

REPORT TO: POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL CABINET

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

REPORT DATED: SEPTEMBER 2019

1. Background

The Improvement and Assurance Board was established in April 2018 with a clear purpose “assist the Leader in driving forward the required change and improvement in the Local Authority”.

This is the fifth report of the Independent Chair and should be read in conjunction with the previous report to avoid repetition. The report of January 2019, is of particular importance as it sets out priorities which remain relevant today.

The Board remit covers Adult Social Care, Children’s Social Care, and all corporate and transformational activity.

This is a highlight report and does not cover all aspects of work undertaken, that level of detail is covered elsewhere, for example:

- Monthly board minutes, agendas and papers;
- Regular performance reports;
- Improvement plan progress reports;
- CIW inspection reports as published

This report will highlight key issues at this point in time.

2. September Review of the Board

A planned review of the remit of the Board has recently been undertaken by the Independent Chair and Welsh Government officials, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. The outcome of the review is summarised below and is subject to Ministerial approval.

- It was concluded that the Board is an essential element of the governance arrangements established to drive forward the improvement required by the CIW Inspection and the Sean Harriss Review.
- It is recognised that the Board will be required at least until the time at which CIW have re-inspected both Adult and Children’s Social Care.
- The recent inspection of Estyn identified areas for urgent significant improvement in key aspects of Education Services. The remit of the Board covering as it is does all improvement and transformation activity, encompasses oversight of the delivery of these improvements.

The Terms of Reference for the Board have been amended to reflect;

- The explicit integration of the Education improvements

- Changes to independent members including the incorporation of direct education expertise.

The revised Terms of Reference are attached.

This report will now identify key issues in relation to the agreed priorities.

3. Corporate Matters

3.1 Senior Leadership

As previously reported key appointments have been made to the Senior Team both corporately and in Social Care. The Board welcomed the Chief Executives decision to separate Education and Social Services ensuring that a Director of Social Services can concentrate exclusively on driving the improvement required in this vital area.

Following the recent Estyn inspection, the Chief Executive has established interim education leadership within the Authority. In the short term, specialist resources have been secured to help drive forward the improvement agenda. These arrangements allow the Authority to establish its response to the inspection, and its delivery plan for the service, in a manner that will assist in the recruitment of a permanent Education Director in the coming months. Clearly this permanent appointment is both a necessary and a vital step.

As identified in the June report, the new Senior Leadership Team has in place the strategic and policy framework necessary to delivery. The task in the next 6-12months is to drive forward the, known to be required, improvements.

3.2 Vision, Finance and Service Strategy

It is the view of the Board that the delivery of the service level improvements will, in time, deliver the minimum cost option. It is vital that the financial imperatives and service improvements are given equal priority. It remains unlikely that significant financial savings can be delivered in advance of the identified service transformation. The Authority, has quite rightly, identified an outcome based approach to financial planning. This requires a significant culture shift and some very difficult choices. In the imminent budget round, and the medium term financial plan, the timing difference between the need for savings and the service level improvements will have to be managed. Impacts on other service areas during this period are almost inevitable, and are of course a matter of political choice.

3.3 Performance Management

The development of a performance management culture continues and examples of the use of evidence to inform change is increasing.

Progress has been made in terms of Quality Assurance with lead officers identified in both Adult and Children's Services. Impressive work has been undertaken to completely revise the strategic and policy environment for QA. An approach has been identified to ensure learning from this work is embedded within day to day

practice. This work is very encouraging. However, consistently meeting this ambitious agenda is hampered by instability in the workforce, as with other aspects of the improvement work.

3.4 Political Leadership and Scrutiny

It remains the case that senior politicians are actively engaged in both the improvement work generally and the activities of the Board. The Leader chairs an in-house board to oversee the improvement effort directly.

In the last month or so, a clear programme of member development activity has been established and delivery is underway.

The Board supports the Chief Executives commitment to both Member and Scrutiny development. The delivery of safe, high quality social care, in particular, is of course the responsibility of all Elected Members.

3.5 Children's Services

Workforce

Creating a stable, competent and motivated workforce remains the single greatest challenge in the improvement journey. A new structure has been implemented. Significant progress has been made in terms of appointing permanent staff to this structure. However, reliance on agency staff is still at a significant level.

The Authority has recently undertaken a major corporate review on all aspects of its workforce strategy and is using evidence from elsewhere to drive its continuing efforts.

Further progress is required if improvements achieved, and those planned, are to be sustained.

Practice Framework

The Authority has continued to drive the adoption of Signs of Safety as its practice framework. Training continues but is occasionally hampered by workforce instability. Creating the time and space to reflect upon and improve practice is a necessary commitment, again affected by workforce issues. However, the emerging evidence of the impact of this work both on practice and morale is a positive sign.

Top 5 Performance Indicators

It remains the case that these indicators are in the main stable at a higher level than at the time the Board was established. Performance has been impacted by the transition to the new structures. The Director has assured the Board, that in the coming months, post restructuring, further concerted efforts will be made to push performance to best practice levels.

The indicator most impacted by structural change has been the level of supervision. It is vital that this is addressed in the short term given that high quality supervision is a key determinant in relation to high quality practice.

Looked After Children Numbers

Numbers have stabilised in recent months albeit at a higher level than at the time of the inspection. The Authority was praised for its approach to the First Ministers practice review and now needs to implement the plans that it detailed.

Further Children's Services Matters

The June report highlighted three areas where limited progress had been made and upon which progress needed to be made in the short term.

The first issue related to Child Sexual Exploitation. The Authority has identified an interim lead role in taking forward this work on a cross authority and multi agency basis. There remains much to be done, but a clear and comprehensive approach is now underway.

Secondly, the Director has now brought forward evidence of the impact of prevention and early intervention work. This is an area the Board will continue to oversee as it is vital that the direct impact on reducing the pressure on statutory services can be identified and maximised.

Finally, the Authority needed to evidence the extent to which it is recommissioning high cost provision and this evidence is now beginning to feature in reports to the Board.

3.6 Adult Services

The Board continues to be briefed in terms of pressures on domiciliary care. The Authority has now developed an evidence based strategy informed by best practice and evidence from elsewhere. The Board notes this extensive work and will monitor its implementation in the coming months.

The Authority has also worked with the Institute of Public Care to examine policy and practice in relation to hospital discharge into social care. The report is awaited and will inform practice change. Implementation of this plan is key.

Service Transformation

The Director continues to develop the service transformation strategy which seeks to implement new practice models which deliver consistency, quality and focus on safeguarding.

At its November meeting, the Board will be reviewing progress. The extent to which the Authority can use good quality data on client pathways to inform this work will be a key test. As will its ability to deal with the impact of demography, loneliness and isolation. The initial drafts reviewed by the Board have been promising the next stage is to develop detailed delivery plans that are viable and sustainable.

Practice

The commitment to developing a strengths based model is welcomed and will be reflected in the transformation planning. A recent visit by CIW examined the strengths based approach. Initial feedback is reported as positive by the Director. Once the formal letter is received it will be used to inform approach in the short term.

Capacity by Service Area

This continues to be an area underdeveloped within the performance reports. Once the authority has developed the required performance information the Board will be able to examine the necessary action proposed. The Authority is making sound progress on reducing the backlog of reviews, but this remains a major performance challenge.

3.7 Conclusions

The Senior Management Team across corporate and social care has benefited from extensive advice over the last 12 months. Strategies and policies that either did not exist or were inadequate have been revised or created. The improvement task is well defined and the overarching need is now delivering at pace.

The Authority and the Board are agreed that, notwithstanding improvements already made, much remains to be done in the coming months to delivery continuous improvement and ensure that it is sustainable.