

Annual Report of the Gwynedd Statutory Director of
Social Services

2015 - 2016

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Opening statement by the Director

It gives me great pleasure once again this year to present my Annual Report for the year gone by. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the performance of our Social Services here in Gwynedd and to highlight those elements that have been successful and also address some issues that have not gone as expected and where lessons need to be learnt as a result.

I also hope that the report will give you a taste of the direction of Gwynedd Social Services to the future and thus highlight our priorities for the coming years. Of course, I welcome any observations from you regarding the contents of the report in general, but also specifically in terms of how our priorities tie-in with what you feel is important to you, your family and your communities. I hope that I have managed to listen to your concerns during the year, and that I am already responding and prioritising as required.

This is the fourth annual report that I have submitted and I am glad to report that I am happy with the performance shown over the year. This performance obviously addresses safeguarding issues, the quality of our service and our provisions. There is room for improvement, and some elements require attention, but on the whole we offer quality services and respond appropriately to safeguarding issues. If any weaknesses in our arrangements come to light, we seek to ensure that we learn the lessons and put the appropriate changes into practice.

As I reported in my report last year, we are now in the middle of substantial change within the care field - indeed it is likely that this period of change will be 'one long journey'. Much of our preparation work for the journey has been done over the past years. An example of this is the firm foundations that have been set in the children care field following a full internal review of the system. Subsequently, recommendations were received to develop One Front Door, a Programme of Preventative Services and Edge of Care Team. Alongside this work in the Adults Care field, jointly with key partners, an attempt was made to take a step back and re-design the health and care system in its entirety, in order to place the citizen at the centre. Further details on these transformational work programmes can be seen in the body of the report.

Although the direction has been set here in Gwynedd over the past years, along with the fact that the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014) has been operational since April, I am glad to report that the 'map' for the journey is now in our hands so that we can fully achieve the required change. On this basis, I have drawn up this report to tie-in with the main principles of the act - namely safeguarding, collaboration and joint production, well-being, early intervention, preventative work and giving our service users a voice and control.

Alongside the legislative changes, the service transformation that is happening in

response to this and the change in the expectations of the people of Gwynedd, we are required to act within financial constraints. In order to achieve this, the relevant departments have been working hard on efficiency saving plans that ensure that we are continuing to offer a service but that we do so at a lower cost. These plans have been successful on the whole and this work is ongoing.

Nevertheless, during the year for the first time, as you are aware, the Council had to make difficult decisions regarding the need to cut services. Some of those cuts have affected the Social Services field. I will monitor the impact of these cuts regularly in order to assess the impact on the residents of Gwynedd. On this point, I believe that it is worthwhile for me to emphasise what has been said many times before – and regardless of how Social Services in Gwynedd will look in the coming years - we will still need to continue to prioritise safeguarding issues, and meet the needs of those with the greatest need.

As a Council, our aim is to meet the needs of the people of Gwynedd in the best way possible within the resources we have and this will be done by placing the people of Gwynedd at the centre of everything we do. We are in a period where we have real opportunities to promote different ways of working and innovating in order to move the service transformation agenda forward. Indeed, we already have successes in Gwynedd that we can all take pride in them and we must try and learn from them and ensure innovative developments across the field.

At the end of the year, it is important for me to acknowledge the leadership and support of Cabinet Members in the care field, Councillors William Gareth Roberts and also Councillor Mair Rowlands. This is the first year that they have held responsibility for this field and their contribution and commitment has been valuable and significant. I also wish to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all of our staff, providers and partners for their commitment and hard work in ensuring that children, young people, vulnerable adults and their families receive the best possible services. Also, a special thanks to everyone who cares informally all year round for a member of the family or a neighbour. Your contribution is priceless.

I hope that you will enjoy reading the report. I would be very happy to receive your comments or ideas on how to take further steps along our journey.



Awen Morwena Edwards
Corporate Director and Statutory Director of Social Services
Gwynedd Council

1. Safeguarding Children and Adults

The responsibility for safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is one of the Council's most important responsibilities. Over recent years, emphasis has been placed on ensuring that the arrangements in this field are robust here and that we realise our personal responsibilities for safeguarding.

Regional statutory arrangements are in place for this field, with the Safeguarding Children Board and Adults Safeguarding Board now in place. These arrangements ensure that there is an overview of the challenges across the agencies, and by means of these boards, reviews are commissioned following unfavourable incidents. The recommendations deriving from these reviews are disseminated across the region and more extensively when, and if, relevant. One of the main aims of this system is to learn lessons following incidents, and ensure that any shortcomings in practices or processes are addressed.

Internally, as I reported last year, a Safeguarding Children and Adults Strategic Panel is now in place. One of the main aims of the Panel is to ensure awareness and improve ownership across the Council of this important field, and also monitor the implementation of some of the transformational projects in the field within the Strategic Plan. I am glad to report that progress has been made in the majority of projects during the year - although I would like to see more implementation in terms of some elements. In particular, in the education field, the appointment of the Safeguarding Officer has been key in driving the work programme forward. It is worth noting that the Panel has agreed during the year to add the "PREVENT" agenda to its remit. This is a Home Office led programme that relates to attempting to prevent individuals from being radicalised.

During the year, recommendations were received from the Care Inspectorate that we need to improve our internal arrangements in terms of the implementation of safeguarding in the adults field specifically. In response, and as a result of legislative changes, the Adults, Health and Well-being Department has fully reviewed its operational arrangements and I will consider the way forward as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, it is good to be able to report that the performance measures we gather in relation to Adults and Children suggest robust performance again this year. It was seen, from all the adult safeguarding referrals completed during the year, we managed to control the risk 97% of the time. We did not manage to control the risk 100% as we did last year because some individuals withdrew their application or rejected interference. The performance of this measure is consistent with the rest of Wales (96% in 2014/15), and the family (98% in 2014/15) of councils that are similar to Gwynedd. In particular regarding children, the risk assessments submitted to case conferences that were considered ones that showed quality when making decisions suggest robust performance again this year - 97% in 2015/16 compared with 98% in 2014/15.

Nevertheless, although I am comfortable with the performance in this field, I wish to highlight that the pressure continues in some specific fields - such as dealing with Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) cases. Work is under-way in response to this - such as training more assessors. I will elaborate further on the operational safeguarding aspects within the adults and children fields in chapter 5.

2. Collaboration and Joint Production

It is likely that the transformation of our services hinges on this element; in terms of the well-being or preventative agendas, or in terms of supporting those most vulnerable individuals.

Collaboration and joint production will be essential in order to ensure that we succeed to make our services person-centred, but also will be a way to ensure that the sector's resources are used as effective as possible - and this in a period of dwindling finances and a general growth in need for Social Services' support. By collaborating and joint producing effectively, it is possible to ensure that structures, budgets and organisations are not barriers to offering the best possible service to the residents of Gwynedd.

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014) sets new responsibilities on us as local authorities, and sets a direction regarding the provision of sustainable services in the future. It also emphasises the need for authorities to work in close partnership with service users, prospective users, families, informal carers and communities. At the same time, it is also expected for us to work very closely with the Health Service and the Third Sector.

For many years, Gwynedd Council has sought to take advantage of opportunities to collaborate on national, regional, sub-regional and local levels. In terms of the care field, the relationship is continuing to develop with organisations such as the Health Boards, the Police, Third Sector, providers and carers. However, we must acknowledge that there is further work to be done, and specifically in terms of links with our communities on more informal levels.

The introduction of the act offers genuine opportunities to formalise and further develop those existing links, as well as open new doors for the benefit of our residents. I believe that we are continuing to break new ground in terms of collaboration and it is likely that the response of north Wales councils to part 9 of the act is clear evidence of this. Part 9 of the act relates to arrangements to establish a Regional Partnership Board in order to improve people's outcomes and well-being as well as improve the efficiency and increase the effectiveness of our service provision.

Specifically, in terms of joint production with users, I believe that we as a Council

have been guilty of thinking that we know better, and that we can offer all answers to resolve individuals' problems. To this end, it is likely that our users have not always been equal partners. It can also be understood to some extent how we in the care field have tended to overly-depend on the professional opinion, and possibly not give enough attention to what the individuals are telling us. This could indeed have happened with the best intentions, but we are increasingly seeing that the change that has occurred which means that we are now listening to the views of the individual is paying dividends.

3. Well-being

As a Council, we are expected to promote well-being for the entire population in our everyday actions. There are legislative expectations on us to report against the well-being standards noted below and they have all been addressed in the report. Here are the standards that local authorities are required to achieve when working with people who need care and assistance, along with the carers who need assistance. We must act and collaborate:-

- in order to define and joint produce personal well-being outcomes that people wish to achieve
- with relevant partners in order to safeguard and promote physical and mental health and people's emotional well-being.
- to learn and develop and participate in society.
- to develop safely and maintain healthy domestic, family and personal relationships.
- and help them to improve their economic well-being, have a social life and live in suitable accommodation that meets their needs.

In addition, local authorities must take appropriate steps to protect and safeguard people who need care and assistance, and carers who need assistance to prevent abuse and neglect and any other type of harm.

In particular for next year, I am expecting to see a substantial development in terms of our understanding of this field, and, by means of developments such as the population assessment, we will be in a strong position to make effective and informed decisions. The population assessment is led on a regional basis and input is also provided by Public Health Wales. Upon considering the well-being standards being addressed throughout the body of the report, and the observations of service users, carers and partners during the year, I can confirm that our well-being aims for the coming year are as follows:-

- To raise awareness of the well-being responsibilities of everyone who is associated with the care sector.
- To engage with communities and attempt to promote community action that will offer opportunities to improve the well-being of the county's residents.
- To establish a procedure that ensures corporate ownership of the well-being agenda.

- To continue to enrich our information and understanding of the field by means of the population assessment.
- To develop a procedure that ensures that information gathered during conversations with individuals are used more widely in relation to future priorities.

In order to achieve the substantial change that is required (as mentioned above), we have appointed one of the Senior Managers within the Adults, Health and Well-being Department to lead in the field. The Senior Manager is also responsible for the housing field, and of course, one can see the natural link between these fields in terms of improving well-being, having a social life and living in suitable accommodation that meets people's needs. More specifically, and in order to drive the work programme forward, a Well-being Manager is also now in post. The appointment will assist to identify different solutions, and will facilitate access to activities that will promote well-being, and efforts will focus on efforts to respond to what matters to people. Also, it is expected that it will assist to lead and supervise responses that will contribute to the well-being agenda, by collaborating with communities and partners to identify opportunities that could assist individuals to maintain their independence and keep control of their lives within our communities.

I strongly believe that we are starting to see our services increasingly responding to our citizens' well-being needs and I hope that the work that has been done during the year is evidence of that. The change to promote well-being ties-in naturally with the need to listen to what matters to our individuals, and also to joint produce where needed. Alongside planning our services for the future, we need to identify gaps in our current services and also ensure that we have a full understanding of what is available in our communities. Work is under-way on conducting a population assessment and we will use that information to identify strengths and weaknesses in terms of promoting the well-being of our residents. In particular in terms of the adults field, parts of Gwynedd has had specific attention over the past year in relation to mapping out what exactly is available for residents, e.g. the Eifionydd area was prioritised as part of an integrated working project that is operational there, and also in the south Meirionnydd area - as that area has and continues to cause serious concern in terms of our ability to support our most vulnerable residents.

The 'Care Challenge' project has been operational for a year now and its main purpose is to improve the understanding of the people of Gwynedd of the challenges facing the care sector, and thus we will aim to promote community action that will improve the resilience of our communities in time - this project is addressed further in chapter 4 'Preventative and Early Intervention Work'. Ensuring that individuals are encouraged to be a part of their community is an integral part of the vision - either through their personal and natural networks or through more bespoke interventions in the community. As a Council, we are taking advantage of national opportunities such as 'Dewis Cymru', and are seeking to promote and ensure that information about activities or informal networks is being disseminated

there as well.

4. Preventative and Early Intervention Work

The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014) places preventative services in the midst of service provision. It focuses on the need to develop a preventative attitude in everything we do in order to make services sustainable for the future. The new focus placed on what matters to the individual ensures that we give attention to these aspects in line with the demand. Although the conversation focuses on the individual who receives the support or who needs care, consideration is also given to the partner or family who very often act as carers also.

Carers have a key role to play in terms of ensuring a sustainable care and health system for the future, and no price can be put on the support provided by carers across the county - who are very often vulnerable themselves. It is essential that we as an authority offer the necessary support, and in order to ensure this, in March 2016 the Full Council commissioned a new project that will address this. By the end of March 2017, the project's purpose will be to review the effectiveness of our current arrangements for supporting non-paid carers and whether or not a decision needs to be made to maintain carers in the future.

The principle is the same across all services, and investing in effective preventative and early intervention is essential in order to ensure that we do not drag people into the system and create unnecessary dependency. Of course, this is the aspiration that we all have as individuals, namely to live as a part of our local communities for as long as possible without formal and excessive interventions by statutory bodies. I have shared the information noted below between the two relevant departments, namely the Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department.

- **Children and Supporting Families**

For years, very good work has been taking place in the field of children and supporting families in terms of the preventative and early intervention agenda. The act has identified the need for authorities to prioritise this work in the future. One of the structural changes that have occurred recently within the Council is the establishment of the Children and Supporting Families Department and this has brought children's Social Services together with innovative preventative elements. The Council also completed an "end to end" assessment in 2014/15 which provided clear recommendations regarding the further developments that needed to be put into action.

One recommendation was the need to establish a programme of preventative services. In June 2015, further development was commissioned in this work within

the Strategic Plan, and seeking to establish multi-agency priorities for the preventative / early intervention agenda in the county. To date, the work has identified gaps and specific needs that need to be targeted when planning preventative packages / programmes for the future and improve the provision being offered to the young person and his/her family. The gaps include speech delay and language; low level mental health support and further parenting needs. In addition to the gaps, the work has looked at the good practice that has arisen from the preventative programmes where it would be beneficial for us to strengthen our provision.

Although the work is progressing in terms of confirming the future direction and priorities, the early intervention service provided through the Gyda'n Gilydd team continues to offer interventions to families in need in an attempt to prevent needs from escalating and avoid referrals to Social Services. Obviously, the contribution of our partners is key here. There is some risk regarding this element of the service as there is no guarantee that the grant will continue post-April 2017 and therefore, during the coming year, there will be a need to focus on how we can look to maintain the service in the future.

"Gyda'n Gilydd has brought us out of a rut. I was slipping into a depression and I couldn't see a way out. I couldn't see the mess we were in – I was in denial. It wasn't helping the children"

(Service User, Gyda'n Gilydd Team)

Flying Start services have been extended substantially over the past year. We succeeded to extend the scheme to new areas, and new childcare provision was developed in Talysarn and Bethesda. These provisions were opened by the First Minister. These new projects offer opportunities to families in deprived areas and ensure that suitable and professional support is available for families during the early years.

As another part of the review undertaken in 2014/15, a suggestion was made to establish an Edge of Care Team. The purpose of the team here is to work intensively with children and families when situations are vulnerable, and children are about to be taken into care. Last year was the team's first full operational year and this development is seen as an exciting and important one that will transform the experience of children and families. The development is seen as good practice and at the beginning of 2016 the service was invited to submit the team's work in a national conference that introduced new developments in the field of looked after children. The team has received 73 referrals during the year and has managed to avoid care costs of almost £300,000 in its first year. This bodes very well for the coming period as the team works with more families.

"They (the Edge of Care Team) have been a lot of help with daily routines,

money and care for our children. We are very grateful for all the support we have received from the service"

(Parent of a Service User, Edge of Care Team)

The Youth Justice Team works across Gwynedd and Anglesey and it continues to be very successful in the field of preventative work and performs excellently against national targets in the six key fields. The numbers of young people who are referred to the service for the first time has reduced substantially and the numbers being placed in custody are at their lowest since 2005. The service is run as an integrated partnership, and the partners' commitment is very good although there is some concern regarding the reduction in the funding available by the statutory partners to maintain the service. During the year, the Bureau system has been operational and offers options in the community for restorative justice rather than formal consequences under the criminal system. Although the numbers who follow a criminal path have reduced, we see that the young people who receive intervention from the team are very complex cases, with a number of those individuals involved in severe crimes or high risk behaviour. Further work will be undertaken by the Youth Justice Board to ensure that specialist and appropriate services are in place for these new challenges.

Some key parts of the act continue to require attention and one of these is the need to establish Information, Advice and Assistance service arrangements within the service. Establishing "one front door" is one of the recommendations raised during the "end to end" review and this is very similar to the legislative requirement. I expect that establishing this service will be a priority for the Children and Supporting Families Department over the coming months.

- **Adults Services**

The 'Care Challenge' project seeks to ensure that the people of Gwynedd are clear regarding the challenge facing us in the care field and encourages and supports communities to contribute. The project could have been discussed as part of the well-being chapter, however, although a number of messages associated with it improves the understanding of the residents of Gwynedd regarding the act and what is meant by well-being - I believe that the community activities we hope to trigger will lead to solutions of a preventative nature that will reduce over-dependency on Social Services.

The project's work over the past year has focussed on raising the awareness of staff, elected members, providers and partners. I had hoped to see more development in terms of disseminating the message amongst residents and communities during the year; however, I also accept that this project relates to changing mind-set and in reality will take years of effective engagement and communication. I expect that the engagement with Gwynedd communities and residents will start properly during the coming year and that we do so by holding visits, sharing information and

identifying strengths, opportunities and gaps.

We are aiming to ensure that this type of informal support will exist for residents across Gwynedd and that they can be used as the first step before, or jointly, with any more formal support from the Third Sector or Social Services. I should also note that we do not anticipate that the solution or community activities will be the same across the county and we will need to ensure that we collaborate and take the lead from our communities when putting things into action.

I have already referred in this report to the Project 'Integrated Working Project, focussing on what counts for individuals', and as part of this work it is intended to establish integrated teams that will receive referrals directly from individuals or organisations and then proceed to act as required. It is likely that the 'Single Point of Access' model that receives much attention on a national basis is similar to the above; however we are going one step further by combining the information component with the action, thus saving the individual from having to deal with many professionals from different teams. I expect to see that driving this work programme forward will be a priority for the coming year, and that we will respond to the challenge we have received from some users regarding the original timetable for establishing the new arrangements in the rest of the county.

Currently, the new arrangements are only operational in the Eifionydd area. The department is seeking to act as quickly as practicably possible, but without moving the programme forward too quickly because of the need to manage the culture which is key to success. Another aspect of the development is the fact that the integrated team obviously requires the commitment of the Health Board, and the fact that the Board is in special measures has been an additional challenge. In the near future, I will be discussing with the Adults, Health and Well-being Department to consider how these arrangements can be tied-in across all adult fields.

Also, there are direct preventative elements associated with the new way of working. As the team in Eifionydd is multi-disciplinary, and works in an integrated way, it is possible to consider the individual's situation in full, along with their partner, family or friend. There are many examples where the conversation about 'What matters' has led to very different solutions to what one would have anticipated originally. Very often, the solutions are of a preventative nature and address problems before they develop in full. The fact that no access criteria are being used by now, along with the fact that the same team responds to the demand and then takes action, makes it much easier to consider the picture in full and thus be able to take advantage of early intervention. Upon realising that a number of the Integrated Team's cases related to accommodation adaptations, it was also decided that it would be beneficial to have a direct contact within the team - and by now, a Third Sector employee, from Care and Repair, is a member of the team.

The new act places emphasis on ensuring that the best use is made of the Third

Sector, and we are now in a strong position in Gwynedd in terms of the provision that is available to the residents across the county. By means of various forums, we have been collaborating and discussing at length with the Third Sector, including social enterprises, regarding how best to plan services for the future. I believe that we need to further develop this aspect of the work, because the Third Sector and the social enterprises have key roles to play in terms of meeting the needs of our residents and offering new opportunities. It is crucial that we work much closer together if we are going to successfully face the challenges ahead. The period of financial constraints means that the Council, along with the Third Sector, must consider how best to maintain a sustainable business model in the future, whilst continuing to place the main focus on achieving what is important to our residents.

Work has been done during the year in relation to developing the opportunities associated with the OPUS project which is being led across north-west Wales. The purpose of this project is to reduce levels of economic inactivity and increase the employability of vulnerable individuals. Gwynedd will focus on people who have mental health problems, learning disabilities, carers, older people aged 54 and over and people on the autistic spectrum. It is anticipated that the business plan will be approved early in the year 2016/17, and its implementation will be a priority in the coming year.

Further developments have taken place over the year in terms of modernising the Learning Disabilities Service and specifically the implementation of the 'Moving On' model. The model's vision is that each individual achieves to the best of their ability, and is encouraged to aim higher and always nurture new skills and experiences. This principle is being used across the Learning Disabilities Service in Gwynedd and examples of individuals who have developed new skills enjoying different experiences were seen during the year.

For the coming year, we will continue to seek to ensure that these principles are embedded in the services, and take advantage of any opportunities that arise and also ensure that we collaborate as effective as possible with our partners.

The most successful plans of the Intermediate Care Fund in 2014/15 have continued during the 2015/16 year. A bid has been made again in order to continue with the good work for the 2016/17 year. The main outputs deriving from the fund specifically are the aims of attempting to reduce the demand on hospitals and freeing up beds; and trialling seven-day working as part of the development of the community integrated teams. Here is a quotation from an individual who attends physical activities in Pwllheli targeted specifically for people living with Dementia and their carers.

"I'm really glad that I come here. In particular when you are on your own - it makes a huge difference"

(Attendees at the Dementia Go sessions, Dwyfor Leisure Centre)

5. People and Ensuring a Voice for Service Users

In this chapter, I will specifically address those children and adults who receive care or direct support from us as an authority. We discussed the principle of seeking to ensure that individuals do not become dependent on services as part of chapter 4, however, the other parallel principle is the fact that children and families use preventative and intensive services as required. In the past, there was a tendency to treat everyone in accordance with specific criteria, and if they needed support or care, there was a belief that those individuals required that support forever. It is also likely that we have been guilty of telling our service users that also, thus raising concern that they only had one chance to be entitled to receive a service.

It is essential that we move away from this mind-set and ensure that the best possible support is available when needed, but that our residents also understand that there is no necessity for them to receive that in perpetuity and that they can return to us if they do not feel satisfied. People's circumstances change daily, and it is important that we tailor our services in response to that. Having said that of course, I emphasise that there are individuals and occasions where continuous care will be needed and we will always ensure that this support is offered to the residents of the county.

At this point, it is worthwhile for me to draw attention to the work that has been undertaken during the year on preparing the workforce for the act, and specifically that a comprehensive training programme has been held. The changes associated with Part 3 and Part 4 of the act, namely assessing and meeting the needs of individuals means a culture change across the adults and children fields. Work is under-way to establish an information, advice and assistance service (discussed in chapter 4) with a clear link with arrangements to ensure that families who are receiving attention correspond to their level of needs as everyone is entitled to a needs assessment. Alongside this, an element to meet needs is also being addressed by means of work programmes such as integrated working. Part 17 (Children in Need) of the Children's Act 1989 is being superseded by the new legislation which means that these children and young people will receive attention as children in receipt of a care and support plan according to their needs, and there is a need to strengthen the preventative services available to meet the needs across the spectrum of needs. To this end, a needs assessment has been completed and the main priorities in terms of the commissioning requirements have been identified - I trust that the operational strategy will play a key role in the development of sustainable services for the future.

Specifically in terms of Part 4 of the act, a new Charging Policy has been adopted and it is operational. During the year it is intended to review the policy in order to evaluate the options available to raise income under the requirements of the act.

A core part of any care provision, and which is a key part of 'assessing individuals' needs', is the need to ensure that users can receive the service through the medium of Welsh. As I have noted in annual reports in the past, the Government's More Than Words Framework outlines the requirement on local authorities to respond in full to this expectation, and specifically to the need for the 'Proactive Offer'. In simple terms, 'Proactive Offer' means providing Welsh-medium services without anybody having to request them. The follow-up Framework to the first Framework has been adopted by the Government recently, and now builds on these requirements. An action plan is in place to meet these requirements. By now, Gwynedd Council has launched its Welsh Language Policy. The policy gives a clear direction to staff, commissioners, private providers and the public regarding how Gwynedd Council intends to comply with the Language Standards. The policy also encourages the people of Gwynedd to take advantage of opportunities to use the Welsh language in the community. The principles of More than Words have been incorporated into this policy.

I am the national lead for the 'More than Words' agenda on behalf of the Wales directors of Social Services and I am a member of the Minister's Task Force. This role means that I have been a part of the development of this current Framework and I have sought to ensure that other local authorities can learn from Gwynedd's positive experiences.

I have shared the information noted below between the two relevant departments, namely the Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department.

- **Children's Service**

There has been an increase in the numbers of looked after children during the year. We now see that there are 207 looked after children (at the end of March 2016), in comparison with 185 last year (at the end of March 2015). It has been required to rearrange the dispersion of the internal resources to meet this, and increase resilience to maintain and develop actions. There is a question-mark as to whether or not this is cause for concern considering the efforts made in the plans of a preventative nature, including the recent development of the Edge of Care Team. In addition, there is national pressure and the former Minister has made numerous references to the need to reduce the number of looked after children. Nevertheless, the department is clear that the progress responds to the need and that the progress would have been higher than this if the other interventions did not exist. The Corporate Parent Panel obviously maintains an overview of this important field and attempts to ensure that every looked after child receives the service, care and support that is due to any other child. The Council needs to ensure that it is a good parent to these children and young people and that it is ambitious on their behalf. Further work is needed in two fields, namely education plans and health

assessments. The challenge for the Panel is to ensure that the voice of the child is heard and that we respond to this.

"Thank you for listening to me and for changing my care package"
(Service User, Arfon Children Team)

The Safeguarding and Quality Unit has developed an outcome framework for the statutory reviews of looked after children and child protection as part of the development of the quality assurance model. The framework focuses on achieving outcomes for children and measuring the impact of the work taking place, and practice development workshops have been held during the period. For information also, this unit is now responsible for managing the work of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Out of Hours Team.

The Derwen Support Service, integrated team for disabled and ill children and young people, has seen the legislative changes and the need to identify efficiency savings as an opportunity to make changes to the way they work. The new arrangements respond to the need for service and are based on outcomes for service users in accordance with the requirements of the act. The Service has been looking at how to attract volunteers to work in group situations, or with individual parents as a way of extending the provision available. Work has been done to introduce the 'Gaf i ymuno â chdi' resources pack for frontline staff to encourage social communication through the medium of play, in particular for children on the autistic spectrum, and to this end, a conference was held where over 100 attendees were present for its launch.

During the coming year, we will see the opening of the new respite unit that is included within the new Ysgol Hafod Lon. It will be a golden opportunity to offer a respite service for more families.

The Fostering Service is continuing to be a service that performs well. At the end of the year, there were 99 Gwynedd registered foster carers, which is an increase of 4 and the service is continuing to recruit. There has been considerable increase during the year in the pressure from the family courts to hold associated persons assessments as a care option for children. An annual review of the service was undertaken by the Care Inspectorate in January 2016 and it was concluded that 'the fostering service provided by Gwynedd Council ensures that there is a variety of fostering placements for children and young people'. Valuable feedback was gathered regarding the quality of the support and the assistance they receive and the feedback was very positive with the support from their supervisory workers being appreciated and identified as an important factor as they chose to foster for Gwynedd. A support group was established for carers who care for members of their own family during the year. This means that they can voice their opinions, take advantage of training, share their experiences, and obtain support from each other which is very advantageous as they are in quite challenging and unique situations.

During the year, the Post-16 team has continued to be a part of the 'When I am Ready' pilot scheme. It is a scheme which promotes young people to extend their foster placements beyond their eighteenth birthday and the intention is to prevent young people from moving to live independently too soon. At the end of the year, six young people in Gwynedd were a part of the scheme. As this scheme has become a statutory responsibility on each authority from April 2016 onwards, the service has been key when leading task and finish groups across the region in order to prepare other authorities to implement the scheme. The team continues to promote work and employment opportunities for young people, and have been a part of the Engagement Framework's Management Board. As a result, a bid for European funding is being prepared in order to strengthen opportunities for education, work and employment for this cohort of young people.

During the year, progress was seen in the number of cases where safeguarding intervention was required as they displayed characteristics of sexual exploitation (CSE). The service has been giving particular attention to this field over the year, and it is acknowledged as a matter of priority and is being addressed on a strategic level. The service contributes towards the implementation of the regional action board and collaborates closely with the specific team that has been established in the police. In addition, the service has identified and designated harmful sexual behaviour as a matter of priority, and has prioritised resources in order to employ an experienced officer (temporary) to develop and lead on a strategy to deal with these cases.

- **Adults Services**

Reference has already been made in the report to the substantial transformation work within the adults field, including the engagement with communities along with the integrated working. We cannot over-emphasise the scale of the change that is afoot in terms of professional practice. In accordance with the act, efforts are being made to ensure that the individual is at the forefront, and thus we need to transform our working method from one that seeks to fit individuals into services to one that designs services around the individual. This will lead to change in how field workers engage with individuals, arrange ourselves as teams and also the support options being offered across the county.

The 'Integrated Working Project, focusing on what counts for individuals' is much more than a project in reality, and means a change in culture and a change in mind-set. Without a doubt, the change in question has seen successes and outcomes for individuals that we can take great pride in them; however, we cannot hide from the fact that it has been difficult at times and challenging for all of us - in particular for staff. Also, it is likely that there have been periods of frustration during the year, in particularly regarding how slow the change has been happening.

Nevertheless, I am confident that we will see a real development in terms of this transformation during the coming year, and a further attempt will be made regarding the engagement and communication with residents and all staff in the field. Despite the occasional frustrations, it is important to bear in mind that individuals who have experienced the new services have responded very positively to them. See below a quotation from one of our service users who is 98 years of age:

"The County's services are second to none I'd say, and I'm not just being flattering, I'm telling the truth. I know how important the individual contact is to keep people confident to carry on living their lives as they want to live. And if they can't, there is somebody there to give some support and advice - rather than having to go from one to another, and not knowing exactly who is who and who's responsible for what"

(Service User, Eifionydd Integrated Team)

During the past year, one of the main matters that has caused regular concern is the stability and sustainability of our Nursing Homes across the county. A number of homes found themselves in a situation where there were escalating concerns and this highlights the fragile nature of the sector. The rate of delayed transfers from hospitals for social care reasons has deteriorated significantly this year - an increase from 1.05% in 2014/15 to 2.45% this year. Despite this, compared with the whole of Wales, Gwynedd's performance remains consistently good, but we must acknowledge that some deterioration has occurred. This performance reflects the general shortcomings of the health and care system in terms of the high demand on hospitals, lack of nursing beds in the community and also a lack of capacity in terms of professional workers and home carers in some specific areas of Gwynedd. Consequently, the measure that 'reviews of care plans' shows a decline from 85% in 2013/14 to 79% by 2015/16. Upon analysing this figure further per area, it is seen that the performance of Meirionnydd is much lower than other parts of Gwynedd. I believe that this decline again highlights the obvious lack of capacity in some areas and discussions are continuing with Health Boards in an attempt to develop appropriate alternative models in response to the problems.

Also, it is a difficult and challenging period in terms of service provision costs. The financial situation places pressure across the sector and alongside our partners we are seeking a proactive response to the challenges that are, and will be, facing us in the future.

"The carers are unfailingly helpful, cheerful, always with smiles on their faces, and optimistic. They have given me the will to live, when things were looking very bleak. Our carers are always very professional and nothing is too much trouble for them. They are like angels to myself and my wife"

(Service Users, Internal Domiciliary Care)

In response to the emergency, in March 2016 the Full Council commissioned a new

project - 'Capacity and sustainability of the Care and Health System'. The purpose of the project is to seek a response to the current problems in relation to care and health provisions within the older people field specifically. By implementing the project, jointly with the Health Board, we are attempting to ensure that we will have the most suitable system in place across the care and health field in the future. However, whilst this project seeks to respond to the greatest concerns across the care and health field, other projects have also been operational during the past year in an attempt to achieve the vision in terms of increasing and improving the accommodation options available for our residents. An example of this is the Extra Care Housing development being implemented in the Porthmadog area and also the decision to develop a new accommodation model for adults with learning disabilities on the Frondeg site in Caernarfon. During the year, it was also managed to ensure an agreement regarding the Older People Accommodation Strategy and use it for the purposes of developmental discussions with partners.

On the whole, this year's performance measures suggest that the service is on the right track. For example, there seems to be a reduction in the proportion of people who receive traditional support in the community and also in our residential homes. This may suggest that we are less reliant on traditional care compared with previous years. Gradual growth was also seen in the use of direct payments which once again promotes and empowers individuals to live their lives as they wish.

Gwynedd was also a part of a national inspection carried out by the Care Inspectorate into the Learning Disabilities field. There was firm evidence that the front-line operational work is of good quality, along with examples of committed and effective collaboration with the Health Service in a person-centred way. Nevertheless, we still need to mature our commissioning plans and ensure regular engagement with our users, parents/carers and providers. To summarise, it was noted that obvious enthusiasm and energy could be seen in the learning disabilities work in Gwynedd and that the service had a 'good reputation'. A work programme has been drawn up in response to the inspection and I expect that its implementation will be a priority for the coming year.

I should note that the provision being run internally on behalf of Domiciliary Care and Residential Care has been inspected annually by the Care Inspectorate as per usual, and I am glad to report that it has concluded that the performance of these services is very good.

Mental Health will be one field of work that will continue to receive specific attention in the future. It has not been an easy period last year in terms of securing discussions with the Health Board, however, with the recent appointment of the Director for Mental Health, I trust that there will be an opportunity now to respond positively to the ongoing concerns.

6. Social Services Governance

As I have noted in previous annual reports, the authority has two departments that focus specifically on the care field. Two heads of department, namely Marian Parry Hughes (Children and Supporting Families Department) and Aled Davies (Adults, Health and Well-being Department) are leading the two departments and I would like to thank them both for their hard work and commitment over the past year. It has been a challenging year as we have worked towards the introduction of the act as well as responding to the financial and operational challenges. The support they give me as Statutory Director is essential and I am glad to report that we work well as a team.

The contribution of Scrutiny is a key source of support for me as Statutory Director. I wish to thank the Services Scrutiny Committee for their observations and support. Particular work has been done in relation to the "From Hospital to Home" investigation and their ongoing scrutiny in particular fields offer me some important perspectives, regarding both departments, as well as facilitate opportunities to improve the experiences of service users. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the regulators have highlighted the need for the Council to review its scrutiny arrangements, and this review is already under-way.

Unavoidable changes have occurred over the year in terms of moving units between both departments, and it is likely that this process will continue whilst we identify the most effective way of operating. However, as part of this we will listen to the views of staff and users to ensure that we do not complicate procedures unnecessarily.

It is important that I draw your attention to Part 8 of the act, as this is the section that notes the requirements imposed on me as the Statutory Director of Social Services. The Cabinet recently approved the 'Director's Protocol' recently - this is a protocol that outlines how we will ensure that we meet the legislative requirements. The protocol ensures robust governance arrangements along with strong lines of accountability. This protocol is available on the website and it is important that staff and members also familiarise themselves with the requirements.

We cannot reflect on the year gone by without noting how difficult it has been in terms of structural gaps, in particular on a senior management level within the Adults, Health and Well-being Department. Undoubtedly, it has been a challenging period in terms of moving work programmes forward, but also it has been an unstable period for staff. It is inevitable that key members of staff and leaders will be absent, either due to ill-health or due to lack of appointment. However, the department is to be praised for achieving despite this additional challenge.

A key part of any governance arrangement is that ability to remain within the resources available. It is very pleasing to report that both departments, namely

Adults, Health and Well-being, and Children and Supporting Families, have managed to remain within their budgets for 2015/16. Despite the financial challenges and the need to achieve efficiency savings, both departments have been able to end the year within their budgets. We must not rest on our laurels; however, this evidence of stability and prudent financial planning bodes well for the financially challenging years to come in the future.

The financial comparison work carried out across Wales and the analysis that has been done over the past years by means of investigations such as "End to End" in the children field and adults field has meant that there has been a sound foundation to the efficiency savings in the respective departments. Comparison work undertaken suggested that we have room to improve in terms of value for money, and all efficiency savings plans are responding to that.

Arrangements are in place to report back regularly on complaints arising from the care field, and every effort is made to resolve them, respond to them and learn from them as soon as possible. Although a report is submitted annually providing an overview of all complaints during 2015/16, I wish to take advantage of this opportunity to summarise the main trends. In the children field in particular, unavoidable complaints have been made regarding parents' expectations in difficult situations. In the adults field in particular, complaints have been made regarding the lack of provision in south Meirionnydd, as well as weaknesses in terms of engagement and communication with service users and families before changing provisions. Also, a consistent theme across both fields is the fact that individual users or their families are unhappy with the reduction in the support they receive.

Therefore, it is crucial that we realise our responsibilities in terms of engagement and clear communication with service users regarding any proposed change or change that is happening. It has been noted many times during this report that we are continually attempting to design the services around the individual who receives it, and in order to do so, they need to be included in any discussions regarding changes from the outset and throughout. Indeed, the need for us to improve our engagement and communication is a general lesson for us in terms of, e.g. leading staff through change also. In general, I should also note that individual members of staff and specific teams have received praise during the year from service users, families and other professional workers. For example, it has been noted regularly how staff have gone out of their way to help in situations that were often very difficult and complicated.

It must be acknowledged that the complaints that highlight lack of provision in some areas of the county underline again the critical and unsatisfactory nature of those situations. However, I can assure you that we are doing everything we can to resolve the situation in the short-term, as well as identifying satisfactory resolutions for the longer-term.

Whilst the general messages heard from the complaints comes as no surprise, I trust that the changes taking place will go a long way towards addressing and resolving many of them in the future. They also underline again the importance for us to make yet more effort to raise awareness amongst our citizens of the challenges in the field, holding a regular dialogue with our communities, in order for them to more fully understand the role and responsibilities of Social Services.

The Council has a number of forums and opportunities it uses to engage with the county's residents, service users and carers. The engagement group is operational in order to ensure that we have an overview of everything that is ongoing. By doing this, and by accepting general feedback from conferences, questionnaires for providers and families, I believe that we have a relatively comprehensive understanding of the views of our service users. Nevertheless, I believe that we still have room to improve our practice for next year. I had hoped to be able to share our main priorities with partners and service users in order to assess whether or not our priorities are genuinely consistent and appropriate. Indeed, I believe that this is something that we should do regularly, and therefore I have asked the engagement group to consider different methods of communicating the priorities of this report during the coming year and receive feedback and observations as the year progresses.

Thank you for reading the report and I hope that it is a fair reflection of the situations and priorities for the future. If you have any observations or questions you are more than welcome to contact me. For a copy of this document in large print, Braille, on audio tape or in another language, contact Rhion Glyn on 01286 679074.