

Performance Evaluation Report Flintshire County Council

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertook a performance evaluation inspection of children's and adult services in Flintshire County Council (FCC/the local authority) in November and December 2023. This in accordance with CIW's Framework for Performance Evaluation of Local Authority Social Services and Cafcass Cymru.

The purpose of this inspection was to review the local authority's performance in exercising its social services duties and functions in line with legislation, on behalf of Welsh Ministers.

We consider the quality standards in the Code of Practice in relation to the performance and improvement of social services in Wales and key lines of enquiry. We seek to answer the following questions aligned to the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (The Act):

People - voice and control

- How well is the local authority ensuring all people are equal partners who have voice, choice and control over their lives and can achieve what matters to them?
- Is effective leadership evident at all levels with a highly skilled, well-qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision?

Prevention

- How well is the local authority ensuring the need for care and support is minimised, and the escalation of need is prevented, whilst ensuring that the best possible outcomes for people are achieved?
- How well is the local authority promoting resilience within communities and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively encouraging and supporting people who need care and support, including carers, to learn, develop and participate in society?

Well-being

- How well is the local authority ensuring that people are protected and safeguarded from abuse, neglect and any other types of harm?
- How well are people supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own informed decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible?

Partnership

- How well is the local authority able to assure itself that effective partnerships are in place to commission and deliver fully integrated, high quality, sustainable outcomes for people?
- Are people encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners?

1. **Summary - Adult and Children's Services**

- 1.1. There is a stable and experienced senior management team in place across both services providing continuity of leadership.
- 1.2. Partner agencies, providers and stakeholders told us that leaders are visible and there are good relationships at a senior level with open communication.
- 1.3. Practitioners also stated leaders are accessible, approachable, and supportive, and overall, ensure practitioners have the right training and skills. A few practitioners (16%) from children's services who responded to the staff survey noted the leadership and culture within the local authority needed to improve, although (86%) said they were well-supported by managers. Similarly, practitioners (91%) from adult services who responded to the staff survey also stated they were well supported by managers.
- 1.4. There are procedures in place to induct new staff members, although at times they would benefit from increased pastoral support. It is acknowledged that a new face-to-face social work collective has been set-up to offer peer support to all social workers across children's and adult services.
- 1.5. Practitioners clearly know the people they support very well. In response to a survey by CIW, many people said they felt respected and listened to by practitioners.
- 1.6. Recruitment and retention of social care practitioners is a national challenge across Wales. The local authority continues to work hard on strategies to support continued recruitment and retention of staff. Examples include commissioning a communications agency to promote working for the local authority and increasing capacity in the workforce development team.
- 1.7. The recent restructure across both services is acknowledged and has potential to provide more resilience, opportunities for greater support and

managerial oversight, as well as career progression. A few practitioners across both services felt the consultation about changes in structure had not adequately considered practitioner's views and had impacted their morale as it did not benefit everyone.

- 1.8. The local authority is well sighted on market stability in its area and the needs of its population. There are examples of the local authority implementing successful strategic plans in response to identified need and the lack of certain support services in its area. This has been achieved by working in partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) and other relevant partners to develop innovative services with significant capital investment. Examples include Marleyfield Care Home and Tŷ Nyth Children's Care Home.
- 1.9. The local authority has a comprehensive supervision policy. Practitioners benefit from regular supervision although the practice and standard of recording is inconsistent. The best supervision records focus on reflective practice and professional development. In other examples, more reflection on practice, and an improved focus on professional curiosity, outcomes and staff well-being is required.
- 1.10. The local authority benefits from good corporate and political support. There is a focus on ensuring statutory duties are met. Senior leaders, managers and politicians recognise significant action and resource is required to ensure the local authority's ability to deliver statutory safeguarding responsibilities. As a result, the local authority commissioned two managed care agency teams in children's services to provide additional capacity. This is impacting positively on the outcomes for children and families.

Key findings and evidence

We present our key findings and evidence below in line with the four principles of the 2014 Act.

2. People – Voice & Control

Strengths - Adult Services

- 2.1 There are examples of person-centred and comprehensive social care assessments which evidence practitioners have taken time to get to know people. Practice in this area, however, needs to be more consistent because there were also examples of less comprehensive and person-centred assessments.

- 2.2 There are good examples of assessments being written in the first person, evidencing well what matters to people. **This is positive practice.**
- 2.3 Unpaid carers' assessments are appropriately offered. Carers of adults told us they significantly benefitted from carers' assessments and provision of support. There is a wide range of innovative practical support to promote carer well-being including counselling, grants, short-term direct payment provision, and short-term break arrangements.
- 2.4 The well-established direct payment service is valued by people and professionals. It is utilised creatively to support people's well-being outcomes. There is a skilled team who support people to have more control over their care and support arrangements through the flexibility of a direct payment to meet their personal outcomes and promote independence. The local authority's user-friendly direct payment portal provides helpful resources for people. This includes a list of personal assistants and relevant details about them. This assists people to choose who they wish to support them and promotes self-control and autonomy and is reflective of **positive practice**. One carer told us of the significant positive impact direct payments had made on both her and her daughter's life, enabling her daughter to live at home with support and care workers they trust.
- 2.5 People's Welsh language needs are considered and recorded.
- 2.6 The majority of staff (85%) who responded to CIW's staff survey from adult services said they had a manageable workload, and they were well supported by managers (91%). Good morale and peer support within teams was also highlighted.

Areas for improvement

- 2.7 Care and support plans could be further developed by setting clearer SMART outcomes and consistently taking a proactive strengths-based approach. Also, whilst people's voices are clear in some assessments, this approach should be further developed in care and support plans. **Reference should be made to what matters to the individual and personal outcomes should be recorded more consistently in the first person.**
- 2.8 People are sometimes supported through a duty system whilst on a waiting list for allocation to a specific worker. This can be challenging for people as there is insufficient oversight of their circumstances, lack of continuity of support, and people have to re-tell their story. **The local authority should continue with its current efforts to ensure a consistent sufficient,**

qualified, and competent workforce to lessen the need for people to be supported by different practitioners who are unknown to them.

- 2.9 There are examples of direct payment reviews being held. However, there was one example which had not received a review. **The local authority must review the arrangements for the making of direct payments and how they are being used in line with Code of Practice 4 (Meeting Needs) to assess whether personal outcomes continue to be met.**
- 2.10 **When practitioners attempt communication with individuals, the local authority should ensure a more consistent evidence base that reflects the communication methods that have been considered and attempted.**
- 2.11 There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that advocacy is consistently considered and offered when it would have been appropriate. **This is an area that must be strengthened to demonstrate routine consideration of advocacy particularly in adult safeguarding.**

3. People – Voice & Control

Strengths – Children’s Services

- 3.1 Overall children and young people’s voice and choice is heard and well reflected in records. Section 47 enquiry records include direct quotes from children, focusing on what is important for them and what worries they have. A few core group minutes contained a voice of the child section which is **positive practice** although such practice would benefit from being more consistent.
- 3.2 Children and young people have opportunities to make their voices heard. We found **positive practice** with children having an opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions with a conference buddy prior to a conference held in line with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures (WSP).
- 3.3 Children and young people are overall well-supported by Personal Advisers (PAs). They benefit most from regular communication, with PAs taking a proactive approach in contacting young people and seek to obtain answers to concerns or issues young people may have. A care leaver told us “Mine [PA] is helpful and would find the answers if she didn’t know. Previously I had a bad experience but now she is the first person I go to if I have a problem.”
- 3.4 Care experienced children and young people also benefit from access to a peer support group. Children and young people told us they value this

opportunity to socialise with others who have had similar experiences. They told us; “I like meeting people who have experience of care,” “I’ve been coming to this group for eight years. It gets me out of the house.” This group has enabled some young people to advocate on behalf of care experienced children in formal meetings with the local authority, ensuring their voices are heard.

- 3.5 The local authority has also procured with a neighbouring local authority the ‘Mind of My Own’ app. It is an app that can be downloaded to a digital device with simple pictures and child-friendly words. It is designed for children and young people to share experiences and views on topics relevant to them. This will further enhance a digital offer for children and young people to make their views known in real time.
- 3.6 Children are provided with sufficient time and opportunities to share their views through direct child-centred work. In the pathway planning records for one young person, the social worker explicitly discussed and amended the plan following consultation with the young person, evidencing the young person had been heard.
- 3.7 There are good examples of documentation which clearly captured the voice of a child, and positive examples of records written directly to the child, providing clarity and focus as to why the WSP have been instigated which is **positive practice**. This practice could be more consistent.
- 3.8 Staff spoken with routinely acknowledged the support of managers. This is important in conversations about risk and safety of children as it promotes organisational accountability with practitioners feeling supported in decision-making.
- 3.9 Staff welcome the learning and development opportunities available to them, including support to attend training in certain areas when this was identified as a specific learning need for them.
- 3.10 There are systems in place to review the standard and quality of practice which include file audits. However, some practitioners were unaware of these systems. Therefore, whilst there is evidence of learning across the workforce, this could be improved with wider dissemination of relevant information.
- 3.11 Overall, there are good management mechanisms in place to support frontline practice. Supervision, management oversight records, and authorisations demonstrate there is line manager oversight in key practice areas. We were told by practitioners they value their managers.

- 3.12 The majority of staff who responded to CIW's staff survey from children's services said they had a manageable workload and (78%) also said they were well-supported by managers (86%). We also heard from practitioners who had progressed through different roles within the local authority and how well-supported they had felt. A few respondents (16%) expressed concerns about leadership and culture. They wanted their feedback and concerns to be taken into greater account, to feel more valued and respected, and they wanted the management and support of staff to be more consistent. CIW has received swift responses from the local authority in relation to how the issues raised are/will be addressed, including commissioning of leadership training, and convening of collaborative conversations to further promote and embed a positive culture across the service.
- 3.13 People's Welsh language needs are considered and recorded. We saw an example of the Active Offer being implemented in practice and a parent being able to converse verbally in the Welsh language in line with their wishes. **However, when Welsh is noted as a preferred language, this should also be the language in which documentation is written.** Unless it is the person's preference to have documentation in the English language and a record is made to that effect.

Areas for improvement

- 3.14 Disabled children and young people have to wait long periods of time for short overnight breaks in a residential provision. The local authority aims to provide alternate support in the meantime through direct payments for example. However, **the local authority must so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure it is able to provide looked after and other accommodated children with accommodation that is within the local authority's area and that meets the children's needs. This in line with Code of Practice 6 (Looked After and Accommodated Children).**
- 3.15 As a result of the fragility in the social care workforce, children and young people experience changes in social workers. Children are supported through a duty system rather than an allocated worker at times. Changes in social workers makes it challenging for children to develop trusting relationships. We heard from one young person how they are aware their social worker will soon change. Parents also have to repeat their stories and views to social workers. As a result of changes in practitioners, support can be delayed, with oversight of children and young people's situation also impacted. **The local authority must continue with its current efforts to ensure a consistent, sufficient, qualified, and competent workforce to meet its statutory duties, and should consider an exit strategy for ending the reliance on the commissioned managed agency team.**

4. Well-being

Strengths – Adult Services

- 4.1 There are examples of practitioners appropriately establishing whether a person is an adult at risk, as defined in the WSP, prior to implementing the procedures. From the social care records we reviewed, we found strategy meetings are generally well attended, and Section 126(1) (s.126) enquiries are largely undertaken and completed within statutory timescales.
- 4.2 The local authority offers safeguarding training to providers as well as in-house practitioners which is **positive practice**. This promotes consistency of practice and ensures that the roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding are widely understood.
- 4.3 There is a strategic commitment to develop community services. The investment in local hubs and other capital investment supports this agenda. For example, Hwb Cyfle is a purpose-built service for disabled people offering different activities in community-based environments to promote people's well-being. The provision would benefit from increased opportunities to support people to maximise their independence in relation to daily living skills.
- 4.4 There are good examples of the development of innovative teams/posts such as the progression and well-being team. These teams are designed to support people and to prevent escalation of needs.
- 4.5 We saw examples of people being discharged from hospital with support in a timely manner. In 2022, the council reviewed and then made changes to how older people are supported in their discharge planning from hospital through the formation of a Discharge to Assess and Recover Team (DART). The DART service has clear roles and responsibilities supported by effective governance.

Areas for improvement

- 4.6 In relation to adult safeguarding, we saw variation in social care records. Greater clarity is required in relation to the views of the adult at risk, decision making, determinations, and whether subsequent actions have addressed the original concern. The outcomes of the enquiries must be shared with the reporter. **The local authority must ensure that adult safeguarding practice consistently meets with the requirements of the WSP.**

- 4.7 There are examples of people's social care assessments and safeguarding reports indicating they lack mental capacity to make decisions about their care. The quality and decision making of these records is variable. **The local authority must ensure practice consistently aligns with the requirements and principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the relevant Code of Practice.**
- 4.8 In common with many other local authorities across Wales, people's rights are impacted by the waiting lists for Deprivation of Liberty (DoLS) assessments. **The local authority must ensure that arrangements for the provision for DoLS assessments are fit for purpose and responsive.**
- 4.9 The current recording system does not support practitioners to capture people's strengths and outcomes in a meaningful way. **The local authority should take this into consideration, with the imminent procurement of an updated recording system.**

5. Well-being

Strengths – Children's Services

- 5.1 Children and families' needs in Flintshire are complex and demand is increasing, as is the picture across Wales. Two agency teams have been commissioned to assist the core staff team to meet demand and the local authority's statutory duties. There is corporate and political support for this, evidencing continued support to prioritise services for vulnerable children, young people and their families. It is noted that there is corporate support to maintain the agency team until the time is appropriate to end their contract.
- 5.2 Overall, safeguarding responses, such as convening initial strategy discussions, are timely.
- 5.3 There is evidence of exceptional strengths-based practice utilised by individual practitioners. This is **positive practice. For this approach to become embedded, the local authority should consider a model of practice that highlights what needs to change in families, with greater focus on how family and wider community networks can be facilitated to keep children safe.** A model would promote a shared understanding across agencies of safeguarding practice and management of risk. It would also provide practitioners with consistent tools and templates in relation to recording and maintaining focus on risk. It is acknowledged that the local authority is on a journey to fully implement a model of practice. This has already commenced with an initial focus on neglect, with the local authority having purchased a neglect-graded profile tool through the National Society

for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to support practice. This is a **positive** response by the local authority to a high number of children affected by neglect on the child protection register (CPR).

- 5.4 In the specific early phase of a Section 47 enquiry, the standard of practice is good and there is evidence of appropriate managerial oversight to inform and support practice.
- 5.5 We saw an example of **positive practice** where a health professional chaired a core group meeting, evidencing in line with the WSP, that chairing and minuting of these meetings is a joint responsibility between children's services and relevant partners.¹

Areas for improvement

- 5.6 There is indication the threshold for significant harm is not always applied consistently when considering removing children from the CPR. We heard this may be as a result of a misplaced conception that maintaining a child's name on the CPR is a means of ensuring continued support services for a child and their family. **The local authority should consider sharing guidance more widely with relevant partners and stakeholders to ensure consistent and shared understanding of thresholds and information sharing protocols.**
- 5.7 Risks are appropriately considered, with timely progression to the right service for children and families. There are, however, delays for some families subject to child protection procedures as enquiries are not always completed promptly. It is not always clear what the determination is post completion of a Section 47 enquiry. **Managers must ensure that, following the timely conclusion of a child protection enquiry, next steps are explicitly recorded with clarity and rationale in relation to the determinations under Section 3 Part 1 of the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.**
- 5.8 As Section 47 enquiries are not always completed in the required timescales, this impacts on timely decision making as to whether a child's name should be included on the CPR. **The local authority should ensure that when it has been determined that a child is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing harm, abuse or neglect, a child protection conference is convened within 15 working days of the strategy discussion/meeting, or the last strategy discussion/meeting (if more than one has occurred), which initiated the Section 47 enquiry.**

¹ [Full report - Rapid Review of Child Protection Arrangements FINAL FOR PUBLICATION \(careinspectorate.wales\)](#)

- 5.9 Some care and support protection plans viewed are service led, with a focus on compliance instead of outcomes. Care and support protection plans are not routinely updated after core group meetings. It is acknowledged that recent training commissioned by the local authority has focused on clarifying roles and responsibilities for social workers. **An outline care and support protection plan devised at first conference should be developed into a more detailed plan at the first core group meeting as is highlighted in the WSP. Subsequent core groups should specifically review progress of outcomes for the child's safety. Leaders should ensure practitioners have clear systems and standards for developing plans which are child-centred and outcome-focused.**
- 5.10 We saw examples of disclosures by police about an individual's criminal background, with a potential risk for a child, having been appropriately considered to promote children's safety. However, sharing of the information was not always completed in a timely manner with pressures of work cited in one example as the reason for the delay. **When the local authority is aware of such information, and it has been agreed they can share information with relevant individuals to promote a child's safety, this must be done in a timely manner.**

6. Prevention

Strengths – Adult Services

- 6.1 Capacity has been created to enable applications for grant funding to be made. This is coordinated through a designated officer, and evidences good corporate support for promoting the preventative agenda.
- 6.2 There are good examples of the local authority working hard to reshape and redesign its service in lines with its vision of people receiving reablement and community-based rehabilitation support. For instance, the expansion of Marleyfield Care Home which enables people to recover following a hospital stay and return to live independently. The local authority invested from its own capital programme supported by Welsh Government grants. The development and implementation of the operational model has been co-produced with BCUHB. This supports the local authority's plan to increase its own residential care capacity, whilst also supporting BCUHB with additional Step-Up Step-Down bed capacity.
- 6.3 Further demonstration of FCC's commitment to support people to return home and to live independently is its plan to expand step-down provision through the development of Croes Atti Newydd, building on their learning from Marleyfield Care Home. Croes Atti Newydd is being developed as part of the

local authority's own capital development supported by Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund and will offer other services in addition to a step-down facility.

- 6.4 The local authority is proactive in promoting different types of services to support people to reach their outcomes, and to enable people to live in their own homes for longer. An example of this **positive practice** is the local authority's promotion and support for micro carers. Similar to the direct payment portal, the local authority has an easy to navigate micro carer portal. This enables people to be able to find and manage their own support. The micro carers are on a specific framework, evidencing their suitability to support people and enabling the local authority to directly commission a service from them.
- 6.5 As is common across Wales, people in some areas of the county are having to wait for domiciliary care packages to support them with their care and support needs. This means people may be inadequately supported during this time, and this may place additional responsibilities on unpaid carers. The Council's Plan for 2023-2028 highlights innovative ideas to try and expand options to provide support. Examples include continuing to grow their in-house homecare service, utilising a rolling scheme of recruitment and promoting and supporting the expansion of micro carers. There is also the availability of pooled cars, and **positive practice** of the local authority commissioning paid drivers to transport care workers who are non-drivers as means of ensuring people are supported.
- 6.6 Single Point of Access (SPoA) in Flintshire provides a swift and responsive service seven days a week which is **positive practice**. We observed the high number of calls coming in and practitioners respectfully answering the calls. This has been corroborated by a person who spoke with us "*They were swift and I'm always confident I can speak to people in SPOA.*" They were equally complimentary of other parts of adult services, evidencing adult services as a whole is focused on preventing escalation of need.

Areas for improvement

- 6.7 Waiting lists for social care assessments and reviews are high and can impact negatively on people. Oversight of waiting lists for social care assessments is inconsistent across teams. Whilst we received verbal reassurance about oversight of waiting lists in teams, there was limited records to evidence this. **The local authority must ensure that waiting lists are appropriately and consistently monitored and key information is recorded to evidence appropriate prioritisation of cases.**

- 6.8 Care and support plans are not always reviewed in a timely manner. **The local authority must keep care and support plans under review to understand whether the provision of care and support is meeting the identified needs of the individual, and to consider if their needs have changed and if a re-assessment is required.**

7. Prevention

Strengths – Children’s Services

- 7.1 The local authority is focused on ensuring the need for care and support is minimised and escalation of need is prevented. There is a well-established Early Help Hub, which includes a range of partners and third sector agencies. The focus is on delivering more timely and appropriate support to families with greater levels of need to those who are supported by universal service solely. In addition, the local authority has created an Information, Advice and Assistance service (IAA) at the beginning of this year. This was a response to the pressure of increase in contacts with the focus on continuing to support families at an early stage.
- 7.2 There is a focus on promoting the well-being of young carers. Children were observed to benefit from the availability of support in a young carers support group. They clearly enjoyed the activities on offer and the company of both practitioners and peers alike.
- 7.3 There is a clear strategic focus on supporting placements in a care home and foster placements, as well as supporting children to remain in the care and/or return to the care of their families through Multi Systemic Therapy (MST). The teams provide support 24 hours a day 7 days a week. One of the teams, North East Wales MST- FIT, supports children who live in Tŷ Nyth as well as children who live at home with their parents. Tŷ Nyth is the first Integrated Treatment Model Home in Wales and is subject of tripartite funding between the local authority, BCUHB and a neighbouring local authority. Children and young people’s outcomes have improved following support from MST.
- 7.4 The local authority has developed a toolkit in response to the Public Law Outline (PLO) refresh implemented in January 2023 by the judiciary across England and Wales. It contains a range of new documentation which will further promote continuity of strengths-based practice. It also provides clarity to parents about what the concerns are about their children, and what changes are required to reduce the concerns. Children who are ten years of age or over will also be allocated a PLO buddy, similar to a conference buddy, to ensure their voice is obtained as part of these pre-court proceedings specifically. This is **positive practice** as it further promotes the voice of

children and their families. Practice can be improved by ensuring that records sufficiently detail when and where a decision was made to commence PLO proceedings, and to reflect that decision making in this respect is timely.

Areas for improvement

- 7.5 Children who are neurodiverse or who are awaiting diagnosis of a potential neurodiverse condition, and their parents, do not always receive prompt and adequate support and communication. Delays in support impact on their well-being. It is acknowledged that the local authority is well-sighted on this and has recently developed their service to include having a dedicated role to respond and support parent/carers sooner, whilst their children are awaiting a neurodiverse assessment/diagnosis. **The local authority should continue to have oversight and monitor the effectiveness of this development and the impact of this for children and families.**

8. Partnership

Strengths – Adult Services

- 8.1 The local authority works well with providers across Flintshire at an operational level to support service delivery and efficiency. Providers told us they have open lines of communication with staff in the local authority and feel comfortable to use them as a 'sounding board' for new ideas and projects.
- 8.2 The local authority holds frequent meetings with colleagues in BCUHB to discuss quality of care and provision in care homes in the area. We observed how this forum promotes effective information sharing and informed decision-making in relation to subsequent actions that agencies would take.
- 8.3 The Progress for Providers scheme is highly regarded by practitioners and providers alike. The scheme enables care home and domiciliary support providers to work towards different awards of bronze, silver and gold in relation to how well they deliver personalised support to people. The approach is **positive** as it promotes outcome-based practice rather than traditional task-based support and the range of tools and guidance to support providers is valuable. The local authority regrades providers according to their performance.
- 8.4 The local authority supports young people with a learning disability up to the age of 25 years to obtain work placements with the aim of paid employment. A more recent development is that this will now be offered to individuals over the age of 25 years with a learning disability. This is a positive joint approach between the local authority, HFT (an established charity supporting people

with learning disabilities), housing association Clwyd Alyn, and Coleg Cambria.

Areas for improvement

- 8.5 Most partnerships are working well at an operational level; however, information is not always shared effectively due to different methods and systems for recording information. This means information regarding people's care and support needs is not easily available across partners, to include some practitioners employed by the local authority. **The local authority should consider, whilst they are procuring a new recording system, how they can further promote information sharing.** All relevant practitioners in different teams within FCC such as locality, substance misuse, and community mental health teams should be able to access all records of the person they support. This would support information sharing and promote a greater oversight and understanding of a person's circumstances.
- 8.6 The local authority must strengthen its systems around carers assessments to ensure the rights and voice of all carers are fully promoted. Carers assessments are not adequately recorded or communicated with the local authority. We saw examples where practitioners are not aware of whether a carer's assessment had been undertaken, and if so, the outcome of the assessment. **The local authority must have greater oversight of these assessments to be confident that it fully meets its responsibilities in line with the requirements of Part 3 and Part 4 of the Code of Practice (assessing and meeting the needs of individuals).**

9. Partnership

Strengths – Children's Services

- 9.1 Systems and relationships are mainly in place to facilitate effective partnership working. Both internal to children's services and in working with partners, there is a shared ethos to safeguard and promote the well-being of children.
- 9.2 Overall, at a strategic level, work with partners is based on a shared understanding and cooperation. Partners described leaders as being transparent and open to challenge. There is regular communication across sector leads, although persistent change in managers in partner agencies was cited as a challenge in working consistently. Some third sector partners considered their work with children's services could be improved in relation to inclusivity and their participation in planning of services.

- 9.3 Information sharing between agencies through Section 47 enquiries, initial child protection conferences and core groups is evident. In further meetings such as review conferences, there can be diminishing contribution from partner agencies. Partner agencies expressed they wished to be more involved in initial strategy discussions/meetings. There is work already underway to establish a MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub) within the local authority which will further promote involvement and multi-agency working.
- 9.4 Placement sufficiency is a challenge across Wales and the local authority has in the past placed children in services which are operating without registration. However, the local authority has utilised significant capital investment to meet its duty of providing sufficient accommodation within its own area to children looked after. An example of this **positive practice** is the recent investment in in house residential care including the recent build of Y Dderwen and the development of 2 small group homes. Children benefit from living close to their family, friends, and community.
- 9.5 Care leavers benefit from continued support once they leave care. This in the form of the 'When I am Ready' scheme, whereby young people remain with foster carers whilst they transition into adulthood. Young people told us how they valued this provision. However, they said they feel hurt that the documentation refers to them as tenants rather than family members of the foster carers they choose to continue to live with. They very much regard themselves as part of the foster carers' family and vice versa. **The local authority should consider how they can influence a change in terminology.**

Areas for improvement

- 9.6 **Children's services must communicate information about duty to report outcomes in a timely manner to the person who made the initial report.** There are inconsistencies in current practice in relation to this.
- 9.7 **Children's services must ensure that appropriate agencies are invited to strategy discussions/meetings in line with the WSP, to include but not limited to, a practitioner making the report and practitioners from education and community-based health services if relevant.**
- 9.8 The views and experiences of parent/carers of disabled children indicated that the availability of support to them could be strengthened and more flexible. They told us the support offered was not always suitable for their and their child's needs. **The local authority must ensure the parent/carer is involved as a full partner in assessing to what extent they are able to**

meet their personal outcomes, or with the support of others who are willing to provide that support; or with the assistance of services in the community to which they have access.

- 9.9 We saw examples of children who were leaving care having to present as homeless to receive housing support. Practitioners also shared that accommodation for young people is an ongoing challenge and an area for improvement. There are clear longer-term options to support young people in general with housing support, in line with the well-being objectives in the Council Plan for 2023-2028. An example is a strategic plan, informed by a multi-agency approach, to create a young person's homeless hub which will offer accommodation as well as support services. **However, the local authority must continue to prioritise its programme of ensuring appropriate housing options for young care leavers and relevant 16–17-year-olds.** This in both the longer and shorter term, and where possible, avoiding the need for care leavers to present as homeless.

10. Next Steps

We expect Flintshire County Council to take appropriate action to improve the areas identified for improvement. We will monitor progress through our ongoing performance review activity with the local authority. We welcome the local authority sharing the positive practice identified with other local authorities, to share learning and help drive continuous improvement in statutory services throughout Wales.

11. Methodology

Fieldwork

- Most inspection evidence was gathered by reviewing the experiences of 45 people through review and tracking of their social care record. We reviewed 34 social care records and tracked 10.
- Tracking a person's social care record includes having conversations with the person in receipt of social care services, their family or carers, key worker, the key worker's manager, and where appropriate other professionals involved
- We engaged, through interviews and/or focus groups, with 40 people receiving services and/or their carer.
- We engaged, through interviews and/or focus groups with 133 local authority employees and elected members (this included but was not limited to social workers, team managers, operational managers, senior managers and director of social services).
- We interviewed a range of partner organisations.

- We reviewed a sample of staff supervision records.
- We observed a resource panel and an interagency meeting in adult services.
- We reviewed supporting documentation sent to CIW for the purpose of the inspection.
- We administered surveys to local authority social services staff, partner organisations and people.

Our Privacy Notice can be found at <https://careinspectorate.wales/how-we-use-your-information>.

12. Welsh Language

CIW is committed to providing an active offer of the Welsh language during our activity with local authorities.

The active offer was not required on this occasion. This is because the local authority informed us that people taking part did not wish to contribute to this performance evaluation inspection in Welsh.

13. Acknowledgements

CIW would like to thank staff, partners and people who gave their time and contributed to this inspection.

14. Glossary

Must -Improvement is deemed necessary in order for the local authority to meet a duty outlined in legislation, regulation or code of practice. The local authority is not currently meeting its statutory duty/duties and must take action.

Should - Improvement will enhance service provision and/or outcomes for people and/or their carer. It does not constitute a failure to meet a legal duty at this time; but without suitable action, there is a risk the local authority may fail to meet its legal duty/duties in future.

Positive practice - Identified areas of strength within the local authority. This relates to practice considered innovative and/or which consistently results in positive outcomes for people receiving statutory services.

Prevention and Early Intervention - A principle of the Act which aims to ensure that there is access to support to prevent situations from getting worse, and to enhance the maintenance of individual and collective well-being. This principle

centres on increasing preventative services within communities to minimise the escalation of critical need.

Voice and Control - A principle of the Act which aims to put the individual and their needs at the centre of their care and support, and giving them a voice in, and control over, the outcomes that can help them achieve well-being and the things that matter most to them.

Well-being - A principle of the Act which aims for people to have well-being in every part of their lives. Well-being is more than being healthy. It is about being safe and happy, having choice and getting the right support, being part of a strong community, having friends and relationships that are good for you, and having hobbies, work or learning. It is about supporting people to achieve their own well-being and measuring the success of care and support.

Co-Production - A principle of the Act which aims for people to be more involved in the design and provision of their care and support. It means organisations and professionals working with them and their family, friends and carers so their care and support is the best it can be.

Multi-Agency working - A principle of the Act which aims to strengthen joint working between care and support organisations to make sure the right types of support and services are available in local communities to meet people's needs. The summation of the Act states that there is a requirement for co-operation and partnership by public authorities.

SMART - SMART is a best practice framework for setting goals. A SMART goal should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound.

What matters - 'What Matters' conversations are a way for professionals to understand people's situation, their current well-being, and what can be done to support them. It is an equal conversation and is important to help ensure the voice of the individual or carer is heard and 'what matters' to them