



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

Performance Evaluation Report 2013–14

Vale of Glamorgan Council
Social Services

October 2014

This report sets out the key areas of progress and areas for improvement in Vale of Glamorgan County Council Social Services for the year 2013–14

Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013 - 2014

Local Authority: Vale of Glamorgan Council

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Summary

The director's annual report highlights the successes and challenges during the reporting period and sets out the council's priorities for 2014-15. Measured against National Strategic Indicators (NSIs), there is some variability in the council's performance although overall it is considered to be good.

There is reference in the director's report to the resource implications of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 and of case law for the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards teams, but the report does not provide any detail regarding future planning for these changes. More detailed information has been provided to cabinet however.

The Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff Local Safeguarding Children's Boards have been successfully merged during 2013/14. Work has been taken forward via the council's Safeguarding Steering Group and schools to deliver safeguarding responsibilities within all the Council's Services (including schools and Human Resources). For other agencies that have safeguarding responsibilities, the council has implemented protocols in respect of neglect and child sexual exploitation.

CSSIW's looked after children inspection found that safeguarding vulnerable children and young people had been identified as a corporate priority for the council. Elected members and senior officers were well informed and showed strong commitment to support looked after children and young people.

In conjunction with partners, including Cardiff council and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (C&VUHB), a 'Statement of Intent' was produced in March 2014, which sets out the response to the Welsh Government's document 'A Framework for Delivering Integrated Health and Social Care for Older People with Complex Needs'. The council recognise the challenges of integration, while remaining strong in its leadership of a number of strategic collaborations.

A structured programme of change has been assisted by continued improvements in collaborative working and commissioning. There has been considerable activity with partners at both strategic and operational levels. The council reports that this is not confined to integration of health and social care but includes co-operation

between adult and children's services, between social services and other council services and across geographical boundaries with other local authorities and agencies.

The council reports that increasing demand for services and reduced resources is leaving a number of services under pressure. However, the council has a number of strategies in place to attend to the service gaps.

During 2013-14, spending on social services in the Vale of Glamorgan Council amounted to £51 million. This compares with £48 million in 2012-13. The council reports that, during 2013-2014, there was significant pressure on social services to remain within the budget set and a requirement to make a further £2 million efficiency savings during the year. The council reports that through service transformation and effective resource management, it has achieved its savings target of more than £2 million and ended the year with a balanced budget.

The council continues to provide strong leadership and planning in social services. The Wales Audit Office reports that the council has clear and robust financial plans in place. The 'Directorate Service Plan 2013-17' and the 'Budget Programme' were the key savings plans for 2013-2014. In adult services, expenditure on community care packages increased during the reporting period and in children's services there were reported demands on the 'children's placement budget'.

To ensure that there is a sufficient and skilled workforce, the council has developed the social services workforce plan, 2013-2017. Staff within social services are reported to be relatively experienced and well qualified and the workforce is stable.

There are detailed plans in place to deal with areas where further change is needed. The council's intentions to improve services are set out in the 'Social Services Plan 2013-2017', this includes ensuring that people's views on gaps in services influence how services are monitored and developed. The council reports that it has strengthened its consultation framework and that consultation exercises are planned to support any service reshaping. The council's annual 'consultation report' found, for example, that service users are generally satisfied with services. It also notes that some gaps are apparent in services, particularly with regard to respite care for adults.

One of the council's key priorities during the reporting period was to work with partners in implementing the 'Carers Information and Consultation Strategy'. Performance Indicators show that the council is strong in offering and providing carers' assessments.

Our inspection of the council's fostering service found evidence that children are encouraged, as part of the review process, to give their views about their carers and the placement. There are other consultation groups involving looked after

children within the council; including a corporate parenting panel, which has three looked after children representatives. However, our National Inspection of Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, who exhibit Vulnerable or Risky Behaviours ('looked after children inspection') found that consideration should be given to whether there could be a more consistent approach to support looked after young people to be engaged in participation and the development and improvement of service delivery.

The 'South East Wales Improvement Collaborative' (SEWIC) has agreed to monitor progress against Welsh Government's 'More Than Just Words' strategic framework. The framework aims to strengthen Welsh language provision in social care and health. The council maintains that progress has been made in identifying Welsh language speakers within their workforce.

Response to last year's areas of improvement

Area for improvement identified last year	Progress in 2013 - 14
Placement stability for looked after children, assessing and responding to placement changes for looked after children.	Some progress has been made, with the percentage of placement changes improving slightly and the percentage of school changes improving by 5 percentage points. However, further work is needed. The council has carried out an exercise to re-tender residential care provision from the independent sector. The service specification includes provision of up to three smaller units of accommodation to offer a wider range of placement options. The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales 'looked after children inspection' found that children's services had a comprehensive commissioning strategy in place.
Increase in-house fostering availability.	The 'Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy' was introduced. A social worker has been recruited to act as a recruitment officer with a focus on recruiting carers to provide further respite services, placements for sibling groups and placements for children with complex needs. The council reports that there has been an increase in the number of foster carers.
Harmonising policies for older adults integrated with mental	Healthcare services provided to the Western Vale in respect of younger and older adult

health services across two health boards.	mental health services are now provided by Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board.
Improve opportunities for employment, education or training for young people who were formerly looked after.	Performance in this area has declined in 2013-14 when compared to last year: from 55.6% to 44.4% of young people who were formerly looked after who are know to be engaged in employment, education or training at age 19. Raising performance in this area has been made an improvement objective for the Council as a whole.
Continue to plan ahead to meet the needs of an increasing proportion of older people in the population.	There is evidence of effective planning ahead in the various strategies referred to in this report.

Visits and inspections undertaken during the year

- National Review of Commissioning for Adult Social Care in Wales ‘commissioning review’.
- National Inspection of Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, who exhibit Vulnerable or Risky Behaviours (‘looked after children inspection’).
- Site visit to the Families Achieving Change Together service.
- Site visit to the Integrated Discharge Service.
- Meeting with independent domiciliary care providers in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- Meeting with the Vale 50+ forum.
- Observation of scrutiny committees.
- Quarterly engagement meetings with senior officers to review progress against areas identified in the 2012-13 ACRF evaluation letter.

While the looked after children inspection was intended to take place between 2013–2014, it actually fell into the beginning of 2014-2015. However, we have chosen to share some of its findings in this report as the information used for the review covers this reporting period.

Areas for follow up by CSSIW next year

- The Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board integrated mental health team.
- CSSIW will contribute to a WAO led review to examine whether councils are effectively supporting older people to live independently, including through joined up working across health and social care.

Performance

Shaping services

The council's single integrated plan or 'Community Strategy' covers the period 2011 – 21 and incorporates a number of key partnership plans and strategies. The strategy includes the 'Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy', 'Children and Young People's Plan', 'Community Safety Plan' (all 2011 – 2014) and the 'Older People's Strategy'. The council report that the incorporation of key partnership strategies and plans into one strategy is intended to improve public services in partnership and provide better use of resources. The aim is to shape and join up services that improve the health and wellbeing of citizens and maintain independence.

The Wales Audit Office reports that the council has effective plans for managing the financial challenges it faces and continues to consult widely with members and key stakeholders on its Budget involving them in identifying what services should be prioritised. The council report that service planning and governance processes have been revised and all the major stakeholders are engaged.

The 'Regional Collaboration Fund' has been used by the council to develop additional joint services such as reablement and to establish a regional joint commissioning unit across social care and health.

The merger of the children's and adults safeguarding boards across the Vale and Cardiff has been completed; there are now two regional boards for adults and children's safeguarding.

Adults

For Older People's services, a key priority for the council in 2013-14 was the development of a new locality based plan to re-model services with the emphasis on further integration with the health board. There is an intention by the council to collaborate with third sector and business organisations in order to extend the provision of reablement, rehabilitation and to deliver a preventative local approach to supporting older people to live as independently as possible.

The council state that, in completing their commissioning plans, they have been able to continue working with Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board and Cardiff council, particularly regarding integrated services and the remodelling of services for Older People. Through the 'Regional Collaboration Fund' there has been a new approach to integrated assessment, an increase in the amount of occupational therapists and improvement of reablement services for older people.

While there were some recommendations for improvement made, CSSIW's commissioning review found that the council have developed good initiatives, such as the regional commissioning hub, which concentrates on high cost, low volume services and provides a good foundation for joined up commissioning in the future. The head of adult services is a joint post with the health board and provides some clear advantages for integrated commissioning.

The 'Integrating Health and Social Care Services Programme' has been revised following work with the King's Fund and WIHSC. The aim of this programme is to accelerate the integration of health and social care services across the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff. In partnership with Cardiff council, the assessment system for older people has been simplified and during the year changes were made to IT systems to assist the new methods of working.

In order to support more people to be discharged from hospital (and to avert admissions to hospital), the council has extended use of the Vale Community Resource Service. Some progress has also been made in implementing the 'Integrated Discharge Service' model with the team now fully staffed. However, the rate of delayed transfer of care (DTOC) from hospital for social care reasons is 8.2 per 1000 of the population 75 years and over. This is almost double the Wales average figure. The council report that this is due to a significant growth in demand for services and vacancies in key teams within the Integrated Discharge Service. These vacancies have since been filled.

In conjunction with Cardiff council and Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, the council has developed a three year 'Dementia plan'. The purpose of the plan is to improve the offer of services to people with dementia care needs. A new commissioning strategy has also been completed for adults with a learning disability. Commissioning priorities include assisting people to become as independent as possible and enjoy life long learning. The council provide a registered Adult Placement Service. There are approximately 25 service users living with an Adult Placement host. The council reports that further work is in progress with housing providers and the remodelling of day services will also play a part in the strategy.

Children

The 'Children and Young People's Commissioning Strategy' sets out how the social care needs of children, young people and their families will be met within the resources available to the council during the period 2013 to 2018. The strategy identifies the challenge of meeting the needs of an increasing number of older disabled children and young people who will need support. The council's priorities include maintaining effective partnership working with all agencies through the new joint safeguarding children board across Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Between 2013-14 numbers of 'children in need' reduced and there was a reduction in numbers of children on the child protection register by approximately 30 percent. This may represent the success of the council's early intervention teams. The numbers of looked after children decreased from 196 to 187 in 2013-14. To promote stability and permanency for looked after children, the council has continued with its strategy of revoking care orders for children and young people who have been placed at home with their parents, "where it is assessed as being safe to do so", supporting long-term foster carers and kinship carers to seek residence orders or special guardianship orders.

For some looked after children requiring accommodation, the council has carried out an exercise to re-tender residential care provision from the independent sector, which includes provision of up to three smaller units of accommodation to offer a wider range of placement options. The council intends that the first of up to three residential units will open during the autumn of 2014.

The council is working on a regional collaboration adoption model with Cardiff, Merthyr and Rhondda Cynon Taf councils. The council is leading and hosting the regional collaboration and there is a cabinet agreed structure for it. Considerable preparatory work is being undertaken to deal with service modelling, governance, finance, and HR issues.

Areas of progress

- In adult services, the regional commissioning hub provides a good foundation for joined up commissioning in the future.
- The council is commissioning local residential services to support children within the authority.
- Service planning and governance processes have been revised and all the major stakeholders are engaged.
- Good progress has been made with the task of putting in place commissioning strategies across a range of service user groups.
- Systems are being developed to monitor the costs of service plans, individually and collectively.

Areas for improvement

The council needs to

- Decrease the number of people experiencing delayed transfers of their care from hospital for social care reasons.

Getting help

Adults

'Contact One Vale' provides a central contact line for people to get advice, guidance and support from the council. An 'out of hours' duty system is in place and the home safety package (TeleV) service, plus the GP out of hours service, are co-located with Contact One Vale. Contact One Vale also includes, amongst other services, the Community Resource Service, Integrated Community Nursing Service, Podiatry and Falls Service.

An improvement priority for the council during 2013-14 was to reduce waiting times for access to the Adult Community Care Team (ACCT). The council report that the Mental Health Measure has redefined eligibility for services and this has continued to affect the numbers of people (and the complexity of need) referred to the ACCT. During the reporting period, a waiting list has remained for both ACCT and the Community Mental Health Older Persons team (CMHOP). This means that early opportunities may be missed to intervene early and prevent issues for people becoming more complex. The council is sighted on the need to continue to drive improvement in this area so that it can achieve its ambition of supporting more people in the community. Occupational therapy teams continue to show good improvement in reducing waiting times for their services.

CSSIW's commissioning review found that the council's brokerage system for the procurement of domiciliary and home help services ensures there is a good range and availability of domiciliary care services. The council is developing an Extra Care scheme in the town of Barry and has plans to develop further extra care and other supported living schemes with independent sector providers.

The council report that it has increased the number of people supported at home, while reducing the number supported in a care home setting. This is in response to increased demand for services and assisting people who want to maintain their independence at home. Performance Indicators show that the percentage of clients supported in the community aged 18-64 increased marginally in 2013-14 to 90.5% and the rate of people aged 65 and over has increased from 74.7% in 2012-13 to 81.1% in 2013-14. The rate of people per thousand aged 65 and over supported in care homes has decreased by 2.3 percentage points.

The Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report 2013-14 states that the council "has been seeking to improve performance for a number of years" in the delivery of disabled facilities grants (DFG) but has, "failed to significantly improve its ranking compared to the best performers in Wales" (Annual Improvement Report 2013-14). There is evidence that the part which Social Services play in the overall process has become more timely.

For people who require residential accommodation as part of their discharge arrangements from hospital, CSSIW found - during a site visit to the Integrated Discharge Service (IDS) - that the 'placement adviser' had a good awareness of residential facilities in the council and surrounding areas and was valued by service users. This ensured that patients and their families were made aware of suitable vacancies in care homes.

There is a 'Carers Support Officer' in place to support carers of people receiving a service from the community mental health teams. The council report that this has resulted in more effective and timely assessments of carers' needs.

Children

Referrals and contacts for children and young people are managed via the intake and family support team. National Performance Indicators show decision making following referral is timely and there continues to be a decrease in the number of re-referrals.

Preventative services feature strongly in the council's planning and intervention strategies. Flying Start,- which targets early years support for families with children under four years of age, is a key element of the prevention strategy. Flying Start provision has been expanded into the Castleland area of Barry. The programme will double in size over the next two years to offer a service to 1,200 children.

The preventative service Families Achieving Change Together (FACT) team seeks to identify and work with families that require support at an early stage to prevent them from requiring statutory services. There were approximately 290 referrals to the service during the reporting period. CSSIW were told by families using the service that it had been very beneficial to them. Families had been supported with parenting their children and they liked the separation of the team from social service's children's teams.

The looked after children inspection noted concerns about the ability of services for children and adolescents with emotional and mental health issues to meet needs. The council's relationship with health services was considered to be overly dependent on the council's children's services providing funding and resources to assess and meet the therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leavers.

The Youth Offending Team provides preventative and statutory services to young people who have offended or are at risk of offending. HM Inspectorate of Probation undertook a Short Quality Screening (SQS) of the service in December 2013 and found a very positive picture in the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Offending Service (YOS). It noted that substantial progress had been made since its 2011 inspection.

Areas of progress

- The council has created a new integrated reablement service with the University Health Board in Barry Hospital and has completed the new Extra Care housing facility in Barry.
- Occupational therapy teams continued to reduce waiting times for services.
- The council has made significant improvement in its Youth Offending work.
- There are systems being developed to monitor the costs of service plans, individually and collectively.

Areas for improvement

The council should:

- Improve the numbers and timescales of disabled facilities grants delivered.
- With the University Health Board, consider ways in which the therapeutic needs of looked after children and care leavers can be met effectively and efficiently across health and social care. This is in regard to child and adolescent mental health services and is also a national problem across local authority areas.

The services provided

Adults

The council's overall aim is to assist people to remain living in their own home for as long as possible and there is a drive to provide home care arrangements as an alternative to residential models of care. CSSIW's commissioning review concluded that the council has a satisfactory range and availability of residential care services and has created a number of specialist provisions for people with dementia.

Adult services support people who have a range of needs including physical or learning disabilities, sensory impairment, mental illness and mental health issues found in older people. There is a range of services provided by the council, including domiciliary and residential care and commissioned services from a number of independent services within and outside the council's boundaries. Approximately 20% of commissioned adult services (care homes and domiciliary care) were non-compliant with regulations applied by CSSIW during the reporting period. However, overall only six percent of all regulated services were non-compliant in the reporting period.

In collaboration with Cardiff council and following consultation with stakeholders, the council has completed a day opportunities strategy. Woodlands Day Centre has been relocated and a review is underway to consider the options for future day

service models. Priorities set out in the director's report for 2014-2015 include: the implementation of the day opportunities strategy and to ensure that new 'Extra Care' accommodation for older people is used as an alternative to more institutional models of care.

For people with a learning disability, assessment and care management is undertaken by a multi-agency team. There are plans for the increased integration of services with Cardiff council and with the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. There is a limited but specialist service for people with sensory impairment, provided through the adult community care and occupational therapy teams.

Children

The council report that demand for one of their major preventative services, 'Families Achieving Change Together' (FACT), is high and at times has exceeded available capacity. The employment of an additional social care officer is helping to address this. CSSIW's site visit found that some cases were being held by this team for an average of five months with some cases held up to 12 months as compared to the policy guideline of three months. The council reports that the level of threshold has increased significantly in that referrals are at a 'child in need' level rather than in respect of children and young people in need of early intervention to prevent escalation to more mainstream services. This reduces the capacity of the service to provide preventative services to a greater number of families. There has since been an internal audit of the service, which is being used to develop a protocol between FACT and the intake and family assessment team.

The Integrated Family Support Service IFSS is provided in partnership with Cardiff council and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. During 2013-14, IFSS worked with 13 families in the Vale of Glamorgan. The annual report demonstrates that some good outcomes were achieved for some families that received services.

CSSIW inspected the council's in-house fostering service during the reporting period and found that overall the fostering agency has appropriate systems in place to ensure they recruit and approve good quality foster carers. However, there were three areas where the service was found to be non compliant with regulations. These relate to statutory visit reports, foster carer training and the procedure for monitoring the educational attainment, progress and school attendance of children placed. The non compliance has subsequently been addressed.

The council has provided funding for a qualified social worker to act as a recruitment officer for foster carers. The aim is to increase the number of in house foster carers within the Vale of Glamorgan. The council has met with its target to recruit eight foster carers during 2013-14; this represented a net gain of two mainstream foster carers.

Areas of progress

- The council has undertaken an audit of referrals between FACT and IFST in order to develop a referral protocol with the intake and family assessment team.
- There has been an increase in the number of foster carers with the focus on providing placements for respite, sibling groups and children with especially complex needs.
- Council-managed services are developing more resilient through increased integration and partnership working.

Areas for improvement

The council should:

- Through the families first management board exercise closer scrutiny of cases held by the FACT service.

Effect on people's lives

Adults

The council report that there is evidence that service integration with health in adult services is providing better experiences for service users. Outcomes include the reduction of duplication, better sharing of key information and streamlining of assessments.

The council has made progress in implementing the 'Integrated Discharge Service (IDS)' model with the team now fully staffed. However, delayed transfers of care from hospital for social care reasons have increased. CSSIW undertook a site visit to this service and spoke with staff, families and patients. There was evidence that operational staff handle circumstances around discharge sensitively. Nevertheless, some patients said they felt pressured when their families received letters setting out the need for discharge. Some delays were caused by staff failing to give families clear information or carrying out a task in good time. Families found that multi-agency meetings were unhelpful as arrangements for discharge were poorly communicated. Some people said that information given to carers by ward staff was confusing. The most satisfied recipients of discharge arrangements were those where the patients were settled back into the community, being supported by effective arrangements. The work of the placement advisor, provided through third sector arrangements, was very well regarded by people who had received this service.

The council report that for 256 adults provided with reablement packages nearly 70% became independent and 18% required a significantly reduced package of care. Through survey, the council was able to establish that, subsequent to providing support to service users, 80% of people experienced increased independence.

CSSIW's review of commissioning found that the monitoring of contracted services by the local authority is shaped by a policy and procedure, and is aligned with the national minimum standards for care homes. However, the procedure for brokerage and contracting relies on contracting for hours of service or tasks to be performed. Further emphasis should be placed on outcomes for people and the quality of care provided. The council reports that this is being undertaken during 2014/2015. Although performance is only marginally lower than the national average, there has been a decrease by nearly 10 percentage points in the number of care plans reviewed for adult service users. This reduces the opportunity for service users to comment on the quality of the care that they receive.

Children

In children's services performance is good, with the council meeting its obligations in many areas. However, meeting the health and education needs of looked after children poses a challenge for the council. The percentage of statutory health assessments undertaken for looked after children is much improved on the 2012-13 performance, although at 66.5% is still lower than the national average of 81%. School attendance of looked after children in secondary schools has declined to 87.6% and is below the Wales average. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are an important tool to establish clear targets and actions to respond to each child's needs and aspirations and to provide a continuous record of their attainments and achievements. The percentage of looked after children that have a PEP in place fell from 75.8% to 40%. This indicated a need to strengthen the working relationship between social services and education. Following implementation of new arrangements in January 2014, the council confirms that most PEPs were completed within the required 20 days of entering care or joining a new school. It will be important for the council to ensure that it sustains this improvement.

CSSIW's inspection of the council's fostering service indicated that children are able to give their views about their placement. This is through placement visits and independently chaired review meetings. In addition to this, carers have their approval review six months following their initial approval. There was evidence that children are encouraged, as part of the review process, to give their views about their carers and the placement. There are other consultation groups involving looked after children within the council; including a corporate parenting panel, which has three looked after children representatives. However, there is no overarching participation strategy in place to show how the views of children and young people routinely influence service development and improvement.

The council's objective to improve the stability of looked after children continue to take effect. The percentage of looked after children who had three or more placements was 10.4% compared with 11.7% in the previous year, although this is still higher than the national average at 8.3%. There is also an improvement in the percentage of looked after children who had one or more changes of school at 16.4% compared with 21.7% during the previous year.

The council strives to maintain contact with all young people who were formerly looked after and a personal advisor is made available for them. Outcomes for young people who were formerly looked after are mixed. While the percentage of young people formerly looked after who are engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19 has decreased from 55.6% to 44.4%, the average qualification points achieved by this group is the third highest in Wales. In partnership with the housing department and third sector provider Llamau, the council report that the needs of young people aged 16–18 years who are homeless are assessed effectively.

The council has undertaken a satisfaction survey for the FACT service. The survey found that overall parents appear to be very satisfied with the support they received from the service, particularly the individual approach that they offer. This approach was also reflected in comments from professionals. The increased confidence of children, young people and their families, coupled with positive changes to their circumstances were noted in the survey.

Areas of progress

- The council's integrated discharge service, operated in partnership with Cardiff council and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board is innovative in its scope and intention and when fully implemented should become an area of good practice.
- Provided through third sector collaboration, the placement advisor was very well regarded by people who had received this service when being discharged to a care home facility.
- The council has reduced the number of school placement moves for looked after children.
- The council has met with an identified priority of merging Cardiff and Vale Local Safeguarding Children's Boards.
- Arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable groups from abuse by council staff are being consolidated.

Areas for improvement

The council should:

- Ensure full implementation of the Integrated Discharge Policy;

Evaluate and improve arrangements for the review of care plans for adult service users;

- Review procedures for brokerage and contracting to ensure there is a focus on outcomes for people;
- Continue to improve rates of statutory health assessments and personal education plans for looked after children; and
- Improve on the percentage of young people formerly looked after who are known to be engaged in education, training or employment.

Capacity

Delivering Social Services

The Wales Audit Office report that the council has effective plans for managing the financial challenges it faces and has developed a plan intended to prepare its workforce for the future. The 'Medium Term Financial Strategy' for the period 2013-2017 has been published. This strategy details how the council plans to achieve a reduction in savings over the next three years.

To ensure that there is a sufficient and skilled workforce, the council has developed the social services workforce plan 2013-2017. Staff within social service are reported to be relatively experienced and the workforce is stable.

CSSIW's review of commissioning concluded that contract monitoring could be improved by developing a clearer focus on the quality of care experienced by the service user. During 2013-2014, the council and Cardiff council began looking at collaborating in the procurement of domiciliary care services. A template market position statement was agreed with completion scheduled for 2014-2015.

The council report their continued membership of the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) for social services. SEWIC brings together directors of social services from ten local authorities in the area to review and develop new services that require cooperation across the region. There is ongoing collaboration with the 'Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru', reporting that it assists in finding good quality external placements for children who are looked after.

Work continues with Cardiff council and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to resolve the difficulties in securing sufficient long-term nursing home placements. CSSIW's commissioning review found that there is evidence of good partnership working between the local authority and the health board to reduce delays in transfer of care from hospital, with partners working effectively to ensure appropriate access to services.

There is ongoing collaboration with the 'Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru', reporting that it assists in finding good quality external placements for children who are looked after.

Areas of progress

- The council is considering collaborating with others in the procurement of domiciliary care services. A Market Position Statement template was agreed during 2013-2014, to be completed during 2014-2015.
- The council has a stable and relatively experienced workforce whose performance is monitored and assessed.
- The Social Services Directorate is able to meet challenging targets for managing staff absences and for completing appraisals.

Areas for improvement

The council should:

- Consider the feedback from the national review of commissioning and ensure, in particular, that contract monitoring places a greater emphasis on the quality of care experienced by people using the services that it commissions.

Providing direction

There is clear leadership and direction for all social services functions. The council report that the adjusted corporate management structure became fully operational during the reporting period. The director is a member of the corporate management team and acts as deputy managing director on a rotational basis with the other service directors. The council continues to benefit from stable and effective political and corporate support in delivering its responsibilities.

The council reports that its key strategic plans for the reporting period were the 'Directorate Service Plan 2013-17' and the 'Budget Programme'. The service plan is linked to the council's key outcomes and objectives set out in the corporate plan for 2013-17.

A key priority for the council is the transformation of services for older people, reporting that older people still experience too much fragmented care across the care pathways shared with the NHS. It acknowledges that current service models are 'over-reliant on crisis responses'. The 'Integrated Mental Health Strategy' and 'Delivery Plan' have been developed in partnership with Cardiff council. An integrated commissioning strategy for the mental health service is also planned.

During the reporting period, the council participated in the Wales Audit Office scrutiny improvement study'. The findings from the peer review exercise concluded that there was good chairing at scrutiny, good relationships between officers and members, and that party political considerations did not impinge on effective scrutiny. The review also found that questions were well organised with members having researched the issues and prepared well. There was, however, reference to the poor acoustics of the venue, which made listening for the public very difficult.

Welsh Government's document a 'Framework for Delivering Integrated Health and Social Care for Older People with Complex Needs' has led to the draft of the council's Older Person's framework entitled 'Meaningful and Purposeful Lives' 2014-2019. This work was undertaken in collaboration with a neighbouring council, the health board, and the Third Sector.

The council has set out its priorities for 2014-2015; these include finalising the development of an 'intensive placement support team'. The team will provide increased assistance to foster carers in caring for children and young people with children and young people with more complex needs. Increasing the number of in-house foster carers also remains a priority. For children and young people who require residential accommodation, the council intends to provide up to three smaller units of residential accommodation for children with more complex needs.

There is an intention by the council to consider the emerging recommendations from the partnership project on 'Remodelling Services for Children with Disabilities' across the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff.

CSSIW's looked after children inspection found that safeguarding vulnerable children and young people had been identified as a corporate priority for the authority. Elected members and senior officers were well informed and showed strong commitment to support looked after children and young people. Corporate parenting arrangements were well established and had directly influenced outcomes for looked after children and young people.

The council has a cross-party corporate parenting panel, which is chaired by the cabinet member for children's services. There is reported involvement of young people who represent looked after children in the Vale.

Areas of progress

- The council continues to provide strong leadership in social services.
- The council continues its lead role in improving the breadth of regional working, including greater use of programme management at a strategic level.
- The council has participated in the remodelling services for children with disabilities initiative across the Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff.

- The council is developing plans to review use of custody levels in partnership with Cardiff YOS and Cardiff and Vale Magistrates Court.

Areas for improvement

There are no areas for improvement.