

Annual Report 2010-11



**Denbighshire County Council
Social Services**

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If you would like to find out more about our services and how to access them, contact the First Contact Team. You can write or call in to see them at:

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For a version of this leaflet in Braille or another language or format, call free on 0800 243 980.

Introduction

This is my second Annual Report about social services in Denbighshire. This report covers 2010/11 and includes my judgment about how effective social services have been in meeting the needs of our communities. The report also explains our priorities for 2011/12.

Although Denbighshire is a small county, it does present a serious set of challenges for those responsible for delivering social services. These include having a rapidly ageing population, some of the most deprived areas in Wales, and serving a diverse group of communities. This report will tell you how we are responding to the challenges we face in Denbighshire.

All local authorities are facing tough financial challenges. In 2010/11 Denbighshire County Council made £6.4m of efficiency savings. We were able to do this with minimal impact on front-line services. But the challenges continue with the Council having to find further savings of around £5m in the coming year. Whilst we have clear plans to find these savings, it will remain a significant challenge to deliver them.

In Social Services we have a good track record of changing services to provide greater independence, choice and value for money. We will need to continue to develop our services and achieve improvements - particularly through collaboration. A key challenge for us will be managing change consistently well. We need to make sure that people who use social services, our staff and communities are completely involved during this period of change and have the opportunity to shape the way changes are made. We have some excellent examples of where we have done this well, but also some not-so-good examples, and we will need to learn from both. Examples are given in this report to highlight some of the experiences of our service users and the views of others who have inspected our services.

To preserve the anonymity of service users, we have attributed their comments to members of Ceri's Family - Denbighshire's virtual family. More details about Ceri's Family can be found on the Healthy Denbighshire website: www.healthydenbighshire.co.uk

I welcome feedback and comments on the contents of this report as it is important to present a recognisable picture of Social Services in Denbighshire. Feedback can be provided to: ACRF Feedback, Ty Nant, Prestatyn LL19 9LG. You can also call 01824 712900 or email: ssdcomments@denbighshire.gov.uk to leave feedback.



Sally Ellis

Corporate Director for Demographics, Wellbeing and Planning

Our summary assessment

My assessment is that Denbighshire Social Services continues to perform well in most areas. We are remodelling our services to make sure that we can respond effectively to changes and increases in demand. This includes:

- ◆ **an ambitious programme to transform adult social care in Denbighshire**

We have changed our structure to make it easier for people to access our services, whilst at the same time developing a locality-based approach to delivering services. This approach reflects developments within Health Services and aims to deliver a service where agencies work together, based in communities throughout Denbighshire, to enable more people to live independently in their community. The emphasis is on prevention and early intervention, whilst recognising that an ageing population will have complex, long term care needs that require responsive support tailored to individuals' needs.

During the summer of 2011 our Head of Adult and Business Services will be moving on following a promotion. One of our Service Managers will act as Head of Service for a period so that changes keep moving forward and we continue to develop and deliver effective services. The new Head of Service will take up their post in October.

- ◆ **realigning the focus of Children and Family Services and the way in which services are planned and delivered**

2010/11 was a time of significant change in the management of Children's Services with a new Head of Service being appointed.

This presented an opportunity to revisit and redevelop our vision and values with staff and to consider our direction. In response to this work we will be revising our structural arrangements in 2011/12. This new structure will provide a focus on good professional practice. Casework activity will also be strengthened with new quality assurance processes.

♦ **working collaboratively across the region**

During 2011/12 we will continue to work in collaboration across a range of services. This includes the work of a regional commissioning, procurement and monitoring hub for high-cost residential placements for both adults and children. We expect this to improve placement quality as well as being more efficient financially.

In summary we recognise that we have many strengths as well as a number of areas for development. This report provides an overview of our services and priorities for moving forward.

Accessing services

Our First Contact Team provides a single point of access to our services, and signpost to alternative services where appropriate. They receive enquiries and referrals and provide information and advice. They provide a safe gate-keeping system for child protection and vulnerable adult referrals.

They carry out initial screening to identify what needs the individual might have, and refer them to the appropriate team or relevant external agencies. We provide high quality public information in the form of leaflets, posters and letters to service users, and through the press and our website. Information is produced in plain language in Welsh and English, and is available in other languages and formats on request. This includes Braille and audio CD. We display information in reception areas and One Stop Shops, and our First Contact Team posts information to service users and the public on request. We have multi-agency points of contact, including Hafan Lles in Prestatyn, the Home Enhanced Care Service (HECS) covering the coastal strip, and the Response and Rehabilitation Service (RARS). Staff are knowledgeable and I believe the service works well.

In 2011/12 we will be looking at how we can further strengthen the way people access our services. This will include extending the availability of social work staff and occupational therapists for initial screening processes and reviewing how effectively we signpost people to services.

Adult Services

We aim to support people to live in their own home wherever possible. This can include:

- ♦ care and/or support in a person's home;
- ♦ short breaks;
- ♦ special equipment and home adaptations;
- ♦ day services, and
- ♦ advice about benefits and how to claim them.

We also help people by providing care within residential and nursing homes.

During 2010/11 we began an ambitious programme to transform adult social care in Denbighshire. The programme has adopted a 'systems thinking' approach which considers social care from the perspective of people using our services and the outcomes they want.

Our priorities for 2011/12

Our comprehensive service business plan sets out how we will develop services to respond to the challenges we face. Our priorities are:

- ♦ strengthening first response services;
- ♦ establishing locality offices;
- ♦ simplifying the pathway for service users and embedding the principle of one contact person (or at the most one team) for service users to communicate with;
- ♦ reducing bureaucracy to enable practitioners to spend at least 50% of their time on direct contact/response;
- ♦ developing and embedding our performance management to focus on quality and outcomes – the things that matter for service users and the Council;
- ♦ work with other local authorities in North Wales to develop an approach to the fees we pay care homes in a way that creates consistency whilst reflecting the local market and issues here in Denbighshire;



- ♦ addressing the rate of care home placements compared to other Welsh authorities (these are currently high and our aim is to reduce them further by providing good community-based alternative services), and
- ♦ refocusing day care to become a day activities service that increases people's independence.

Older people

The main challenge that we face to older people's services is to manage the impact of the increasing numbers of older people in the county. Over 20% of the Denbighshire population are aged over 65. The Welsh average is 17.8%. Rapid increases in the numbers of people aged over 80, and the fact that over 60% of pensioners live alone, is leading to a need to develop services that promote independence and well being as well as responding to more complex long term care needs.

Adapting services to respond to demographic change is one of our priorities. I am proud of what we have achieved so far. We have worked closely with older people to develop our approach which includes a range of community initiatives - Passion for Life, Dignity in Care and Telebuddies - all of which actively involve older people in the design and delivery of services.

We have worked closely with other services in the Council, including Housing Services, and in 2010/11 we have developed the role of wardens as part of our reablement approach and developed sheltered housing as community hubs. We have also worked closely with Leisure Services to promote accessibility to activities for older people living in the community who don't receive social care services. Initiatives like water sport activities on Marine Lake in Rhyl for the over 50s and leisure activities for people in Extra Care and day services have developed in 2010/11. We have Extra Care Housing schemes operating in Rhyl and Prestatyn, with one being developed in Ruthin and plans in place to build one in Denbigh.

Overall, I am pleased that services are considered to be generally of a good to high standard and are well received by service users and their carers. We have well developed care management processes which involve assessment, care planning and reviewing.

Particular attention has been given to successfully improving the consistency and timeliness of reviews in 2010/11.

“[My social worker] has arranged a shopping assistant, a cleaner and even put us in touch with a gardener and Meals on Wheels. Nothing was too much trouble for him and, as I am not as sharp as I used to be, he was most patient in explaining things in detail. These arrangements have taken a weight off my mind and I am so grateful.”

Service user feedback.

We continue to work closely with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board (BCUHB) who share many of the challenges we face. We have continued to perform well with the NHS to enable discharge from hospital and have a number of joint services. This includes 2 major partnerships – the Community Equipment Service (CESI) and the Response and Rehabilitation Service (RARS).

CESI is a service offered in partnership with the NHS. CESI provides a wide range of equipment - like Telecare - to help people live independently within the community.

RARS is a multi-disciplinary team which aims to prevent inappropriate hospital and care home admissions. RARS also facilitates discharges from hospital and care homes.

2010/11 saw the first year of operation of our integrated locality team at Hafan Lles, Prestatyn. This brings together a range of staff working mainly with older people to provide a single access point for services in Prestatyn. This model formed a blueprint for the development of our locality teams across Denbighshire.

Elderly mental health

We have strengthened our services for older people with mental health needs this year. We have set up 2 very successful groups at Gorwel Newydd (Extra Care in Rhyl) which bring together elderly mental health (EMH) service users and the residents of Gorwel Newydd. We have also extended support for carers of people with dementia through the provision of day activities. These approaches move away from traditional models of EMH day care.



Specialised services like the ABBA project have been commissioned through the Supporting People programme for older people with particular needs, like those with dementia, to help them to remain safely at home for as long as possible. Continuing Health Care (CHC) funding has been used effectively to deliver a single point of access for elderly mental health (EMH) and dementia support workers. As part of the arrangements specialist support staff work with people with dementia to help them stay safely in their own community. Developments like these are critical as the numbers of people with dementia living in the community continues to rise.

People with learning disabilities

The population of adults with learning disabilities is also growing quickly because people with learning disabilities are living longer and more babies born with complex needs are surviving to become adults. We have a growing number of older people with learning disabilities and of younger people with challenging behaviour and other physical needs.

Resources are not growing at the same rate as the numbers of people with learning disabilities and there is an entirely justified demand for services that are more personalised. This means that the service user is more in control of the services they receive. We are changing our services in response to this and I am proud of what we have achieved so far.

We have developed new approaches to accommodation. Developments include Key Ring, adult placement, specialist community living (for example for people with a learning disability who suffer from dementia), Intensive Supported Independent Living (ISIL) and outreach support for those able to live relatively independently. In 2010/11 we have planned a new housing scheme which provides low-level supported housing for 5 adults with learning disabilities. This scheme differs from the intensive 24 hour on-site support offered through existing community living schemes and the low level Key Ring model.

Person-centred planning (PCP) is key to the way our learning disability services work. Our goal is to make sure that all assessments and care plans are always tailored to the person.

“ ‘Jane’ would like to say a big THANK YOU for her Person Centred Plan. She is absolutely thrilled with the result and has shown it to everyone she knows. The photo... is particularly thoughtful and means a great deal to ‘Jane’ – even her budgie ‘Bernard’ is included! ‘Jane’ would like you to know how much she enjoyed her meeting and we all thought it was very productive. Once again thanks from us all for your help, thoughtfulness and kindness.”

Feedback from a service user’s relative.

A Citizen Directed Support (CDS) pilot (which is a way of providing support driven by the service user’s preferences rather than the services available) was undertaken last year and the evaluation drew on the experiences of service users, carers and staff. Feedback was very positive and we will now roll out CDS across the service.

Services for physically disabled people and people with sensory impairments

We work with adults who are physically disabled, have a sensory impairment, or have a chronic illness and/or challenges in their lives. Our aim is to promote independence and encourage participation in meaningful activities for people of all ages.

We always aim to ‘reable’ people. The term ‘reablement’ refers to the approach we take to support people to regain their skills, confidence and independence. A reablement strategy with a supporting action plan has been developed which sets a vision for reablement in Denbighshire. The strategy (called Moving Forward) focuses on developing and maintaining services to support vulnerable people, enabling them to remain in their own home, with dignity, for as long as possible.

Occupational therapists add value to social care providing expertise in delivering a wide range of services, for example:

- ◆ reablement and community rehabilitation;
- ◆ assessing for and improving confidence to use equipment, and assistive technology devices effectively;
- ◆ providing accessible homes through designing appropriate housing adaptations, and
- ◆ training others to move from a care to an enabling approach, for example by working with the Housing Warden Service in the development of "Hand in Hand".

In 2010/11 we worked with Conwy County Borough Council to develop a joint tender process for support scheme providers for Direct Payments (this is where money goes directly to the service users rather than simply funding the services we decide). We have engaged well with service users to develop this approach. There has been significant take-up from people with a physical disability, but further work is needed to make sure that other client groups also make the most of this service. We have extended the scheme to people who can't make decisions for themselves by appointing an appropriate person and developing 'managed accounts'.

“Direct payments have provided me with more independence and freedom.”
Service user feedback.

We commission good quality services from independent providers including the MS Society and North Wales Deaf Association. We also work with other organisations to provide services including Vision Support and Denbighshire Care and Repair.

Work is underway to develop Intensive Supported Independent Living (ISIL) accommodation in Henllan which will provide supported living for 4 people with physical disabilities by March 2012. This will provide an option to live locally for people with complex physical disabilities who might previously have had to live outside Denbighshire. I am delighted we are making progress with this development – it was not easy to achieve.

People with mental health needs

Denbighshire has a higher incidence of mental illness than other North Wales authorities. We work in partnership with Conwy and Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board (BCU) to provide advice and support to people suffering from mental illness and their families.

We have an established mental health performance and quality group in Denbighshire. However, the group has not met consistently throughout the year and we will be looking to strengthen these arrangements in 2011/12.

"The staff genuinely care about you, and are extremely helpful when you have a problem or a hard decision to make....."

Service user feedback

Mental health services are led by BCU but it is important that service planning continues to recognise the role of local government services in aiding the recovery of people with mental illness. For example, social care support, housing and employment opportunities are critical to people with mental health needs. This includes ensuring a consistent focus on recovery rather than illness. We have been working with BCU to bring a strong social care perspective to the reconfiguration of local mental health services. BCU recognise the need for a social care lead for mental health issues and we will be progressing this in 2011/12.

Substance misuse

Substance misuse has a major impact on the lives of many children and adults who are referred to Social Services. It is often a key factor in child protection issues and domestic violence. Substance misuse is a complex area because of the vast range of needs and types of services needed to address them. Preventing substance misuse is important and we aim to make sure that people know where they can get help and support. We work with the NHS to offer these services.

The Rhyl Night Shelter provides a safe and secure environment for homeless people and substance misusers. It aims to reduce both the number of homeless people and crime and disorder in one part of Rhyl.

We aim to help substance misusers to reduce the harm they are causing to themselves, their families and communities. There is a strong inter-agency approach to substance misuse - protecting individuals and communities through enforcement activity, as well as working with our partners to address concerns in our towns during the evening and night-time.

Carers

We value carers and appreciate that this can be a challenging and demanding role. We aim to improve the quality of life for carers and support them to achieve their potential so that they and the people they care for can live fulfilled lives.

We have continued to implement our Carers Strategy in 2010/11, and are providing more services to carers than ever before. We have developed a range of information and services including providing opportunities for carers to take time away from their caring responsibilities. Over recent years there have been significant improvements to the service, including the appointment of a Carers' Commissioning Officer, a dedicated Carer Assessors Pilot Scheme, Carers Emergency Card Scheme, Healthy Carers Worker Pilot and a dedicated webpage.



However, demand on the Carer Assessors has resulted in a waiting list and we are in the process of developing our systems so that they more accurately reflect the level of support provided to carers. These are areas that we will be looking to improve in 2011/12.

We are currently working as part of a regional response to the new Carers' Measure and national review of respite.

Protection of Vulnerable Adults (POVA)

We have a duty to protect vulnerable adults and investigate situations where a vulnerable adult may be at risk of abuse or neglect.

We work with a range of people including the police, the NHS and other agencies to protect vulnerable adults from harm. We also take action to protect anyone who is found to have suffered abuse, or whose welfare is likely to suffer without further intervention or services.

Miss Q was a resident of Home Z. The district nurse found that she had severe pressure sores, and that they should have been called in earlier to treat them. The district nurse reported the case via POVA as possible neglect as the right medical support had not been sought. CSSIW have investigated the case, and are still considering whether to prosecute or not. Social Services have conducted reviews of all who are still residents in the care home to ensure their safety and well-being.

We perform well against the national performance indicator that measures whether risk is removed or managed in POVA cases. This position will be strengthened by work we have undertaken to improve the way risk is assessed as part of our unified assessment process and the systems we have to check that actions agreed as part of the POVA process are followed through.

We have a comprehensive training programme to raise awareness about POVA across the social care workforce. We have also secured agreement to develop an Adult Protection Committee with Conwy.

In 2011/12 we will implement revised POVA guidance and carry out a service user/carer involvement survey to ensure the service is meeting needs of vulnerable adults.

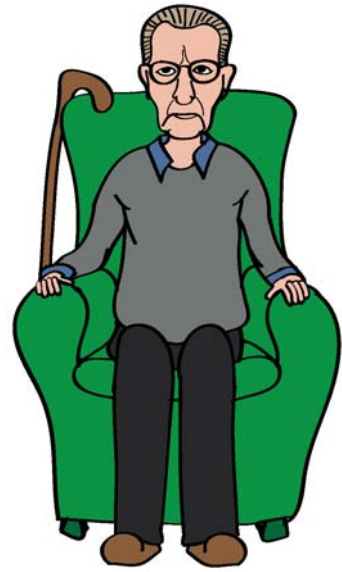
Hospital Social Work Team

The Hospital Social Work Team with many other disciplines to support people in hospital and to make sure that discharges are effective, efficiently managed and safe. The Team undertake community care assessments for adults over the age of 18 and offer practical and emotional advice and support for service users, carers and family members. The service has continued to work well in 2010/11 and the rate of delayed hospital discharges remains low. There are also collaborative arrangements with neighbouring counties for the hosting of specialist social work services such as social work for cancer and renal patients.

Community Development Agency

“Dennis has been getting to grips with internet surfing as well as email. In one of our sessions Dennis, who was a soldier during World War II, mentioned he had never received his Cyprus campaign medal. He wondered if there was still a possibility of receiving this long overdue medal, and how he would go about it. After doing a little research on the internet we came across the Veterans UK website, where we found the process was quite simple. All we needed to do was fill out a form and post it to Service Personnel and Veterans Agency in Gloucester. Four weeks later I came into the centre to find Dennis beaming with pride as he showed off his Cyprus Medal.”

Quote from Community Development Agency staff member.



The Community Development Agency provides support to a range of community initiatives, building community leadership and mutual support. This includes ventures reducing social isolation and promoting the use of computers. Together with European and grant-funded schemes, we are able to see more vulnerable people supported within their communities without the need for statutory services.

“It’s an excellent and very friendly service, helping ordinary people develop computer literacy is enormously important these days and I believe the friendliness of your staff is the essential component to this.”

Service user feedback.

The Community Development Agency provides accessible social activities in areas of Denbighshire where people are less engaged and are more likely to be disadvantaged. This includes enabling individuals and community groups to access information technology resources and get help and advice on how to use them. The involvement of the team in demographic change initiatives outside Rhyl has been a positive step, for example the ‘Pub is the Hub’ project in Corwen.

Welfare Rights Team

As one of the primary drivers of Denbighshire's Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Anti-poverty network, Denbighshire's Welfare Rights Team demonstrates value for money by securing resources and improving the well-being of service users. The Anti-poverty and Welfare Rights Team continues to offer advice to service users, council tenants and people in poverty to improve their financial quality of life and general well-being.

"I can only say the service we had from you has improved our lifestyle immeasurably both in our health and comfort. Thank you."

Extract from Welfare Rights service user feedback form.

The team is responsible for contracts with Denbighshire Citizens Bureaux and Rhyl Benefits Advice Shop who deliver complementary services. This partnership is the first in the UK to track the number of people they bring above UK poverty lines. The team also chairs and convenes Denbighshire's Advice Network which meets every 3 months to share good practice, carry out joint work, training and publicity. I have been particularly pleased to see the work being done to tackle child poverty – as part of the Family First pilot.

Supporting People Team

We have an effective Supporting People Strategy which focuses on developing a range of housing-related support services. These include helping people with budgeting and managing relationships with neighbours. The services increase the number of people who are helped to maintain independent living and prevent demands on statutory services.

We are keen to see these approaches continue to develop in 2011/12 as they are a cost-effective way of providing support. I am concerned that changes to the way Supporting People resources are shared across Wales could have a negative effect on the services we are able to provide.

Children & Family Services

Denbighshire's Children and Family Service is committed to improving the life chances of the most vulnerable children, young people and their families in Denbighshire. Our aim is to enable children, young people and their families to live safely in their communities and do well, for example at school, which is what we all want for our children.

Over the past year we have looked at the way in which children's services are planned and delivered. This work took place at a time when there was a noticeable increase in the number of children and young people both entering into care proceedings and/or the looked after system. We have managed to maintain performance standards in most areas and in 2011/12 there will be a focus on sustaining performance and improving quality. We will also be implementing a revised structure for the service.

In 2010/11 we started work on a Families First pilot. This approach involves working closely with Education and Health staff and creating a 'Team Around the Family' approach to service provision. The aim is to tackle the whole family's problems at an earlier stage and to minimise their impact on children.

Whilst we have a range of actions planned for 2011/12, our priorities are:

- ♦ to protect vulnerable children from significant harm;
- ♦ to work with vulnerable families to avoid escalation of difficulties and reduce the risk of family breakdown;
- ♦ to make sure that looked after children have positive placement experiences within permanent, stable, secure and loving families that encourage them to achieve their potential and have a smooth transition into adulthood, and
- ♦ to make sure children with complex additional needs are provided with a range of opportunities to maximise their potential and social inclusion within their family.

Safeguarding and child protection

One of Social Services' key responsibilities is to protect children from harm and take action to protect any child who is found to have suffered abuse, or whose welfare is likely to suffer without further intervention or services. Our Duty and Assessment Team manage the referral and allocation systems and assesses and investigates where a child may be at risk of harm, abuse or neglect. We try to do this in partnership with families, and wherever possible, keep children in their own homes.

Our performance in undertaking initial and core assessments deteriorated in 2009/10, so in 2010/11 we set up a RAP (Referral and Assessment Project) to review arrangements for the way we deal with enquiries and referrals for Children and Family Services. I am pleased to say this work led to improved performance against key performance indicators at a time of increased activity and service pressures. It also developed clearer transfer arrangements between the Duty and Assessment Team and the longer term operational teams.

Our Safeguarding and Reviewing Unit takes responsibility for managing our child protection processes. We have an excellent record of reviewing cases within timescales, for example 100% of child protection review meetings were carried out within set deadlines this year.

We work with a range of people, including the police, schools and the NHS, to safeguard children and promote their well-being. A good example of this is the Conwy and Denbighshire Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) - a multi agency forum for coordinating how local child protection services are planned, delivered and monitored.

The joint Conwy and Denbighshire LSCB has been in place since May 2008 and makes sure that there is a consistent approach to safeguarding and child protection across all key agencies. This year, the LSCB has delivered 80% of the LSCB Business Plan including introducing a new system to audit the work of all partners against good safeguarding practice. It has also improved its performance against Welsh Government targets. The LSCB training group continues to provide good quality, multi-disciplinary safeguarding training to all agencies working with children across both counties. In 2010/11, there was a particular focus on sexual abuse, neglect, domestic abuse and an overview of child care legislation.

Over the next year, we will continue to work hard to meet the increasing demand on services. We will carry out reviews of child protection activity so that we can continue to improve the quality and timeliness of assessing, planning and reviewing. We will consult with children, young people and their parents who have been through the child protection process and will be taking a keen interest in the results of Families First work – for example, work we are doing to locate vulnerable families.

Children in need and family support

Over recent years, we have invested in a range of family support and therapeutic services. These have helped to avoid family breakdown and supported children and young people who have been abused. We work with Education, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), the NHS, the Police and Housing Services. Together, we have been successful in delivering good results for children.

The Duty and Assessment Team (and the Children with Disabilities Team) carry out assessments to determine whether a child is in need and what kind of support will meet their needs.

Where the needs of the family require more long-term support, the Children in Need and Court Team work closely with children and families to address difficulties and make sure that where possible, children can be cared for safely and successfully within their own families and communities.

2010/11 also saw another large rise in the number of children who are the subject of care proceedings through the courts. Working closely with the family and the courts to make sure that these children are safeguarded is demanding for staff engaged in the process.

In 2011/12 we will be reviewing our Family Support Strategy to try and make sure our services better match the needs of families. This should help us reduce the number of children being re-referred or in care proceedings and result in better coordination of effort in supporting families. The Families First pilot is helping us to do this.

We acknowledge the extremely important role that young carers have and understand how demanding this role can be. We identify the needs of young carers through both the Assessment Framework for Children in Need and through detailed young carers assessments.

We work closely with other agencies and providers to make sure that the needs of young carers and their families are met.

The Children and Young People's Partnership multi-agency young carers' strategy was implemented in 2010/11. This has helped to identify and support young carers and raise their profile. We continue to work with schools to monitor and review the attendance and attainment of young carers.

We acknowledge that the quality of care plans varies and that timeliness of reviews of Child in Need cases continues to be a problem. Over the next year, we will improve our assessment, planning and review functions.

“We have all benefited enormously from the input of the TAPP team. It was reassuring to know that [they] were only a phone call away if we needed their help.”

Service user feedback.

Services for children and young people with disabilities

The Children with Disabilities Team provides services to help children minimise the effects of their disability, integrate with their community and maximise opportunities for them to achieve their full potential.

“I attended the Denbighshire family fun day held last Saturday for families with disabled children aged 0-18 years, held at Denbigh Leisure Centre. This event was well attended and it was a pleasure to see the youngsters participate and really enjoy themselves. “

Excerpt from reader's letter published in The Journal, 14 July 2010.

National trends are likely to increase the profile of disabled children in the population. The demand for services exceeds our resources, which means there is a potential for unmet need. We also face challenges in meeting the needs of some children with highly complex needs. As a result we have a small number of children in specialist placements outside of Denbighshire.

As well as social work support, we offer a wider range of services. These include overnight stays, project work with carers, direct payments and funding for further support for disabled children and parent carers at local day care facilities.

Transition support is a key component of the services provided by the team. This is supported and delivered through the social workers with the close support of a designated transitions co-ordinator. A key focus of supporting young people in transition is to provide effective planning to make sure that their future needs are identified and assessed, and that seamless, appropriate and accessible services are put in place.

There has been a lot of work undertaken in 2010/11 to move towards the development of an integrated service for disabled children based at Hyfrydle in Denbigh. This will enable us to use integrated referral, assessment and care management processes across all partner agencies. This should mean that children and families don't have to tell their story many times over.

The development of the Conwy and Denbighshire Transition Planning Protocol has helped us to improve cross-sector assessment and delivery of services. We expect the Hyfrydle base for services for disabled children to start operating on 2011/12.

Looked after children and care leavers

'Looked after' children are children and young people who are in the care of the local authority because of a care order made by the court or by agreement with their parent(s). The Council acts as a 'corporate parent' to make sure their health and well-being is promoted, that they take full advantage of opportunities and reach their full potential.

We strive to make sure that children and young people have permanent, stable and caring placements that help support their successful transition into adulthood.

In Denbighshire, there are approximately 175 children who are 'looked after', which has increased since 2009/10. We believe the increases are partly because of professionals taking a more cautious approach to managing risk. People are keenly aware of cases of neglect as a result of high profile cases in the national media. This has led to increased pressure on the Children Looked After and Court Teams and on fostering and adoption services. Despite this increase, the service has continued to make sure that looked after children have an allocated social worker, a comprehensive care plan and - where possible and appropriate - are placed with in-house foster care.

In 2010/11 we have continued to build on our work as 'corporate parents' and we offer a good range of services and extracurricular activities. The Education Champions Scheme has grown in strength and continues to see the Corporate Executive Team take proactive and personal interest in improving outcomes for looked after children in Year 11.

I am delighted that school attendance rates for looked after children continue to be positive and there are currently 7 young people who are likely to go on to university in 2011/12.

The Corporate Parenting Team is responsible for providing social work support to all looked after children and care leavers. The team works closely with the Fostering and Adoption Service, carers and partner agencies to make sure that children and young people have quality care and support within appropriate placements.

As in many other local authorities, there has been an increase in the number of care proceedings. This has put a lot of pressure on the choice of placements for children and supervised contact arrangements.

We have undertaken a review of the Supervised Contact Arrangements to make sure that arrangements are appropriate, sustainable and provide a positive experience for children and their families. This has resulted in more streamlined and co-ordinated contact arrangements.

We keep in touch with young people who have left care. The Southwark Judgment has created additional demand to support young homeless people aged 16 – 17. We have put clear processes and policies in place with the Housing Service to make sure young people have suitable accommodation and support.

Working alongside the Corporate Parenting Team is a dedicated Personal Advisor Service, commissioned from Barnardo's. They work closely with care leavers to help them to achieve their goals, and provide the necessary tools to lead a fulfilling adult life. I am very pleased that as a result of the close relationships between young people, personal advisors and social workers the outcomes for care leavers are positive, with a high proportion of Denbighshire's young people in suitable accommodation and engaged in education, training and employment when they left care.

Fostering and adoption

The recent increase in the number of children coming into care has placed more demands on the Fostering and Adoption Service. Over the past few years, we have steadily increased the number of our foster carers, which has meant we have been better able to match individual children's needs and place them in their home communities. We only have a very small number of children placed outside Denbighshire. We have a very good relationship with our foster carers, providing structured training, supervision and support, which reduces the risk of placement breakdown. The increasing numbers of children and young people becoming looked after will mean a renewed drive on recruiting foster carers.

Providing placements for teenagers and large sibling groups continues to be a big challenge.

The CSSIW annual inspection of both the Fostering and Adoption Services in 2010/11 were very positive with no formal requirements placed on either service.

The North Wales Adoption Service became operational in 2010. This presented some challenges at first as it effectively brought six approaches into one. However, these issues are now resolved. Work continues to establish the service fully and we will be taking special care to support and develop the service in 2011/12.

We have achieved improved levels of placement stability for children. For example, in 2010/11 the % of 'looked after' children who had 3 or more placements in a year reduced to 4.6% from 5.37% in 2009/10, compared with the national average of approximately 9.7%. We recruit, train, supervise and support our foster carers which reduces the risk of placement breakdown. The implementation of both the Placement Strategy and Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy has seen an increase in the recruitment of foster carers. We are delighted that this has enabled us to successfully place children locally in the vast majority of cases.

Supporting the services

Leadership and culture

Denbighshire's Annual Improvement Report from the Wales Audit Office (January 2011) identified that the Council had made significant progress since a turbulent period in 2007/8. It stated that "good leadership is driving change, making Denbighshire County Council well placed to deliver better outcomes, despite current weaknesses in some arrangements." The key messages from the report were that "the Council's leadership is good and is making a difference. The Council is doing its best to work in partnership with others. It has got better at stating clear priorities and policies and is changing the way that it plans and reports on progress. However, there are weaknesses in how the Council manages its staff but it is working to improve this."

Senior Social Services staff, including the Director, Head of Service and middle managers, have contributed well to the overall life of the Council in 2010/11, leading and supporting corporate programmes of work.

Corporate and political support

Corporate and political support for social services remains consistent and strong.

The Council's corporate priorities, which will be in force until 2012, continue to reflect issues of high significance for Social Services. This is particularly true of the Demographic Change priority. Through the work of the People and Places Board, led by elected members and the Director of Demographics, Wellbeing and Planning (who is the Director of Social Services), we are working to actively promote the independence of older people and make Denbighshire a good place to grow older.

The BIG Plan, Denbighshire's Integrated Community Strategy, Children and Young People's Plan and Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Strategy for 2011/14, also demonstrates well the importance being given across agencies to priority issues for Social Services. Outcomes for older people, vulnerable families, healthy lifestyles and keeping children, young people and vulnerable adults safe account for four out of eight of the key outcome areas in the plan.

Workforce

A well trained and motivated workforce is at the heart of delivering good social care. We have a committed and dedicated workforce. We work with partner organisations to attract and keep a highly skilled and qualified workforce. We have worked hard to raise the profile of social care and make it a positive career choice for young people and people returning to work, for example through the North Wales “Care Ambassadors” project. In 2010/11 all national prescribed training targets were met. We also substantially reduced reliance on agency staff and now have only a small number of social workers through agency arrangements. We also addressed succession issues relating to our management teams during 2010/11. We had a number of staff approaching retirement but are now successfully making appointments within the new structures.

The Social Care Workforce Development Partnership illustrates a sound collaborative approach to workforce management and development. The partnership has been effective in evaluating and identifying future workforce improvement actions to make sure our future plans are effective. In 2011/12 we will be looking to develop more opportunities to work with our neighbours on joint approaches to training and workforce development.

Sickness absence has continued to reduce in Adult Services, but rose in Children and Family Services in 2010/11. Reducing this will be a key focus in 2011/12.

Information systems

Effective information systems underpin the delivery of modern social care services. Good IT systems enable us to record information about clients, their needs and the services they receive in one place. This means that information is co-ordinated, supports service delivery and is accessible to those who need to see it.

In 2010/11 we upgraded our IT system (PARIS), which resulted in a 25-30% reduction in the time taken to record assessments for adult services on the computer. Further work is needed in 2011/12 to reduce processes in Children and Family Services and to make sure that there is more close working with other councils that use the same IT system as us.

Performance and quality assurance

We have good processes in place to monitor our performance and the quality of our services and we continue to respond to what people tell us so we can improve services further.

In Social Services we have well established performance and quality management groups. These involve operational managers in evaluating performance, identifying corrective actions and approaches to securing improved performance. This approach has been critical in helping to improve key areas like the timeliness of reviews in Adult Services and the timeliness of initial and core assessments in Children and Family Services.

We have also involved service users and carers in evaluating our services as part of our quality assurance (QA) approach. Whilst we are making good progress, we know that further work is needed in 2011/12 to draw together and further develop the range of initiatives and activities that take place operationally and that we are consistent in following our QA frameworks for our services.

Involving users and carers

Social Services are strongly committed to involving and engaging with service users and carers. We involve them in individual care planning, service development, recruiting staff, and, in some cases, in running services.

The views of older people were proactively sought and helped to inform the new structure and vision for adult social care this year. User and carer feedback also informed an evaluation of the Carer Assessor pilot scheme, and led to continuation of the service for 2011/12. During the Reablement pilot in 2010/11, we sought views of service users to determine the effectiveness of the service and inform the roll out and Moving Forward Strategy.

The involvement and engagement of children and young people and their parents/carers in wider service development is an area for development. We also need to develop the consistency of providing feedback to those who have made a contribution.

In 2011/12 we will be completing a corporate self assessment as part of the Council's strategic response to 'getting closer to the community'. We will be using the outcome of the self assessment to develop an action plan so we can make further improvements to the way we involve people who use our services and carers.

Planning and partnerships

In 2010 the Council set out the principles for how it should work in future with other councils and organisations in a 'Statement on Collaboration'. This places a clear focus on collaboration where it would help to bring about improvement.

The Council is taking a lead role in collaborative and partnership working at all levels. Our Chief Executive has chaired the National Procurement Board and represented Denbighshire in the National Efficiency and Innovation Programme Board and the Front Line Resource Review Working Group. Our Directors contribute to regional programme boards, including one relating to Social Services. These boards report to a Regional Leadership Board which consists of the Leaders and Chief Executives of each North Wales council, the police, the fire service and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Local Health Board (BCU).

For Social Services, collaboration and partnership is helping us to plan and deliver cost effective and better quality services in a range of areas. These include the procurement and monitoring of high-cost residential placements, adoption, and emergency duty services.

Overall we have good working relationships with the BCU. There has been good partnership working in the development of intermediate care and locality working, for example.

During 2011/12 we will be streamlining statutory partnerships across North Wales. Conwy and Denbighshire have already agreed to establish a joint Local Service Board which will provide an umbrella for further social care and health integration.

Financial stability and resources

Like all other local authorities, we face a very challenging financial situation over the next few years. This means we have to make our services more efficient by working with other organisations and making sure we make the right changes. In Denbighshire, doing all we can to avoid a negative impact on the public has been a key principle. This may mean doing things differently.

There has never been a greater need for organisations to work together to continue to provide high quality services in spite of financial pressures. We will do this in a number of ways, like investing to save, more joint working, and being more efficient in the way we work. The Council developed a medium-term financial plan during 2010/11 which set out how we propose to make savings of approximately £20m over 4 years. Social Services' proposed savings are set out in this and will be consistently tracked and monitored.

Commissioning and contracting

We recognise the importance of working with voluntary organisations and independent providers to deliver the right services at the right price.

We have commissioning strategies which set out our plans for developing services. We developed these with the NHS, education and the voluntary and independent sectors. We also consulted service users to make sure that our plans will deliver the services they need. Where appropriate, we commission services with other organisations, like our Joint Commissioning Panel for Children and Family Services and our Supporting People Planning Group. Over the first 2-3 years, we have been keen to implement our strategies and this is shown in the new services coming through now.

Some of our strategies are coming to an end now, and during 2011 we will review and update our progress in delivering our existing commissioning strategies. We will refresh the relevant action plans to take account of regional commissioning approaches, guidance from the Welsh Government, including the new Carers' Measure, the emerging response to 'Sustainable Social Services', the Welsh Government Social Services policy document, as well as the new financial circumstances.

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