

Children's Services Overview

Introduction

This is Monmouthshire's first Children's Social Services overview report. Its purpose is to give an accurate and honest appraisal of current services in Monmouthshire and outline the priorities for improvement over the next year or so.

The comments and judgements in the report are based on a number of sources of information including hard statistical information, feedback from service users and feedback from other agencies. Our aim is to present an accurate picture reflecting the things we have done well over the last year and the things we need to improve.

We have given consideration to the core areas of work and activity we have undertaken and have structured the report in two ways. There are chapters covering general issues common to all groups (i.e. access, assessment and care management and safeguarding) and then chapters for each service-user group (eg children with disabilities, children looked after). By doing this we have sought to minimise duplication; even so, there are inevitably overlaps within the report.

One of the most important aspects of the report is our "judgement". Each section starts by summarising how we think we are doing and indicates our priorities over the next year, our position is supported by a grid which indicates these points in more detail.

In summary then, how are we doing in Children's Social Services in Monmouthshire? My view, as Head of Service, is that our services are mainly adequate, with some areas of good performance but also some gaps where services are not consistent and need improvement. The department has worked hard to improve services over the last year and battled with a number of obstacles. There are a number of developments that have taken place over the last year that have contributed to the departments improvement agenda including –

- The establishment of improved performance management information including a monthly indicator report for managers providing opportunities for managers to comment on their team's performance. This has enabled more understanding and ownership of performance management at all levels.
- The delivery of regular quarterly staff conferences alongside, improvements to staff training and supervision. All managers are now trained in staff supervision as a matter of course.
- The establishment of a newly consolidated service management tier with increased clarity of roles and responsibilities.

We have however experienced a number of difficulties and challenges over the last year including –

- Recruitment of managers and staff. The Service has seen a number of team management posts become vacant and despite national advertising, applications have been poor or few. Currently the service has four permanent team managers, one temporary team manager, three agency team managers and two uncovered posts.
- The implementation of a new electronic data collection and recording system known as the Integrated Children's System (ICS). This has been introduced in stages and required social workers to learn a new way of

- recording their work with children and families. It has also required increased IT and typing skills.
- Operating within the parameters of our budget. We have experienced an overspend due to our purchase of externally provided foster placements and agency staff.

These are my views and we would like to hear what you think. In particular, are we describing the Monmouthshire social services that you know from your experience?

Tracy Allison
Head of Service

Service Context

In order to consider the key aspects of Children's Social Services, it is important to briefly summarise the current structure and context of the Service.

Children's Social Services provides a range of services to children, young people and their families within Monmouthshire. The county covers a large geographical region and is predominantly rural in nature; this brings certain challenges to providing consistent service delivery and provision. Currently the assessment and case management functions are delivered from two teams covering geographical areas in the north and south. However the other service functions and provision are delivered on a county wide basis from one location these include separate teams covering children with disability (CWD), looked after children and care leavers (Through Care Team), fostering (Child Placement Team), adoption (Adoption Team) and young offenders (Youth Offending Team). We have a number of specialist roles including the Safeguarding Principal Officer, the Independent Reviewing Officer, and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Business Officer.

We work collaboratively with other local authorities and host a joint Monmouthshire / Torfaen Adoption Service and Youth Offending Team. We also work in partnership with other departments, agencies and organisations. A number of our support services are currently commissioned from the third sector (Action for Children), this includes family group conferencing, family support, advocacy, personal advisors and disability support (including short breaks).

Access, Assessment and Care Management

This first section of the report picks up the process issues around access, assessment, and care planning common across the service user groups.

A key issue for us is making it easy for children and families to access our services. We know we need to improve this within Monmouthshire. We are currently reviewing our office accommodation and aim to build better links with the County's One Stop Shops. Our teams in the north of the county are in the process of moving to new office accommodation above the Abergavenny One Stop Shop and we are working towards reconfiguring the structure of how we provide our initial access and assessment functions to improve our responsiveness. We are also supporting staff to have more flexibility in their working day by providing opportunities for agile working, enabling staff to record assessments more promptly, thus reducing the impact of travelling time between offices and home visits. Service users are able to access the Emergency Duty Team outside of normal working hours.

We produce a wide range of public information which is available via our offices and on our website. However we have more to do to ensure that new users can access the information they want, we also need to improve the availability of information in Welsh and other languages. We currently have complaints leaflets that are accessed on request but are moving to actively distribute these when families are first visited

We aim to consider all new referrals or requests for support within one working day. This is an area we have made considerable improvement in over the last year.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
The Percentage of referrals during the year on which a decision was made within one working day	74.5	74.1	97.2

(Source: SCC/006)

It is important to also acknowledge that the volume of referrals into the Service has also increased this year, 428 referrals were received in 2007/08 and 471 in 2008/09. This has risen to 739 in 2009/10. Increasing our accessibility to children and families within the County may have contributed to this increased volume.

A central role for social services is assessing children's needs, working with them to put in place appropriate support and reviewing this on a regular basis. We do this through following the Framework for Assessment guidance; this indicates specific timescales for both our initial assessments and more detailed core assessments. Over the next year we will be seeking the views of children and families in relation to their experience of the assessments we undertake. In the last year, we have made significant progress in the timeliness of these assessments. Both the assessment teams in the North and South of the County have worked much closer together over the last year to improve consistency in this area and workers have an increased understanding and focus on the importance of timeliness in our assessment work. Each team now reports on its performance in this area on a monthly basis. Performance in this year however, has been affected by the continued implementation of ICS.

A measure of our success is the steadily increasing percentage of initial assessments completed within the timescales indicated in the Framework for Assessment guidance.

	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10
The Percentage of Initial Assessments carried out within 7 working days.	63.7	66.7	74.8

(Source: SCC/042)

Our timeliness in respect of our more detailed core assessments has also increased over the last year from 42.9% in 2008/09 to 59.3% in 2009/10 by the third quarter. This is consistent with our clear direction and improvement pathway, this also includes now includes a need to increase the number of these assessments undertaken. These improvements have been achieved despite having significant problems in the recruitment of social workers and team managers. Although there have been inconsistencies in the team management cover within the North and South Teams we have successfully improved the management oversight and quality assurance of referrals and assessments. We have also devised a new training course for staff in 'assessment work' and this will be implemented over the next year, with a view to improving the quality of our assessments particularly in relation to the analysis of information and enhancing the multi-agency aspect of these assessments. Management audits of assessments indicate a need to evidence the views of children, their families and other professionals more strongly. We are also working on strengthening the use of historical information within our assessment work, along with the use of chronologies.

Further to assessment, a child considered to be in need may be eligible for ongoing support. If this support is provided by Social Services and ongoing, we will formulate a care plan. We have recently been undertaking work to ensure that all children we are working with post assessment have a relevant care plan. This involves transferring care plans previously recorded on a Word document onto the new ICS. The need to duplicate plans has placed an additional task on our social workers and also complicated our performance measurement. We aim to ensure that all children's plans are reviewed in accordance with statutory timescales; we can demonstrate effectiveness in this area if the child is looked after or subject to child protection processes, however we have to improve this for children in need.

Wherever it is possible we support children to live within their family, each of the teams has a support worker who can provide task-orientated support. We also commission further family support from Action For Children, namely family group conferences and parenting support and assessment. Some of these services are provided from our family centre in the north of the County.

During 2010 we continue to operate within tight financial constraints and also must plan for these pressures to increase over future years. We continue to offer services to children and families whose needs are greatest. We have established tight financial management processes including that, all requests to purchase specialist assessments or interventions from other professionals not working directly for Children's Social Services are considered by our resource panel chaired by the Head of Service. This panel also considers the prioritisation of parenting support provided by Action For Children on our behalf.

Judgement

We are proud of the progress we have made in improving our responses to new referrals and the timeliness of the completion of our initial assessments. However, we need to improve the timeliness and volume of our core assessments.

We also need to improve our office accessibility and information available for children and families at the referral and assessment stage.

Requires significant improvement	Inconsistent	Mainly good with some gaps	Well established and effective across the board
		✓	

Priorities for action

- Improve the links that Children's Social Services have with the County's One Stop Shops
- Review the range and language of information leaflets available
- Continue to improve the management oversight and auditing of assessments
- Implement staff training in assessment
- Implementation of Service User feedback questionnaires

- Ensure that every child receiving services has a current care plan
- Improve the timeliness of reviews for children in need
- Improve our staff recruitment and retention

Safeguarding

During the last year following the death of Baby P, we undertook a review of our safeguarding arrangements and reported this as requested to CSSIW. Both Children's Services and our Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) were part of a CSSIW review in May 2009. In respect of Children's Services this review noted that safeguarding arrangements in Monmouthshire were satisfactory but needed strengthening.

The areas already indicated in the earlier Access, Assessment and Care Management section apply to this team, particularly in relation the timeliness of referral decisions and assessments. The Lead member for children and Head of Children's Social Services visit the two assessment and case management frontline teams regularly. 83.8% of our initial child protection conferences are held within statutory timescales, we need to continue to work at improving this. 78.6% of our initial core group meetings are held on time, this figure is above the target we set for this year.

Our child protection review meetings are held within statutory timescales in 93% (at the third quarter) of cases. These figures are pleasing because during this year we have implemented new data and reporting systems within ICS for our child protection, which

'The chairman was very nice, helpful, made me feel comfortable and that I could have my say'

has enabled in workers changing some of their working practices. We started the year in April 2009 with 54 children on the child protection register; this figure rose to 78 in August 2009, however from October the figure gradually has reduced and now we end the year with 44 children on the register. All families attending initial child protection conferences

receive a feedback questionnaire and children over the age of 10 are routinely invited to attend meetings.

Children and young people also have the option of using our commissioned independent advocacy service to enable them to participate in these meetings and decisions made.

All children who are on the Child Protection Register have an allocated qualified social worker. We have an experienced principal Safeguarding Officer who chairs our Child Protection Meetings; this officer also chairs the South East Wales Inter Agency Child Protection Forum. However as noted earlier we do need to strengthen our overall recruitment and retention of key staff particularly team managers. There is a comprehensive four tier training programme in relation to child protection coordinated by the LSCB. We try to ensure our newly qualified staff have protected caseloads and effective mentoring arrangements.

'Overall the meeting I attended was a lot better than I expected.'

Over the last year we have commenced work on improving our quality assurance methods and processes – ensuring that managers provide more consistent decision-making in relation to thresholds and monitor the quality of practice. We have implemented mandatory supervision skills in child protection training for our managers and senior practitioners. We still need to improve our auditing arrangements over the next year, however we have a suite of safeguarding management information reports that managers draw on.

There are now comprehensive arrangements in place for legal advice outside of core office hours.

The CSSIW review of our safeguarding arrangements noted that there are well established partnership arrangements that assist joint working, with good attendance of partner agency staff at strategy meetings, case conferences and reviews. The CSSIW review of our LSCB considered that the board had made satisfactory progress in the way it coordinated the activities of each person and agency on the Board and effective partnership working was noted as a strength. We have appointed a Business Manager for the LSCB within the last year; this has focused and enhanced the functioning of this Board. A clear business plan with key priorities has been developed. Within the last year the LSCB has produced a bank style 'safeguarding' card, providing basic information on reporting child protection matters, this card has been widely distributed within organisations in Monmouthshire.

There is good corporate and political support for safeguarding children with effective scrutiny arrangements, this was noted in our CSSIW review of our safeguarding arrangements and evidenced in the funding of two additional social work posts for the frontline teams.

Judgement

In summary we consider our safeguarding arrangements are adequate and we are pleased with the improvements we have made over the last year. However we need to continue to build on this progress and ensure that we have robust processes in place within all aspects of our safeguarding work, in order to assist us to manage our work particularly during the current period of staffing difficulties.

Requires significant improvement	Inconsistent	Mainly good with some gaps	Well established and effective across the board
		✓	

Priorities for action

- Improve the timeliness of our initial child protection conferences
- Continue to improve the recruitment and retention of staff
- Increase the opportunities for analytical and reflexive practice
- Continue to improve the audit arrangements within the Service
- To develop the quality assurance role of the LSCB

Children with Disabilities

The Children with Disabilities Team based in the South of the County, provides both assessment and support to children and families anywhere in Monmouthshire, currently the team are working with 172 children. The team includes social workers, support workers and occupational therapists. The areas already indicated in the earlier Access, Assessment and Care Management section apply to this team, particularly in relation to incorporating the child's view and other professional's views within assessments. In 2009/10 the team completed 74% of initial assessments and 82% of core assessments on time. The team has its own eligibility criteria to ensure that services are provided to those most in need. The team offers a range of support and can also draw on the Council's domiciliary care service and fostering service. Within the service there are two salaried foster care projects providing respite care, however over the last year the service of these two resources has been interrupted by the need to halt or change carers.

A range of other service's are commissioned from Action for Children or accessed from other partner agencies including outreach sessional support work in the community, a sitting service, family link carers, short break provision and holiday play schemes. Ongoing work is being undertaken to review the type and frequency of support children receive from Action for Children in order that services are targeted at those most in need. In order to operate within the current financial constraints all requests for the funding of residential care placements or the residential component of educational placements are considered by a multi-agency specialist placement panel. Over the last year we have seen improvements in our working relationship with the Lifelong, Learning and Leisure Directorate particularly in relation to the provision of holiday play schemes for children with disabilities. This is an example of our commitment to promoting independence and social inclusion. The team also welcomes any opportunities for partnership or integrated models of working.

Children's Social Service's seeks to ensure that children and young people with disabilities are able to develop maximum independence in line with their abilities. Currently the Children with Disability team are working with 55 children aged 14 to 18 years old. A transition project team is in place, working with 10 children who will be moving to adulthood. This team is exploring effective multi agency working practices that will assist a smooth transition in order that a co-ordinated approach can be developed. Over the last year improvements have taken place in the working relationship between the team and Social Services providing support to adults.

Another key area of work is occurring in relation to children with autistic spectrum disorders. The ASD stakeholder group sits under the auspices of our Children and Young Peoples partnership, this group has now formulated an action plan looking at the full range of issues relating to ASD. The team has welcomed this because there appears to be an increasing demand from children with autistic spectrum disorders. Key areas of focus highlighted within this action plan include raising awareness about ASD and developing a clear 'pathway' through services for children (and adults) with autism. Extensive staff training has also taken place within the County.

'A's life has improved in leaps and bounds as a result and for the first timeI hope A's next social worker

The team also works with a number of siblings of children with disabilities and utilises the services of the Young Carers Project. Over the next year we need to review our use of direct payments and increase this method of support wherever possible.

Judgement

The Children with Disabilities Team continues to need to address those areas and priorities for improvement that are highlighted in the Access, Assessment and Care Management Section. We are however pleased with the range of services we are able to offer to children with disabilities although have struggled at times with how we prioritise these.

Requires significant improvement	Inconsistent	Mainly good with some gaps	Well established and effective across the board
		✓	

Priorities for action

- Improve the quality of our assessments of need in order to assist with the prioritisation of resources
- Continue to review the current care plans of children with disabilities and the prioritisation of available resources
- Review current services to identify gaps and consider new models of service provision
- Continue to support the improvement of services for children with autistic spectrum disorders
- Ensure the full operation of our two respite foster care units

Children Looked After

Our overall looked after children (LAC) population increased at the beginning of this year, largely due to the arrival of 19 new young people seeking asylum. In April 2009 we had 115 children looked after which is the highest number the County has ever experienced; however in recent months we have seen a gentle reduction in numbers and we currently have 85. This has corresponded with improvements that have been made to the decision-making processes around when children should become looked after and a number of children and young people moving on to alternative permanent arrangements or independence. We aim to continue to ensure that only those children most in need are looked after and our available family support services are targeted at helping children remain within their own families.

All of our looked after children are allocated to a qualified social worker and have their care plans reviewed by our Independent Reviewing Officer. 100% of our looked after

children's reviews are carried out within statutory timescales. The Independent Reviewing Officer actively audits the information and care plans that we are required by government guidance to have on file, any gaps or shortfalls are raised directly with the relevant management. We have taken steps recently to improve the quality of information that placement providers such as foster carers receive when a child is first placed; this has involved relaunching the importance of placement planning meetings and auditing our foster care placement agreements. We continue to need to improve the quality of our permanency planning and the evidence of our decision-making; we have been able to actively improve the use of alternatives to long-term care particularly special guardianship. Our number of children placed at home but remaining subject to a care order has decreased to one. We have also recently introduced a new process for considering when children may need to be considered within the court arena, this involves a legal threshold meeting that is chaired by the Head of Service or a Service Manager. We actively support wherever possible contact between children looked after and their families and have appointed a support worker tasked with supervising contact.

We work well with our partner agencies in caring for our looked after children, this includes working with the Health looked after children's nurse and the Personal Education Plan Officer in Lifelong Learning and Leisure Directorate. 60% of our looked after children had a Personal Education Plan in place within 20 school days of entering care or joining a new school, this is an improvement on the 32.5% noted in 2008/09. We fund a part time Psychologist to work with our carers and looked after children where permanency is an issue. We also commission an advocacy service from Action for Children, however we need to work at this service being actively used more by our looked after children. We have comprehensive information packs that are given to children when they first become looked after and have well developed consultation guides for children and young people to share their views within the review process. Our participation officer acts as a point of contact for children looked after to share their concerns or complaints and every year we hold consultation days to seek their views through a number of different mediums. All our looked after children are eligible for free leisure passes to our County leisure centres. We also have an arrangement with our local Fire Service for our looked after children to have priority places on the Young Fire Fighters Scheme.

We have worked well over the last year with our elected members to continue a good standard of Corporate Parenting, jointly running our recent 'Pride Awards' evening where the achievements of our looked after children were celebrated.

Our asylum seeker population has involved the department improving its understanding of the processes and procedures relating to working with this group of young people. We have established a temporary social worker dedicated in working with our asylum seekers and have developed a comprehensive guide for foster carers in relation to caring for young people from Afghanistan. We also are represented at local and regional forums relating to asylum.

Over the last year an area of concern has been the increased use of externally provided foster placements. We have worked well to review this situation and ensure where ever possible only those children with additional needs are placed in the independent sector. Ways in which we ensure tight financial management and decision-making include:

- all requests for placements for children are authorised by service managers.
- all requests for external placements and complex care packages go through our resource panel chaired by the Head of Service;

- all requests for residential care placements or the residential component of educational placements are considered by our multi-agency specialist placement panel
- all decisions to proceed under the Public Law Outline and initiate legal proceedings are now made in legal threshold meetings chaired by the Head of Service or a Service Manager

Our children and young people who are looked after long term have social workers that are in our 'Through Care' Team. This team also works with all of our care leavers and this enables consistency of worker through the transition to independence.

Judgement

We end the year with 85 children looked after, this enables us to be well positioned to improve and enhance our services to this group of children and young people. We have actively improved our management oversight relating to admissions to care and have reviewed our children in external placements to ensure the right children are looked after in the right placement. We do however need to continue to make improvements in our range of local placements.

Requires significant improvement	Inconsistent	Mainly good with some gaps	Well established and effective across the board
		✓	

Priorities for action

- Recruit to our behavioural support social worker post that sits within our commissioned family support service to prevent admissions to care
- Improve the take up of the use of advocacy of our looked after children
- Improve the quality and evidencing of our permanency planning
- To continue to monitor those children where court proceedings may be required via the use of our legal threshold meetings

Fostering and Adoption

These two areas have been put together for clarity within this report, though the analysis was carried out separately. Our Fostering and Adoption Services are important aspects of the department in contributing to the outcomes of our looked after children. They are provided via two different teams, the Child Placement Team and the Adoption Team. The Adoption team is a joint Monmouthshire and Torfaen Service, hosted by Monmouthshire. During the last year both of these teams have been subject to CSSIW inspection, we are currently awaiting the final report of the Fostering Service.

We have experienced inconsistency in the management of both of these teams over the last year, both team management posts became vacant and we have been unsuccessful in recruiting permanent team managers. Interim team management arrangements have

just been finalised. We have also seen a change in the Service Manager for these teams over the last year.

Within the Child Placement Team we need to make significant improvements to the processes and systems through which the team's business is conducted. We must ensure our policies and procedures are clearly known by all Children's Social Service staff. We also need to improve the consistency of support and supervision to our current carers over the coming year, at present morale is low amongst some of our more experienced carers. We also need to ensure we undertake unannounced visits to our foster carers. We currently offer quarterly support group meetings attended by the Head of Service, this is an effective forum for the sharing of departmental information. Although we have a comprehensive training package for carers, we need to improve the take up and the recording of this. Historically our foster carer allowances were low but this year we were able to increase them by 10%, this has aligned us more favourably with some other authorities.

Currently we are not able to meet the demand for foster placements within our own service and as mentioned above we are heavily reliant on placements provided by the independent sector. This has caused us to not manage our provision within our current budget. Over the coming year we will undertake a comprehensive recruitment programme in order to try and enhance our pool of foster carers. We will also update our placement strategy to reflect the changes in our looked after children population and changing placement need e.g. placements for asylum seeking children, mother and baby placements. We are a member of SEWIC, a South East Wales consortium. This is currently focused on regionally standardising the commissioning of independent placements.

The Adoption Service has focused over the last year on the integration of both the Monmouthshire and Torfaen Adoption Services, this work will continue over the coming year with an increased focus on streamlining processes and policies. The service has an experienced staff group. There is a need to improve the written information available in respect of the business of the service and further work is proposed over the next year focusing on the establishment of clearer Service standards and benchmarks enabling the enhanced monitoring of Service performance.

From April to December 2009 11 children in Monmouthshire were adopted and 14 assessments of potential adopters were completed. There is a need to increase the timeliness of these assessments.

An Adoption Support Services Adviser (ASSA) is in post focussing on post adoption support. We need to improve our assessment of needs that determine our support plans. However, the authority is developing good links with health and education and the Service utilises support from a council funded psychologist and the services commissioned from Action for Children. The profile of this service and the range of support available require enhancing further over the coming year and needs to be clearly incorporated within a service business plan.

Over the last year the role of the Adoption Panel has been expanded to include permanency planning, there is a need to embed the processes around this more across the other parts of Children's Social Services. There is a need to continue to monitor that each child placed permanently has life story work undertaken and that consideration to later life letters is given. We also need to ensure that the allowances that we sometimes

pay in respect of adoption, special guardianship and residence orders are reviewed annually to take into consideration any changes in circumstances that people may have experienced.

Judgement

We are pleased that we have been able to increase our foster carer allowances this year but are aware that our support to carers has been affected this year by the inconsistency in the management of the Child Placement Service. We have significant areas that we need to improve over the coming year, including our support and supervision of our carers and the systems within which we record our work in this area.

We are pleased with the initial merging of both the Torfaen and Monmouthshire's Adoption Service but over the next year we need to now integrate our systems and processes for conducting our business more fully. We have benefited from the expansion of the Adoption Panel to include permanency and now need to embed this further within our other teams.

Requires significant improvement	Inconsistent	Mainly good with some gaps	Well established and effective across the board
		✓	

Priorities for action

- Update our placement strategy
- Undertake a recruitment campaign to enhance our pool of foster carers
- Ensure our foster carers receive regular supervision and unannounced visits
- Ensure our foster carers receive appropriate information about the children they have placed with them
- Establish an Adoption Service business plan
- Enhance our Post Adoption Support Service
- Review annually the allowances that we currently pay in respect of Adoption, Special guardianship or Residence Orders to ensure they are still necessary

Leaving Care

The Through Care Team supports and provides services to our young people leaving care and moving to independence, in line with the statutory requirements laid down in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. We currently work with 60 young people who are leaving care or who have left care.

All of our care leavers are allocated a qualified social worker until they are 21 or 24 years old, this is unique within Wales as other Social Services departments offer unqualified workers post 18 years. We also offer and allocate an independent Personal Advisor to our young people, this Personal Advisor service is commissioned from Action for Children. At present most young people utilise their social worker more than their personal advisor, we aim to improve the use of this service over the next year.

Currently we run quarterly 'Independence' workshops for our young people planning to leave care or those that have already left care. These workshops are co facilitated by some of colleagues in other support agencies e.g. the Police. We need to enhance the range of appropriate supported lodgings and supported housing projects available for our care leavers, however none of our care leavers are homeless or in prison. However our care leavers are given priority status on the County Housing Waiting List. We actively support our young people in further and higher education when ever appropriate; this can include both financial and practical support. At present we have one young person at university and three young people due to start in September 2010.

The Council is committed to supporting the training and employment of care leavers and it is proposed that a work placement scheme will be developed. This is an example of our commitment to promoting independence and social inclusion. Currently we have one young person placed within our corporate training department already. We also support our young people in care and post care in social activities and have a football team that play in tournaments within South East Wales. All our care leavers are eligible for free leisure passes to our County leisure centres. Also some of our young people have appeared in a film aimed at helping train social work students in a local university. Recently a successful workshop took place where some of our Councillors spent time with our care leavers.

'We would like to take the opportunity to thank you for the support and advice over the last few years.....We are sure that you have played apart your part in helping B to realise his potential....'

Every member of the Through Care team represents Monmouthshire at the All Wales Leaving Care forum on a rota basis; this enables us to draw on local and national knowledge and initiatives.

We are mindful that this Team works with young people for many years and this means the volume of young people eligible for leaving care services may increase faster than those moving on. We have therefore introduced tighter scrutiny of young people transferring in from the other teams; this is now considered within our resource panel.

Judgement

We offer our young people leaving care a comprehensive service and are able to demonstrate positive outcomes for many. We are pleased with the our performance in this area and are hopeful that we can enhance the service further with the ongoing work that is taking place in respect of developing council work or training placements.

Requires significant improvement	Inconsistent	Mainly good with some gaps	Well established and effective across the board
		✓	

Priorities for improvement

- Continue to improve the use and role of Personal Advisors
- Develop improved training and employment options, drawing on placement opportunities within the Council
- Ensure that where appropriate young people have comprehensive pathway plans
- Work with our Housing and Supporting People to develop a wider range of move-on accommodation

Youth Offending

The Youth Offending Team is a joint Monmouthshire and Torfaen Service, hosted by Monmouthshire. The focus of this service is to prevent offending and re-offending. It is a multi agency team and funded by a range of agencies including Social Services, Police, Health and Probation.

It currently sits within the top quartile of national performance and was subject to an inspection this year. The overall inspection judgement was that the YOT is performing well. Over the last year the Service has experienced changes in both Service and Team Management but this has had minimal impact on performance.

'Thank you very much for all your help you have given me.....I like you being my support worker as you listen to my suggestions, thoughts and you take me as I come'

This service works with young people within the community at risk of offending, this work is undertaken by the Prevention Intervention Project team, over the last year this team has integrated within the wider Youth Offending Service. A number of different agencies refer young people to the project and a range of services are accessible including services

dealing with emotional and mental health issues along with substance misuse. We have worked hard to improve our work with colleagues in education, it is important that we continue to ensure our young people are in receipt of appropriate education. We still need to ensure our working relationships with the other teams in Children's Social Services are effective and we also need to work with our housing colleagues to ensure there is safe and suitable accommodation for those young people who are homeless. We undertake assessments on all of our young people known to the team; however we are aware that we need to improve how we evidence diverse and different needs within our assessments. We have worked hard this year to improve how we identify and manage areas of vulnerability or risk that a young person may experience or present.

We still need to be clearer about vulnerability and risk in the reports we write for courts. We do however have effective working relationships with the local courts. The Service has implemented a new Statutory approach to working with those young people who have offended, this is known as the scaled approach, it is important that we monitor the impact of this new way of working.

'This is a little card to say a very big thank you for all that you have done for me and my family'

Our last inspection noted that we provided good quality services to parents/carers and victims of crime. Children and young people are able to make direct amends to victims and their local community through a range of projects.

Judgement

We are pleased with our Youth Offending Service; it is performing well in many areas of its practice and is contributing effectively to partnership working within the County.

Requires significant improvement	Inconsistent	Mainly good with some gaps	Well established and effective across the board
		✓	

Priorities for improvement

- Improve the use of performance information in the analysis of trends in order to enhance service planning
- Monitor the impact of the new Scaled Approach
- Continue to work with the local Education departments to ensure that young people get appropriate education.
- Work with our Housing colleagues to consider accommodation options for those young people who are homeless.