



Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012/2013

Local Authority Name: Denbighshire County Council

This report sets out the key areas of progress in Denbighshire County Council Social Services Department for the year 2012/13 and the areas for future improvement

Summary

The council continues to work with an ambitious programme of modernisation which aims to restructure and shape services and the expectations of citizens. There is evidence of continued progress despite a challenging environment.

There is continued strong leadership at departmental and corporate level with effective working relationships with the lead member. The use of the service challenge approach gives an additional level of internal scrutiny.

The director's report provides a coherent narrative that places the council's performance in the context of the modernisation programme, and challenging financial and demographic environments.

The modernisation programme is being delivered in the context of achieving efficiency savings and the services are delivering a balanced budget. Both service areas are using savings to "pump prime" further service developments. The Wales Audit Office indicates that the council has ambitious but deliverable plans with effective medium term financial planning.

Adult services

The evidence indicates that the council's emphasis on early intervention, prevention and reablement has meant that there are fewer people being supported in residential care, and that more people are able to lead independent lives. Where people do need ongoing support, this is increasingly being provided without recourse to statutory services and within people's own communities. Many people

are benefiting from short-term support packages to re-establish their independence and are not requiring any ongoing services.

The council recognises that the provision of support to carers needs to improve and there are strategies in place to achieve this.

There are some issues, however, in ensuring timely engagement, decision making and action at a strategic level with the local health board. Whilst acknowledging this, the council reports that the commitment to achieving more effective engagement within the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) remains high.

Children's services

Performance against a significant range of national indicators remains amongst the best in Wales. The council provides an effective response to incoming referrals and performs well in fulfilling its responsibilities in relation to children in need and child protection. The council has recognised the need to improve services to young carers and care leavers, and has taken action to achieve this. While the council has maintained and improved performance in a number of indicators relating to Looked After Children we noted that across a number of key indicators performance has deteriorated. This is an area that would benefit from further analysis by the council to understand the reasons underlying the change in performance and to identify what action is required to achieve improvement.

CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- Continuing ability to influence locality focused strategic planning with the BCUHB.
- Achieving a smooth succession when the current director retires next year.

Response to last year's areas of development

Overall, there has been a good response to the areas of improvement identified in last year's report. The council has achieved improvement in:

- Consultation with children and their families in service development and review.
- Development of commissioning strategies, although not yet fully implemented in practice.
- Improvement in the numbers of core assessments achieved within the required timescale.
- Increased co-ordination of family support services.
- Timely reviews of care plans for adults.
- Improved focus on care leavers and their needs.
- Improved numbers of annual performance appraisals for staff.

In some areas the council has not yet evidenced that they've fully achieved the progress expected. In particular:

- Staff sickness absence which remains high.
- Improved consistency in the provision of support to families following de-registration from the child protection register.

Where necessary, these matters will remain a focus for CSSIW during the coming year.

Good practice identified:

CSSIW has identified the following areas of good practice:

- Robust internal scrutiny of performance, including “service challenges”.
- Collaborative working with other council departments.
- Training and supporting service users to provide dignity in care training.
- Short-listing of volunteers and staff for national awards.
- Development of market position statements to engage independent and third sector social care organisations in shaping services.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

No site visits have been undertaken in the last 12 months.

CSSIW completed a programme of inspections of regulated services operating in Denbighshire and held routine engagement meetings with senior council officers.

There has been attendance at a range of safeguarding meetings in both adult and children's services and escalating concerns meetings in respect of adult care homes in Denbighshire.

Denbighshire took part in a national review of children in need.

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 will be discussed with the council during regular engagement meetings in the coming year.

- Establishing clear measurable outcomes to assist with the evaluation of existing and proposed services.
- Assessment and support to carers.
- Performance in relation to looked after children.
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
- Staff sickness levels.

- National thematic inspection of looked after children.
- National thematic review of commissioning of social care for older people.
- Partnership working with the BCUHB.

PERFORMANCE

Shaping services:

Adults

The council has a sound business planning approach based on current and projected profiles of needs, using national and local data and forecasts of population and need. This has supported the council in producing a clear business plan which is focused on developing and extending services based on the available information. The business plan seeks to ensure a balance between using early intervention, preventative and reablement approaches to maintain independence and services for people with complex long-term care needs. The plan identifies well defined priorities for improvement.

Adult services are developing “market position statements” for various categories of service needs, and these are intended to support the strategic work within the council and with independent and third sector providers. These documents, along with the relevant commissioning strategies, will be available through the council’s website.

There is strong evidence of partnership working which has been effective in developing and delivering restructured and targeted services. This is true in relation to other council departments (eg leisure and community services), other local authorities, other public sector agencies, and independent and third sector services. An example of this is the North Wales Commissioning Hub which involves the six North Wales authorities and the BCUHB with Denbighshire as the lead authority. The initial focus has been on monitoring existing contracts and developing an informed approach to quality assurance. It is expected that the approach taken by the hub will assist in further improving quality of life and quality of care for people using social care services.

The council reports that the embedding of the new structures in relation to the BCUHB has continued to cause some issues, with some delays in effectively taking forward joint service developments. However, the council also notes that there continues to be a commitment to joint and collaborative working in order to achieve positive outcomes for people in Denbighshire. The development of a Single Point of Access (SAP) for health and social care enquiries is seen as an example of this. Although implementation has been delayed, the commitment to achieve the project has been evident and the council now says that the SAP will become operational during the Autumn of 2013.

Service users and advocates are extensively consulted about service development and service quality. Through this process, the council recognises that some challenges remain in helping people to understand the changed emphasis and approach of adult services.

Children

The council continues to develop an integrated and seamless service within a distinct theoretical and structural model. This prioritises early intervention strategies. The structures and systems to support this have now been in place for over 12 months and council is engaged in evaluating their effectiveness. The council notes that there have been a number of benefits: improved relationships with partner agencies, a developing early intervention service that provides a continuum of service (alongside statutory services) for families as their needs escalate and de-escalate, a high level of development activity in respect of working practices, systems and service delivery, sustained (and in a number of cases) improved performance.

There is also recognition that some aspects of the restructure are not yet delivering intended outcomes. Plans are in place to address these areas.

The council has provided evidence that it has undertaken consultation with families around a wide range of services. These include the experience of the early intervention and preventative services, the experience of care leavers and the experiences of children on the child protection register. Significant work has been undertaken to map out the profile of needs of children with additional needs and their families and to develop appropriate strategies to address service development needs. There is evidence that service users views have been incorporated into further service developments.

Areas of progress

- Development of market position statements to inform and support provision of services.
- Progress in achieving implementation of the SAP.
- Continued development of early intervention, preventative and reablement approach in adult social care.
- Continued development of an early intervention model for children with clear links to a wide range of policy requirements.
- Use of consultation to evaluate children and families experiences of services to assist in the further development of services.

Areas for improvement

- Embedding the new structure fully into working practice.

- Establishing clear measurable outcomes to assist with the evaluation of existing and proposed service developments. Objectives should be focused on progress for children and families, and progress in meeting longer term service goals (eg to reduce the number of families requiring intensive and longer term intervention).
- Development of domiciliary care market to reduce pressures on reablement service.

Getting help:

Adults

The council has sought to further improve the existing, good arrangements to provide the people of Denbighshire with information, advice and guidance on services and how they can access these. As the lead agency for the development of the SAP, Denbighshire has effectively engaged with a wide range of stakeholders.

The council's performance in responding to referrals continues to be a strength. There is evidence of effective partnership work with health colleagues to achieve timely discharges from hospital with the reablement service strongly contributing to the very low delayed discharge rates and to the prevention of people needing either hospital admission or residential care.

The intake and reablement service assisted 1786 people to regain and maintain their independence. Following the input from the service, 72% of the people assisted no longer needed a formal package of care. The council intends further developing the reablement service and is investing substantial additional funds in 2013/14 in order to continue with this flexible response to short-term needs.

Fewer people were either supported in the community or through residential care during 2011/12 than in previous years. The council noted that this was because of the service restructuring and the focus on the provision of preventative and reablement services and changes to how the council responds to requests for minor adaptations.

The council has made a substantial improvement to the timeliness in reviewing people's care plans due to increased investment and a sustained focus amongst practitioners. Performance in this key indicator is now amongst the best in Wales and this will support the council in ensuring that people have the right service to meet their needs.

The council recognises that it is necessary to improve the assessment of needs in their own right and the support offered to people who are carers. The council has commissioning arrangements with six third sector agencies to provide carers support and has contracted the North East Wales Carers Information Service

(NEWCIS) to provide a carers needs assessment service. In addition, the council has been heavily involved with the North Wales Carers Strategic Group in developing a North Wales Carers Information and Consultation Strategy. The council also intends to make further resource investment to support a three year plan to develop carers support from 2013 onwards.

Children

The council has provided evidence of sustained or improved performance in many of the key indicators around access to services and effective case management. The re-referral rate remains at the same level as the previous year: the completion of initial assessments within seven working days has improved, the completion of core assessments within 35 working days has substantially improved, and children seen by a social worker and seen alone by a social worker as part of an assessment has improved.

The council's internal audit process has established that these high standards of performance have been achieved without any decrease in the quality of work. The effectiveness of assessment and intervention is also supported by reportedly low rates of "step-up" referrals from families supported through the early intervention strategies to statutory services.

The council reports 7345 contacts with 799 of these proceeding to referral. The contacts that did not progress to referral should have been signposted to the most appropriate service for their needs. The council has recognised that there is a need to evaluate whether the signposting service is effective.

Implementation of an integrated service for children with disabilities has taken place but the degree of integration for assessment had been adversely impacted by relocation difficulties. Access to agreed premises was substantially delayed but this now said to be resolved. The council's consultation with parents and children with additional needs has identified areas for service development and these have been included in the service business plan.

Delays in access to the occupational therapy service have been addressed, with improvement evidenced in timescales from referral to assessment to receiving a service. Further work to enable swift access to disabled facilities grants for minor adaptations is underway.

Areas of progress

- Improved timescales for completion of assessments and sustained quality of assessments in children's services.
- Improved timeliness of reviews for adults receiving services.

Areas for improvement

- Completion of a new service model for children with additional needs and their families.
- Assessment and support to carers.

The services provided:

Adults

The council is committed to a strategic approach that focuses resources on early intervention, prevention and reablement, while recognising that some people with complex and long-term needs will require additional support. The focus with the latter category of people remains on establishing responsive support, tailored to individual need and within their own community as far as possible. The adult social care department has engaged effectively with other council departments to develop and sustain the range of community based services available to people.

Using this ethos, the council has developed a range of resources and has clearly identified where additional resources are necessary, building the future achievement of these into the service business plan. This includes the continuing provision of a highly valued telecare service and the future development of three further extra care schemes. The council is also looking to transform the provision of day care services in line with the objectives of the reablement service and has a transitional approach to this work.

The council has acknowledged a need to improve the numbers of people accessing direct payments and intends widening the scheme to provide funding for minor adaptations and equipment. As a result, people will be able to make their own decisions about purchasing aids and adaptations. There is increasing emphasis upon personal choice and control offered by the active promotion of direct payments and citizen directed support. This forms a key part of the council's transformation strategy.

Children

Overall the council has a reasonable range of services to meet the needs of children and families. The profile of services available has changed, based on the council's work to identify those children and families who are most likely to need intervention. Consultation with children and their families has contributed to service developments in respect of young carers and care leavers.

The early intervention and preventative services remain key to the council's approach to children's services, and continues to be subject to evaluation and further development. For example, the council made the decision to decommission the children's home and has invested some of the savings in extending the family

support service to cover seven days per week. The savings will also be used to develop a support foster care service, intended to be used as part of the early intervention model. The sustained focus on early intervention has supported continued improvements in key performance indicators. For example, the number of reviews of the care plans for children in need that take place within the required timescale has increased.

The council has undertaken an extensive profiling exercise in respect of children with additional needs. Service provision is to be shaped through a similar intelligence based approach to that used to establish the model of early intervention, and through the consultation with children with additional needs and their families. The commissioning strategy for children's services identifies clear strategic priorities. The actions to support these priorities include developing a multi-agency approaches to early intervention and managing risks, work with community based provision to give equity of access to leisure facilities, work to review and reconfigure the occupational therapy service and establish lean processes for access to disabled facilities grants, and work with adult and business support services to develop transition arrangements.

The range of services for children who need to be looked after by the council is not yet as clearly defined as the early intervention and preventative services and the planned work in respect of children with additional needs and their families. Although there has been a small decrease in the numbers of looked after children, the "turnover" is reported to be high with 79 children becoming looked after in 2012/13.

There is a pattern of decreased performance, in some cases over the last three years, in relation to key indicators for looked after children. For example, the percentage of children with a plan for permanence in place within the required timescale has reduced from 100% in 2010/11 to 75.56 in 2012/13 and the percentage of looked after children with three or more placements has doubled over the last three years. The council has not provided clear evidence that it has interrogated this and understands the reasons for the deterioration in performance in relation to looked after children.

The early intervention approach is intended, over time, to reduce the numbers of children and families requiring intensive intervention and the numbers of children who need to be looked after by the council. These are long-term objectives where the impact may not have a demonstrable effect for several years. The commissioning strategy identifies that the main resource for looked after children will be foster care, and that the strategic priorities will be focused on reducing placement moves and ensuring that foster carers are supported and trained to meet children's needs in order to provide stable and safe homes. This is a limited response to the needs of looked after children. There is little information about how the council intends to look after children with the most complex and challenging

needs where foster care may not be appropriate or to fulfil their additional responsibilities to children in custody.

Areas of progress

- The percentage of children in need whose plans are reviewed within timescale has substantially improved.

Areas for improvement

- Performance in relation to looked after children especially in relation to planning for permanence and placement stability.
- Evaluating the quality and impact of commissioned services in meeting the needs and delivering the objectives.

Effect on people's lives:

Adults

There is evidence to indicate that the council's strategic approach is securing some improved outcomes - this is perhaps shown in the indicators that fewer people need residential care and fewer people need long-term support to live independently.

The council's own evaluation indicates that more people are accessing reablement services, with the council reporting that 72% did not require any further home care support following completion of the programme. Feedback from service users has been positive, in particular reflecting that people felt the service treated them with dignity and respect. The indications are that the approach is making a positive difference to people's lives.

The ability of the reablement service to make quick and individualised responses has been important in maintaining low rates of delay for people being discharged from hospital. The council considers that the pressures on the reablement service are likely to grow and are already focused on further investment in the service.

The council has maintained a good standard of performance in relation to adult safeguarding. They report that in over 96% of cases the risk was managed and, where this was not the case, alternative strategies to safeguard and promote service user welfare were put into place. Following an internal review, the approach to the safeguarding process is being changed to establish the role of team managers as designated lead managers who will hold and manage a small caseload of protection of vulnerable adult cases. The council's rationale for this change is that it will support the safeguarding process in being more robust and will address anticipated pressures in this area.

The council has also taken appropriate action in respect of the recommendations of a serious case review which reported in October 2012.

The council strives to fulfil its responsibilities in respect of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards and, whilst additional and well attended training for independent sector staff has taken place, overall activity remains low. In 2012/13 Denbighshire received 12 requests for authorisation with five standard requests being granted. This latter number remains lower than may be expected at just five - despite being one of the higher numbers in North Wales.

The low level of activity generally across North Wales will be a focus for further attention over the coming year.

Children

The council demonstrates a strong commitment to safeguarding children, including having an effective approach to child protection. Work is under way to establish structures which will support the changes which will be required by the Social Services and Wellbeing Bill 2013, with good evidence of effective partnership working with other North Wales authorities.

There is good evidence of an effective internal audit process in relation to child protection and of the development of media through which "lessons learned" can be shared with practitioners.

There are an increased number of children on the child protection register, a pattern sustained over the last three years. There has been sustained improvement in the timeliness of initial conferences and core group meetings. Performance in relation to child protection reviews has reduced slightly.

There is a need for sustained attention in order to improve the quality of services to and ability to ensure positive outcomes for looked after children. The current approach is not ensuring that looked after children's health care and education needs are being met in a manner that supports positive outcomes. These are key areas of need for looked after children that may have a profound and enduring impact on their continued development, and achievement of successful transition into their adult lives.

There is a three year pattern of deterioration in many of the performance indicators regarding health care. For example, over the last three years the percentage of children who have a health care plan in place has reduced from 83% to 33% and the numbers of children receiving a dental check has reduced from 83% to 59%. Performance in these areas is amongst the lowest in Wales. The council has not provided a clear explanation for this.

There is a similar pattern of deteriorating performance in relation to education for looked after children. For example, the percentage of children with a personal

education plan in place within the required timescale has dropped over three years from 88.5% to 57.8%, fixed-term exclusions have increased over the last 12 months and, whilst attainment levels overall have improved, at Key Stage 3 they remain below that of comparator authorities and the all Wales average.

The council needs to further develop the partnership arrangements in place with the BCUHB and Denbighshire Council's education department to ensure sustained improvement in these key areas for looked after children.

The percentage of LAC reviews within held statutory timescales has slightly reduced in the last 12 months. The council needs to ensure that the previously robust arrangements that ensured 100% compliance with this performance target are still in place and working effectively to improve this key area.

There has been a clear focus on evaluating the services to young people who are preparing to or have left care. This has included effective consultation with care leavers that has resulted in further developments to this service area.

Areas of progress

- Increasing effectiveness of reablement service.
- Clear business planning for adult services.
- Effective use of internal audit processes in child protection.
- Consultation with children and their families.

Areas for improvement

- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards.
- Health assessments and health care for looked after children.
- Education assessment and support for looked after children.
- Ensure timely and effective statutory reviews for looked after children.

CAPACITY

Delivering Social Services:

The council remains focused on delivering the necessary structural and cultural changes to achieve its ambitious modernisation programme. The primary ethos is to maintain or re-establish independence and control of their lives with the people who use services. There is a clear focus on delivery and evaluation with increased input from citizens.

There is increased commitment to collaborative working within the council, with other North Wales authorities and agencies and with the independent and third sector organisations who provide services. This is shown in the multi-agency approach to jointly assess and manage risk within children's services; the

commitment to the Regional Commissioning Hub, work with social housing providers to develop innovative community focused services and to deliver increased support to carers. Relationships with partner agencies are considered good at both individual and organisational levels, despite some challenge in engaging effectively at a strategic level with the new structures within the BCUHB.

The council has an effective medium term financial plan and service developments are clearly linked to corporate objectives. Both adult and children's services have worked to deliver their objectives within budget and to achieve the necessary financial savings. This has been realistically evaluated by the services and, where the achievement of further savings creates increased risks, this is confidently reported. There is evidence of corporate support for the approach taken through both the service challenge and the scrutiny processes.

There has been considerable focus on workforce development with a clear developmental strategy intended to support the structural and cultural changes necessary to achieve the modernisation plan. The strategy seeks to embed learning at all levels of the organisation using a variety of learning models.

Evaluation by the council and external inspection indicates that staff morale has improved with increased understanding of the expectations and support available.

Staff sickness levels remain a challenge despite a sustained and focused strategy to achieve a reduction in the levels of absence through sickness. This remains an area where the council recognises the need to improve. There is a clear focus of attention on this issue with further developments in the departmental and corporate approaches to absence management.

There continues to be a robust approach to performance management which is increasingly embedded in day-to-day work and practice. This approach is being further developed to focus on the outcomes achieved and not just inputs and outputs. Work is under way to develop an outcomes framework for both services that will satisfy the requirements of the forthcoming National Outcomes Framework but will also enhance the quality assurance processes by providing a tool to demonstrate and measure the achievement of outcomes.

Areas of progress

- Corporate approach to service planning and development.
- Partnership and collaborative working.
- Development of outcome focused performance measurement.

Areas for improvement

- Staff sickness levels.

Providing direction:

The council has one lead member with oversight of both adult and children's services. This has been significant in enabling understanding of the service areas and the pressure that exists and cross over points, effective communication with members overall, and in supporting effective dialogue with and securing engagement from political leaders. There are effective relationships with other departments and continued work to sustain and further develop these. These relationships have been pivotal in supporting the department in making significant decisions in shaping services and investing in further development.

In addition to the usual scrutiny process, the council undertakes a "service challenge" on a quarterly basis. This involves members and senior council officers challenging the performance of each service area. This additional layer of scrutiny further strengthens both the internal quality assurance and performance evaluation processes as well as enabling the council to ensure effective corporate responsibility and accountability.

There is strong and consistent leadership and direction provided by the corporate director for modernisation and wellbeing (statutory director of social services) to the senior management team. This, in turn, is passed on to practitioners in both services. This is increasingly effective in supporting the cultural and practice changes necessary to deliver the modernisation programme. There has been an increased focus on communication between staff and managers, which has supported the reported improvements in staff morale and engagement with the change process.

It is understood that the statutory director of social services plans to retire next year. Given the strong leadership she has provided to date, it will be important that attention is given to succession planning in order to sustain the drive for improvement the council has achieved in recent years.

Partnership working at all levels is mostly effective, despite the challenge referred to above around strategic engagement with the BCUHB. The council has been effective in leading and supporting multi-agency initiatives, for example the SAP project. There are generally good arrangements for corporate approaches and buy-in by other departments to support initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of people in Denbighshire.

Areas of progress

- Clear and consistent leadership and direction.

Areas for development

- Succession planning for the post of Statutory Director for Social Services.