

# ssia

Social Services Improvement Agency  
Asiantaeth Gwella'r Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

## Children's Services Peer Review

## Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

December 2014



WLGA • CLILC



Leading Social Services  
in Wales  
Yn arwain  
Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
yng Nghymru



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## **Acknowledgement**

This report was co-written by SSIA Associates Cathie Williams and Phil Hodgson. The SSIA would like to thank to the following for their contribution to the Peer Review and this final report:-

Angie Allen, Senior Social Worker at Cardiff Council, Jake Morgan, Director of Social Care, Health and Housing at Carmarthenshire County Council (formerly Director in Pembrokeshire) and Mike Nicholson, Strategic Director for People at Newport City Council

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# 1. Introduction

Neath Port Talbot asked the Social Services Improvement Agency (SSIA) of the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to work with them to deliver a Children's Services Peer Review. This was the first social services, rather than corporate, peer review for Wales. A peer review is designed to help an authority and its partners assess current achievements, areas for development and capacity to change. The peer review is not an inspection. Instead it offers a supportive approach, undertaken by peers as knowledgeable, 'critical friends'. It aims to help an organisation identify its current strengths, as much as what it needs to improve. Its focus is on offering feedback that can be used for improvement and development. Peer review is about sector-led improvement and mutual learning and the members of the review team learn a lot too. In order to deliver the review, a set of draft standards for children's services was developed in order to set a benchmark and to describe 'what good looks like'. These standards are aspirational and are attached at Appendix 1. There are four themes to the standards that are:

- **Outcomes for, and the experiences of children, young people and their families**
- **Leadership, strategy and working together**
- **Service delivery, effective practice and commissioning**
- **Performance, quality and resource management (including human resources)**

The peer review did not look at the early intervention, care leavers or the work of

the Children's Safeguarding Board work that are part of these standards, as Neath Port Talbot had asked for these to be excluded. The team were asked specifically to:

- Compare NPT's progress and performance
- Identify strengths and areas for development
- Identify the extent to which NPT understands 'what good looks like'

As a result of discussions between SSIA and Neath Port Talbot, a peer team was secured consisting of:

**Jake Morgan:**  
**Director for Children and Schools**  
**(Pembrokeshire County Council)**

**Mike Nicholson:**  
**Strategic Director (People)**  
**(Newport City Council)**

**Angie Allen: Senior Social Worker**  
**(Cardiff Council)**

Cathie Williams and Phil Hodgson acted as co-review managers. They are both SSIA associates and ex-directors of social services.

Helen Patterson, Chief Executive of Wrexham Council had originally intended to be part of the team but due to unforeseen circumstances was unable to do so.

As preparation for the review, Neath Port Talbot provided a range of data and documentation, including a statement from the director, and selected case files for the review team to sample from. They also arranged a schedule for on-site work.

The peer review team were on site in Neath Port Talbot for the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September, and the 29<sup>th</sup> September until the 3<sup>rd</sup> October.

During the course of the review, the peer team:

- Read documents and a director's statement
- Analysed data
- Observed practice
- Held meetings and focus groups with council staff, councillors and partners from the statutory and independent sectors
- Undertook a small case records audit related to the standards
- Gave initial feedback to the senior management team and lead councillors
- Undertook an action-planning workshop with the senior management team. The notes from this are attached as Appendix 2
- The team were able to communicate with most of the people and saw most of the documents that they asked for. They did not meet with CSSIW

The peer challenge team would like to thank staff and councillors for their open and constructive responses during the review process. The review was very well organised.

Our feedback on the last day of the review gave an overview of the initial key messages. This report builds on the initial findings and gives a more detailed account of the review. The report is structured around the themes of the draft Children's Services Standards.

## 2. National Context

In 2011 the Welsh Assembly Government published 'Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action'. This paper set out how the Welsh Assembly Government intended to take social services and social care forward.

Sustainable Social Services highlighted the need to establish better focused services by service users and carers having a much stronger voice and greater control over their services. It set out the government's expectation that the delivery of services became more effective through greater collaboration and integration of services.

The vision in Sustainable Social Services has the following principles:

- A strong voice and real control – children and young people have a right to be heard and to have a significant say in matters that affect them
- Supporting each other – work to support, strengthen and build on people's desire to help each other, especially at times of difficulty
- Safety – a right to be protected from avoidable harm and from neglect
- Respect – expectations that children, young people and adults are treated with dignity and respect
- Recovery and restoration – when facing difficulty support that enables individuals to return to living in the way that they would choose
- Adjusting to new circumstance – when circumstances have changed being supported in adjusting to new situations

- Stability – support must maximise the need for stability to grow and develop, this is especially true for children
- Simplicity – getting help in the most straightforward way
- Professionalism – expectations that professionals are competent, confident and safe

It is clear that social services in Wales are facing real and unsustainable increases in demand and the numbers of looked after children and those on the child protection register have grown significantly in some local authority areas.

Sustainable Social Services was then quickly followed by Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill and then the Act in 2014. The Bill and Act drew on the principles of Sustainable Social Services. The Act focuses on the reform of social services law and to make provision to improve the well-being outcomes for people who need care and support and carers who need support. The Act emphasises the requirement to make provision for cooperation and partnership by public authorities with a view to improving the well-being of people.

The Act requires:

- The promotion of well-being of people who need care
- Imposes duties on local authorities in relation to people who need or may need care and support
- Local authorities to assess the needs in their areas for care and support and preventative services
- Local authorities to provide or arrange for the provision of preventative services

- The provision of information and advice relating to care and support

The Act's regulations and statutory guidance are currently being developed by the Welsh Government in conjunction with key stakeholders, including independent organisations. The regulations and statutory guidance is scheduled to be the subject of consultation at the end of 2014.

The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) monitor local authority performance against a set of key performance indicators, national themed inspections and service inspections. Where services are found to have significant defects, this may result in a local authority being the subject of the Serious Concerns Protocol. When the Protocol is invoked CSSIW will monitor performance closely by regular monitoring visits and further inspection of key services. Neath and Port Talbot County Borough Council are currently being monitored through the Serious Concerns Protocol.

### **3. General Findings**

The peer review team saw evidence of strong, inclusive and realistic leadership through senior officers. It is evident that the council has completed a lot of work to improve services for children, young people and their families since the CSSIW inspections. The team thought that the initial priorities in terms of workforce, systems, processes and 'back to basics' were right. The council is delivering significantly improved national performance indicators in the areas that the team was looking at.

The team understands that the council now want to move on and so are being

more challenging to the council than they would have been had the review taken place 18 months ago.

Having made the progress that it has, there are four main areas that we believe the council should now focus on:

- Improving outcomes for, and the experiences of children and young people and their families. Ensuring that children and young people have 'voice', are heard and responded to
- Safely reducing the very high rates of Looked After Children, with the associated cost and quality issues
- Improving the quality of services
- Improving external relationships with some key partners

#### **4. Outcomes for, and the experiences of children, young people and families**

##### **Strengths:**

- The peer team was given one or two examples of where children and young people had influenced training and a leaflet
- Case records evidence that social workers are prompted to see children and young people on their own

##### **Areas for Development:**

- Neath Port Talbot needs a systematic approach that allows children and young people to be involved and have a voice
- It's important for the children and young people, their families, for

practitioners, managers, councillors and the public to know what difference you are making and how you are improving outcomes

- Defining the outcomes that are wanted for the children of the borough can unify everyone by way of purpose, vision and values
- Achieving a balance between "back to basics" and child centred intervention

This is one of the major areas for development for the council and of the four themes the one where most work is needed. While the team did see some records where desired outcomes had been identified, the peer team saw little evidence of a focus on achieving good outcomes for children and young people or of the involvement of children and young people and their families in decision making.

Without a focus on improving outcomes for children and young people and their families, it is difficult for practitioners, managers and councillors to understand what difference they are making in children, young people's and families lives. Focussing on this can give a unifying purpose, a sense of 'one team' across councillors and all levels of staff.

Research repeatedly evidences poor outcomes for Looked After Children when compared to the general population. Neath Port Talbot has a very high rate of Looked After Children and therefore it is essential to demonstrate that outcomes are better for the children in care than if they had been supported to remain at home (see the section on Performance and Resource Management below).

There are at least two levels relating to the involvement of children and young people and their families. The first relates to casework. Whilst systems are set up to ensure that children and young people

are seen on their own, and this is recorded, there is less evidence that their involvement is purposeful and influences what happens. When asked, the four children in care whom we met were able to clearly describe how their lives had improved as a result of becoming Looked After.

Whilst the focus of improvement has been on 'back to basics' there is now scope for developing a greater commitment to child-centred work. A greater focus on the quality of the relationship and on nurturing young people's growing autonomy and ability to share in decision-making about them would be of benefit.

At a more strategic level, the engagement of children and young people in a range of activities can both benefit them in terms of understanding that they can influence the work of the department and benefit the services and products (such as information, training courses etc) that are delivered.

## **5. Leadership, strategy and working together**

### **Strengths:**

- Practitioners were enthusiastic about strong managerial leadership and support for children's services
- A robust approach has been taken by leaders and managers in developing increasingly strong structures, systems and processes that have been introduced and embedded over the last 18 months
- There is a strong narrative about the strengths, and priorities for development
- It is a strong step to invite external 'critical friends' into the authority to

provide an objective view about strengths and areas for development

- There is strong evidence that the previous bullying culture has been addressed successfully

### **Areas for Development:**

- There is scope to now to embed that leadership more collaboratively and deeply and to 'pull improvement from the front' now, as well as 'push from behind'
- The service and council needs to think hard about its external relationships and networks including Welsh Government, the regulator and the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru
- The council has good examples of practice that it should encourage managers to showcase
- The council should now focus on nurturing professional leadership that:
  - Continues what has been the gradual emergence as social workers leading on casework
  - Encourages excellence
  - Provides the council with the expert resource to address the needs of very complex cases

### **Leadership**

The appointment of the Head of Service and then the Director, together with a new team of Principal Officers has had a positive impact in setting clear priorities, which have included; systems, processes and importantly workforce stability. The focus on strong structures, clear lines of accountability and responsibilities has established an impressive improvement in many key performance indicators. The senior managers have successfully introduced a culture and modus operandi of openness and challenge. Team and Deputy Team Managers expressed

enthusiastic support for the manner in which business was now being undertaken – “there is a real sense of pride in the workforce” and a “buzz around the authority”.

A number of managers and practitioners explained senior and middle managers are providing leadership, which is visible and structured. Developments had taken place to engage practitioners and managers in groups tasked with maintaining and improving performance, and developing better outcomes for children and young people. The Performance Improvement Group provided an opportunity for the peer review team to observe how the process was being effectively managed and how it was contributing to positive change.

The knowledge, experience and skills of the Chief Executive, Director and Head of Service should be exploited and used across the council to continue to look forward and further develop a council and community that is aspirational. Some interviews during the peer review, and it is important to emphasise they were in the minority, tended to highlight and focus on levels of poverty and deprivation within the borough. Whilst this is an issue, it would be helpful to benchmark against authorities across Wales and England who have similar or greater levels of poverty and deprivation. By undertaking this benchmarking professional staff and elected members will have further opportunity to reflect and question what action is required to address the high numbers of looked after children. Being aspirational, which the council demonstrated during the review, may require looking at attitudes in similar councils to understand what they do differently and how this might be applied in Neath Port Talbot.

Senior managers have the knowledge, experience and a unique opportunity to encourage elected members to be questioning and curious about why some council’s with similar demographics are achieving different results.

The previous culture of bullying and harassment has been successfully addressed and there was no evidence of this being a problem. The peer review team were consistently impressed by the current and much healthier open style of leadership which is focused, encouraging and where necessary nurturing. The leadership team and senior managers are to be congratulated on achieving this change.

## **Strategy**

The peer review was asked not to include Early Intervention and Prevention services in the review. With the benefit of hindsight this was probably an opportunity missed to review and appropriately acknowledge the development of the Multi Agency Think Family Partnership. Prevention and early intervention is critical to safely maintain families together in their home communities and also help reduce safely the Looked After Children population. The Director and senior managers referred to the Think Family Partnership during the review with enthusiasm and referred to how this was having a positive impact on maintaining children in their home communities. This and other similar approaches should continue to be a priority for focused strategic attention for the council.

The leadership team and Principal Officer group are aware and determined to focus on strategies to prevent the need for intervention that requires children and young people to become a looked after

child. Attention should focus on prevention, admission to care, permanency and reducing the number of children who are the subject of Care Order's and placed with parents, relatives and friends.

The leadership team together with its managers should apply the same rigour and systematic approach they have applied to establish effective structures, processes and systems in addressing a children and young people's service that has and continues to experience demand that is unsustainable and not in the long term best interests of children, young people, families and communities.

## **Working Together**

During the peer review process key agencies from across the public and independent sector and a representative group of foster carers confirmed contact with the council's children's services had improved significantly during the past 18 – 24 months. The Head of Service and Principal Officer group were credited with a pro-active philosophy and approach to inter agency and multi-disciplinary working.

The interface with key organisations could and should be developed by considering carefully how the social services department and council work effectively in achieving productive external relationships and networks. This is particularly the case with the Welsh Government, the regulator and the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru. This is critical in achieving appropriate recognition of the improvement journey to date and how it will sustain progress and continue to develop a 21<sup>st</sup> century children's service that is sustainable and effective.

The council should consider profiling its achievements, services and aspirations through encouraging its staff and managers to showcase.

## **6. Service delivery, effective practice and commissioning**

### **Strengths:**

- Staff describe an increasing sense of pride and are enthusiastic and committed to further improvement
- The focus on workforce is having an impact
- We did an anonymous straw poll of 35 staff participants in this review, asking them to rate change over the last year. The average score was +2 (staff were given a scale whereby -5 meant they thought things were much worse and +5 meant they felt that they were much, much better)
- There were lots of examples of improvements, including in timeliness, legal surgeries, improved focus, more compliments.

### **Areas for Development:**

- Quality needs to become a central focus and be accelerated
- The very high rate of Looked After Children needs to be addressed as a priority
- The quantity and quality of family support and of support for Looked After Children needs to be addressed
- Evidence of management oversight on case files
- Staff believe in the direction of travel, but some don't think they are there yet

- Data for the year ending March 31<sup>st</sup> 2014 indicates that the service presents as overheated with the:
  - Highest number of Core Assessments in Wales
  - Second highest number of Initial Assessments in Wales
  - Second highest number of Children in Need in Wales
  - Highest number of children on the child protection register
  - Highest Looked After Children rate in Wales and England

## Service Delivery

Clarity about the structure, role and responsibility of managers and practitioners has been achieved through the team organisational arrangements; intake, community, Looked After Children, Engaging Route 16 and the Independent Reviewing Officer Team. Team & deputy team managers and social work practitioners were clear about their role and responsibility within the service.

Achieving consistency across teams remains a challenge. Llangatwg and The Independent Reviewing Officer team require development; the council is aware of this and working on change.

The council's pro-active investment in recruitment, training and development within children's services has had a positive impact. This is evidenced through the move from reliance on agency staff to the appointment of permanent staff. The availability and expectation that practitioners and managers attend training and development opportunities has been welcomed and effective. The placement of two Human Resources staff within one of the Children's Services teams was a bold and innovative move which proved successful.

The development of a "whole workforce approach" and "back to basics" practice which has focused on assessment, care planning and child protection has delivered improvement in service delivery as measured by key performance indicators.

There is a need to apply the same systematic approach the council has taken in establishing clear structures, systems and processes to deliver quality. It is encouraging that the council acknowledges quality needs to become a service and corporate focus and responsibility.

## Effective Practice

The review team undertook a survey with 35 practitioners and asked them to rate change over the last 12 months, September 2013 – September 2014. The scale used was -5 being much worse and +5 being much better. The average score was +2. A sample summary of comments made by practitioners is detailed below:

### Positives:

- We are listened to
- An excellent manager
- Communication is good between social worker and other agencies
- Strong leadership
- Improvement in risk assessing
- Better gatekeeping
- Support as a newly qualified social worker was excellent
- Recognition of change needed
- Workforce stability
- Social workers are confident – we know what we are doing
- Low caseloads
- Open communication
- More structure – back to basics
- Team spirit

- Good morale and better workforce

### **Negatives:**

- Not enough support workers
- Need for greater consistency of communication – only some teams seem to be told about policy and practice changes
- Detailed and comprehensive assessments not completed
- Work in progress on quality – just on the agenda
- Provision of information for CP and LAC reviews is poor
- Unstable in one team; lack of services for LAC
- Provision of services for C+F is resource rather than needs led
- Too much paperwork
- High caseloads (25 plus)
- Care plans are frustrating as CP chairs and IROs write them. We can't amend them (Care Plans) even when poorly written
- Still work to do putting back basics
- Procedures not always clear
- Staff sickness burnout
- Future cutbacks

A survey was also undertaken with a relatively small group of 15 of the council's foster carers in order to test the quality of their experience of the service. The review team used a similar scale, 0 being worse and 10 being much better. The average score was 7.5.

The Director, Head of Service and Principal Officers demonstrated a consistent understanding of the progress made and achieved. Critically, they also understand and articulated there remains further changes and improvement required in achieving consistency and quality. As this focus develops, there should be greater evidence of management oversight in case records.

The introduction of legal surgeries has been productive and has facilitated important conversations and debate about what is in the best interest of the child. This includes whether the threshold for legal orders has been met and what other strategies and intervention could, and might be pursued to maintain the child safely within their family, home and community.

The review team meetings and interviews with managers and practitioners reinforced the commitment to continuing the journey of improvement. The review team consistently observed the level of enthusiasm and energy in the workforce. There was realism about the progress made and what remains to be done. Managers and practitioners articulated the importance of maintaining the momentum for change and improvement.

### **Commissioning**

There is need for renewed energy and activity in commissioning services to address the levels of activity and effectiveness of intervention.

The service is managing inappropriate and unacceptably high levels of activity. This level of activity has and will have a detrimental impact on the quality of intervention. Analysis of the service as at March 31st 2014, identifies that the council children's services has:

- The highest rate of core assessments in Wales
- The second highest rate of initial assessments in Wales
- The second highest rate of children in need in Wales
- The highest rate of children on the child protection register
- The highest rate of Looked After Children in Wales and England

The council is aware of the need for urgent attention to review and change existing services commissioned with independent organisations, including commissioning for outcomes. Priority and focus should be on services that promote and maintain children and young people, who are at risk of entering the Looked After Children system, in their families and home communities.

The balance between agency and in-house placement provision requires a strategic approach that delivers more local and in-house placements. This will contribute to improving outcomes for children and opportunity to re-invest funding in intervention services that manage risk and achieves maintaining children, safely, with their own families and community.

## 7. Performance and resource management

### Strengths:

- There has been a significant focus on and improvement in key performance indicators
- The council has protected the budget for children and family services
- There has been significant investment in workforce, systems and processes that lay the foundations for improving outcomes although some areas still under pressure
- The council knows its strengths and areas of development

### Areas for Development:

- Now you have general compliance, focus on quality
- Do more benchmarking and external comparison and audit

- Be more ambitious for your children and young people - get the deprivation factor in proportion and compare with your family group not with the most deprived areas of the country
- Safely address the rate of children becoming, and those that are currently Looked After with much greater urgency – you can both improve outcomes AND reduce cost AND give greater financial sustainability

## Performance

The council's children's services performance indicator monitoring system has established and provided a valuable context of the service and its business. This did not previously exist.

The council's processes to collect and collate data and report performance of key indicators provided evidence of good and effective systems having been developed and maintained. This provides opportunity for frequent monitoring of performance and the review team were briefed by both professional staff and elected members how performance data was being monitored and scrutinized.

An example of good progress in delivering improvement is the council's response to referrals. The outcomes measured by key performance indicators of timeliness, decision making within one working day, initial assessments completed within 7 days during the period April – September 2014 demonstrates performance is above the Welsh average in 2013/14.

However, the performance indicators only gives half of the picture, and having now established systems to manage the quantitative data, the peer review team

feels that it is important to focus on the quality of the work and the extent to which planned outcomes are realised. The council's approach in developing good and informative systems has been effectively applied in stabilising its workforce. The previous reliance on agency staff has been successfully addressed with the recruitment of permanent social work practitioner appointments against the staff establishment. The review team were briefed and provided with evidence of successful recruitment processes.

The appointment of permanent staff has been critical and has achieved stability. The council, consistent with many authorities across Wales and the United Kingdom are recruiting newly qualified social work practitioners. Importantly newly qualified social workers, together with more experienced practitioners have benefitted from the availability, and expectation, of completing professional training development opportunities.

## Quality

The peer review team audited a small sample of case files from the following categories:

- Families who have not been previously known to social services prior to initial contact and where early intervention/prevention needs have been identified during initial contact
- Child protection referrals
- Child protection re-referrals
- Children with disabilities
- Looked After Children

Inevitably this process highlighted positive and focused attention in some cases and room for improvement in others. The following information is

provided as a brief sample of the findings from the small file audit:

### Strengths:

- Child seen alone
- Clear outcomes identified
- Parents strengths identified and recorded
- Advocacy considered and provided
- Case summary evident
- Good case recording
- Evidence of supervision recorded
- Clear outcomes identified in initial and core assessments

### Areas for Development:

- Parents and Childs needs not fully identified and addressed
- Consistent supervision on file
- Analysis of available information
- Quality of care plan
- Needs, not service alone, should influence care plan

The council should benchmark its performance with both Welsh and United Kingdom local authorities to more clearly understand its position and to enable it to be more ambitious for its children and young people. The peer review team suggests this should be undertaken with all practitioner staff in children's services, also across the council, particularly in education, housing and youth services. In addition politicians should have the opportunity to understand NPTs performance in relation to Welsh and United Kingdom performance.

### Resources

The council and senior managers in children's social services consistently demonstrated awareness and need for a strategic focus, with clear targets that drives and delivers safely, a reduction in the rate of Looked After Children. This

has the potential to both deliver better outcomes for children and young people and to enable resources to be more effectively used to support families and on prevention.

The council is to be applauded for protecting the financial investment in children's services at a time of public sector cuts. This has been effective in stabilising and improving performance in this service. The review team were reassured during interviews with senior managers that there was an acknowledgement that this was unsustainable.

Senior politicians demonstrated a good understanding and awareness of the service and financial position in children's services but may need to seek greater clarity about the service strategy to safely reduce the rate of Looked After Children and its financial impact.

## **8. Activities that may help Neath Port Talbot to progress**

The peer review team made the following suggestions to Neath Port Talbot in terms of areas for progression:

- Work with Bridgend and Swansea and lead on addressing the areas where Neath Port Talbot depends on the behaviour of key partners in the system, for example the courts and the Health Board
- Re-boot the Family Support Strategy and commissioning and base it on safely reducing the number of children in care by improving outcomes
- Develop a professional quality framework that brings together a professional social work lead, outcomes for and engagement with CYP, supervision, professional development and so on
- Develop a LAC Forum, Young People's Safeguarding Forum and involve children and young people in a range of consultations etc. They are experts by experience
- Ensure that all casework involves CYP and/or their advocates or representatives
- Reflect on Deputy Team Managers holding cases and the potential for creating teams that are brittle
- Focus on achieving consistency in caseloads

The team suggested the following areas for the action planning workshop at the end of the time on site:

- Voice of the Child
- Looked After Children (LAC) Strategy
- Outcomes - quality v quantity.
- Dependence and Protection v Promoting Independence
- Continued improvement and maintaining momentum
- Interface with external organisations
- Achieving consistency across operational teams
- Financial sustainability
- Consolidating and maintaining workforce gains

Notes from the workshop are attached as Appendix 2.

## Appendix 1: Draft Children’s Services Standards

The standards are grouped into four main themes, with further sub-themes

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Outcomes for, and the experiences of, children and young people and their families who use services</b>	<b>Leadership, strategy and working together</b>	<b>Service delivery, effective practice and commissioning</b>	<b>Performance, quality and resource management</b>
<b>Elements</b>	<p><b>1. Outcomes</b></p> <p><b>2. Children and young people and their families experiences of services</b></p> <p>This theme looks at what difference to outcomes for children and young people and their families there has been. It also looks at the quality of experience of people who have used the services and supports provided.</p>	<p><b>3. Leadership</b></p> <p><b>4. Strategy</b></p> <p><b>5. Local Safeguarding Board</b></p> <p>This theme looks at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the overall vision for children, young people and their families’ services</li> <li>the strategy that is used to achieve that vision</li> </ul>	<p><b>6. Service Delivery and effective practice</b></p> <p><b>7. Commissioning</b></p> <p>This theme looks at the effectiveness of service delivery, practice and commissioning in securing better outcomes for children, young people and their families</p>	<p><b>8. Performance, quality and resource management</b></p> <p>This theme looks at how the performance, quality and resources of the service, including its people, are managed</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• how this is led</li><li>• the role and performance of the Local Safeguarding Board</li><li>• how all partners work together to ensure high quality services and outcomes</li></ul>		
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## Outcomes for and the experiences of children and young people and their families who use services

This theme looks at what difference services make in relation to outcomes for children and young people and their families and the quality of experience of those who have used the services provided.

1.	Ideal Service	Probes and Questions	Possible sources of evidence
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p>1.1 Children and young people and their families who use services have improved outcomes as a result</p> <p>1.2 The council works with partners to prevent harm occurring to children and young people and address risk of harm at an early stage</p> <p>1.3 Children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect are safeguarded in the community and in establishments such as homes and hospitals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officers and Members work across individual service and agency boundaries, and beyond traditional definitions of their roles, to improve outcomes</li> <li>• Outcomes for children and young people supported by social care services are improved through effective co-ordination with partners</li> <li>• Families are supported to parent their children and young people well and to support positive outcomes for them</li> <li>• Children and young people are in good health or are being helped to improve their health and their health needs are identified</li> <li>• Children and young people attend school or other educational provision and they learn. The attainment gap between them and their peers is narrowing</li> <li>• Children and young people have their welfare safeguarded and promoted</li> <li>• Children and young people live in safe, stable and appropriate homes or families with their brothers and sisters when this is in their best interests. The development of safe, stable and secure relationships with adults is central to planning for children and young people's futures and this supports the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an emphasis on outcomes throughout all strategies, plans and progress reporting and in interviews and case records</li> <li>• Performance reporting includes outcomes measures</li> <li>• Case files. Local Safeguarding Adults Board reports.</li> <li>• Serious Case Reviews, Domestic Homicide Reviews, Serious Untoward Incidents, Mental Health Inquiries, Coroners reports</li> <li>• Reports to the Council, NHS, Community Safety Partnership and Local Strategic Partnership</li> <li>• LSCB, council and management reports</li> <li>• Council and LSCB publicity and reports</li> <li>• Consideration is given, and appropriate action is taken, in</li> </ul>

	<p>1.4 The council and its partners' approach to work with children, young people and families clearly has an outcome based focus</p>	<p>development of secure attachments that persist over time and wherever they are living</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help and protection for children and young people is sensitive and responsive to age, disability, ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, gender identity, language, race and sexual orientation</li> <li>• Children and young people who are, or who are likely to be, at risk of harm or who are the subject of concern are identified and protected</li> <li>• Children and young people who live in households where at least one parent or carer misuses substances or suffers from mental ill-health, or where there is domestic violence, are helped and protected</li> <li>• The public (including under-represented and vulnerable groups), is aware of the risk of abuse and neglect to children and young people and how to raise concerns</li> <li>• Effective prevention and early intervention is in place</li> <li>• When support is needed, children, young people and families are able to access it for as long as it is needed, throughout their childhood and beyond</li> <li>• There is a shared approach to outcomes between the Council, NHS, Police and other partners</li> </ul>	<p>relation to information received from the public</p>
<p><b>2. Children and young people's, and their families</b></p>	<p>2.1 The views and experiences of children, young people and their families are at the centre of service design and influence development and strategic thinking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The local authority is proactive and accurate in identifying and responding to the changing needs of its local communities and the performance of its services and staff. Change and improvement are consistently and effectively implemented and reviewed for their impact. Children, young people and families clearly benefit from improvements that are made and the impact of their feedback is well evidenced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback from people who have used safeguarding services and actions taken as a result appears in plans, reports and strategies</li> <li>• LCSB reports</li> <li>• Aggregated reports from reviews</li> </ul>

<p><b>experiences of services</b></p>	<p>2.2 The council and its partners have achieved high levels of expressed, positive experiences from people who have used services</p> <p>2.3 Delivery accords with the public sector Equality Duty</p> <p>2.4 Services are personalised to the strengths and needs of individual children and young people and their families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate where appropriate</li> <li>• Children and young people are listened to, practice is focused on their needs and experiences and influenced by their wishes and feelings or, where they cannot represent their view themselves, those advocated on their behalf</li> <li>• Adults working with children and young people who are, or have been looked after help them to understand and manage their early childhood experiences, to progress well and achieve educationally, and to influence decisions about their future</li> <li>• Children and young people receive help that is proportionate to risk; children and families are not routinely subjected to formal child protection investigations if these are not necessary</li> <li>• People experiencing services are treated sensitively and with dignity and respect</li> <li>• There are services available to support families including where adults may also be at risk of abuse or neglect, and for abusers to address their behaviours where appropriate</li> <li>• Wider family members, friends and neighbours are engaged in safeguarding children when this is appropriate</li> <li>• Children and young people are represented by a Children in Care Council or similar body which is regularly consulted on how to improve the support they receive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protocols, strategies, examples of children and young people's involvement</li> <li>• Forms and protocols that use respectful language</li> <li>• A range of methods for engaging with children and young people e.g. young people's parliaments, focus groups, involvement activities</li> <li>• Policies and procedures</li> <li>• File audits</li> <li>• Management information</li> </ul>
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## Leadership, strategy and working together

This theme looks at how political and professional leadership is exercised in developing and implementing vision and strategy alongside key partner leaders to improve outcomes for children and young people and their families.

<b>3. Leadership</b>	<b>Ideal Service</b>	<b>Probes and Questions</b>	<b>Possible sources of evidence</b>
	<p>3.1 There is recognised and active leadership within the council</p> <p>3.2 There is joint and co-ordinated leadership with and by other key partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspirational, confident, ambitious and influential leadership changes the lives of local children, young people and families, including children who are looked after and those who have left or who are leaving care</li> <li>• Leaders are visible and effective. They innovate and promote creative ideas to sustain the highest-quality services, including early help services, for all children and young people</li> <li>• Professional challenge and leadership ambition inspire high-quality work with families that helps, protects and promotes the welfare of all children and young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable</li> <li>• Social workers are knowledgeable and skilled casework leaders working with other professionals</li> <li>• There are clear and agreed structures, accountabilities, roles and responsibilities at member and officer leadership level for Safeguarding</li> <li>• Leaders are ambitious for all the children and young people in the area and make it known. They clearly communicate the overlays and distinctions between safeguarding, domestic violence, exclusion, hate crime, anti-social behaviour and community cohesion so that vulnerable adults are safeguarded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews, focus groups and observation</li> <li>• Council reports, plans and strategies</li> <li>• LCSB reports</li> <li>• Media reports</li> <li>• Case records</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Officer leaders communicate clearly the legislative frameworks within which safeguarding sits</li> <li>• Key councillors, non-executive board members and officers are knowledgeable about children and young people, particularly those for whom they are corporate parents and those who need safeguarding. They keep abreast of local and national developments and learning, including enquiries, serious case reviews and reports</li> <li>• The Director of Social Services, the lead elected member and the senior management team have a comprehensive knowledge about what is happening at the 'front line' to enable them to discharge their responsibilities effectively</li> <li>• They know and understand the difference that help, care and protection are making</li> <li>• The council acts as a strong and effective corporate parent for children looked after and those leaving or who have left care</li> <li>• Leaders, both professional and political, drive continuous improvement so that the local authority is consistently effective as the lead agency for the protection and care of children and young people and as a corporate parent</li> <li>• The Chief Executive holds the chair of the LCSB to account for the effectiveness of the board</li> <li>• Partners actively champion the key principles as set out in the public duties on race, gender and disability</li> <li>• Leaders are supported by appropriate training and resources</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>4. Strategy</b></p>	<p>4.1 Promoting the wellbeing of and safeguarding children and young people and their families are prominently embedded in corporate and service strategies across the council and partners</p> <p>4.2 The council has a clear vision, priorities, strategies and plans for children and young people that promote their wellbeing and safeguard them</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The local authority works with partners to deliver early help, protect children and young people, improve educational attainment and narrow the gap for the children looked after and care leavers</li> <li>• The council's corporate plan, children's services, LCSB, Adult Safeguarding, Community Safety (including domestic violence, anti-social behaviour and hate crime), Equalities and Diversity and Community plans demonstrate commitment to improving the lives of children and young people and dovetail with each other</li> <li>• Analyses have been undertaken of both needs and the sufficiency of services and plans are published that set out clear local priorities and the range of available services that respond to and meet the needs of local children, young people and families in need of help, care and protection</li> <li>• There is a clear and up-to-date strategy for commissioning and developing services delivered by a suitably qualified and experienced workforce that meets the needs of local children and young people and families</li> <li>• The process of developing strategies has been inclusive and includes the Council, children and young people, NHS, police, CPS, voluntary and community sectors, etc.</li> <li>• There is a clear strategy for improving outcomes for children and families in need of support or protection and for children who are looked after</li> <li>• The council knows what the views and experiences of children and young people who have used services are and has incorporated these in its vision,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate, Children, Young People and Families and Partners' strategies and plans</li> <li>• Commissioning and contracting documentation</li> <li>• LCSB reports</li> <li>• Policies and procedures</li> <li>• The vision is articulated by the leaders and all employees across the Council and by its partner organisations</li> <li>• Needs Analyses</li> <li>• Director's Reports</li> </ul>
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		strategies, plans and priorities. These are also incorporated into commissioning processes	
<b>5. Working Together</b>	<p>5.1 There is multi-agency commitment to safeguarding</p> <p>5.2. Safeguarding is effective at all levels (prevention and intervention)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Safeguarding Board demonstrates effective leadership and co-ordinates the delivery of Children’s Safeguarding policy and practice across all agencies, with representatives who are sufficiently senior to get things done</li> <li>• The Safeguarding Board provides challenge and support on the outcomes for, and experiences of, children and young people needing safeguarding services and the impact and effectiveness of service delivery to its member organisations</li> <li>• The Safeguarding Board has a clear understanding of how well it is performing through regular self-assessment and benchmarking and has a positive attitude to learning and improvement as a board</li> <li>• The Safeguarding Board uses data, information and intelligence to identify risk and trends and formulates action in response to these</li> <li>• There are strong links between the Children’s Safeguarding Board, the Safeguarding Adults Board, the Community Safety Partnership and other strategic partnerships</li> <li>• There are clear protocols in place that integrate different agency procedures – for instance between Serious Untoward Incidents and Safeguarding, Children’s and Adults Serious Case Reviews, Domestic Homicide Reviews, Mental Health Reviews etc</li> <li>• There are mechanisms in place to ensure that the views of children and young who are in situations where they need protection, and their families and carers, inform the work of the board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board reports and minutes</li> <li>• Council Executive and Scrutiny reports and minutes</li> <li>• NHS Trust and Police Authority and other Board papers and minutes</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reporting mechanisms (to the Board and from the Board to the Council and the Boards of partner organisations) are clear and effective</li><li>• Partners work in an atmosphere and culture of co-operation, mutual assurance, accountability and ownership of responsibility</li><li>• The Chief Executive, drawing on other LSCB partners and, where appropriate, the Lead Member will hold the director to account for the effective working of the LSCB</li></ul>	
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## Service delivery, effective practice and commissioning

This theme looks at the effectiveness of service delivery, practice and commissioning in securing better outcomes for children, young people and their families.

<p><b>6.</b> <b>Delivery and effective practice</b></p>	<p>7.1 Partners have robust and effective service delivery that improves outcomes for children and young people and makes safeguarding everybody's business</p> <p>7.2 Safeguarding is personalised and meets the requirements of law and guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and young people who are, or who are likely to be, at risk of harm or who are the subject of concern are identified and protected</li> <li>• Help is provided early in the emergence of a problem and is well coordinated and recorded through multi-agency arrangements</li> <li>• Thresholds between early help and statutory child protection work are appropriate, understood and operate effectively</li> <li>• Records of action and decision are clear and up to date</li> <li>• Children and young people are listened to and heard. Social workers build effective relationships with them and their families in order to assess the likelihood of, and capacity for, change</li> <li>• Risk is well understood, managed and regularly reviewed</li> <li>• Children and young people experience timely and effective multi-agency help and protection through risk-based assessment, authoritative practice, planning and review that secures change</li> <li>• Decisions about children and young people becoming looked after are made using high-quality assessments about the risk of harm or actual harm to them and the likelihood of change in their family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies and procedures and the awareness and utilisation of them by staff</li> <li>• Guidance for staff and partners (including such tools as flow charts)</li> <li>• Information and advice for the public</li> <li>• File audits</li> <li>• Interviews</li> <li>• Practice observation</li> <li>• Any staff surveys</li> <li>• Staff views of support from safeguarding 'specialists'</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thresholds are clear and applied appropriately</li> <li>• Children and young people are listened to by social workers who know them well</li> <li>• Adults working with children and young people help them to understand and manage their early childhood experiences, to progress well and achieve educationally, and to influence decisions about their future</li> <li>• They return home with the support they need and when it is safe for them. If this is not possible, they live in stable placements where they are helped to build positive relationships and maintain contact with their family and friends where this remains in their best interests</li> <li>• Care plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that the child or young person's current and developing needs continue to be met</li> <li>• Permanent homes and families are found for children and young people without unnecessary delay. Their needs are met and they live with their brothers and sisters if that is assessed as being in their best interests</li> <li>• They do not experience placement moves unless they are part of a planned return home or in accordance with plans for their future. Their education is not disrupted unless it is their best interests and plans for their schooling provide any extra help they need to make up time and learning that has been missed</li> <li>• They develop safe and secure relationships with adults that persist over time</li> </ul>	
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When support is needed, children, young people and families are able to access it for as long as it is needed, throughout their childhood and beyond</li> <li>• The public, voluntary sector, all council and partner staff are clear what abuse is and how to respond to it. People are clear what a safeguarding referral is</li> <li>• Contact arrangements are clear and responses are timely and proportionate</li> <li>• Specialist safeguarding staff/ safeguarding teams support others in identifying and addressing safeguarding issues</li> <li>• Children's services staff are alert to when there are adults who are experiencing abuse or neglect in the household and there is joint work with Adults Services with families where both adults and children may be experiencing abuse</li> <li>• Information sharing protocols are clear so that information is shared appropriately across agencies. Staff are confident in using these arrangements</li> <li>• Young people leaving care and preparing to leave care receive support and help to assist them in making a successful transition to adulthood</li> <li>• Plans for them to leave care are effective and address their individual needs. They are safe and feel safe, particularly where they live</li> <li>• Young people acquire the necessary level of skill and emotional resilience to successfully move towards independence</li> <li>• They are able to successfully access education, employment, training and safe housing</li> </ul>	
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They enjoy stable and enduring relationships with staff and carers who meet their needs</li> <li>• Effective relationships with Cafcass, the health community, the family courts and the local Family Justice Board ensure that avoidable delay in care proceedings is reduced and children, young people and their families benefit from efficient and effective progress through legal proceedings</li> </ul>	
<b>7. Commissioning</b>	7.1 The council commissions safe and cost-effective services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commissioning and contracting set out quality assurance and service standards that assure they are effective and safeguard children and young people and their families. Clear expectations and reporting requirements are placed on providers and they respond to these</li> <li>• Contract monitoring has a focus on safeguarding and effectiveness and any shortfalls in standards are addressed</li> <li>• Commissioning and contracting with regulated providers includes CSSIW registration and regulation guidance in relation to quality and safeguarding</li> <li>• Actions take place to safeguard individuals (whether funded by the host or other local authorities) to safeguard people when standards in services put people at risk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifications and contract monitoring reports</li> <li>• Management and LSCB reports</li> <li>• Case files</li> <li>• Documented accreditation schemes</li> </ul>

## Performance, quality and resource management

This theme looks at how the performance, quality and resources of the service, including its people, are managed.

<b>8. Performance and Resource Management</b>	<b>Ideal Service</b>	<b>Probes and Questions</b>	<b>Key documentation and evidence</b>
	<p>8.1 Services are held accountable through performance measures, including quality measures, towards the outcomes for children and young people and their families in the strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a performance management framework that runs across children’s services functions</li> <li>• Quality assurance systems incorporate safeguarding and risk management, together with improved outcomes for children and young people. These systems incorporate children and young people’s definitions of what is a quality service</li> <li>• Local workforce and training plans provide people with the right skills for children’s services</li> <li>• There are sufficient, sufficiently skilled staff at all levels to deliver strategy, maintain the council in a position where its activities are lawful and promote positive outcomes for children and young people and their families</li> <li>• The local authority social care workforce is sufficient, stable, suitably qualified and competent to deliver high-quality services to children and their families. Managers and practitioners are experienced, effectively trained and supervised and the quality of their practice improves the lives of vulnerable children, young people and families. There is effective organisational support for the professional development of social workers, and leaders provide the right environment for good social work to take place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A suite of indicators including quantitative and qualitative measures of performance that is reported regularly to senior and team managers</li> <li>• Summaries of training activity</li> <li>• Skills and confidence as demonstrated in interviews, observations and through file audits</li> <li>• Serious case reviews</li> <li>• Council and management reports</li> <li>• Interviews and observation</li> <li>• Overview and scrutiny agendas and reports with evidence of follow up</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff have regular supervision that facilitates good decision -making support and an appraisal scheme that operates at all levels and which addresses development and performance</li> <li>• There is cross-sector training and development including equality awareness training</li> <li>• There is a range of systems that improve the quality of services on the front line, including through quality assurance, performance reporting and mechanisms (such as file and practice audits, customer feedback, practice forums and mystery shopping)</li> <li>• A learning culture is evident. Partners learn from both best practice and from things that don't go well. Serious case reviews are used as the basis of improvement for the future</li> <li>• The local authority, through performance management and monitoring, has an accurate and systematically updated understanding of its effectiveness. It demonstrates a track record of dealing rigorously and effectively with areas for development. Leaders, including elected members and managers, have a comprehensive and current knowledge of what is happening at the 'front line' and a track record of responding appropriately and quickly to service deficiencies or new demands</li> <li>• Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and demonstrably used to improve the quality of decisions and the provision of help to children and young people</li> </ul>	
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The local authority knows itself well, is a learning organisation and can demonstrate evidence of practice that is informed, modified and sustainably improved by feedback, research and intelligence about the quality of services and the experiences of children, young people and families who use them. This may, for example, include feedback from the children in care council, change that arises from complaints that children and families make about their experiences or from successful or disrupted placements or adoption breakdown</li><li>• Arrangements for the role and process of overview and scrutiny are clear and effective, with council resources devoted to it to ensure effectiveness</li></ul>	
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Cathie Williams  
2014

## **Appendix 2: Notes from Action Planning**

Three members of the peer review team facilitated a workshop that included senior, middle and first line managers. The themes proposed and considered for the workshop included:

- Voice of the Child
- Looked After Children (LAC) Strategy
- Outcomes – quality v quantity
- Dependence and Protection v Promoting Independence
- Continued improvement and maintaining momentum
- Interface with external organisations
- Achieving consistency across operational teams
- Financial sustainability
- Consolidating and maintaining workforce gains

An initial discussion with the Director and Head of Service confirmed a preference to identify a small number of themes and issues to achieve clear and time focused action. The following three themes were agreed for the workshop:

- Looked After Children Strategy
- Outcomes for children, young people and families
- Voice of the child

An additional theme was proposed and agreed:

- What the service stands for

### **Looked After Children Strategy**

#### **Key issues included:**

- Commissioning
- Support to and for placements
- Prevention and gate keeping arrangements
- Training for foster carers, including becoming buddies/counsellors
- A simplified payment system for foster carers
- A review of the balance between in house and agency placements.
- Analysis and profiling the LAC population
- Developing and delivering a safe reduction strategy
- Regularly reporting benchmarking rates of LAC with Welsh and English averages

#### **Action:**

- Outline strategy by 15.11.14
- Lead – PO Placement Service

## **Outcomes for Children**

### **Key issues included:**

- Identifying what should be included in measuring positive outcomes for children
- NPT applying a systematic approach for measuring outcomes
- Utilising existing tools readily available in the market
- Actively and regularly engage and discuss what good outcomes are with managers and practitioners
- Talk with families within and outside NPT to understand what was important and successful
- Utilise distance travelled tools
- Strengths and needs questionnaires
- Flying Start measures
- Regularly and systematically debating with children, young people and families, what it is you are trying to achieve
- Undertaking case studies and file audits

### **Action:**

- Initial Plan by 31.10.14
- Implementation by 31.3.15
- Lead – PO Safeguarding

## **Voice of the Child**

### **Key issues included:**

- Limited evidence of engagement with children, young people and families
- Apply a systematic approach to achieving engagement and giving children a voice
- Identifying a model and mechanism to collect, collate and evaluate children's views
- Listening to children
- Focus on Looked After Children, Children on Child Protection Register and Children in Need
- Care Planning process that influences and shapes service delivery and intervention
- Skilling practitioners to engage effectively with children and young people
- Methods of engagement might include; survey monkey, focus groups, forums for young people, mood questionnaires and viewpoint (LAC)
- Opportunities to celebrate success with children and their families

### **Action:**

- Outline Strategy – 31.12.14
- Lead – Head of Service

## **What the Service Stands For**

### **Key issues included:**

- Development of a service strapline

- Convey the strapline with staff, members, partners, regulators and the Welsh network
- Favoured strapline at workshop – 'Achieving quality, supporting families, managing risk'

**Action:**

- Strapline agreed and implemented by 31.1.15
- Lead – Director of Social Services & Housing