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Dear Ms Bulman

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) convened an Improvement Conference on 9 October 2020, attended by the senior leadership team from Powys Social Services, the Leader of the Council and portfolio holders. The Improvement Conference is one element in CIW's continuum of performance review activity carried out under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care Act section 57 and 58 and aligned with the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act.

The purpose of the Improvement Conference is for CIW to seek assurance that the local authority, through its senior officers and elected members, recognises and thoroughly understands the concerns held by CIW about its performance, provision or leadership and is able to demonstrate improvements have been made. CIW seeks assurance that the local authority has appropriate plans to continue to improve and has the resources and capability to deliver its plans.

The meeting heard from representatives of Powys Teaching Health Board (PTHB), Education, Dyfed-Powys Police, Audit Wales and the Improvement and Assurance Board.

Background

CIW inspected children's services in July 2017 and identified serious and significant failings. We found some children remained at risk of harm due to poor care and safeguarding responses from Powys County Council. We identified the lack of corporate

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

and council oversight and support for social services as a significant factor in this poor performance.

We inspected adult services in January 2018 and identified serious failings. We noted the same lack of support and understanding within the council for adult services and a range of serious and unacceptable delays and deficits in the response to people in need of care and support.

CIW placed Powys County Council under enhanced monitoring arrangements. The council developed improvement plans and an Improvement and Assurance Board was established to oversee progress.

Since this time, CIW has undertaken nine pieces of monitoring activity within the local authority, a follow up inspection of children's services in October 2018 and an Interim Assurance Review of adult services in March 2020. Most recently, we undertook a Performance Evaluation Inspection in September 2020.

The monitoring activity focussed on particular areas of service provision. We interviewed service users, managers and staff and other agencies. We read case files and other documentation. We examined progress in relation to:

- care and support- children's services - March 2018
- safeguarding and quality assurance – adult and children's services – July 2018
- care and support – adult services – December 2018
- safeguarding – children's services – February 2019
- initial contact service – adult services – May 2019
- support for care leavers – children's services – June 2019
- care and support – adult services - September 2019
- children in family court proceedings – children's services – November 2019
- reablement – adult services – January 2020

We maintained regular contact with senior managers in the local authority throughout this period and received performance data. While we could not complete further monitoring work in March, due to COVID-19, we continued with regular on-line meetings with Heads of Service throughout the height of the pandemic.

Children's services

The follow up inspection in 2018 identified improved corporate oversight of children's services but continued to note a lack of shared vision for children's services or a cohesive approach to how this would be achieved. Since this time, the local authority has invested in training and development and introduced a recognised framework across its services. It has established early help and edge of care teams to support children within their families and prevent escalation of need. Support for care leavers was a notable deficit in children's services previously, but we identified significant improvements from our monitoring work and we are aware of plans for further developments around accommodation.

Senior managers are committed to improving safeguarding for children at risk of sexual exploitation, and we are now assured of more effective systems and practice, although this took longer to achieve than anticipated. Review of performance data illustrates

improvements in timeliness of assessments and visits to care experienced children and those on the child protection register have been sustained over several months or more.

Adult services

We have identified incremental improvements to the care and support for adults in Powys throughout our monitoring work. The early development of quality assurance and attention to performance data assisted with managers' ability to review waiting times, for example. Response times in safeguarding are noticeably improved.

'Assist', the initial contact service, is a substantial improvement on its predecessor (PPD) in terms of responsiveness and the quality of information and advice provided to callers. Improved working relationships with the third sector has enabled better support for people in the community without formal social work intervention. We noted a move to strength based working and a growing culture of increased attention to the wishes of the person being assessed or provided with care and support.

Some improvements, such as timely reviews of care and support plans and increased provision in domiciliary care, took longer to achieve and should continue to be monitored carefully. Improvements in joint working with PTHB also took longer to be identified and initial progress in respect of discharge planning and reablement noted in January 2020 was reviewed again in the recent Performance Evaluation Inspection.

Performance Evaluation Inspection

Overall, we found the local authority has made significant progress since our last inspections. People in Powys can be assured the local authority is committed to enabling their voices are heard and ensuring they receive the care and support they need. There was a collective willingness to focus on prevention as a means of ensuring communities and services become sustainable for the future. Senior managers and lead members have raised the standards expected in social care.

The imperative of partnership working with PTHB during COVID-19 appears to have accelerated progress in joint working and highlighted the benefits to people of closer working, particularly in terms of discharge planning and reablement. We also found improving links with housing and education are supporting the social services agenda across the local authority. In children's services, we could see the impact of early help services and spoke to families who could articulate the help they had received to remain together and resolve the issues that had led to the referral. In adult services, the new bridging team provides domiciliary care to support discharge from hospital and bridges the gap between short-term interventions and longer-term care.

Improvement Conference

Colleagues from PTHB, Education, Dyfed-Powys Police, Audit Wales and the Improvement and Assurance Board provided their views. This allowed us wider insight into how Powys County Council is advancing on practice, corporate oversight, scrutiny and partnership working.

We note the commitment of the Council Leader and the portfolio holders to continue to develop services and sustain the improvements made. Following a history of changing senior leadership arrangements, there is now a stable senior management team in place across social services and key middle management posts are filled.

PTHB described the development of stronger positive working relationships, which include constructive challenge and shared goals. The police described improved partnership working. Safeguarding activity was maintained through the first wave of COVID-19. There is improved engagement by Powys County Council with the regional safeguarding board and the police now regard the systems around children at risk of exploitation as robust. Education colleagues described constructive joint work with children's services to improve support for vulnerable children. There was consensus that partnership working with senior managers in social services was characterised by high levels of honesty and transparency.

Frontline staff continue to receive regular supervision sessions to guide and support their practice and relevant training is available to them. Recruitment continues to be a challenge in children's services, despite efforts made by the local authority. Powys County Council has developed very good performance data and quality assurance reports, which enable officers and councillors to see where progress has been made or sustained and identify areas for further development. In combination with strength based social work models, this clear and structured approach forms the basis of an optimistic staff and management culture. This is a significant positive shift since our last full inspections.

There was consensus at the Improvement Conference that senior leaders know what is working well and what requires further improvement.

The next few years will bring additional challenges for Powys County Council to sustain the improvements made and further develop, in the face of longer term responses to COVID-19 and budgetary pressures. The Leader provides assurance of her cabinet's commitment to the transformation plans.

We are particularly aware of the need to maintain and further develop domiciliary care in Powys. Advances in technology-enabled care should take into account people's range of wellbeing needs and the risks of loneliness and isolation. The Performance Evaluation Inspection identified further improvements required for the reablement service, particularly in supporting people who live with dementia.

Outcome

Given the information gathered from our work over the last three years, including speaking to people using services and engagement with our partners, we conclude Powys County Council has made substantial progress.

Enhanced monitoring arrangements are no longer required. From the date of this letter, our performance review and engagement with Powys County Council will return to our usual levels of engagement.

We wish to acknowledge the hard work and determination demonstrated by senior leaders and staff at all levels to change and improve services for the people of Powys. We also wish to thank all those who facilitated and were involved in our inspection and review work throughout this period.

Yours sincerely



Lou Bushell-Bauers
Head of Local Authority Inspection
Care Inspectorate Wales

CC.

Dr Caroline Turner – Chief Executive, Powys County Council
Councillor Rosemarie Harris – Leader, Powys County Council
Councillor Myfanwy Alexander – Portfolio holder Adult Services, Powys County Council
Councillor Rachel Powell - Portfolio holder Children's Services Powys County Council
Dylan Owen – Head of Commissioning, Powys County Council
Michael Gray – Head of Adult Services, Powys County Council
Jan Coles – Head of Children's Services, Powys County Council
Jack Straw – Chair, Improvement and Assurance Board
Philip Hodgson – Improvement and Assurance Board
Alastair Davey – Deputy Director, Welsh Government
Lisa Williams – Audit Wales
Karen Newby Jones - Estyn
Becky Collier - HIW