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Public Guardian

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Ms L Stimson
Powys County Council
Appointee/Deputyship Unit
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Cambrian Way
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LD3 7HR

9 November 2017

Dear Ms Stimson

Re: Assurance Visit

I am writing following the assurance visit that took place on 18 October 2017. The visitor's report has now been received and reviewed. Thank you for taking the time to meet with the visitor and discuss the management of the deputyships.

Section 1 of this letter outlines the purpose of an assurance visit and how the information obtained at a visit is reported back to the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG).

Section 2 summarises the visitor's findings and Powys County Council's (PCC) performance against the public authority deputy standards.

Section 3 summarises your feedback for OPG and any further action that will be taken on receipt of this.

Section 4 then provides an overall summary of PCC's management of its deputyship cases.

1. Assurance visit process

OPG uses assurance visits as a means of supervising public authority deputies.

Assurance visits look at specific cases selected for review and also at how a deputy ensures the proper management and administration of their deputyship caseload. Court of Protection visitors conducting assurance visits make reference to the published public authority deputy standards when reporting their findings and observations to OPG.

The standards, released in July 2015, clearly set out what is expected of public authority deputies and provide an important checklist of actions and behaviour every deputy should follow. They form an important part of OPG's improved approach to supporting public authority deputies, and help to make sure clients' best interests are served at all times.

25 of PCC's deputyship clients were selected to be reviewed as part of the assurance visit. Of these, 23 were visited by a Court of Protection visitor. The visitor then met with the deputyship team to discuss the clients visited and the management of the deputyship caseload as a whole.

2. Performance against the deputy standards

Standard 1: Secure the client's finances and assets

In all of the cases selected there was evidence that clients' finances are regularly reviewed. There was also evidence that funds are used responsibly and in clients' best interests, and that the case officers monitor spending to ensure sufficient funds are available for future needs. Personal allowance is provided regularly and spending records are checked and audited.

Client financial statements are produced and reviewed every three months. Where appropriate a referral is made to DWP. The team has expertise in welfare rights and benefits, and it was noted that each of the clients selected had had their benefits reviewed within the last four months.

Independent financial advice has been obtained in cases where there is significant capital. In addition the team has a good understanding of the cost of the local care market and undertakes ongoing reviews in relation to this.

From the evidence gathered at the assurance visit PCC is meeting standard 1.

Standard 2: Gain insight into the client to make decisions in their best interests

In all of the cases selected for review it was demonstrated that the deputyship team is maintaining regular contact with clients. In the majority of cases there are

at least annual visits, and there is also contact with some clients via regular telephone calls and face-to-face meetings. In addition the case officers attend care plan and social work review meetings.

The team is also in regular contact with social workers and others involved in their clients' care. There is access to the Adult Social Care database where all communication and decision making is securely recorded.

It would appear from all the information provided that PCC is meeting standard 2.

Standard 3: Maintain effective internal office processes and organisation

There is a deputyship policy in place which is based on the OPG standards. Decisions are delegated based on financial values and there is an appropriate level of oversight and supervision in place. The named deputy has some involvement and authorises any major decisions. Three monthly updates on the deputyship service are presented to PCC's Adult Safeguarding Operational Group. Feedback and reports are also given to the Regional Safeguarding Partnership and the Powys County Cabinet.

The deputyship team were able to demonstrate a good understanding of the authority's safeguarding policy, and good management of any conflicts of interest that are identified. There are effective accounting systems and financial controls in place, and appropriate measures to protect confidential data.

It would appear from the information provided that PCC is meeting standard 3.

Standard 4: Have the skills and knowledge to carry out the duties of a deputy

From the cases reviewed the visitor was fully satisfied that the deputyship team has a good understanding of the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005 and its five statutory principles, and are applying these in the management of their cases.

The values and principles of the MCA were clearly articulated during the assurance visit. Both you and the case officers are all experienced and competent professionals who are fully aware of their role and responsibilities.

The team receives regular training and supervision to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to carry out the duties of a deputy.

From the information provided PCC is meeting standard 4.

3. Your feedback to OPG

The visitor was asked to gather any feedback from PCC to OPG during the assurance visit.

You advised that you access copies of the OPG102 and 103 report forms online and so there is no need to send paper copies by post. One of the OPG's aims is to make communication 'digital by default' and this issue is currently being reviewed by one of my colleagues. I will make enquiries regarding the work that has been done on this and will update you once I have some further information.

You also advised you would like to sign up for the digital service. We are now accepting registrations from all public authorities who would like to use the service. I will now contact you to discuss the registration process.

I am glad to hear that you are finding the monthly spreadsheet useful, and that you feel the system of having an allocated case manager is working well. I would like to thank you for your positive feedback and look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.

4. Overall summary

The visitor was extremely impressed with PCC's management of its deputyship cases and felt the service provided by the deputyship team is excellent. They reported that the team is well managed, effective and competent.

During the visits to the clients it was noted that the deputyship case workers were often known by name and spoken of extremely highly by both clients and support staff. It was clear the team has developed strong personal links of trust and respect with their clients, families and care staff.

From the information received from the visits to the clients and the assurance visit, the OPG has no concerns with PCC's management of its deputyship cases. It would appear that PCC is meeting clients' needs well in a manner fully compliant with the MCA and public authority deputy standards.

Once again, I would like to thank you for your co-operation in the process of the assurance visit. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on 0115 934 2817 or email OPG.PA@publicguardian.gsi.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely

Emma Cooper
Office of the Public Guardian