

REPORT TO: POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL CABINET

REPORT FROM: INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF THE PCC IMPROVEMENT AND ASSURANCE BOARD

REPORT DATED: 17 JANUARY 2019

1. Background

The Improvement and Assurance Board is an advisory body, established in April 2018 with a clear purpose, which is 'to assist the Leader in driving forward the required change and improvement in the Local Authority'.

This is the second report of the Independent Chair and has been timed to allow the CIW Children's Inspection Report, published on 9th January, to be taken into account.

It is important to re-emphasise that, although it is imperative that the Authority promptly addresses the recommendations of the CIW Inspection Reports, covering both Adult and Children this, in itself, is not sufficient; hence the Board's remit extends beyond this. The follow up to the recommendations in Sean Harris's Review of Leadership, Governance, Strategy, and Capacity - commissioned by Welsh Ministers following a request for statutory support under section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 from the Authority - is also overseen by the Board.

It remains the case that, whilst vitally important, simply delivering on the specific recommendations from the external reviews will not necessarily deliver sustainable improvement. Hence, the Board has an oversight of all the Authority's transformation activity, which aims to meet current service and financial challenges.

The scope of the Board's work is extensive, and by necessity, this report is a highlight report. It does not seek to cover all work underway or planned. That level of detail is covered elsewhere, for example;

- Monthly Board minutes, agendas, and papers.
- Monthly performance reports.
- Improvement Plan progress reports.
- CIW Inspection Reports as published.

This report will now cover key aspects in relation to Corporate, Children's Services, and Adult Social Care. The report will also, in summary form, highlight the priority areas for the Board in the coming months.

2. Corporate Matters

2.1 Senior Leadership

The recent appointment of a permanent Chief Executive, who commences at the end of February, is a very significant step on the path to sustainable improvement and builds on the permanent appointments elsewhere in the Senior Leadership team.

The Acting Chief Executive is in the process of implementing a new Senior Management structure which should ensure that the Authority is well placed to move improvement forward with increased pace. A key appointment that is currently being made is the Director of Transformation; a development that is both needed and welcome.

As with any new structure, it will need to be embedded quickly to ensure new ways of working become the norm. There are risks to be managed, and it is particularly important that care is taken to ensure that the statutory role of Director of Social Services is fully delivered.

In the last few months, significant progress has been made on putting in place the vision, frameworks, policies, and strategies. The coming challenge is to operationalise and embed this promising work, ensuring sustainability.

2.2 Vision, Finance, and Service Strategy

Since the review of 'Leadership, Governance, Strategy and Capacity', the Authority has adopted a clear corporate vision. It has also established a framework to deal appropriately with service and financial planning. The challenge now is to deliver on these as the medium-term financial plan and 2019/20 budget are developed and agreed.

The Authority has faced significant extra cost as the improvement journey has begun; this is not unusual in these circumstances. My last report identified the need to address the commissioning, contracting, and cost of key service elements (out of County placements, comparative costs etc.). As costs continue to rise, this work is ever more urgent, and progress must be made in the coming period.

However, as previously stated, essential though this efficiency work is, it is highly improbable that all, or indeed any, of the extra costs will be offset. The Authority, like all others, faces difficult choices in terms of funding increasing social care costs from a finite budget. It is essential that proper provision is made for social care actual costs in the current and future budget rounds.

Very positive work has been undertaken to develop a vision for Children's Services, and an appropriate range of policies and strategies for the Service, for example, dealing with safe CLA reduction; the pressing need now is to operationalise and deliver consistently.

2.3 Performance Management

There has been continued progress in terms of 'what good looks like', and the use of the performance management framework to define, monitor and deliver improved performance. Data and systems errors are being identified and addressed in order to improve the quality of performance information. There remains work to be done to achieve a full data set on Adult services.

As the recent CIW report shows, this work has delivered significant improvements in some areas, but there is much to do to achieve best practice levels consistently and comprehensively. The new Corporate and Service Leadership is striving to embed a performance management culture throughout the organisation; this remains an ongoing challenge. An emphasis on quality as well as numbers is recognised as vital and is developing.

2.4 Political Leadership and Scrutiny

- Senior politicians continue to be positively engaged in the improvement work and the Board.
- The Leader oversees the improvement effort with Cabinet colleagues on a regular basis.
- It remains unclear as to whether there is a consensus, politically, on the approach to scrutiny.
- All elected members are engaged in the budget process and face difficult decisions, as the significantly increased costs of social care have to be funded.

2.5 CIW Inspection – Children, January 2019

The full inspection report is available in the public arena, and therefore will not be detailed here. The report in headline terms found that since the last visit;

- Significant improvement had been delivered in a range of specified areas.
- Improvements were often caveated in terms of consistency or sustainability questions.

- There were areas where no improvements were shown since the last visit (e.g. CSE).
- There were areas identified for immediate improvement.

The key message, however, was that whilst there were many positives, serious concerns continue in identified areas.

The Authority needs to update its improvement plans accordingly, in order to directly address the findings of this inspection report, and the Board will monitor delivery of the plan.

3. Priorities

This section of the report details, in broad terms, the priority areas for action in the coming months. The Authority's plans will need to be at a more granular level, as it would be far too detailed to cover all matters in this report.

3.1 Children's Services

CIW Inspection

The Authority's improvement plan must directly deliver on key shortcomings identified in the latest CIW report, including but not exclusively;

- Addressing commissioning, contracting, and value for money of the full range of high-cost services.
- Developing and delivering a strategy for dealing with child sexual exploitation.
- Delivering a range of prevention and early intervention services that directly assist statutory services ,families ,children and young people.
- Achieving consistency and quality in social care practice.

Workforce

This remains a substantial and key challenge on which all else depends. The Authority is currently implementing a sustainable structure, fit for purpose, in stages up to April 2019. Delivering a permanent, competent, trained, motivated, and supported workforce is an overwhelming priority.

Practice

The delivery, comprehensively, on the Signs of Safety practice model is key to driving up quality, consistency, timeliness of social work. The Head of Service is appropriately driving this vital change programme which must deliver in the coming months. Quality of assessments, their timeliness, and outcome focus will all be impacted positively by this development.

Partnerships

Sustainable Children's Services require strong partnerships, internally and externally. The focus to date has been, understandably, on in-house matters and crisis management. In the coming period, as both practice and early help plans are developed, full engagement and joint working with partners is key.

3.2 Adult Services

The recent monitoring visit identified issues in terms of consistency and quality; these issues aligned with the Authority's own Quality Assessment Adults. The revised improvement plan is being developed and will be monitored in the coming period.

The major challenges facing the service are not unique to Powys. The impacts of demography, loneliness, and isolation, creating more demand. A diminishing working population and the non-availability of some services, e.g. domiciliary care.

The Authority's priorities are;

- Implement a clear practice model, delivering consistency and quality in basic practice, and ensuring a strong focus on safeguarding.
- Address with partners, service pressures by developing alternative models, including technology assisted care.
- Develop community capacity and personal resilience.
- Deal with domiciliary care capacity issues.

3.3 Corporate Services

With the strong focus on improving Children's Services, it can be forgotten that a major element of the improvement journey is the need to deliver on the Corporate improvements identified in the 'Review of Leadership, Governance, Strategy, and Capacity'. Failure in this area will mean that improvements made will ultimately not be sustained.

Since October 2017, significant progress has been made across the range of Corporate issues, such that policies, strategies, and frameworks have largely been put in place. The challenge now, as previously stated, is to operationalise and embed this good work. Hence, in broad terms, the priorities in the coming period are;

- To populate the new senior management structure, define and embed new ways of working, particularly between Corporate Directors and Heads of Service.
- To ensure the new arrangements are effective at the Member/Officer interface, and transparently deliver the Statutory Director of Social Services duties.
- To drive and embed the performance management culture across the organisation.
- To ensure that the vision is reflected in the MTFP and budget decisions.
- To further define the transformation programme, and drive the changes required at pace.

4. Conclusion

The agenda overseen by the Board is broad, encompassing Corporate, Children's and Adult Social Care. This reflects the reality that improvement will only be sustainable if the whole organisation changes, in line with the reviews and reports available to it.

The recent CIW inspection identified a range of improvements, but also areas yet to be improved, and continuing serious concerns.

The Authority is on an improvement journey and, in the broadest terms, is largely where it would be expected to be at this point.

The new leadership, the recently developed vision and policy framework, and more, gives an opportunity to increase the pace of change and embed the approaches in pursuit of sustainable improvement.

The priorities identified here are, by necessity, high level; the Authority is updating its detailed plans in light of recent reviews, and these will continue to be monitored by the Board.

REPORT AUTHOR: JACK STRAW