

# Introduction

Herefordshire Social Services was reviewed between October and December 2002 by a team working on behalf of the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate. The Review is part of a rolling programme covering the whole of England and Wales. The purpose of the Review is to give local people a clear and independent view of how well Herefordshire:

- ◆ responds to individual people who need information and help;
- ◆ plans for its population as a whole; and
- ◆ manages its resources and performance.

## Herefordshire Profile

Herefordshire Council is a unitary authority situated on the borders of mid-Wales and the English counties of Shropshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire. It is a mainly rural county with 84 per cent of land classed as agricultural. It covers 843 square miles and is the second most sparsely populated county in England. The population is 169,000, with a higher percentage of older people than the national average, a very low percentage of people from minority ethnic groups and a relatively large traveller population. Unemployment is below the regional average but Herefordshire is also a low-wage economy with average weekly earnings well below the national and regional averages. There are no wards among the 10 per cent most deprived in England although this obscures some pockets of deprivation. The rural nature of the County and its dispersed population does, however, have a significant impact upon the range and availability of services.

## Main Findings

### *Information and help*

- ◆ Users and carers are generally satisfied with the services they receive. However, they express some frustration at the difficulty of getting into services and then maintaining contact with a social worker.
- ◆ There is an excellent range of information available but few people receive information about services in writing and people are not routinely informed about how they can comment on services.

- ◆ High thresholds for services, especially within children's services, need to be reviewed, and the management of child concern cases need to be clarified with other agencies.
- ◆ The needs of carers do not feature sufficiently strongly in assessments and care plans.
- ◆ Care management and assessment practice is variable across all services.
- ◆ Reviews are not undertaken regularly. However, this has improved for child protection.
- ◆ Adoption and fostering services are good.
- ◆ For older people, there is insufficient intermediate care and home support provision to assist people in remaining at home or to return home from hospital.
- ◆ For learning disability services, very good progress has been made in reshaping some day opportunity services into valuable community-based facilities and supporting people to live in their own home.
- ◆ Services for both adults and children with disabilities are relatively underdeveloped.
- ◆ Arrangements for transition from children's to adults' services need to be improved. The Authority is investing in a project to rectify this situation.

## ***Plans for the population***

- ◆ The Authority has made considerable progress in shaping some services to meet users' needs.
- ◆ Services for children and those for adults with learning disabilities are effective in many respects but there remain areas for further improvement.
- ◆ Plans for reshaping services for older people are well advanced but current provision does not yet adequately support users in leading independent lives.
- ◆ Partnership working is generally good, and the relationship with Health is particularly close, but it needs to be formalised.
- ◆ The Authority has begun to gather information about the needs of the population but lacks a systematic approach to ensure that unmet need and future demand are fully understood. Consequently, it has not ensured that services fully meet the needs of the population.
- ◆ The balance of in-house and independent-sector provision is changing in response to service demand and information about costs.

- ◆ Some excellent practice in involving service users and carers in shaping services now needs to be extended across all client groups.

## ***Managing performance and resources***

- ◆ Performance management and project planning need to improve.
- ◆ Quality standards are not specified for all services and arrangements for ensuring compliance with standards and procedures are also insufficient.
- ◆ The complaints system is currently inadequate but steps are being taken to improve the position.
- ◆ There are good supervision arrangements in children's services but this is more variable in adults' services.
- ◆ Appraisal, training and development of staff and managers is improving, but the Authority needs to ensure equitable access to the programme.
- ◆ The Directorate currently faces a serious financial situation. The service most affected is that for older people. A recovery plan has been put in place, which is reducing overspending. However, budget pressures still remain a challenge for the service.
- ◆ The Directorate has yet to move to a balance of provision that makes the most efficient use of all available resources.
- ◆ It is proactively managing its buildings and property but faces a challenge in balancing efficiency with accessibility in a rural county.
- ◆ Recruitment and retention problems are being addressed but an overall strategic approach is required.
- ◆ Diversity is taken seriously, but there is more to do to raise staff awareness and ensure services are culturally sensitive.

## **Improving Services**

The key areas for improvement are to:

- ◆ make sure people understand what they can expect;
- ◆ improve the standard and consistency of assessment, care planning and reviewing;

- ◆ build on recent positive developments to support people to maintain their independence, participate in community life and enjoy a better quality of life;
- ◆ improve longer-term planning and commissioning;
- ◆ embed good practice within a comprehensive performance management framework; and
- ◆ make the most of available resources.

## Overall Summary

Herefordshire is currently serving some people well with promising prospects for improvement. People receive a prompt service and most users have a named social worker. Investment in family support services has contributed to more children being supported at home and a reduction in the number of looked after children. Good progress has been made in integrating Learning Disability and Mental Health services with Health. Yet, across all client groups, there is still an insufficient range and quantity of provision to support adults and children to maintain their independence and remain at home. Thresholds for receiving services are too high and this presents risks, particularly in children's services. There is too much variation in the quality of assessment and care planning with an unacceptable proportion of this being unsatisfactory. Discharge arrangements for people leaving hospital need to be improved by ensuring there are sufficient resources in place in a timely manner. There is an impressive level of political leadership, and a clear sense of purpose and direction within the management team. Investments in senior and middle management have yielded considerable benefits in improving performance. Excellent relationships with other agencies, such as Health, are helping the Authority to achieve its goals. The Authority faces a difficult financial situation, especially in Social Care but at the time of the Joint Review, the Authority was making good progress in dealing with this.

# What Happens Next?

The Review was presented to the Council on 10 July 2003.

The Council has agreed an action plan to address the issues raised. The Joint Review Team, the Social Services Inspectorate and the external auditor will be monitoring the progress of the Council in fulfilling the plan.

If you would like further details of this action plan, please contact:

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The Review Team wishes to thank all those who contributed so generously to our work, including users and carers, staff and managers from Social Services and other agencies.

This is a summary of a fuller report which is available from Audit Commission Publications (0800-502030), price £15.

If you have any queries about this review or the Joint Reviews programme generally, please contact us at:

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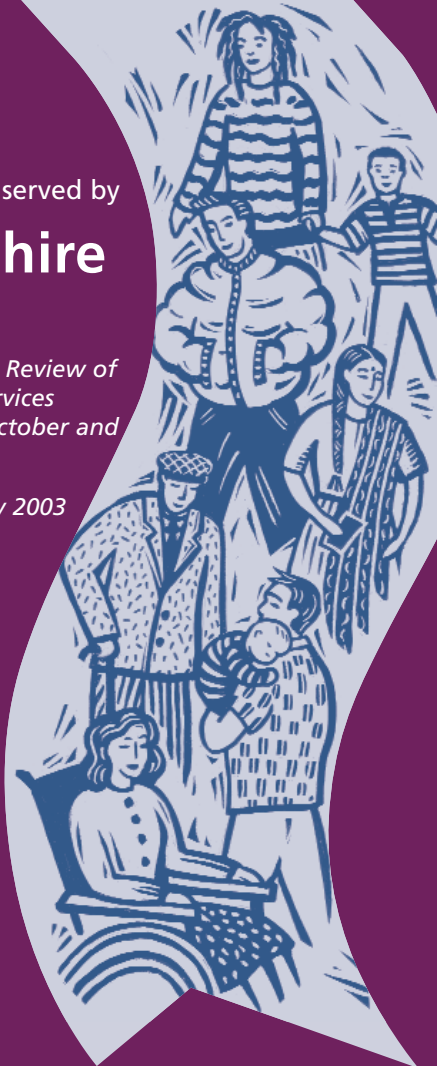
How well are people served by

# Herefordshire

Social Services?

*A summary of the Joint Review of Herefordshire Social Services undertaken between October and December 2002*

*Report published in July 2003*



**SSI** *Social Services  
Inspectorate*

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commission