

## The context in which we work

We are operating in a fast moving environment which is exciting and challenging. Having laid out our strategy in my annual report this online-only section describes the key factors that we need to engage with and influence to achieve our objectives.

### National

- The policy direction for social services in Wales is articulated in the [Social Services and Wellbeing \(Wales\) Bill](#) which is currently going through the legislative processes and offers a once in a generation opportunity to transform the delivery of social care in Wales. I welcome the focus on outcomes, the confirmation of the role of social services within Local Government and the emphasis on families and citizen centred services. The recognition of the need for strong, connected communities and early intervention supports our work in both adults and children and indeed the whole authority direction within Monmouthshire. There is also a move towards regional approaches and in areas such as safeguarding structures and adoption services we have moved ahead of the formal legislation to redesign services on a regional basis..
- The continuing UK wide economic climate has an impact in two ways:
  - The recession and the UK wide response to this is likely to place the families we work with under increased stress and consequently increase demands on social services; we continue to monitor this situation;
  - Whilst the Council has protected services for vulnerable people within the 2014/15 budget setting process there have had to be savings. As I write this we do have overspends in both adults and children's services. Though these are not significant when seen in a Welsh context they reinforce the need for our strategy based around changing practice, earlier intervention and engaging communities.
- Across the UK the number of children Looked After by local authorities have increased significantly and Monmouthshire has experienced similar patterns. This additional demand has caused financial and organisational pressures for the authority
- The issue of the structure of local government across Wales remains a key contextual factor; at present we are waiting for a statement from the Welsh Government on the future configuration of local authorities.

### Regional

- We have built stronger relationships with [Aneurin Bevan Health Board](#) (ABHB) particularly via the Frailty and Mental Health/Learning Disability Boards. A

Children's Board has also been established and a new governance framework for all integrated health and social care work has been put in place. The sustainability of the private and independent sector and how we build mature and effective commissioning relationships with them is key. We continue to work with other authorities through the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative and across the ABHB area to commission regionally where appropriate. Recently significant sums of grant funding have been made available such as the Regional Collaboration Fund and the Intermediate Care Fund and we have worked as a partnership to allocate these.

## **Local**

- Monmouthshire is a large and varied county with rural areas and market towns which contrast with newer towns with good transport links in the south. This influences how we deliver services and requires us to be flexible about the way we meet needs.
- The protection of vulnerable people has been identified by the Council as one of three clear priorities along with education and the promotion of enterprise and job creation.
- We have moved forward on the integrated health/ social care agenda and on managing demand through building resilient communities and this work has attracted interest from across Wales and beyond. We are keen to build on this reputation and influence developments across the region.
- The continuing fallout from the recession means we are facing significant budget reductions over the next three years. We will put our energy into redesigning our services and changing the way that things are delivered. We expect our staff to work with communities to design and deliver services that make a real difference to peoples lives

In summary, the local, regional and national picture aligns well with our strategy. The financial situation is a significant pressure here as elsewhere, with increased costs and demand at a time when budgets are essentially static. It is thus very important that the overall policy context is broadly supportive of the approaches we are taking and I believe that it is.