



Arolygiaeth Gofal a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol Cymru
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

**Inspection Report on the Arrangements for
Looked after Children and Young People in
Bridgend County Borough Council**

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Report on the Inspection of the Arrangements for Looked after Children and Young People in Bridgend County Borough Council.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This inspection was carried out by Care and Social Services Wales (CSSIW) as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The focus of the inspection was determined by the analysis of evidence provided for last year's Annual Council Reporting Framework (ACRF) and CSSIW's Chief Inspector's letter with the accompanying performance evaluation. A copy of CSSIW's performance review on Bridgend County Borough Council 2010/2011 is available on the CSSIW website www.cssiw.org.uk

- 1.2 The inspectors would like to thank all staff in Bridgend, the service users and other agencies who contributed to this inspection.

2. Methodology

2.1 The inspection was carried out by Pam Clutton and Sheila Booth. The inspectors read 15 children and young people's case files which included a number of care leavers and those who had left care in the last twelve months. Cases which related to children and young people who had become looked after in the last twelve months were selected for review, together with a number of cases which related to children and young people who were being supported by the local authority to live at home under a care order or under a special guardianship order.

2.2 The inspectors carried out a number of interviews with senior officers and staff, including:

- Director of Social Services;
- The chairperson of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- The chairperson of the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee;
- Head of children and young people's services;
- The group manager with responsibility for service provision.
- The safeguarding and quality assurance manager;
- The principal education psychologist and the looked after children education service manager;
- The team manager of the independent reviewing team and two independent reviewing officers;
- The team managers from the fostering and the adoption services teams;
- The youth offending service manager;
- The manager of the residential complex needs unit;
- Four social workers, a senior practitioner and three team managers from the safeguarding teams and services for the 16 plus team;
- Senior representatives of statutory and third sector partner agencies;
- A group interview with two area safeguarding teams; and
- Observation of a Corporate Parenting Committee meeting.

2.3 The report includes direct feedback from service users and families.

2.4 Inspectors considered performance indicators for 2010 - 2011 and the period April 2011– March 2012, case load information, data on supervision, and a number of committee reports, protocols and information on looked after children services.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 There is good corporate support for children's services in Bridgend. The Council continues to make the improvement of children's services a priority .A considerable amount of work has been completed to stabilize the workforce and reorganise workloads to improve efficiency and manage the high volume of work. There are positive signs that this work is resulting in better outcomes for children and young people.
- 3.2 There are pressures for staff in prioritising work for 'looked after 'children. Social workers struggle to have capacity to add value to the care children are receiving. This could result in the more vulnerable and challenging children not always receiving the support they need. Education and health support services are providing good support but there is no system to alert them to children who have a priority need.
- 3.3 There is a proactive approach to addressing the challenge of rising 'looked after children population with effective programme management in place. Communication about the aims of the programmes needs to be improved and staff more engaged in the development of the service.

4. Summary of key findings

- 4.1 Looked after children and their families have access to comprehensive information about services and can easily contact key staff.**
- Children's services did not provide specific information for looked after children and young people and their families outlining their rights or the authority's corporate parenting responsibilities.
- 4.2 How far needs and risks are assessed effectively to support looked after children and young people to achieve the best outcomes.**

- The timeliness of core assessments has improved considerably and inspectors saw some good assessments on files reviewed;
- There was inconsistency in quality and few assessments recorded the consideration of risk. Inspectors were informed that there is funding available for specialist assessments;
- Assessment and progress records seen were of good quality. A small number of children and young people did not have a current core assessment or a copy of an assessment and progress record on file.

4.3 How far people have a good up to date care plan describing the services that will be provided to meet their needs.

- The quality of care plans was inconsistent with a lack of synergy between assessments and plans;
- There was little evidence of the involvement of service users in the planning process with the exception of pathway planning for care leavers;
- There was little focus on permanency or contingency planning.

4.4 Cases are managed and monitored effectively to support the best outcomes for looked after children and young people.

- There has been an improvement in the percentage of looked after children and young people's cases managed by a qualified worker in the previous twelve months;
- There was evidence that statutory visits were timely but it was not possible to determine from the recording of the visits what progress the looked after child or young person was making;
- Social workers interviewed demonstrated a high level of commitment to looked after children and young people;
- There were examples of good quality direct work being carried out with looked after children and young people;
- The quality of the recording of reviews was inconsistent but with some excellent examples which clearly evidenced the progress of the care planning;

- Recording of service users views was minimal and some examples of reviews being carried out without the relevant participants were noted.

4.5 How far services provide good standards of care, with respect for people’s needs and their individual circumstances.

- There was evidence in some cases reviewed that looked after children and young people were doing well and achieving educationally;
- Personal education plans were completed for the majority of children and young people whose files were reviewed. However the quality was poor with little indication of who was involved in developing or implementing the plan;
- There is a gap in services for children whose emotional well being is compromised .Workers were concerned that looked after children and young people had not received support from child and adolescent mental health services.
- The high number of looked after children and young people present a challenge to the delivery of education support services for all. The range of provision and quality of the service in cases reviewed was good.

4.6 Do people have their wellbeing promoted and are they safeguarded by the authority working in co-ordination with other organisations?

- Case files seen by inspectors evidenced that the All Wales Child Protection Procedures were being followed in a timely way;
- The recording of assessment of risk and decision making could be improved. It was difficult to track the outcomes of some child protection interventions;
- There were arrangements in place to check out that looked after children and young people were being kept safe.

4.7 How far people using services are enabled to achieve the best possible social outcomes, in terms of independence, overcoming barriers to inclusion and developing abilities.

- There was evidence that families were being supported to parent their children in their community;
- Financial arrangements for children to be looked after under special guardianship orders have been regularly reviewed but review of support arrangements were not on files seen by inspectors. The authority has identified the need to formalise a training and support framework for both kinship these carers;
- The support provided for looked after children and young people to develop independence skills needs to be clearly outlined and agreed with carers;
- Arrangements to celebrate the positive attributes of looked after children and young people were successful and valued by all who participated;
- There were good arrangements in place to work with looked after children and young people who had been engaged in offending behaviour;
- Care leavers have been well supported to achieve positive outcomes. The authority recently launched an integrated service for young people aged 16 to 21 years. The provision aims to support vulnerable young people including care leavers to achieve independence.

4. 8 Are people are supported by staff who have appropriate qualifications, training, experience and skills? Are there sufficient staffs to meet people's needs?

- There are committed frontline staff and managers, staff morale is mostly good, and newly qualified staff joining the authority welcomed effective management support, mentoring and protected caseloads;
- There has been improvement in the stability of the workforce in children's services which had suffered a high turnover following the restructuring of the front line teams in 2010;
- There had been instability in the management arrangements for one team which had impacted negatively on morale;

- The volume and complexity of the safeguarding case work was stretching the capacity of workers to undertake pro-active direct work with looked after children and young people;
- Staff had not been able to access an appropriate level of training to acquire specific skills to support looked after children and young people.

4.9 Are the mechanisms in place for consulting with service users and carers about what they want from staff?

- Children's services had made considerable effort to organise a consultation event with looked after children and young people which was poorly attended.
- Children and young people need support to participate more fully in influencing their care plans and reviews.

4.10 How far the authority is able to ensure that staff and services meet the standards that have been set for them.

- There is an effective performance management framework in place with good availability of data on looked after children and young people;
- There are examples of improved permanency planning leading to more effectively resourced services but there is further work to be completed ;
- Social work staff need further training and support to promote permanency planning and carry out direct work with looked after children and young people;
- The independent reviewing service needs a more coherent and consistent system to monitor progress of care plans;
- There was no clear framework in place for carers in relation to decision making in some areas but guidance is being revised;
- There was evidence of regular case file audits but it was difficult to see the improvements achieved;
- Not all service users and staff interviewed were aware of the arrangements for looked after children and young people to access an advocacy service;

- Workers welcomed improvement in achieving better quality services through commissioning but the commissioning policy and guidance needs to be updated.

4.11 Meeting people's needs for quality social services are a clear focus for councillors, managers and staff.

- There is strong corporate support for looked after children and young people, and members are well informed about the performance of services being provided;
- The senior management team are committed to a number of projects for looked after children and young people aimed at :
 - Reducing the number of looked after children and young people;
 - Increasing the quality and range of placements; and,
 - Improving adoption outcomes.
- Not all staff were aware of the aims of the projects and how they are intended to work together;
- Members had visited front line teams but some staff reported they did not have the opportunity to communicate with them individually;
- The Corporate Parenting Committee Cabinet had shown excellent commitment to improving the life chances of looked after children which would be enhanced with increased involvement from all directorates.

5. Key findings

5.1 Getting Help

Access arrangements

The authority provides a children's guide to fostering which was reviewed in 2010. The guide is generic, not age related, and does not have a children's rights focus. This has been acknowledged by the authority and the service is currently developing and revised the guide. Young people interviewed were not certain about what rights they have, or about the frequency of statutory visits or reviews. Inspectors were not provided with any available literature for children and young people in relation to kinship care, statutory guardianship orders, or living at home on a care order. One young person interviewed suggested that an effective way of keeping looked after children and young people informed would be to have available an application for a mobile phone. The authority needs to develop a range of information which is age specific and easily accessible.

5.2. Assessment care management

There were 348 children and young people being looked after by Bridgend at the end of February 2012. This had increased from 328 in March 2011 which was a rise of 6% during 2011/2011. The authority is making determined efforts to ensure that the thresholds for children entering the looked after system are at the right level. The focus of this inspection was on the children who were looked after on a longer term basis either on a care order or under section 20 of the Children Act (1989). At the time of the inspection 75 looked after children cases were in court proceedings and 40 children had adoption placement orders in place.

The timeliness of core assessments had been a priority for improvement identified by CSSIW in 2010/2011. The senior management team had focussed successfully on promoting improvement which had resulted in 86% of assessments being completed within 35 days over the period of April 2011 to March 2012. This compared with 35.5% for the previous year. Inspectors found there was an inconsistency in the quality of core assessments reviewed. There were some examples of good quality assessments which evidenced consideration of risk and were outcome focussed.

Social workers reported that the electronic assessment templates did not facilitate the process. The electronic recording system is under review and senior management are aware of the issues. There was little evidence of how service users and their families were involved in the assessment process or whether they received copies of their assessments. Although assessments are subject to quality assurance it was not evident how good practice was disseminated or that inexperienced staff have access to examples of good quality work to assist their development.

Social work support for looked after children is provided by workers in four generic teams, each one covering an area of Bridgend County Borough Council. The level of looked after children and young people cases supervised by qualified workers in 2010/2011 had increased over the three years from 77% in 2009 to 90% for the first three quarters of 2011/2012. Welsh Government guidance is that all looked after children are supported by a qualified social worker. All children becoming looked after are now allocated to a qualified worker. Historically this had not been the case because of lack of capacity in the qualified workforce. Services for looked after children were delivered by two specialist teams before the service was restructured into generic teams in 2010. Support for permanency planning and direct work with children needs to be increased especially for those members of staff who have not previously worked with children in long term care.

The percentage of statutory visits carried out within prescribed timescales during the period April 2011 to February 2012 was 74% which is an improvement from 62% in 2011/2011. While it was evident from files seen that statutory visits were being completed it was not possible to determine from the recordings what progress children and young people were making. However social workers interviewed were clearly very knowledgeable about the children and young people on their case loads and were able to discuss their progress in detail. While young people and carers interviewed were not certain about the prescribed timescales for visits they felt they had regular contact with social workers. It was clear from discussion with service users and social workers that direct work was being carried out but this was not evident from files seen. Some workers reported that while they had identified work which was needed they did have problems finding the capacity to carry it out.

Timeliness of care planning remained stable at around 89% throughout the year. However plans seen by inspectors did not reflect the needs identified by core assessment which had been completed. Some plans had not been updated, did not identify outcomes, and lacked timescales. The percentage of children who had a permanency plan in place at the second review remained at around 90% throughout the year. The quality of the recording of the arrangements for permanency was inconsistent with little consideration of contingency planning. It was not evident that children, young people and their families were aware of the plan for permanency, as their views were not recorded on all plans or minutes of reviews seen by inspectors. An exception was a well developed plan for a disabled child. Some workers had concerns that care plans were not actively reviewed but that the focus was more on the child's living arrangements.

5.3 Range and Quality of services

Some children in long term foster placements whose progress was tracked for the inspection were experiencing stability and high standards of care. The percentage of looked after children and young people who had experienced three or more placement breakdowns during the year had remained stable at around 8%. Fostering services are being stretched to provide a range of placements to meet the presenting needs of children and young people. There is a relatively high use of independent placements (76) of which 56 are placed out of county. There has been some success in increasing foster placements driven through an element of the looked after children and young people's project which aims to increase the number and range of foster placements. Bridgend are members of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru which is making progress in ensuring quality placements and reducing costs.

The residential accommodation service for young people in Bridgend has been redesigned following a comprehensive review. One residential unit has been closed and the two remaining units have had their changed their purpose. One has become a transition unit which is set up to deliver a service for young people who require an intensively managed transition into independent living, a second aims to provide placements for those who are particularly vulnerable and present complex needs. The redesigned service was launched in January 2012 so it has not been running long

enough to evidence the intended outcomes. However the changes evidence that the authority is actively reviewing the needs of their looked after population.

The independent reviewing service had been recently been increased to six full time independent reviewing posts with business support, supervised by a team manager. The independent reviewers are all well experienced qualified social workers. The manager's position was vacant at the time of the inspection with interim cover arrangements in place. The previous manager returned to provide information on the service. The performance of the service in relation to timeliness is positive with an average of 98% of reviews carried out within timescales for the previous eleven months. Inspectors found some inconsistency in the quality of the recording of reviews and in two cases reviews had been held without the relevant people present. However well written reviews were seen where it was clear to see what progress had been made in implementing the child's care plan.

There was little evidence of the views of children and young people and their carers being recorded on review documents .However independent reviewing officers who were interviewed were very knowledgeable about children and young people whose plans they reviewed. There was a lack of capacity for independent reviewing officers to meet with all children before their reviews, but there was an expectation this would happen if there were any concerns about a child or young person. All independent reviewing officers interviewed were clear about their responsibilities in relation to the escalating concerns protocol. Any concerns about looked after children and young people would be raised initially with the team manager whose staff managed that case. There was good communication in place between independent reviewing officers and team managers but the progress of children and young people was not systemically brought to the attention of managers. It is recommended an alert system is developed for all reviews so that managers can review a child's progress with the worker at an early stage.

Social workers in some cases reviewed were actively supporting family contact for children and young people, and this was seen to help them manage relationships and enhance their well being. Inspectors saw examples where contact with family members was a positive experience, well planned, and carried out with consideration for all parties. Staff reported that there was not enough suitable accommodation for contact,

and they often had to commit a high percentage of their time to co-ordinating contact arrangements.

There was evidence of good support for those young people who were experiencing difficulties maintaining placements. However some workers had concerns about the lack of placement choice which had led to serial placement breakdowns for some more challenging young people. A post has been developed to provide additional support to foster carers at critical times. A support care service which aims to prevent children from being looked after has been developed with assistance from Fostering Network Wales. These services have not been operational long enough for an evaluation of the outcomes to have been completed but evidence the authority's proactive approach to maintaining stability for looked after children.

There is a fulltime health worker for looked after children and young people based with the independent reviewing officer service and employed by the ABMU Health Board. She is supported by a health visitor who works four days a week. Sixty percent of looked after children and young people's health assessments were completed during 2010/2011. Generic health visitors complete initial assessments for those under five years olds and any additional input needed is provided by the looked after children and young people health workers. Those children and young people aged 5 to 18 years receive a medical initially and then annual assessments are completed by the health workers. The timeliness of health assessments is affected by the numbers of children and young people being placed out of county. The service aims to add value to health assessments. Workers try to see children and young people alone and with their carers to better assess whether health needs are being met. The coordinator sits on the accommodation and permanency panel which is held weekly so has an overview of children becoming looked after. Links between social workers and the health workers were reported to be strong but there needs to be a more systematic approach to ensure that additional health support can be prioritised when needs are identified. For example health staff are not always notified should a child with complex needs become 'looked after' or if a young person becomes pregnant.

Health workers have access to looked after children and young people review documents and do attend reviews if there is a particular health issue. There is not

enough capacity for health workers to read all looked after children and young people reviews given that 871 were carried out in the previous eleven months.

Good links are maintained with school nurses and colleagues who provide a sexual health service. There are challenges for health staff in:

- Providing support for children whose emotional well being has been compromised;
- Promoting good sexual health advice for all looked after young people although health staff work with carers and service users to provide information and support;
- Providing a consistent service for those children and young people in out of county placements;
- Providing wider public health support.

The education support service for looked after children and young people consists of a co-ordinator who supervises a team of four support workers and a business support post. The coordinator is supervised by the head education psychologist whose team provides a number of support services for those in mainstream and specialist education. The looked after children and young people support team are accommodated in an education setting which is used to deliver some services. The percentage of children who achieved the core subject indicator during 2010/2011 improved for two age groups and was maintained for a third age group. This data is collated annually so was not available for 2011/2012. There is a positive approach to supporting children and young people in education with priority given to those at risk of exclusion. After school clubs and other constructive activities were welcomed by service users and carers.

Training is provided for designated looked after children and young people's teachers and there are good links with staff including half termly meetings. One to one support is available for children at risk of exclusion. An education psychologist service is available one day a week and children and young people can be referred to the mainstream service if appropriate. Inspectors did see evidence that some looked after children and young people were waiting for support from the educational psychological service. Work has been completed to increase the timeliness of personal education plans which was identified as an area for improvement in 2011/2011. The quality of personal education plans is being reviewed; those seen by inspectors were not of good quality.

There are challenges in achieving consistency and flexibility to provide supplementary services such as mentoring or for improving emotional well being. Overall staff and service users were positive about the education support services provided and there was a proactive approach to developing the service further.

5.4. The effect on people's lives

Arrangements to protect vulnerable people

While safeguarding was not the focus of this inspection there was evidence on the files seen by inspectors that the All Wales Child Protection Procedures were being followed within prescribed timescales. The recording of risk assessments and decision making was identified as an area for improvement. There were arrangements in place to check out that looked after children and young people were being kept safe. The majority of statutory visits recorded that children and young people had been seen alone by social workers. Children and young people had attended their reviews but it was not evident that they had the opportunity to prepare for their reviews by meeting with their social worker or independent reviewing officer. It was not recorded whether advocacy services had been offered to all looked after children and young people systematically, but there was evidence the service was working well for children using it. The service does not have sufficient capacity to respond to all referrals and there were nine children on the waiting list at the beginning of April. Services are commissioned from Barnardo's to provide support for those children and young people who have been, or are at risk of being sexually exploited and those who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour.

During the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 there were 79 new concerns assessed on 57 children and young people who were looked after. These led to 45 strategy discussions or meetings. There was one looked after young person whose name was placed on the child protection register.

Success in promoting independence and social inclusion

The authority has been proactive in looking at alternative options for permanency leading to 146 children being placed with relative carers or under special guardianship

orders. Relative placements are being regularly reviewed, inspectors did not see any reviews for those receiving financial support for special guardianship orders. However the authority reported these are being completed and an element of one of the LAC projects has started to take action to further improve the review system. The training and support for relative carers and those with special guardianship orders is not well developed, this is also being addressed.

There was evidence that young people are being prepared for independence through work with carers, health staff and the leaving care service. However there are no standards in place to ensure all young people have the level of support they need. It was evident that the leaving care service was providing an effective service for young people tracked during the inspection. The authority had kept in touch with all the care leavers aged 19 years during the eleven months before the inspection took place. An average of 88% of care leavers were in appropriate accommodation for the same period. It has been acknowledged that there is a shortage of suitable accommodation for single people in Bridgend.

The corporate parenting committee had been making efforts to influence this area of concern. Although the authority has put measures in place to increase the opportunities for care leavers only four out of fourteen 19 year olds were engaged in education, training or employment during 2011/2012. The looked after children and young people's education service supports young people with careers counselling and works with training providers and the leaving care service to promote learning and employment opportunities. The authority provided apprenticeships for care leavers and inspectors saw evidence of good outcomes for young people who were successful in gaining a place on the scheme. The multi-agency integrated service for vulnerable young people 16 to 21 years which had just been launched in the authority has the potential to improve outcomes for young people to support themselves to live successfully in the community. The service will need to be reviewed and evaluated to ensure its aims are achieved.

There is an improvement in the interface between the youth offending service and looked after children and young people's service but the protocol for joint working needs to be reviewed. There has been a system in place since February 2011 which has had a 94% success rate in keeping looked after children and young people out of the youth

justice system. One of the cases tracked by inspectors where a young person had been engaged in offending behaviour evidenced good multi-agency working and commitment by the workers involved.

5.5. Workforce

The workforce had stabilized in the last year with a reduction in both sickness absence and turnover of staff. There were no vacancies reported and the use of agency staff was minimal. This is a considerable improvement from the last inspection which was carried out in 2010. One team had been supervised by four managers over a period of two years. This has had an effect on the morale of the team but workers were positive about the current manager. Staff reported working long hours although case loads were more even across the teams. Morale was mainly good although some members of staff perceived their workloads to be difficult to manage. Some staff believed there was not enough recognition of the effect of court work on workload. There was evidence that the senior management team was making progress in addressing some of these issues. However a number of social workers were concerned that although they had identified direct work which needed to be carried out with looked after children and young people they had not had the capacity to carry it out.

Staff supervision was reported to be above 80% and workers reported good levels of formal and informal supervision. There was a focus on casework and staff were conscious of the pressure of time restraints and the need to improve performance. Although some processes had been stream lined it was reported that many templates on the electronic recording system were time consuming and repetitive.

Some staff had not had experience of working with looked after children and young people before the service was restructured. They had not had the opportunity to access relevant training or to develop additional skills needed to carry out direct work.

5.6 Performance management

The authority has a strong performance management system in place and there is proactive use of data to promote improvement. There was evidence on files reviewed by inspectors that file audits were being carried out. Issues highlighted were similar to

those identified by inspectors but it was difficult to see where the learning from the audits had led to improvements. It was not clear how staff were informed about the outcomes of the audits and how their development to address the shortcoming identified was supported.

There was evidence on files and from interviews that some carers are not clear about the responsibilities they have with regard to making decisions for the looked after children and young people in their care. The authority should consider how they ensure that all carers are well informed about how they manage day to day decisions out arrangements for children and young people. The performance of the independent reviewing service was delivering positive outcomes. However there is no system in place to give an early warning to managers that 'looked after children' are not making progress. This results in the inability to act quickly to address issues as they develop. It is also difficult for the senior management team to have an overview of the permanency plans for looked after children and young people population as a whole.

5.7 Leadership, corporate and political support

The senior management team have a clear vision of how the service can deliver better outcomes. Project management is being utilised to deliver the following:

- Reduction in numbers of looked after children;
- Increase in number of foster carers;
- Improvement in permanency options.

The projects are in the early stages of development but there are indications of positive progress. Staff interviewed were not well informed of how the looked after children and young people projects are envisaged to work together to achieve the desired outcomes. Improved communication with the whole staff group would increase the likelihood of the success of this vital initiative.

There was evidence of good corporate support for children's services. The corporate parenting committee was well informed about the challenges facing the service in supporting looked after children and young people to achieve their potential and lead fulfilled lives. The committee had been proactive in improving the life chances for children and young people in their care. Increased involvement from other directorates

such as housing and leisure might improve opportunities for stable accommodation and training and employment opportunities.

The agenda for the children and young people's scrutiny committee is set by the chairperson. He has firsthand knowledge of some aspects of permanency as a member of the adoption panel and the corporate parenting committee. It is crucial that there is robust scrutiny of the performance of children's services in relation to providing permanency and good outcomes for looked after children and young people. There has been a change in leadership arrangements in the authority with the departure of the Director of Health and Wellbeing who had the role of accountability for children's services. An interim arrangement was in place at the time of the inspection but this had not impacted on the progress of improvement plans.

6. Strengths

- Good corporate support for looked after children and young people;
- Services users spoken to were very positive about the support they received from their social workers and carers;
- Improved stability in the workforce who are committed to supporting looked after children and young people to achieve the best outcomes;
- The development of projects which have the potential to address the challenges of delivering effective permanency plans for looked after children and young people;
- All staff demonstrated a strong interest in improving services and clearly demonstrated how they valued the resilience of looked after children and young people;
- There was an experienced and effective independent reviewing team in place;
- The senior management team have a clear vision of what improvements are needed and what needs to be done to achieve them;
- Care leavers are receiving good support and plans to deliver an integrated service to vulnerable young people over 16 have potential to make services more effective; and,
- There is a sound performance management system in place.

7. Areas for improvement

The following priorities for improvement were identified:

- The authority should consider developing a range of information for children and young people becoming looked after and how it can promote it's accessibility;
- Continue to improve consistency in the quality of core assessments;
- Ensure that decision making is clearly recorded and information from statutory visits is evidenced on children and young people's files;
- Continue to improve the permanency planning for looked after children and young people ensuring that the consideration of their views is included in care planning;
- Improve on the consistency in quality of care plans and reviews ensuring they reflect assessments. Have a better focus on recording the views of children and young people with a proactive approach to the prevention of drift;
- Develop a more coherent and consistent system for the independent reviewing officer service to monitor and report care planning;
- Increase the focus of a preventative and proactive approach to health and education support for looked after children and young people;
- Ensure the availability and consistency of advocacy services for looked after children and young people particularly while significant changes are taking place across Wales;
- Guidance for the support of independence skills for looked after children and young people should be developed;

- Improve the communication system with children's service's staff so that they have a better understanding of the aims of the looked after children and young people projects and can contribute better to service planning and implementation;
- Communicate the outcome of the ongoing review of the workload of the safeguarding teams to all staff;
- Introduce a system to ensure that the outcomes and lessons learned from case file audits have been implemented;
- Develop a system to ensure that policies and procedures for looked after children and young people are regularly reviewed;
- Members should have the opportunity to meet with children's services' staff individually on a systematic basis;
- Consider how corporate influence could further improve the opportunities available to looked after children and young people.