

Performance Inspection Summary

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

November 2006

Inspection findings

Delivering social work services in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar presents particular challenges. The islands are remote, their populations scattered and communications and transport sometimes difficult. The proportion of residents over 65 is the highest of any Scottish local authority. A small number of managers have to deal with the same wide range of requirements as larger management teams in bigger authorities. Recruiting the right staff is not easy.

This inspection found that the department was delivering some effective services, particularly in the fields of residential and day care. Local organisations and groups were well represented in planning and delivering services. However, the priority given to these services had left weaknesses in the way other services were being run. These included important parts of home care services and children and families services. There were also weaknesses in some key work processes, particularly risk assessment, case recording and the availability of up-to-date guidance for staff.

We met a staff group motivated to deliver high quality services but one that was not always properly supported to do this. There was a need for a clearer vision for social work services together with a firmer strategy and stronger leadership to deliver it. The pace of change and improvement needs to quicken.

The full inspection report contains 20 recommendations, some requiring urgent action. The recommendations are directed towards improving important aspects of management and practice to deliver better and more consistent services. These include:

- Collecting and using more information about how well services are performing;
- Carrying out proper assessments of the needs of service users and the risks they may pose to themselves and others;
- Keeping records that are up-to-date and fit for purpose;
- Making sure that staff have appropriate guidance about critical areas of practice;
- Preparing better plans for specific services;
- Undertaking more systematic workforce planning and supporting staff better in their work;
- Improving the ways in which services are commissioned from other agencies;
- Providing better strategic leadership.

SOME EXAMPLES OF GOOD SERVICES DELIVERED BY SOCIAL WORK SERVICES AND PARTNER AGENCIES

- A carer whose relative had been attending a particular day centre for several years said that the centre was “everything she would want for him” and that the staff were excellent. The centre enabled the service user to meet others and to participate in activities that otherwise would have been unavailable. The carer said that her relative’s progress was regularly reviewed and that she was actively involved in these reviews.
- The community alarm system – Faire is an excellent example of a simple, flexible service. It can be easily accessed without complicated assessments. It is designed to help people to continue to live in isolated circumstances. The electronic alarm system enables people to make personal contact with a staff member quickly. It has a diverse range of applications and the potential for more. It is well run by experienced and knowledgeable staff.
- The Uists and Benbecula pre-school assessment team (Pre-Scat) is a multi-disciplinary, inter-agency group. The team offers *‘... care to children with special needs which is co-ordinated, monitored, planned and adapted, according to the level of need of each individual child’*. We found evidence of the team planning its activities, evaluating its performance and providing effective services to children and families.
- Dun Berisay had a very positive and welcoming induction pack for all new staff. It was informative, personalised and written in an inclusive way. The pack included a poem and some quotes from authors that set a strong, person-centred tone about offering care to older people.
- Adult day care services staff across the authority were supervised regularly. They said that supervision systematically addressed both their work with service users and their professional development. They considered that their managers supported them well.

What is a performance inspection?

The Social Work Inspection Agency (SWIA) is carrying out performance inspections of all local authority social work services in Scotland.

SWIA gathers and analyses a wide selection of information about a local authority and the social work services it provides or is responsible for. The inspection findings are published in a report that identifies strengths as well as areas for improvement.

This leaflet summarises some key findings of the inspection of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Council's social work services, which are set out in the full report published in November 2006.

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar will produce an action plan in response to the inspection report. The plan will set out how any necessary changes are to be made. Once the plan is agreed, SWIA and the council will monitor the implementation of the plan together.

If you would like a copy of the full report or would like to know more about SWIA, please contact:

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