

Charlotte Walton
Wrexham CBC
2nd Floor Crown Buildings,
31 Chester Street, Wrexham,
LL13 8BG

Date: 12 October 2018

Dear Charlotte,

Re: Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Improvement Conference at Wrexham
Children's Service.

Further to the improvement conference held on Monday 8 October 2018 I want to thank you for the professional manner in which concerns were discussed and the positive, proactive approach of Wrexham officers and Members.

Improvement conferences are a new approach for CIW as we move towards a more collaborative approach to working with local authorities to support improvement in areas where early concerns about outcomes and performance have been identified.

We had agreed an improvement conference was necessary because our evidence and your performance indicators demonstrated the quality of service offered to children and families in Wrexham has declined and is no longer of a good enough standard to consistently support children to achieve positive outcomes.

The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) (now Care Inspectorate Wales CIW) carried out an inspection of children's services in Wrexham County Borough Council during January and February 2017. The aim was to review how well people were served by the local authority when seeking information, advice and assistance. We found the local authority to be making positive improvements to a number of areas and our report found the service works hard to keep children safe. However, we also made some recommendations for improvement which included quality assurance, consistency of understanding and measurement of risk within the assessment process, and stronger management oversight. In response Wrexham developed an action plan.

We had cause to return to Wrexham children services in early December 2017 following concerns raised with us by a third party in Autumn 2017. On our return we read case files and found parallels with the areas highlighted for improvement in our 2017 inspection report. On this occasion we found some areas to have deteriorated further. We recommended timely consideration of the ability of the current action plan to effectively address service delivery issues including;

- Risk assessment, analysis and mitigation.
- Analysis of the level of social worker turn over, including volume, trends, contributing factors with proposals for mitigation
- Consideration of efficacy of family support services. Particularly for longer term cases.
- Contribution of management support and supervision to consistency of practice across the service, including timely decision making, effective support for newly qualified and students, the consistent and effective use of available tools to identify opportunities for improvements and positive outcomes for the child.

As agreed CIW carried out a further monitoring visit In July 2018 when two CIW senior managers spent two days on site reading case files and speaking with council officers. From the evidence gathered including Wrexham's own performance indicators we found the service was not on a journey of improvement and in some areas previously highlighted there was further deterioration. From this we concluded there are aspects of Wrexham children's services which are inadequate and do not consistently support children in Wrexham to achieve positive outcomes.

These findings led CIW to request an improvement conference on the 8 October 2018. In summary the three systemic issues addressed were:

- Human resources including; recruitment and retention of social workers, use and turn over of agency staff, agile working, provision of IT and mobile phones, induction and training.
- Quality assurance including; consistent availability of professional supervision, timeliness of response, case recording, case analysis, decision making and management oversight.
- Process and paperwork including; reflecting processes and documentation not being as lean as they might be and not always making best use of social work time.

At the improvement conference we highlighted and agreed the importance of Wrexham County Borough Council taking immediate actions to rectify these deficits and ensuring improvements can be sustained in the longer term.

Having noted areas requiring immediate attention we also noted there are areas of strength in Wrexham children's services, not least the commitment of staff to the children they support and the readiness of managers to implement change and deliver service improvement.

We all recognise well motivated staff as the biggest asset in all social care services and the many pressures they face in their jobs, particularly at this time. I trust every

effort will be made to encourage and support staff to continue to deliver of their best during this period of change and improvement.

The authority is expected to provide an improvement plan, or updates to existing plans, to CIW within four weeks of the conference. Evidence of improvement will be reviewed at a formal review meeting convened within six months. Membership at review meetings will usually include those who attended the initial conference, though this could be reduced or added to as required. Where there has been insufficient improvement, or at any time where concerns increase, CIW may carry out a focused inspection to enable more in depth consideration of issues and areas for improvement.

If you have any questions or require further clarification please do contact me directly.

Yours Sincerely,

Vicky Poole

A copy will be sent to the Chief Executive, Council Leader, and Wales Audit Office