

Powys County Council

Review of progress made on organisational improvement and future recommendations for Improvement Support and Assurance

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared for the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government in order to examine the following strategic issues:

- The progress made by the Council in addressing the corporate and service issues identified in various inspection reports from 2019. This includes Children's Services, Adults Services, Education and associated Corporate Leadership and Governance
- The specific recommendation made in my report of 2018 and the progress made in implementing these
- The effectiveness of the Improvement and Assurance Board in supporting the delivery of improvements in the Council
- The Leadership capacity in the Council to drive improvement without external support and assurance
- Recommendations for the future arrangements for the Improvement and Assurance Board

1.2 The detailed terms of reference for the review and methodology are appended to this review. In summary these included

- a review of the detailed self-assessment and associated documents produced by the Council
- Discussions with each of the inspectorates and regulators
- Discussion with the Independent Chair and Members of the Improvement Assurance Board
- Interviews with Members and officers from the Council

1.3 I would like to place on record my thanks to all those involved in the review for their time and engagement and in particular the Members and Officers at Powys County Council for their excellent organisation while I was on site.

2 Findings and recommendations for further improvement

2.1 The following sets out my findings from the review and any associated recommendations for the Council.

a) Corporate Leadership and Capacity

- The Council is very well led by the Cabinet and Executive Management Team who are cohesive
- There is now a clear externally facing vision for the Council which is outcome focussed and ambitious
- Strategic infrastructure including business planning, performance management and HR/OD are much improved
- The Transformation Programme is well thought through, planned and resourced
- That inevitably given the breadth of improvement required that in many areas there is still work to do over the next 12 months to fully embed the improvements but give the impressive drive of the Chief Executive and Director of Transformation I am confident that this will be achieved.
- There were reports from some staff of poor behaviour by a small number of non-executive Councillors. This is an important issue for the Council to address and include in the Member Development Programme

b) Children's Social Care -Progress on Children's Social Care is positive with many improvements made to practise and outcomes. The Council rightly recognises that there is still work to do to embed change and to improve the services in order that a positive outcome would be achieved from an inspection. Key issues include:

- The Improvement and Assurance Board has been able to support the achievement of strategic progress which is recognised as being good. The Board does not have the capacity or remit to provide assurance of case level practise and as such the Council is recommended to undertake this via a peer review or similar as part of the next phase of improvement if CIW do not Inspect the service.
- Continued progress over the next 6 months should see the Council achieve its objectives relating to Children's Services.
- There are individual strategic projects e.g. the creation of more in-house capacity for Children's homes that need to be progressed at speed and could benefit from corporate leadership and transformation support.

c) Adults Social Care-Progress in Adult Social Care is positive but is more mixed than progress in Children's Social Care. The Council rightly recognises that there is still work to do to embed change and to improve the services in order that a positive outcome would be achieved from an inspection. Key issues include:

- Similar to in Children's Social care if practise improvement is sustained over the next 6-12 months the Service will be able to achieve the Council's objectives for the service.
- The Council recognises that while practise improvements have been delivered and good progress made on DTOC some more strategic projects

such as the domiciliary care market development and the move from reliance on residential care have been slower to develop

- To make faster and sustained progress on key projects such as development of the domiciliary care market it is recommended that there is corporate leadership and transformation support provided.

d) Education-The key findings in respect of Education are as follows:

- The Council's strategic response to the Estyn report has been quick and impressive. There has been strong internal leadership and external capacity brought into support this
- The challenge of ensuring the strategy is delivered and the necessary tough political decisions are taken is appreciated and this will be a key test for the Council over the coming months in respect of being able to drive further much needed improvement
- The next six months are therefore key for the Council in turning a strong vision into reality and being successful in doing so will exemplify the progress made in the Council

3 Future Ability of the Council to drive it's own improvement

3.1 It is clear that the Chair and Members of the Improvement and Assurance Board have played a pivotal role in driving improvement in Powys over the past two years. The Board over time has been able to move from a directive role to one more of challenge and support. This reflects the success of the Board and the progress made in the Council and the growth in capacity and leadership.

3.2 Looking forward it is clear that given the progress made and the growth of capacity in the Council that the organisation is now much better placed to drive its own improvement

3.3 There remains over the next six months a number of significant challenges including implementing changes in Education and Schools and delivering strategic projects in Childrens and Adult Social Care

3.4 Therefore, it is my view that for the next six months the Improvement and Assurance Board should remain in place with a revisited remit with a specific focus on ensuring an effective transition to the Council driving its own improvement

3.5 In more detail my recommendations relating to the Board are as follows:

- The Board should remain in place until 30th September 2020
- That given the progress made on Corporate Leadership and capacity that this area no longer needs to be overseen by the Board
- That the Board should meet monthly until June 2020 with a final meeting in September 2020

- In the period of July to September the Chair and Independent Board members should continue to report to Welsh Government based on continued engagement with the Council
- That in order to give final agreement to the ending of the Improvement and Assurance Board that Welsh Government are satisfied with the alternative arrangements put in place by the Council
- Proposals for the alternative arrangements should be submitted by the Council to Welsh Government by 1st July 2020
- In proposing the alternative arrangements the Council should have regard to the following:
 - A Council led Improvement Board potentially Chaired by the Chief Executive
 - A continuation of cross party and Scrutiny involvement in the revised arrangements
 - Further strengthening of Scrutiny arrangements and wider Member development
 - Maintenance of external challenge and advice in specific issues eg Education and Social Services
 - Engagement with the WLGA improvement offer and Peer Support

4. Conclusions

4.1. The Council, Improvement Board and Welsh Government should be commended for the progress made over the past two years

4.2. There is much still to be done but the Council is in a much stronger position to drive its own improvement

4.3. The continuation of the Improvement and Assurance Board for a further six months in a revised form should provide both an appropriate level of ongoing support while providing the Council with a sufficient period of time to put in place its own alternative arrangements