

Health and Social Services Committee

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Date: Wednesday 1st February 2006

Venue: Committee Room 3 & 4, National Assembly Building

Title: Social Services In Wales 2004/2005:

Report Of The Chief Inspector, Social Services Inspectorate For Wales

Purpose

1. To present the Chief Inspector's Report for 2004-05 on the performance of Social Services in Wales to the Committee
2. To provide an opportunity to discuss major themes arising for the Welsh Assembly and Social Services in Wales

Summary and Recommendations

3. To note and comment on the report of the Chief Inspector "Social Services in Wales 2004-05".

Background

4. The report was published on 26 January 2006 and widely circulated. Copies were made available to Members of the Health and Social Services Committee. It develops themes arising from SSIW's third annual programme evaluating the performance of each social services authority in Wales, from its inspection and reviews and from other programmes of work aimed at promoting improvement.
5. In last year's report the Chief Inspector set out his view that services must improve and do so at a pace greater than that seen over recent years. The response to this has been positive, and the Welsh Local Government Association, with the Association of Directors of Social Services, set out a renewed commitment to improving social services performance. Work has been done to develop proposals for a dedicated social services capacity within the Association which will work with authorities to achieve service improvement. The WLGA proposes that this be established in 2006 and that it will work with other improvement capacity, including that available within the health services as appropriate.
6. The Chief Inspector continues to emphasise that strong professional leadership, clear accountability arrangements and a political and corporate commitment are prerequisites in the task of strengthening social services performance. These are clearly evidenced in those authorities that have made progress

following inspection and joint review reports and in the two authorities subject to the Chief Inspector's target setting and monitoring under the protocol for responding to serious concern about social services performance during 2004-05.

7. The report recognises that there is evidence of further progress towards achieving improvement in social services performance. SSIW's third round of performance evaluations show that some authorities are making good progress but, in others, the efforts being made are not yet being translated into improved outcomes. Overall, the greatest areas of challenge are:

- Ensuring strong professional leadership for social services
- getting assessment and care management, the basics of social work practice, right
- improving management information and performance management practice
- improving commissioning
- reshaping services to meet changing needs.

8. Progress made in tackling workforce issues needs to be built upon and accelerated, with recruitment and retention and work to ensure staff obtain the necessary skills and qualifications being a top priority. The new social work degree was successfully introduced in 2004 and there is an improvement in numbers registering for training. The Care Council for Wales has made good progress with the registration of social workers and has opened the register to other social care staff. The report "Social Work in Wales: a Profession to Value" has been produced by the Association of Directors and shows the important leadership role the Association can fulfil. The percentage of qualified staff in social services in Wales continues to increase but progress needs to be accelerated in residential services for children as a particular priority.

9. Progress is being made in local authority ability to manage service performance by improving management information systems. There are encouraging signs of improvement in a number of service areas e.g. new services designed to promote independence and social inclusion and arrangements to protect vulnerable adults, a reduction in delayed transfers of care from hospital. In children's social services, there are wide variations in performance between authorities, and all authorities experience increasing demands which place great pressure upon them. SSIW is conducting an exercise in respect of looked after children and children in need in order to draw out how procedures and practice contribute to current pressures and could be improved. It's work already shows that there are high thresholds are high and there is a lack of sufficient preventative and support services needed to work with those requiring targeted intervention and support.

10. The Chief Inspector's comments underline the importance of the forthcoming policy paper setting out the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for social services and social care which will be published in 2006. This will emphasise the fact that these are important services in their own right and will seek to give a clear sense of direction to local authorities in discharging their services functions and to the partnership arrangements which will be required with other services, including the health service, in doing so.

Compliance

11. The Annual Report fulfils the duty of the Assembly, delegated to the Chief Inspector, under Section 142 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003 to publish a report on its functions under Chapter 6 of the Act.

Conclusion

12. Members of the Health and Social Services Committee are invited to provide their comments on the report.

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