee for scrutiny and comment prior to sign off at Cabinet in July.
- 1.3 One of the contributions that informs the Director of Social Services Annual Report is the input from the annual CSSIW Evaluation report which we use to validate good practice and amend work programmes where improvement is required.
- 1.4 This report provides this Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the areas of progress, good practice and areas for improvement from their latest Evaluation Report which is attached as an Appendix

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report
- 2.2 Scrutinise and comment on the information provided

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 3.1 The CSSIW Annual Evaluation report is divided into various chapters:-

Summary

Performance

- Shaping Services
- Getting help
- Services provided
- Effects on People's lives

Capacity

- Delivering Social Services
- Providing Direction

3.2 In their summary , the key messages from the CSSIW report included:

“Staff and members who work in the council have a strong sense of pride, delivering a high level of services that are appreciated by local people.

There is evidence of the positive value that preventative services bring to children and families in the authority from an inspection that looked at preventative and early intervention services”

3.3 CSSIW also identify potential risks for the Council going forward including:

- *The ability to manage frontline services as well as ensuring budgets are met overall and, in particular, the financial impact on the council of the high numbers of children on the child protection register and in the looked after system.*
- *The ability to continue to offer support to people at all levels of eligibility criteria given the demand on services.*
- *instances of children on the child protection register not being allocated a social worker.*
- *Looked after children not being allocated and supported by a social worker.”*

3.4 The report identifies good practice including:

“Child appreciation days where sibling groups who are adopted can share their histories as a family and ongoing work with carers around involvement in shaping services for the future.”

3.5 It also identifies areas for follow up by CSSIW this year including:

“Safeguarding arrangements in both children and adult services, the impact and development of the revised operating model in adult services, proposed development of services to support a preventative strategy in children’s services and the authority’s review of services for children with a disability.”

3.6 There were no surprises in the report. We know where we need to continue to make improvement but we also need to acknowledge areas of genuine progress and innovation. These will be key elements of the next Director of Social Services Annual Report.

3.7 Overall the report is a fair reflection of the position of the Council at the end of the last financial year i.e. the year ending 31st March 2013 and a useful source of reference for Officers in considering the annual self assessment undertaken as part of the process in the development of the 2013/14 Director of Social Services Annual Report.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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COMMUNITY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28TH JANUARY 2014

**REPORT OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR COMMUNITY AND
CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**Item: CSSIW Annual Council Reporting Framework Inspection Evaluation
and Review 2012/13**

Background Paper:

- **Director of Social Services Annual Report**
- **Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance Report 2012/13**

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Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012/2013

Local Authority Name: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

This report sets out the key areas of progress for the year 2012/13 in Rhondda Cynon Taf Social Services Department and areas for future improvement

Summary

Rhondda Cynon Taf social services has strengths in a number of areas. The council is continuing with its ambitious programme to secure ongoing modernisation. There are a number of strategies in place as the authority endeavours to move towards a culture of supporting independence on a locality basis in partnership with other key stakeholders. The council has a number of mature relationships, particularly with the local health board and third sector partners that work harmoniously.

Staff and members who work in the council have a strong sense of pride, delivering a high level of services that are appreciated by local people. This is borne out by the policy within the council to continue to provide support at all four levels of eligibility criteria to the adult community. The challenge in the future will be the ability to manage this level of support for frontline services which may become unaffordable in the light of economic pressures that all local authorities are facing.

Adults

In adult services the pace of change has increased with evidence of a number of initiatives identified in last year's report coming to fruition. A revised operating model was introduced to support the strategic imperative of assisting people to remain as independent as possible, whilst ensuring that they are safe. Work around reablement and first access has progressed.

Longer term there are plans to retender domiciliary care services, review contracts within the voluntary sector and look at the future of all in-house directly provided provision to ensure value for money is achieved, as well as meet the changing needs of the citizens of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Children

In children's services progress has been made in a number of areas identified for improvement in last year's evaluation but some areas still require attention. There is evidence of the positive value that preventative services bring to children and families in the authority from an inspection that looked at preventative and early intervention services. CSSIW found some examples of good case work practice, as well as good arrangements with statutory and voluntary agencies. The commissioning strategy for children's services is now operational. It is of concern to note, however, that little progress has been achieved around some workforce issues that have been identified as areas of concern for some years previously. These have yet to be addressed satisfactorily.

Whilst the figures in relation to convening conferences and core group meetings indicate the council's overall performance in child protection work is in line with similar councils, there were a number of instances when children on the child protection register were not recorded as having an allocated social worker. This is a cause for significant concern. Other councils ensure 100% allocation. Similarly, only 70% of looked after children were allocated to a social worker, which is much lower than any other council in Wales.

This year the Wales Audit Office (WAO) has worked closely with the council looking at methods for collecting and reporting performance indicators. Overall these are reliable although the WAO has reported some issues relating to a small number where improvements could be made. CSSIW will continue to work closely with the WAO and the authority's performance and improvement team on this.

The director of social service's report provides a clear overview of the council's performance for the year 2012/2013. Heads of service plans set out clearly the divisional objectives and achievements as well as the challenges that the authority faces over the next few years.

CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- The ability to manage frontline services as well as ensuring budgets are met overall and, in particular, the financial impact on the council of the high numbers of children on the child protection register and in the looked after system.
- The ability to continue to offer support to people at all levels of eligibility criteria given the demand on services.
- Instances of children on the child protection register not being allocated a social worker.
- Looked after children not being allocated and supported by a social worker.

Response to last year's areas for development

The council has made progress in a number of identified areas of development from last year's evaluation including the implementation of commissioning strategies in both adult and children's services. The preventative agenda continues to be driven ahead in both divisions. In children's services more work is needed around the timeliness of assessments and capacity issues to ensure children are appropriately safeguarded.

Good Practice Identified

- Child appreciation days where sibling groups who are adopted can share their histories as a family.
- The Social Care Accolade awards around providing innovative training opportunities and raising awareness around the impact of anti-social behaviour in children's services.
- "Butterfly" project in partnership with Dementia Care Matters to improve the quality of in-house dementia residential care home provision.
- Ongoing work with carers around involvement in shaping services for the future.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

In addition to inspections of regulated services and routine engagement meetings with senior officials, CSSIW has undertaken the following activity:

- National review of outcomes for children in need/looked after children (2012).
- Inspection of children's services (2013).
- Site visits and inspection in relation to support to carers.
- Site visits to examine arrangements for reablement services.
- Regulatory inspection of fostering and adoption services.
- Attendance at multi-agency operational group and safeguarding meetings.
- Attendance at scrutiny committee.
- Meeting with performance staff.

Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

A number of specific areas for improvement have been identified in the body of this report. The council's progress in relation to these areas will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year. Emphasis will be placed on progress with the improvement priorities identified in the director's annual report including:

- Safeguarding arrangements in both children and adult services.
- The impact and development of the revised operating model in adult services.
- Ongoing partnership working with Cwm Taf Health Board.

- Proposed development of services to support a preventative strategy in children's services.
- The authority's review of services for children with a disability.
- National thematic inspection of looked after children.
- National thematic review of commissioning of social care for older people.

PERFORMANCE

Shaping Services:

Shared Purpose Shared Delivery sets out the Welsh Government's requirement on local authorities and their partners to produce a single integrated plan to replace existing partnerships and strategies. Delivering Change was Rhondda Cynon Taf's single integrated plan developed in response to extensive consultation and agreed by the Local Services Board for implementation in April 2013. Its joint vision is that all people in Rhondda Cynon Taf are safe, healthy and prosperous. The plan is detailed with key priorities including safeguarding children and adults, improving health and supporting families. It places greater emphasis on delivery, on preventative services and early intervention that can make a real difference to people's lives. It offers clarity about how success will be measured and outcomes achieved.

Adults

Demographic trends indicate that by 2023 the population is predicted to grow by 4%. The number of people over 65 is likely to have doubled. This increase means that a larger part of the population will develop health and social problems related to old age which will impact on service delivery. This will be a challenge the council will need to respond to.

The council continues its commitment to work towards the integration of health and social care services to provide a more holistic and seamless service for people in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Its aim is to further extend the use of intermediate care and reablement services to help more people live independently by building on a model which, to date, has been successful. The reablement service was part of CSSIW's programme of site visits during the year. The aim of this visit was to understand the service better and to see how joint working with Cwm Taf Health Board and Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council bring added value and consistency to the delivery of good quality services in one place. The views of people who accessed the service was that it provided a more consistent and service user focused approach.

Rhondda Cynon Taf recognises the important role that carers play in the authority and carers have reported that they value the support they get in order to help them to continue caring. Some of them have been able to help shape the future of services by taking part in staff selection interviews as well as accessing training opportunities. Similarly, the council reports positive involvement with service users and carers in the design of mental health services in response to implementing the mental health measure.

Children

Children's services have a good track record in taking an innovative approach to strategic service and practice development and improvement. The council makes good use of internal and external reviews to drive forward service change and deliver improved outcomes for children and families.

Underpinning this is the implementation of the commissioning strategy which was one of the priorities identified by the authority last year and the Families First practice framework. The Team Around the Family (TAF) framework is a key aspect of the early intervention and prevention pathway, and provides an integrated model of working. The council reports that significant progress has been made on rolling out the model across the whole authority. Systems for measuring outcomes are established. This should deliver a more holistic, though focused approach, to family needs and prevent children from requiring more costly statutory interventions.

The 2012 to 2015 commissioning strategy for children's services was presented to the corporate parenting board in March 2013. The strategy provides an effective overarching direction for service development within one of the most deprived areas of Wales, identifying key priorities to meet the poverty agenda. It identifies how it delivers on the Single Integrated Plan and incorporates examples of best practice from partner agencies.

Areas of progress

- Significant progress has been made around early intervention and prevention models across the whole authority delivering intensive direct support to families.
- Implementation of the commissioning strategy for children's services.
- Inclusion of carers to help shape future services.

Areas for improvement

- Developing a forward looking strategy for all adult service user groups which is sustainable in the face of increasing demand.
- Ongoing implementation of the children's commissioning strategy.

Getting Help:

Adults

The commissioning strategy for adult services has been implemented this year and sets out the direction of travel for the next three years. It identifies commissioning priorities, potential partnerships and prospective outcomes. This approach should ensure that the council appropriately appraises its options and actively shapes the market to help people achieve their goals for self-determination. It also identifies the need to provide best value and recognises the challenges it faces in relation to its own residential provision. As well as being more expensive than independent sector provision, these

services present an increasing financial burden on the council in relation to the safe maintenance and the upkeep of the buildings. The council needs to be clear about its commitment and capacity to ensure that its homes are safely maintained and run in line with regulatory requirements.

This year saw a number of significant changes in adult services with the introduction of a new operating model of service, which recognises the need to respond to strategic imperatives as well as placing local partnership working at the heart of what it is trying to achieve. Its success is being monitored.

Performance information suggests that support to carers has diminished this year in terms of both numbers of carers who were offered an assessment and those who had an assessment undertaken. However, the level of assessments is high in comparison to other authorities. Almost all of those carers who had an assessment were provided with a service. A short inspection undertaken in March 2013 considered the ways in which the carers project brings better outcomes for individual carers and their families, and how the service supports or sits alongside mainstream social services. The inspector found that delivery of services was innovative and person centred. Carers reported that support contributed greatly to their wellbeing and allowed them to continue with their caring tasks. Implementation of the carer's strategy remains a priority for the council to continue to drive this work forward as well as to implement the requirements set out in the new Carers Measure.

The council has continued to promote independence through direct payments. Opportunities are being explored to maximise the use of telecare and ensure people can choose where they live. There is now a dedicated officer to support this development.

The council is proposing to remodel services for people with physical disabilities to create supported accommodation that can offer people the opportunity to experience more forms of independent living prior to moving on to more permanent accommodation.

Children

During our inspection in children's services in the first quarter of 2013, we noted that duty arrangements in the three locality intake and assessment teams worked effectively. Performance management information shows that all new referrals had a management decision made within 24 hours. However, almost a quarter of referrals were allocated to someone other than a social worker for initial assessment, usually an assessor care manager. Although some progress has been made this year, the level of cases allocated to unqualified workers remains the highest in Wales.

All but 8% of referrals proceeded to initial assessment. The authority should seek to understand the reasons behind the high levels of referrals which proceed to further intervention and consider whether this may be linked to the quality of initial screening decisions and a tendency to be risk averse.

There was an increase in the number of re-referrals received over the past year but the level is comparable to other neighbouring authorities. The council will want to continue to work on this and reports confidence that the implementation of the multi agency safeguarding hub in 2014 will strengthen future arrangements.

It is acknowledged that the council continues to face increasing demand for services in line with many other local authorities in Wales. Improving performance around some core indicators timeliness and the quality of assessments was identified as an area for improvement last year. However, performance information indicates that no progress has been made, with fewer initial assessments completed on time and more undertaken outside of the statutory timescales, resulting in overall performance being amongst the poorest in Wales. Core assessments undertaken within timescales show similar performance with other local authorities, however, the assessments that took longer than the statutory timescales indicate a significant drop in performance this year. The national review undertaken by CSSIW in December 2012 looking at outcomes for children in need/looked after children reported a tendency to conduct a number of assessments within the same timeframe. This duplicates work and, although reports were of a satisfactory standard, they added little value to outcomes for children and families. The authority acknowledges that processes require streamlining.

Flying Start provision has been successfully developed in a number of areas and is having a positive impact in Rhondda Cynon Taf. It is reported that there are 16% (2542 children) of all children under four who are benefiting from some kind of service, making it the second highest in Wales.

65 young carers were assessed in 2012/2013 all of whom have been provided with a service.

Areas of progress

- Implementation of a commissioning strategy for adult services.
- Introduction of a new service model in adult services.
- Duty arrangements in the locality intake and assessment teams works effectively.
- Flying Start provision established across the borough.

Areas for improvement

- Performance around some aspects of assessments relating to children's services remains an area for continued improvement for the third consecutive year.
- Ongoing work around embedding the new operational model within adult services

The Services provided:

Adults

The council has a broad range of services that increasingly meet people's needs for independent living. This approach is underpinned by early intervention initiatives, such as the First Access and Reablement Services, and is increasingly supported through the prompt issue of personal equipment, of which there was a notable increase. However, fewer adaptations were achieved and the council recognises that people are waiting too long for this assistance. In response, it has prioritised this as an area for improvement and recent data suggests that this is being incrementally achieved.

The Reablement Service is the first point of contact for most people referred to social services. Although the majority of people receiving the service are older adults, the service is available to anyone over 18 years of age who meets the criteria. Referrals come from other professionals, including case managers or those managing hospital discharge. Reablement is offered as part of a crisis response to support continued independence either before going into hospital or as part of hospital discharge. There is a range of information available about the service, and managers work closely with other professionals, (for example, discharge liaison nurses) to ensure a timely response. Feedback from people who use this service is positive.

The Mental Health Measure has been fully implemented with the local health board. Early indications are positive and there are already signs of increased referral rates to secondary services and community mental health teams. Recommissioned day services for people with functional mental health problems are providing a more joined up approach to service delivery.

The quality of commissioned older person's services in Rhondda Cynon Taf is mixed. There are a small number of care homes where there are concerns about effective and sustainable leadership and management and the quality of staffing.

The quality of the council's own care homes is mainly satisfactory although regulatory inspectors report challenges in accessing key information around recruitment processes which the council holds centrally. As registered managers are legally responsible for the settings they manage, they need to be able to assure themselves that staff have up-to-date checks and the appropriate qualifications to undertake their roles. The council needs to ensure that this information is readily available to managers. Some inspection reports make reference to deterioration of the fabric of buildings and delays in maintenance programmes being progressed which has an impact on the overall environment.

The quality of the in-house domiciliary care provision is good. The services are well run and have strong leadership.

The council is reviewing opportunities to improve the delivery of learning disability services in partnership with the local health board. Plans are in place to reshape supported living services and undertake a competitive tendering exercise in 2013/2014. The aim is to support the development of services on a geographical basis covering the three distinct area of the county, as well as to streamline the current fragmented arrangements where a number of providers are providing a service.

Children

Preventative services within Rhondda Cynon Taf had been assisted over recent years by the Families First programme, where a range of early intervention and support services were available to vulnerable children and children in need. The Canopi Partnership has now been rolled out to all 12 school clusters across Rhondda Cynon Taf. It enables agencies to deliver local community based support services to children and families. This, in turn, is complemented by the development of TAF, which provides resources to work intensively with vulnerable children and their parents and or carers.

The role of the Integrated Family Support Team (IFST) model is focused on situations where substance misuse by parents or carers poses a significant risk to their children. Whilst it is too early to evidence the impact of the IFST in reducing the numbers of children becoming looked after or those children who were subject to child protection proceedings, there is evidence of some effective preventative work. The role and remit of this team and the newly introduced rapid response team needs to be clearly communicated to the locality teams and the child disability teams as evidence from CSSIW fieldwork suggests that it is not consistently understood.

Observation by an inspector of a group meeting of parents and children as part of the strengthening parenting programme saw staff working in an honest and respectful way with parents and their children. Parents and young people from the group talked about the positive difference the support had made to their lives.

Rhondda Cynon Taf continues to have high levels of looked after children. The development of a strategic approach to reduce the number of children the authority looks after, and deliver more locally based placements as part of a medium term financially sustainable budget, is one of the key drivers for change within the council. The Looked After Children Action Group consisting of senior officers from children's services and the finance department has taken a range of actions to address the challenges faced, including the establishment of a placement panel.

The adoption service was subject to inspection by CSSIW this year. Inspectors found that considerable investment in the service has resulted in significant improvements and positive outcomes for children with a good number of children having been placed with adoptive parents as a result. The council has introduced child appreciation days where a sibling group of children placed with different families were able to understand and share their

histories as a family. This is commendable practice. More work remains to be done in fostering services although there has been a recruitment drive to recruit carers which has been mainly successful.

The long-term plan is for fostering and adoption services to be delivered through regional collaboration, in line with the Welsh Government's strategic vision for sustainable services. In the interim, the council will need to continue to provide a robust service that meets the needs of the looked after children population.

Services for children with a disability have faced a number of challenges during the year. Key areas for development have been identified and this is one of the priority areas for review in the coming year.

The local authority has a childminding network in place which regulatory inspectors report as being very supportive to those childminders in it and to the authority that has links to it.

Areas of progress

- Reablement services demonstrate good partnership working and a commitment to continued improvement.
- Canopi Partnership is now delivering services across the borough.
- Introduction of the looked after children action group to address the challenges in LAC services.
- Improvements made in the adoption service with evidence of positive outcomes for children.

Areas for improvement

- The council needs to introduce an appropriate system within its registered services to ensure that information required by regulations is readily available to managers and inspectors.
- Waiting lists for adaptations should be reduced.
- Continue to monitor and address the high number of children that are looked after in the authority.
- Achieving compliance identified in the fostering service inspection report.
- Better communication between frontline teams in children's services to clarify roles and functions particularly around preventative services.

Effect on people's lives:

Adults

Regulatory inspectors work closely with the contracts and safeguarding teams on an ongoing basis around the improvement agenda through the multi-agency operational group. The approach is based on early identification and sharing of issues of concern which are raised with external partners and, where necessary, escalating concerns are instigated. Inspectors say that this process works well and there are examples where the local authority, the local

health board and CSSIW have worked together sharing intelligence and evidence to provide consistent messages to providers. This is particularly important where poor performance has been identified and enforcement action is being considered.

One eighth of the population in the borough are reported to be undertaking some form of caring duties and Rhonda Cynon Taf's approach to supporting carers has established a number of innovative person centred approaches. Different aspects of the project respond to the specific needs of each group of carers. Carers identified that the support networks and opportunities for "time out" (for example pampering days), have sustained them to carry on with their responsibilities. They also said that they appreciated the training opportunities and information that they were able to access.

The number of service users reviews undertaken this year shows good performance and compares well to neighbouring authorities. However, performance is slightly down this year which the authority attributes to the reconfiguration in adult services.

The percentage of people supported by the council, both in relation to care homes and people supported in the community, is much higher than other similar authorities although the figures for both have dropped slightly this year. The council continues to operate at all four eligibility criteria levels. Whilst there is a move towards a culture of non-dependency, where this is appropriate, promoting independence is a long-term strategy for the council and one that will require continued focus as economic pressures intensify.

Children

Safeguarding is identified as one of the top priorities for Rhondda Cynon Taf and the department has made progress over the past year. This has included the introduction of a joint Cwm Taf Safeguarding Children Board (CTSCB). This was established in June 2012 and work continues to consolidate the new board and develop structures to work effectively together. Although at an early stage, this collaborative approach will promote consistent safeguarding practices across Cwm Taf as well as sharing the expertise built up by managers and practitioners in this challenging area.

This year is the first year in five consecutive years where there has been a decrease in the number of children on the child protection register. The authority reports a reduction of over 11%. Although still significantly higher than other local authorities in Wales, this is a step in the right direction. The focused attention on the preventative agenda and the range of services available to support families has undoubtedly contributed to this.

The authority has worked hard to ensure safeguarding arrangements for children are robust and the number of child protection conferences held on time has markedly improved over the last three years. Where child protection case files were examined as part of the inspection in children's services

earlier in 2013, inspectors found referrals that had progressed to assessments in relation to child protection concerns were appropriate.

It remains a significant concern that not all children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker even though fewer children have been recorded on the register this year.

The number of children being looked after in the council has continued to rise, albeit that the increase has slowed down. The total remains significantly higher than other local authorities in Wales. One third of these children are allocated to someone other than a social worker which falls short of expectations, despite being an identified priority last year. Whilst managers state that they are confident that these cases are constantly monitored, the council will want to assure itself that it is appropriately safeguarding children and families in the borough.

Rhondda Cynon Taf has the second highest percentage of pupils leaving education with no qualifications in Wales. The average pupil in Rhondda Cynon Taf only attends 11 out of the 12 statutory years of education which has a major impact at Key Stage 4. The council is seeking to increase opportunities for younger people to enter employment, education and training and has implemented a strategy and an action plan which uses early identification procedures and targeted intervention approaches to address this. It is participating in a Wales Audit Office (WAO) study around supporting young people who are at risk of not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The percentage of looked after children achieving at Key Stage 2 has dropped significantly from 37.5% to 26%. This requires attention. There has been some improvement at Key Stage 3.

During 2012/13 the LSCB has conducted and published three child practice reviews (CPRs) as part of the pilot arrangement with Welsh Government and CSSIW. These have been in response to significant incidents. Whilst the practice of social services has not been criticised in these cases, the reviews have provided the opportunity for agencies to review practice and, where necessary, to learn lessons that can improve practice and outcomes for the future.

Complaints are dealt with through proper procedures and in one high profile case relating to the respite care of a younger adult, a robust investigation was undertaken. It is important that CSSIW is appraised and kept updated in a timely way in cases where there is potential for press interest.

Areas of progress

- Implementation of the new joint CTSCB.
- Work on reducing the number of children on the child protection register.
- Learning from child practice reviews.
- Person centred approach to work with carers.

Areas for improvement

- Ensuring all children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker.
- Ensuring looked after children have an allocated social worker.

CAPACITY

Delivering Social Services:

There is clear evidence of both corporate and political support for social services, with priority given to safeguarding vulnerable children and adults. This is evidenced by the council's financial commitment across social services in comparison to other comparable authorities in Wales. In children's services expenditure has increased by over £7m this year alone.

Rhondda Cynon Taf is the third most deprived area in Wales and this is reflected in the high levels of unemployment, inequalities in health and low educational achievements. The corporate director's annual report predicts an increase in deprivation and poverty in the coming years as a result of national government welfare and benefit changes. It sets out the challenges facing the council in the coming months and years, particularly in respect of the number of children becoming looked after by the council. This was reflected in an overview and scrutiny committee report, where there was a reported overspend in the LAC budget exceeding £2.2m at the end of December 2012. Whilst this represented a significant reduction, cost pressures for 2013 remain considerable.

The council has provided information on the workforce in children's services which shows evidence of the continued trend towards recruiting qualified staff. The successful secondment policy of "growing our own" social workers has given a number of assessor care managers the opportunity to gain a social work qualification and return to work in the authority.

The single salary point policy developed within the council as part of the job evaluation has played a positive role in recruiting newly qualified staff who are provided with good induction and training and development. However, during the inspection in children's services, CSSIW spoke with more experienced staff who felt there was limited opportunity for their professional development. In addition, in their view, retaining experienced social workers was becoming more difficult as experienced staff were expected to mentor newly qualified colleagues who receive the same remuneration. This has impacted on morale in children's teams, with the exception of the IFST team. The authority will wish to consider the impact of this policy on its workforce in social services and its ability to retain staff into the future.

Staff CSSIW spoke to in front line services during the inspection of children's services also reported pressures they faced in relation to workloads. Some

staff said that they felt overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of cases they dealt with, particularly if they had limited experience.

This year the council was awarded a number of accolades from the Care Council for Wales in respect of particular projects and initiatives in social services. The council won public recognition for better outcomes through working together with South Wales Police – for an interactive workshop for young people about the impact of anti-social and discriminatory behaviour on others. Rhondda Cynon Taf has also established the first local authority training centre to offer work based qualifications in child care for early years practitioners. In adult services there is a one year partnership project with Dementia Care Matters and Clydach Court Care Home to improve care for residents with dementia.

Area of progress

- Success in being awarded three accolades from the Care Council for Wales.

Areas for improvement

- Retention and morale in children's services and consideration of the impact of current terms and conditions.
- Financial planning and budget management in the future within a challenging environment and in particular the impact of the Welfare Reform Bill.

Providing Direction:

The council has clearly thought out the strategic direction for the future of social services based on the numerous collaborations and its mature attitude to partnership working. This has been strengthened even further during the year in both adult and children's services, supporting better services to people within their own community as well as working with families to promote better outcomes for their children.

Leadership is strong in Rhondda Cynon Taf social services with an experienced director and a mature long standing management team. A new head of children's services has recently been appointed for 2013/14 following the promotion of their existing head of service to a post in a neighbouring council.

To date, social services has been sheltered from budget cuts within the wider council. However, senior managers in social services recognise that they cannot expect this level of protection in the future. The ability to manage front line services as well as ensuring budgets are met is likely to be the biggest challenge for the authority.

The guidance Shared Purpose, Shared Delivery talks about the need for local authorities having effective scrutiny in place to ensure democratic

accountability for partnership actions. This year CSSIW has attended and observed scrutiny meetings on two occasions. Members have identified the risks of welfare reform and the effect on vulnerable families and the local economy, as well as the potential financial consequences for the borough.

An effective Corporate Parenting Board provides an informed scrutiny and championing role for looked after children.

Areas of progress

- Joint working and productive relationships with all key partners.
- Encouragement and development of innovative approaches.

Areas for improvement

- Continue to develop a good level of challenge and scrutiny which considers the strategic approach to future sustainability as well as current and medium term operational performance.

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