



# Inspection of Children's Services Gwynedd Council

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

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## Introduction

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) undertook an inspection of services for children in Gwynedd during May 2018.

Our approach to the inspection was underpinned by the eight well-being statements and associated well-being outcomes as outlined in the Welsh Government's *National Outcomes Framework for People who need Care and Support and for Carers who need Support* (March 2016). Our approach builds upon the associated local authority quality standards set out in the *Code of Practice in Relation to Measuring Social Services Performance issued under section 145 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act*. In addition, the inspection considered the local authority's capacity to improve through an analysis of the leadership and governance of its social services functions.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children and their families. The scope of the inspection included:

- the experience and progress of children on the edge of care, children looked after and care leavers including the quality and impact of prevention services, the effectiveness of decision-making, care and support and pathway planning
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after and children who return home including the use of fostering, residential care and out of local authority area placements
- adherence to fostering service regulation and national minimum standards
- the quality of leadership, corporate parenting and governance arrangements in place to determine, develop and support service sufficiency and delivery particularly in relation to looked after children, care leavers and their families.

While the main focus of the inspection was on the progress and experience of children and young people looked after and care leaver's transition into adulthood, the inspection included a focus on children, young people and their family's engagement with:

- Information, advice or assistance (IAA), preventative services;
- Assessment/reassessment of needs for care and support and care and support planning;
- Child protection enquiries, procedures, urgent protective action, care and support protection plans.

Inspectors read case files, interviewed staff and administered a staff survey, interviewed managers, and professionals from partner agencies. Inspectors talked to children and their families wherever possible. Young people and care leavers attended two focus groups.

## Overview of Findings

- We found Gwynedd children's services demonstrated significant strengths and has a committed and stable workforce who are responding to an increasing but manageable workload both in terms of complexity and volume. Staff demonstrated dedication and commitment to promoting best outcomes for children and families.
- The Information Advice and Assistance (IAA) service is an area for ongoing development. The authority had only recently implemented the requirements of the Social Services and Well Being Act (SSWBA) and it recognised that the service needed to be embedded and further developed, informed by learning from operational practice. Work is required in developing how people are informed about services offered by the department, what they can expect and what's available within the community.
- Referrals were responded to in a timely manner, and on the whole we saw effective decision making with conversations held by duty workers in respect of eligibility in line with requirement of the SSWBA. An area for further development is the proactive offer of support with focus on strengthening links with 3<sup>rd</sup> sector and preventative services.
- Gwynedd Council's supporting families' strategy is being developed and requires greater identification of need/unmet need within the county. Priority should be given to progress this strategy and strengthen preventative services for young people and families. There were recognised gaps in prevention and early intervention across Gwynedd and a lack of awareness of support services available amongst staff.
- Assessments on the whole were timely, responsive to children's emerging needs and of a good quality. We saw examples of assessments which focussed on children's outcomes with clear analysis in balancing risks, strengths and barriers. Where the assessment identified eligible need, a timely care and support plan was developed. The quality of the care and support plans seen was inconsistent and where there had been a significant change in the individuals or family's circumstances assessments were not routinely updated to assist more effective care planning and support.
- Social work staff told inspectors that the timeliness and quality of partners contributions to assessments was generally good. Inspectors saw some effective multi agency partnership working and a commitment to supporting families and maintaining children within their families. We saw examples where the intensive involvement of the children's social worker, the social services edge of care team, and partner agencies had resulted in good outcomes for the child and their family.

- We saw evidence of care and support plans regularly reviewed in collaboration with children, families and partner agencies. There is a need to strengthen the care and support plans to enable children, young people and families to have a clearer understanding of decisions made, and in a format which is easy to follow.
- Looked after Children's Reviews were held in line with requirements; however work needs to be undertaken to strengthen reviewing arrangements for children and young people creating improved experiences of reviews. Some children and young people did not view their review or pathway process positively.
- Keeping children safe was a high priority for Gwynedd children's services. Procedures were robust and timely; staff were confident in their application and took pride in the positive outcomes they achieved for children through their work. Gwynedd Council is seeking to further strengthen performance in focusing on their engagement with families in developing an 'effective child protection model'.
- We saw strong leadership and governance in Gwynedd Council. The corporate parenting board is ambitious to develop best outcomes for looked after children with good support from across the council.
- The head of service led the children's services department with confidence, demonstrated strong leadership and commitment to continuous development. Professional social work expertise is located at this tier of the organisation. The senior management team created a positive, ambitious and supportive work culture. Senior managers within children's services were knowledgeable, experienced and offered stability for the workforce. There had been changes at team manager tier with some managers new to their role.
- On the whole children, young people and families were positive in respect of the support provided by Gwynedd Council. Young people told us they particularly valued honesty and viewed the role of the personal advisors as key in assisting their transition to adulthood.
- The Welsh active offer was fully embedded within the local authority.
- There is a need to strengthen fostering arrangements to ensure children receive consistent positive experiences and improved outcomes when looked after. The availability of foster carers and suitable placements is an area of challenge given the change of profile of Gwynedd's looked after children population with an increase of looked after children living with parents and connected persons and difficulties in finding suitable placements for children with profound needs.

## **Areas for Development**

### **Access arrangements: Information, Advice and Assistance**

1. Address recognised gaps in preventative and early intervention and strengthen the proactive offer of support in developing stronger links with community services, strengthen signposting to agencies along with the development of a range of accessible and available services.
2. Recent developments in IAA need to be underpinned by continued work to facilitate appropriate and timely referrals and involvement with partner agencies.
3. Develop a resource for IAA staff to keep them up to date with local services to enable them to effectively carry out the functions of providing information.
4. Ensure chronologies are used consistently and updated to assist practitioners to access relevant and significant case information in a timely manner to facilitate effective decision making.

### **Assessment**

5. Assessments must be updated following a significant change in circumstances to enable effective care planning and improved engagement with and outcomes for children and young people.

### **Care and Support and Pathway Planning**

6. Further develop reviewing arrangements for children looked after, and offer consistent opportunities for children and young people to meet with the independent reviewing officer (IRO) prior to review. Areas to focus upon include the outcomes the child wants to achieve, having regard to a child/young persons wishes in respect of location of the review, and improvements in the recording of the child's needs and direct work already undertaken.
7. Further develop care planning and engagement with children, young people and carers to ensure consistently developed co produced plans. Children, young people and carers need to be supported to understand decisions underpinning care and support plans.
8. Strengthen fostering arrangements and adherence to regulations. Priority should be given to recruitment of foster carers to enable improved placement choice.

## **Leadership and Governance**

9. Develop stronger quality assurance mechanisms across the department to be assured services provided and commissioned for children and families are timely, of a good quality and deliver good outcomes.

## **Next Steps**

CIW expect Gwynedd Council to consider the areas identified for development and take appropriate action. CIW view that Gwynedd children's services overall provides a good quality service and has the capacity to build on existing strengths. CIW will monitor progress through its on-going engagement activity with the local authority.



# 1. Access arrangements: Information, Advice and Assistance

## What we expect to see

The authority works with partner organisations to develop, understand, co-ordinate, keep up to date and make best use of statutory, voluntary and private sector information, assistance and advice resources available in their area. All people, including carers, have access to comprehensive information about services and get prompt advice and support, including information about their eligibility and what they can expect by way of response from the service. Arrangements are effective in delaying or preventing the need for care and support. People are aware of and can easily make use of key points of contact. The service listens to people and begins with a focus on what matters to them. Effective signposting and referring provides people with choice about support and services available in their locality, particularly preventative services. Access arrangements to statutory social services provision are understood by partners and the people engaging with the service are operating effectively.

## Summary of findings

- 1.1. The local authority had worked hard in the context of the SSWBA to reshape its services but at the time of the inspection the IAA service had only been in operation since April 2108. There had been an increased demand upon the children's service with referrals received being greater in 2018 than when previously inspected in 2014. Referrals received by the IAA service are responded to in a timely and appropriate manner. We observed timely and appropriate responses to child protection referrals. We saw staff in the IAA service using the *what matters* conversation and the five steps to eligibility in line with SSWBA guidance.
- 1.2. The active offer of the Welsh language was fully embedded with Welsh being the local authority's language of work. They were able to deliver a service bilingually with the vast majority of the workforce being Welsh speaking.
- 1.3. We found the IAA service was still being embedded and not yet supported by clear eligibility thresholds negotiated with partners. Staff within the IAA service provided proportionate assessments and short term social work involvement to facilitate preventative work. Where longer term involvement or child protection intervention was required, cases transferred to the relevant area teams. We saw evidence of appropriate transfer of cases to teams. We saw seamless transfer of child protection cases from the IAA service to area teams who would undertake the child protection investigations.

- 1.4. We saw that the IAA decision maker would use the business system (WCCIS) to access background information and make informed decisions on incoming referrals. We saw some evidence of children who had been re-referred to the service, and a stronger quality assurance mechanism within IAA is needed to ensure that the information is gathered efficiently to enable effective decisions. WCCIS has only recently been implemented within Gwynedd children's service and we found it difficult to gain an overview of the child with development work to the system still underway to ensure information can be accessed and stored in a timely manner. The system was causing some challenges for practitioners across teams, particularly when searching for information. Practitioners told us they were not always confident they had found all the information they might need. The use of chronologies in case files could assist decision makers to make timely and appropriate decisions.
- 1.5. The IAA senior practitioner held strategy discussions in a timely manner on new referrals prior to transferring to a team. We saw evidence of good operational working between the children's services department and the police and some health professionals.
- 1.6. Further work is required to develop the newly established IAA service to enable workers to provide a comprehensive information service to the public. The Family Information Service was a part of IAA and staff members had access to DEWIS, however some staff members were not confident that they had an up-to-date comprehensive list of information they could draw upon. We did not see information available for callers to the offices on the range of services available in their community and the preventative services provided by the local authority.
- 1.7. It was positive to see a 'team around the family' (TAF) worker as a member of the IAA service whose role would be to respond to referrals and map areas of need and signpost to community and preventative services.
- 1.8. Gwynedd Council has already recognised this deficit and is already taking steps to make improvements. The availability of preventative services and effective signposting to third sector organisations is an area under development underpinned by the 'Supporting Families Strategy' now being driven forward with the recent appointment of a Senior Manager.

## 2. Assessment

### What we expect to see

All people entitled to an assessment of their care and support needs receive one in their preferred language. All carers who appear to have support needs are offered a carers needs assessment, regardless of the type of care provided, their financial means or the level of support that may be needed. People experience a timely assessment of their needs which promotes their independence and ability to exercise choice. Assessments have regard to the personal outcomes and views, wishes and feelings of the person subject of the assessment and that of relevant others including those with parental responsibility. This is in so far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with promoting their wellbeing and safety and that of others. Assessments provide a clear understanding of what will happen next and results in a plan relevant to identified needs. Recommended actions, designed to achieve the outcomes that matter to people, are identified and include all those that can be met through community based or preventative services as well as specialist provision.

### Summary of findings

- 2.1. We saw detailed and good quality assessments undertaken in a timely manner. We saw a number of assessments where the child was subject to public law proceedings and these assessments contained a detailed analysis of individuals and families strengths, barriers and risks.
- 2.2. The quality of assessments was generally good and inspectors saw good evidence of children being seen as part of their assessment and their voice being heard. In the best examples assessments were coproduced with the family and included what mattered to them, with analysis focused on potential strengths and risks which supported the identification of both eligible need and appropriate early help. Families understood the outcome of the assessments and next steps. Some families told inspectors that their social workers and edge of care workers took time to listen to them, explained the processes, discussed the assessment findings and that this supported them to understand and make the changes identified. However in other examples families did not have a shared understanding of what would happen next. Whilst assessments were routinely shared in writing with the family and relevant partner agencies staff identified that the format of the assessment document was not easily accessible.
- 2.3. There was evidence that staff had a clear focus on children and young people however the format of the assessment did not always capture the quality of the good work undertaken including direct work as part of the assessment.
- 2.4. We saw little evidence of assessments being updated to inform care planning for children and families in receipt of long term support. Updating assessments when there have been significant changes would

enable a more robust approach in securing and supporting children's long term placement needs and maintaining focus on improved outcomes.

- 2.5. The quality of pathway assessments was variable with review documents in need of more detail in respect of young person's updated assessed need and outcomes. We saw evidence of young people not always engaging with the pathway assessment and planning process and some told us they did not like the current reviewing format. Social workers from the 16 plus team who were newly allocated to the young person undertook the pathway assessments and plans. Young people found the form filling aspect of this process unhelpful at a time when they were experiencing pressures, such as exams.
- 2.6. Some social workers within teams were trained to undertake specialist assessments, such as AIMS (assessment of young people at risk of displaying sexually harmful behaviours), and PAMS (parenting assessment of parents with learning difficulties). We saw evidence of where these assessments contributed to effective care planning. We saw evidence of parent and baby assessments and opportunities offered to parents to demonstrate parenting capacity within the safeguards of parent and baby placements.
- 2.7. The Derwen integrated service undertook all assessments for disabled children including those where there are concerns of risk or potential harm for a disabled child. Inspectors only reviewed a small sample of assessments undertaken by the team but the assessments and resulting plans were generally good quality. The team co worked some cases with the child and family team and found this a valuable source of advice and support particularly in relation to developing their child protection practice. Inspectors noted that the recent addition of a new short breaks unit for children has provided an additional means of supporting families and offering opportunities for positive experiences.

### **3. Care and Support and Pathway Planning**

#### **What we expect to see**

People experience timely and effective multi-agency care, support, help and protection where appropriate. People using services are supported by care and support plans which promote their independence, choice and wellbeing, help keep them safe and reflect the outcomes that are important to them. People are helped to develop their abilities and overcome barriers to social inclusion.

#### **Summary of findings**

- 3.1. Gwynedd Council has recognised an increase in the number of children placed with family members and under placement with parent regulations and also recognised the challenge in finding suitable placements for children with profound and complex needs.
- 3.2. The local authority has mechanisms in place that ensure looked after children and young people have a timely care and support plan or pathway plans that accords with guidance. Some of the care planning documentation continues to be under development following the implementation of the SSWBA. The quality of care plans were variable and most did not reflect an updated assessment. Some children and young people told us they did not always understand the reason for changes made to their care plans. There is a need to strengthen engagement and direct work with children to enable them to have an improved understanding of their care plans. However, we saw some good examples of care planning undertaken in partnership with families and agencies. We saw evidence of a social worker producing a one page plan for a child to ensure the plan was easy to follow and understand. We also saw evidence of effective care planning within the service where family members, social workers, support workers and agencies worked together to coproduce care plans.
- 3.3. The edge of care team was developed to support children to remain within their families and to return children home following becoming looked after. We saw evidence of the team working intensively with families, alongside social work teams and partner agencies in supporting children to achieve this. We saw evidence of good outcomes where families received intensive support and a multi agency response.

#### **Care Leavers**

- 3.4. Some young people told us they greatly valued the support received from their personal advisors, viewing them as 'life savers'. Whilst the service has been configured to provide minimum changes of social workers we heard that some young people would welcome support from the 16 plus team at an earlier stage to prepare them for adulthood and the challenges that came within this transition period.

- 3.5. We found examples of workers demonstrating tenacity in continuing to work with young people regardless of their behaviour and a positive ethos of wanting to help young people achieve their potential.
- 3.6. The local authority worked hard to encourage young people aged 16 -17 to remain looked after until their 18th birthday, and as appropriate in accordance with 'when I'm ready guidance' beyond their 18th birthday. The local authority recognises this transition period can cause anxiety for young people. We saw evidence of supported housing provision for young people, however the authority recognise that the range of supported accommodation options is limited and the need for a strategic approach to enable seamless transition of young people in need of ongoing support from children's to adult services.
- 3.7. Care leavers have access to appropriate education and employment opportunities, including work experience. We found that young people are encouraged and supported to continue their education and training. We also saw examples of young people being financially supported to continue their studies in university settings. We found the 16 plus team to be proactive in making use of specialist professional knowledge from other teams to enhance their learning and provide direction in supporting young people with the challenges they face.

### **Long term Planning**

- 3.8. The local authority, including social workers, managers and independent reviewing officers, viewed permanency for looked after children and young people as a priority. We saw evidence of early planning, good case management and management oversight, including panel arrangements ensuring that all children and young people have a permanency plan that is timely, relevant, and effective and accords with guidance. We saw evidence of appropriate scrutiny of care plans within the public law outline (PLO) panel minutes where decisions were made in respect of thresholds to commence pre care proceedings work and final care planning. The use of Section 76, (SSWBA) voluntary accommodation has declined and is used when children require short term accommodation. Where longer term plans are required, these plans are undertaken as part of public law proceedings, where a Guardian is appointed to uphold the rights of the child.
- 3.9. The local authority demonstrated it was committed to successfully returning children and young people home where it was in their best interests. Where the plan for the child or young person was to return home there was evidence of purposeful work to help the family change so it was safe for the child to return to the family. Workers were proactive in offering opportunities for children to remain with parents.
- 3.10. The local authority has ensured that the role of the IRO is recognised and understood by managers, staff and partners. IRO's have the independence, and capacity to monitor the performance of the local

authority as a corporate parent, however greater rigour is required to ensure that the reviewing process is robust; child focused and challenges areas in need of improvement to uphold children's rights. We found the IRO quality assurance functions were not embedded within a strong quality assurance framework, with reports being produced upon demand and not as part of a formal arrangement. We saw evidence that IRO's were able to challenge compliance, drift, and the effectiveness of agencies contributions to the plan; however this was viewed by inspectors and some staff members as an area in need of strengthening. IRO's are confident in that they have clear pathways to escalate issues as appropriate to managers, officers and members.

- 3.11. Looked after children reviews were held in line with guidance, however there is a need to strengthen reviewing arrangements for children looked after in offering children and young people consistent opportunities to meet with the reviewing officer prior to review. This would provide opportunity to have regard to a child/young person's wishes in respect of location of the review; an improved record of the child's needs, strengths and risks, areas of direct work undertaken; child's voice and desired outcomes within reviewing documents. We heard that some children and young people did not regard reviews held in schools positively, however some reviews continued to be held in schools. In a sample of reviewing documentation seen by inspectors the voice, views and wishes of the child were insufficiently recorded and greater detail was required to capture current need and risks, and work undertaken in order to monitor progress. We saw little written evidence of life story work being undertaken with children within reviewing documentation.

### **Placement choice, stability and wellbeing**

- 3.12. The decision to place a child away from their home authority was based on a thorough assessment and analysis of the child's needs. We found that Gwynedd Council's considerations and actions when making an out of area/out of Wales placement met regulatory requirements. Panels were appropriately constituted with decisions being timely, well informed, recorded and endorsed by a nominated officer. The local authority adhered to the requirements to notify the receiving authority that a child is moving to their area and to assess the adequacy of resources to meet the child's need before the placement is made to ensure that the child's care, health and educational needs will continue to be met as soon as they begin to live outside their home area, and with minimal disruption. The local authority also had good arrangements in place in relation to notifications they received from placing authorities.
- 3.13. We saw evidence that finding suitable placements for young people was problematic. Social workers told us some placements were made because they were the only option available, not because they were the best choice of placement for the child. The lack of choice means contingency planning is not always possible and limits the social worker's ability to make the best plans for children. We saw an example

of a child placed with extended family in line with their wishes and an example of a child being placed in an emergency within a placement which did not fully match their needs. Finding longer term placements which fully matched children and young people's needs was a difficult task. We saw examples of children placed with parents which on the whole were delivering good outcomes, requiring intensive support to manage risk levels. Good practice and risk management was evident with the workforce pulling together and going over and above when situations arose where young people required intensive support. This was particularly evident when the workforce was attempting to maintain children within their placements.

- 3.14. Gwynedd Council has a placement commissioning strategy which identifies key priorities to address the needs of looked after children and recognises that there has been significant change in the profile of looked after children. 25% of looked after children live with parents; of the 64% placed within fostering arrangements 27% are with friends and family, with 5% placed in residential care. Gwynedd Council is working with its regional partners to find solutions with regards to placement sufficiency and availability of bespoke specialised placements to meet the needs of children and young people where there are difficulties in finding suitable placements. This area of work is in need of urgent progression to enable improved outcomes and appropriate placement choices for looked after children.
- 3.15. There is a need to give greater priority to fostering recruitment with the fostering team having a growing demand for viability assessments and connected person assessments. Focus is required to strengthen working arrangements within the team to ensure adherence to regulations.
- 3.16. We saw effective partnership working with education and health services in securing good outcomes for children in need of care and support. We saw an example of the education department securing support of a full time teacher to work with a child who had been excluded and reintegrated back into education. We saw a clear pathway enabling children who are looked after to access emotional health support and opportunities for foster carers to access support and consultation with the community adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) when looking after children with complex emotional and behavioural needs.

## **Participation**

- 3.17. On the whole workers promoted children and young people's voice and work in a child centred manner; however this was not always reflected within records. We saw the need for stronger engagement with young people when changes were made to care planning to aid a greater understanding of decisions made.
- 3.18. Looked after children would value opportunities to meet with other looked after children. This opportunity has not been available to children



in recent times and an area Gwynedd Council are looking to develop. There was a young person who attended the corporate parenting board to represent young people's views.

- 3.19. Gwynedd Council's complaints policy is clear and easy to follow and evidence was seen of managers being proactive at responding to and resolving issues at early stages. Some young people told us they did not know how to make a complaint, however we did see evidence during our inspection of a young person's views being heard and complaint responded to in a timely and appropriate manner. The local authority need to ensure that all children receiving social work support are fully aware of how to make a complaint.
- 3.20. Advocacy is actively offered to children and young people within Gwynedd, however finding a Welsh speaking independent visitor was considered challenging. We saw evidence of Gwynedd Council having a positive relationship with advocacy providers and having a good understanding of the importance of the services. The number of children taking up the offer of advocacy remains low and a particular focus for the local authority is evaluating their performance in this area. Gwynedd Council are looking at the range of forums available to engage with young people and recognise this is an area of ongoing development.

## 4. Safeguarding

### What we expect to see

Effective local safeguarding strategies combine both preventative and protective elements. Where people are experiencing or are at risk of abuse neglect or harm, they receive urgent, well-coordinated multi-agency responses. Actions arising from risk management or safety plans are successful in reducing actual or potential risk. People are not left in unsafe or dangerous environments. Policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding and protection are well understood and embedded and contribute to a timely and proportionate response to presenting concerns. The local authority and its partners sponsor a learning culture where change to and improvement of professional performance and agency behaviours can be explored in an open and constructive manner.

### Summary of findings

- 4.1. Safeguarding was prioritised within the department and workers were focused on ensuring children and young people were safe. We saw skilled, competent and supported workers performing well in meeting children and young people's need to be safeguarded. Child protection enquiries were timely and thorough, informed by decisions made in a strategy meetings held in accordance with guidance and good practice. Findings and decisions in relation to significant harm were clear and resulted in action, including urgent action needed to protect children and young people. Child protection enquiries were led by a suitably qualified and experienced social worker. We saw evidence of timely responses to child protection referrals and good liaison with partner agencies during the investigation process.
- 4.2. Risks and vulnerability were known to the authority, including in relation to such behaviours as going missing, substance misuse, offending, exploitation, trafficking, risk taking behaviours and new technologies. Generally, proactive action was taken to mitigate harm or potential harm and such behaviours received a well co-ordinated response that reduced risk of harm. In several cases reviewed inspectors saw evidence of effective multi agency working and intensive support provided to families in cases where there were risks of significant harm. In these cases good outcomes were achieved with children returning home to parents. Significant work was undertaken to maintain children with their parents and although this was not always possible in all cases good outcomes were achieved with children often remaining within the extended family.
- 4.3. The local authority has a clear approach to risk assessment and the relationship between risk management and child protection pathways are well defined. The effectiveness of the plan on the child's safety and well-being was evaluated as part of the child protection conferencing review process and included the young persons' view of their plan. We saw evidence in one case where the children's views were listened to and incorporated into planning with good outcomes achieved when

children returned home to parents successfully. In some cases a stronger quality assurance mechanism could have strengthened the quality of safety plans.

- 4.4. 'Effective Child Protection' was a recent innovation within Gwynedd children's services and was being piloted within child protection conferences. This is an emerging model that concentrates on four key elements of conversations, thresholds, change and measurement. Training has been delivered for social workers in holding collaborative conversations and developing awareness in the way language is used. The model attempts to measure outcomes by the use of scaling with clear focus on change.
- 4.5. We saw evidence of robust planning and interventions where child protection risks had been identified. There were effective multi agency core groups held in a timely manner and use of PLO panel meetings to assist in care planning and determining level of risk. PLO meetings were chaired by a senior manager and represented by team managers across the department, legal advisor, resource providers and relevant partners. We saw evidence of effective engagement as part of this process along with intensive work undertaken by edge of care team, social workers and partners to mitigate risks and achieve good outcomes. Progress was reviewed in a timely manner within the PLO process.

## 5. Leadership, Management and Governance

### What we expect to see

Leadership, management and governance arrangements comply with statutory guidance and together establish an effective strategy for the delivery of good quality services and outcomes for people. Meeting people's needs for quality services are a clear focus for councilors, managers and staff. Services are well-led, direction is clear and the leadership of change is strong. Roles and responsibilities throughout the organisation are clear. The authority works with partners to deliver help, care and support for people and fulfils its corporate parenting responsibilities. Involvement of local people is effective. Leaders, managers and elected members have sufficient knowledge and understanding of practice and performance to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively.

### Summary of findings

- 5.1. Gwynedd Council's vision and ethos of 'Ffordd Gwynedd' and 'putting the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything they do' was recognised and understood by the workforce and reflects the ethos of the SSWBA.
- 5.2. Lead member and other elected members demonstrated commitment to delivering good quality children services with a strong corporate parenting ethos extending across the council. We saw evidence of enthusiasm shown by the lead member in championing children services corporately. The chair of the corporate parenting board and lead member for children had spent time in meeting social work teams and held regular meetings with the head of service and quality assurance officer in order to have a greater understanding of the department's challenges and strengths. Gwynedd Council's corporate parenting board is supported by the chief executive who chairs one of the work streams to develop better experiences and outcomes for looked after children. There was a revised corporate parenting strategy which underpinned the need to develop work streams to strengthen the performance of the corporate parenting board.
- 5.3. It is important that continued priority is afforded to children's services, including looked after children and care leavers to enable the department to drive on improvements for children and families in light of rising numbers of cases, complexity of work, and changes seen in profile of looked after children.
- 5.4. We saw evidence of member oversight in driving forward the supporting families strategy. Currently early work is being undertaken in mapping need with the view of developing the preventative and early intervention services within the county. Prevention is a recognised area where development is required and an area in need of priority. Gwynedd covers a large geographical area which has vast rural areas which adds to the complexity of delivering accessible services to all children and families.

- 5.5. Gwynedd Council has a stable, skilled and experienced workforce, with most people having worked for the local authority for many years. The senior management team was well established and regarded with confidence by the workforce. There was evidence of Gwynedd Council 'growing their own' skilled workforce having links with a university and providing good opportunities for ongoing training and development. We had an overwhelming response from the workforce following a staff survey sent in connection with the inspection, which was reflective of a workforce engaged in continuous improvement.
- 5.6. Overall, staff were positive about their experience of working for the local authority and valued being able to practice in Welsh. An area of recognised strength amongst the workforce was the good operational working relationships between teams, departments and external agencies. Examples of these were evidenced extensively within the case files reviewed.
- 5.7. The workforce said they felt supported by managers and were able to raise concerns as they arose. Teams were led by strong operational managers. There had been staff movement between teams with some recent changes where some teams had relatively new team managers and senior practitioners who were all offered management training. The head of service had a good oversight of the service and knew her workforce well. She had knowledge of the children and families supported by the service and direct oversight of all children subject to Public Law Orders and placed with parents. The head of service uses a variety of means to maintain oversight including regular conversation with her staff and a range of panels.
- 5.8. There is a need to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms in order to assure that placements commissioned for children looked after are of a good quality and deliver good outcomes. Attention is required in strengthening quality assurance in the areas of IAA and reviewing processes in respect of children on the child protection register and children looked after.
- 5.9. Supervision policy and documentation was clearly understood by staff and good supervision practice was seen across the department. We saw evidence of the authority's expectation that preparatory work would be undertaken by workers and managers prior to timely supervision sessions with workers valuing the opportunity supervision gave to review cases.

## **Methodology**

### **Fieldwork**

We undertook 9 days of fieldwork activity

We selected case files for tracking and review from a sample of cases. In total 49 case files were reviewed; of these 15 were followed up with tracking interviews with social workers and family members and 4 were subject to a tracking focus group which involved multi agency partners.

We interviewed, children, parents and relatives.

We interviewed a range of local authority employees, members, senior officers, Director of Social Services and the Chief Executive.

We interviewed a range of partner organisations, representing both statutory and third sector.

We reviewed a sample of 6 staff supervision files.

We reviewed 185 staff survey results.

We reviewed supporting documentation sent to CIW for the purposes of the inspection.

We looked at a sample of complaints that were made about children' services.

### **Inspection Team:**

Lead Inspector: Sharon Eastlake. Supporting Inspectors: Christine Jones, Kate Young, Sian Roberts.

## **Acknowledgements**

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