

Annual Council Reporting Framework for Welsh Social Services

Newsletter No. 2 February 2009

1. Introduction

Welcome to our second newsletter. In the autumn of last year we introduced the Annual Council Reporting Framework to you, its aims and objectives and its overall timescale. We also made some early suggestions as to what you could be doing to start preparing for implementing this new reporting framework.

Following on from the work undertaken by the two pioneer authorities (Torfaen and Wrecsam), we are now in a position to tell you more about some important emerging learning. In addition, we begin to identify the changes within the CSSIW structure and design of a new inspection framework which provide authorities with new challenges and opportunities.

The main purpose of this newsletter is however to set out for authorities the early lessons from Torfaen and Wrecsam, with a view to allowing preparatory work to be undertaken ahead of a major roll-out programme during the summer.

2. Early Learning

a) Engagement with key stakeholders

This reporting framework requires a cultural change in terms of ownership and reporting of performance. Focus initially on your internal stakeholders e.g. management teams and front line staff, scrutiny members, senior management teams (crucially Heads of Service). Aim to ensure that everybody is aware of how their responsibilities/duties contribute to the bigger outcomes/performance reporting, understanding why performance management matters to the end user and consequently, what this process aims to achieve.

You might want to consider engaging key external partners in conversation which helps them to understand and accept their part in service delivery and how agreement might be brokered in terms of how their performance impacts on yours, and vice versa. Your draft Report is a good opportunity to define the impact of unresolved difficulties on the effectiveness of your services.

Keep at the front of everyone's mind the big ambitions of this initiative, which are to own the quality and effectiveness of social care delivery locally, to report on it in ways that makes sense to users, staff, politicians and citizens, and to link our evaluation of where things stand to immediate improvement actions.

See your staff as a key audience for the Report; they need to be able to attest to its accuracy

b) Ownership of the Report

Paragraph 6.9 of the draft guidance on the role of the statutory Director of Social Services, usefully sets out the minimum requirement of the Report from CSSIW's position. However it is important to remember that this Report is owned by the statutory Director on behalf of her/his local authority and as such will focus on the Council's own strategic objectives as well as national priorities.

Consider and negotiate, sooner rather than later, whose signatories appear on the Report for your authority (Director and??? e.g. Chief Exec, cabinet lead) and what the governance process/timetable will need to be in place for its consideration and approval.

c) Links to existing processes

It is important to avoid duplication of effort where ever possible. Therefore make clear links to and use of existing departmental and corporate council processes (business planning, risk assessment plans, WPI etc) as well as to service and core business plans. Once your first Report has been published, you will find it very useful to consider a regular quarterly review through management teams or performance management groups. This will give you an overview of your overall performance as well as considerably aid production of the subsequent Report and will also help with end of year financial pressures

d) The Overview Report

The Overview Report, as referenced in our first newsletter, needs to be much more about action rather than a lengthy service description (which people will be able to find elsewhere in the report). It will set out, where ever possible in the language of outcomes, where and how services will be different in twelve months time as a result of actions that will be taken, and the rationale behind those proposed actions.

We strongly recommend that the Director takes a significant personal responsibility for drafting this overview section.

e) Identification of roles and responsibilities

Early identification of the key roles and responsibilities to be allocated to senior managers is vital, as is the engagement and support of technical and information support staff. The Director needs to be able to have confidence that senior managers are empowered to engage and direct the change of culture this new process demands. The early distribution of tasks across performance and service delivery areas and staff is key to a successful Report. A key task will be to draw up and agree a project plan with the Director and, for the project manager along with the Director to monitor progress against the plan.

High profile personal leadership of the project plan/work programme by the Director is crucial, as will be the visible support of key elected Members.

f) New opportunities

Many Directors have been keen to present a much more rounded picture of social care locally than the national PIs alone, important as they may remain.

Some examples of how that could be done are;

- to focus much more on the care-provider side (the quality/experience of a person's residential care home or home care service will often be the most important thing to them, but performance reporting has tended to major on the assessment and care-management side), maybe using your own quality assurance, but certainly drawing on Inspection Reports and ratings, both of your in-house and external providers.
- recent painful experience in England has demonstrated that to rely on national PIs alone to evaluate case-management and casework is not enough. It will be important to find ways of reporting on case-sampling and file-reading
- the overview report will also be of much more human interest if "case cameos" can be included, describing real people, their interaction with social care, and the outcomes of that in their lives

The biggest challenge however, is to develop service user/carer/citizen engagement and input across the whole piece. It seems likely that the development of an effective and imaginative engagement strategy across all service user groups will take a number of years to comprehensively put in place (possibly a 5 year plan). Some initial additional dedicated capacity may be needed unless such processes are already well developed. But we need to be able to demonstrate that we are getting better at listening to what users and their carers have to say to us about their lives, needs and ambitions, and the part social care can play.

Engagement with those citizens who do not use social care is as yet relatively undeveloped and should ideally be managed by the corporate centre across all services, not just social services.

g) Pre publication challenge

Individual authorities will need to put in place robust and challenging test processes before the Report is released into the public domain (this is likely to be when it is first presented to Scrutiny Committee although it will still be in draft). This is not just a question of asking if you've forgotten anything! It's about them testing whether your overall approach to a service is robust and whether the way you manage activity in critical areas is effective.

Questions might include:-

Is there evidence to support the conclusions reached?

Does the picture painted accord with my perceptions?

Are the improvement actions planned appropriate to address the picture of quality and performance?

Are they realistic and deliverable?

You should aim to use the most knowledgeable individuals and those with the biggest stake in what you do to constructively challenge what has been written. You should consider using front-line staff, users/carers, peers/critical friends from other authorities and partner organisations. The SSIA's Peer Advisor Scheme would be an obvious resource to think about. By introducing a variety of colleagues to your Report and receiving their feedback, you stand a far better chance of unearthing your gremlins and weaknesses before going public, and affording yourself the opportunity to resolve issues and prepare to deal with any criticism that may come your way.

Elected Members will themselves provide challenge through the Scrutiny process, but you may want to involve them at earlier stages of informal consideration as well.

The Pilots are seeing pre-publication challenge as an iterative process, with elements of it coming in at different stages of drafting from early on, rather than as a one-off late-stage event.

h) Resourcing the production of the Report

It is too early to come to any firm conclusions about how resource-intensive the production of the Report may or may not be. The SAQ was in itself an intense exercise and demanded a block of dedicated resource to complete it every year, at a time not of your choosing. The demands of this new process can, by contrast, be built in, planned and staged through the whole of the year, to fit better with local patterns of demand and capacity. How far it places new demands on your existing resources will depend in the main on how sound your current performance management and business planning is.

Three areas have already shown themselves to be areas for some useful consideration; first the use of existing processes/standing groups/meetings/reporting mechanisms rather than reinventing and building an additional bolt-on; secondly, to have a clearly timetabled project plan which works backwards from the date your final report goes to Council and thirdly, to allocate time early on to build the culture of this new approach and everyone's part in it.

It does seem likely that some dedicated capacity, as well as opportunity choices about the use of the time of quite a number of staff, will be needed to establish the processes for generating the Report in the first year. Beyond that, it may be that the process is little more demanding than the current.

i) Methodology

Pilots have found the structure of RADAR logic useful for the more detailed report and have used that to develop their ideas. There will be more information on this when the toolkit is issued in late spring, although you may wish to familiarise yourselves with the RADAR concept before then should you wish to consider it.

Both Pilots are finding the structure provided by the well-established "domains" useful and workable, and prefer it to a "client-group" approach.

Both Torfaen and Wrecsam are also using the performance management aspects of Ffynnon, particularly the data storage functions, as a repository for their evidence base, and are exploring its potential for adding value to business planning.

Finally..... remember not to be too over ambitious in the first year of production, but be sure you can confidently evidence and justify everything you say.

3. Engagement with CSSIW

The engagement with CSSIW will become clearer as the pilot authorities work through the preparation for publication. It is very encouraging, though, that they have committed themselves to a work-shop style key meeting with each Council, when CSSIW will begin to look at the more-or-less final draft Report along with other evidence they have gathered. Following this, CSSIW will prepare the tailored inspection plan which will be the basis for authority engagement with CSSIW over the coming 12 to 36 months. This will be sent in a letter to the Council, for publication at about the same time as the Council's own Report. The comments of CSSIW in this workshop will also afford another important phase of pre-publication challenge, on the basis of which the Council can review and revise its draft Report.

CSSIW have decided to bring to a close the process of requiring authorities to complete an annual SAQ (and then publishing the Performance Letter) as from the end of this current round. 2009/2010 will therefore be an interim year and ADSS Cymru will be preparing some advice with the assistance of the SSIA, as to how Councils might wish to approach this period. This advice note will be presented to SSPG for endorsement

This interim year should be viewed by all stakeholders as a baseline year.

4. Timescales

Torfaen and Wreccsam have undertaken this project within 'real-time' parameters. As such both have chosen to report to scrutiny and executive board by July of 2009.

The first full round of reporting by all 22 authorities will be by September 2010.

The SSIA project team will be holding a number of workshops and meetings over the coming months and a more detailed note with specific dates on these will follow within the month. However we can give you an indication now of what activity is planned;

- information and discussion sessions with each of the 3 regional Directors meetings
- information and discussion sessions at the 3 Heads of Service Groups
- a workshop for Scrutiny and Executive members and chief officers from Wreccsam and Torfaen in February/March
- a regional series of workshops for scrutiny and executive members
- a series of 11 workshops across Wales (likely to see authorities paired) in the summer, to which each Council will be invited to bring a "team" of the 6/7 people who will be key to delivering the report.