

Annual Council Reporting Framework for Welsh Social Services

Newsletter No.1 Autumn 2008

Welcome to our first newsletter. Later ones in the series will bring you news of the pilots, but it's a bit too early for that as yet. The aim of this issue is to raise the profile of the project amongst the wider local authority and stakeholder community.

Background to the project

In June 2007 the WLGA Social Service Policy Group & ADSS Cymru agreed to develop a process to improve and strengthen internal council arrangements for assessing and managing performance of social care. They asked the SSIA to develop and test-out a process and framework which would support all Councils in Wales to produce an annual report. The report would comment on effectiveness and quality in meeting social care needs, together with priorities and plans for improvement. This project is therefore seen as:-

- an important initiative, which transfers performance management accountability from the national centre back to local authorities through its council members, chief executives, managers and officers
- having to be robust and effective in its ability to report to and engage with local citizens and key stakeholders including CSSIW
- part of what replaces the joint review inspection process, which has come to an end.

The responsibility for the report is likely to be placed on the statutory Director of Social Services within the awaited Guidance on that role.

How the project is going to be developed

Summer 2008 - SCP Consult has been awarded a contract to work on designing a new annual performance reporting framework and Torfaen and Wrexham social services have been chosen to act as pilots following their expressions of interest.

September 2008 to March 2009 - SCP, Torfaen and Wrexham will work together with the SSIA during the development of the framework and will assist with the identification of any issues in advance of the national rollout.

The primary outcome of this work will be a toolkit which will provide a framework which local Council's will be able to use to produce their

annual report. SSIA will also be planning for a roll-out of this tool-kit to the other 20 Councils over the summer of 2009.

The focus of the CSSIW letter to authorities will then be on the robustness of the information-base for judgements made, the validity of the judgements made about priorities and the suitability, and adequacy of the business plans to address the quality and performance issues.

Aims and Objectives of the Annual Report

The aims and objectives of the annual report will be to;

- provide robust evidence for judgements made by the authority as regards their services and management, particularly when they are exposed to challenge
- reinforce the current approach to performance management but also to develop the use of softer measures (especially users, carers and key stakeholder input) and tracking of progress towards the Council's own strategic objectives
- give a much more immediate link to a council's action/business planning
- identify clear priorities for the investment of scarce improvement capacity, both locally and nationally.

What will the Annual Report look like?

First, it is important to note that the Annual Report will be published and therefore available to all stakeholders alike, following the necessary scrutiny and pre-publication challenges e.g. local residents, service users and carers, local authority staff and Council members.

There is still much work to be done, but we are likely to recommend that the report should be in three sections, as follows;

- **The Overview:** i.e. the document that reports the Council's view of its current effectiveness and its priorities for improvement. It should present a recognisable picture to those delivering and served by individual services, as well as explaining why and how the Council has made the decisions it has made around its priorities for improvement.
- **The Evidence Trail:** i.e. the store of evidence that the Council bases its report on, and, crucially, the judgements it has made on each piece of evidence which in turn have led to its overall conclusions
- **The Business Planning Section:** which will deliver the improvement as set out in the 'Public Report'.

Timescale

The following proposed timeframe will be confirmed by the Programme Board in Spring 2009. However Council's will be asked to produce their first annual reports in September 2010.

Next steps

We know that people are impatient to learn more about this, and especially the experience of the pilot Councils. But it is still very early on and there is not yet much to say. But we can promise you that we will share the learning as it emerges (not wait till the end of the pilot process) through this Bulletin and by targeting particularly relevant management groups.

It is however worth saying just a couple more things.

First, that there is a critical balance to be struck between local freedom to produce a report which suits each Council's needs, ways of working and communicating and the national need for assurance. We are quite clear that this must not be a "filling out a given format" exercise. It must "belong" i.e. be categorically owned by each Council in its own way. But we are also working with CSSIW to clarify their minimum evidence requirements (probably much more relevant for the "evidence-trail" part of the report rather than the public-facing "overview"), which are most unlikely to be less than the current SAQ, and will follow the existing recognised "domains".

Secondly, there are some things which Councils can be doing now to ready themselves, before anything more emerges from the Pilots.

We would suggest:-

- Doing all you can to test and be in a position to demonstrate the robustness of your key PIs.
- Mapping the ways in which you will be able to report on user and carer views of your services and planning to develop further these vital but "softer" measures.
- Working out how you would track progress towards your own local strategic objectives, where there will not be national measures available.

The next newsletter will be issued in January/February 2009

