



Social Services Improvement Agency  
Asiantaeth Gwella'r Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

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# 1. Introduction

**The improvement responsibilities which have been carried out by the Social Services Improvement Agency (SSIA) for the past ten years transferred into the new Social Care Wales on 3rd April 2017.** This is a time of new opportunities, but also a time to reflect. If the opportunities are to be realised, it is important that we learn from the experiences of those ten years. This short report seeks to tell 'the SSIA story' and in so doing identify the learning which can help in taking forward improvement activities across the social care sector. This is more crucial now than it was ten years ago. The challenges of helping people to achieve the greatest possible sense of well-being, with growing population pressures and the impact of austerity are significant.

This report provides a chronological account of SSIA's journey and identifies five programmes which evidence the most innovative and transformational programmes of SSIA's work. These have been termed 'game-changers' and more detail on these can be found later on in the report. It ends with some broad reflections on the learning that can be taken from these experiences.

It should be noted that an account such as this must be selective and subjective by its nature. It is also recognised that some work has been left out and other commentators might have included different 'game-changers'. There will be different views about which of the SSIA programmes were most transformational and what are the key lessons to be learned. It is hoped that this will enable people to reflect and help them come to their own conclusions.

## 2. The Journey

**In Autumn 2005, the WLGA (Welsh Local Government Association) and ADSS Cymru (Association of Directors of Social Services) hosted a 'Social Services Summit', bringing together key stakeholders. At the time, two Welsh Councils were subject to intervention by the Welsh Government because of serious concerns about their social services.** Both were seen to be recovering and there was interest in how turnaround was being achieved, but there were also fears that the performance of some other Councils might be slipping back.

The consensus emerging from the Summit was:

- recovery from entrenched poor performance took too long and demanded sharp sustained focus, significant capacity and strong leadership
- spotting the signs of decline and acting on them in good time would be far more effective and less costly
- interventionist top-down approaches tended to reinforce a 'victim' mentality, and did not generate the confidence and energy that Councils need to achieve recovery
- whilst Joint Reviews had brought detailed scrutiny and highlighted significant deficits, they were infrequent, expensive (of money and scarce capacity) and were not an effective engine for improvement
- across Wales, whole-system transformation was needed to deliver better results for individuals, families and communities

Urgent behind the scenes discussions followed between Welsh Government officials, the Chief Inspector, ADSS Cymru and the WLGA, leading to an announcement that the WLGA would for an initial three years host a "Social Services Improvement Agency". The WLGA demonstrated its commitment and recognition of the need for urgency by preparing the ground (engaging a Lead Strategic Adviser) before the funding was secured.

It was agreed from the start that SSIA would not make top-down interventions in failing Councils. In its first Business Case, all the stakeholders (WLGA, Solace, ADSS Cymru, Welsh Government and the National Learning and Innovation Agency for Healthcare (NLIAH) in December 2005)

signed up to SSIA treating the 22 Councils as its individual “clients”. No Council would be compelled to engage with it and it would observe the confidentiality due to each “client”.

## **The First Few Years (2006-10)**

### **The first SSIA business case reflected its emerging operating and engagement principles:**

- **helping Councils**, both officers and Members to understand and act on their own performance - there was an offer of ‘diagnostic’ input which was taken up by a number of Councils approaching the SSIA with concerns
- **facilitating knowledge transfer**, including adapting and developing the existing All Wales Unit website, supporting a network of Councils which were in the run-up to a Joint Review, and supporting the three newly-established all-Wales Heads of Service Groups (adults, business and children)
- **building improvement capacity**, by recruiting a pool of accredited “peers and associates” to offer support across Councils and drawing up a Collaborative Framework Agreement for procuring consultancy support
- **addressing the big issue of the day which was rising numbers of Children Looked After.** The “Better Outcomes for Children in Need” (BOCIN) programme used a methodology which became a trademark for SSIA work which would see i) a trawl for the best available evidence and make it accessible ii) support a few Councils which would

volunteer to test-out innovative approaches and iii) share the learning (conferences, workshops, workbooks, toolkits) quickly with the rest of Wales

Some issues identified in that first plan but not making it to the immediate action list were promoted later, including Strategic Leadership Development and the need to help first-line managers focus on the quality of social work practice. There is no doubt that these priorities emerged from the pre-occupations and concerns of the social services community Wales-wide. The first business plan was responsive and topical. So it is no surprise that it included “time-limited help to up to three Councils subject to intervention protocols”.

From the start, the core staffing was kept very small. And three staff members were based in the regions to support collaborations, each with a budget of £15,000. This was an early recognition of the drive towards regional collaboration that would grow rapidly in strength.

It was in SSIA’s second year that three of what turned out to be its major themes found their way into the funded plan. These became ‘game-changers’ and transformational engines:

- there was strong interest in emerging ideas about how to help frail elderly people regain aspects of independence through reablement. This was an issue identified by several Councils when, as part of the Demonstrating Improvement programme, they were asked to identify systemic changes that

they saw as vital. In return for being backed up with capacity and expertise to accelerate change in these areas, learning would be shared promptly with the rest of Wales

- Scoping began for strategic leadership development programmes and for line-managers of social workers
- the development of a robust framework for Councils to evaluate their own social services performances was seen as vital to moving on from Joint Reviews

In that year funding for regional collaborations climbed to £245k shared between 3 regional collaboratives (from £45k in the first year). This was the year of the [Beecham Report](#) and [Making the Connections](#), as well as the launch of [Fulfilled Lives; Supportive Communities](#), which largely shaped SSIA's third year with the context of increasing partnership and regional working.

A powerful library of change-resources was published deriving from the BOCIN work, open [here](#). The challenge was what could be done to keep children safe and thriving in their own families, so that only those for whom it was the right answer came into care. This was a theme that SSIA returned to many times throughout its existence. There is no 'magic bullet' in this area and societal factors were contributing to the rising numbers of children needing to be looked after UK-wide.

During these early years, customised support was provided to three Councils to address concerns about their performance.

This work continued into the middle years with another two Councils but direct support to individual authorities did not become a major call on SSIA's resources.

2008/9 was the last of the three years' funding initially agreed for SSIA and a convincing case had to be made if SSIA's work was to continue beyond March 2009. Plans for the third and fourth years were grouped around these major themes:

- mainstreaming reablement
- developing a citizen focus and service-user control
- working towards agreed outcomes with individuals and families (which would grow into another game-changer over the next few years) strengthening local accountability through robust performance evaluation, management and reporting (a scheme for each Council to report on its social services effectiveness was to be piloted and a second cohort of peers was accredited)
- collaborating for improvement - funding to support regional collaboration was increased again and a project manager was appointed to scope and develop a single adoption service for North Wales
- supporting strong and confident leadership of a modern skilled workforce - the first "leadership for Collaboration" cohort began as a partnership with PSMW (Public Service Management Wales) and this was also the first year of the bespoke TMDP (Team Manager Development Programme)

## **The Middle Years (2010-2014)**

**After evaluation and consultation, the Welsh Government agreed to continue to support SSIA but funding has always been annual since that time. This was challenging as stakeholders recognised that the big issues needed sustained focus over several years if change was to be achieved and embedded.**

The report of the Welsh Government [Independent Commission on Social Services \(Pearson\)](#) was now a major influence and the context was of a 'brewing perfect storm' with rising and more complex demand and reducing resources. Independent reviews of safeguarding arrangements for both children and adults led to the need for change and there was a drive to align SSIA's work more closely with that of other agencies (e.g. NLIAH).

In 2010/11, eight regional improvement initiatives were focussed on safeguarding. Annual Council Reporting crystallised into an agreed Framework which all would use, and TMDP became a substantial programme (and subject to a positive independent evaluation), open [here](#). However, enthusiasm for Citizen Directed Support was not yet matched by agreement about how to deliver it and progress was halting.

In the next year, with the drive to maximise impact whilst minimising fixed costs, the core team was further reduced in size, with dedicated Programme Boards becoming an important element in steering and delivering key programmes – for ACRF (Annual Council Reporting Framework), the Management

Development Programmes and service transformation (in services for people with learning disabilities and for frail elderly people).

The frail elderly workstream followed from in-depth analytics of every Council's patterns of response to need and spend which had been commissioned by SSIA the previous year. Its findings were drawn together in the influential report, open [here](#). SSIA's interactive webinar open [here](#) was joined by hundreds of people, including several from elsewhere in Europe. Two sub-regions were supported to forge ahead with whole-system reconfiguration and as always to share the learning.

Rapidly rising spend on services for adults with learning disabilities was impacting on many Councils' budgeting and few were content with the outcomes being achieved. A specialist consultancy was engaged by SSIA to apply 'progression' thinking with one Council in each region, analysing and evaluating right through from the service and strategic level to individual service-users. The impact was such that many other Councils (with their NHS partners) then commissioned this same input. This work reported on an on-going basis to the Ministerial Advisory Group for People with Learning Disabilities.

The learning from the eight safeguarding initiatives supported in the previous year was fed-through to the newly established National Safeguarding Board. And the second round of reports were made to Councils by their Directors of Social Services using the ACRF. SSIA continued to support



its evolution and in this year its programme board committed SSIA to developing more commonality and comparability between Reports (a “core set of grids”), more targeted and proportionate drilling-down (perhaps in a rolling cycle) and introducing peer challenge and some high-level analysis of all 22 Reports. The TMDP rolled-on into its next cohort (still prioritised and subsidised from the SSIA budget) and work was undertaken on a successor to PSMW’s “leadership for collaboration” programme which was coming to an end.

In 2012, the Memorandum of Understanding (which SSIA had brokered) between Councils and care providers was reaffirmed and was to be re-visited. First mention was made of a ‘single improvement fund’, an ‘integrated improvement plan’ and a ‘strategic improvement collaborative’, all perhaps indicating early steps towards what would become Social Care Wales five years later.

The next two years (2012-14) saw the advent of two more game-changers. First, there was a declared ambition to design a website for the citizen which would support the delivery of ‘information, advice and assistance’ – this would be launched as the Dewis portal in 2016. Secondly, stakeholder discussions were convened on the vision for outcomes focus social work and the changes that would be needed to make it happen. These clearly reflected key elements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill, which was crystallising national priorities at this stage. To make room for SSIA to support them and with alternative funding becoming available from the Regional

Collaboration Fund and the ESF (European Social Fund) 2013/14 was the last year of SSIA allocation to regional collaboratives. Work began on a Middle Manager Development Programme to complement those for Team and Strategic Managers which would see a complete set of bespoke programmes across Wales (See Game Changers 3).

An important report on the Opportunity Assessment work to reshape responses to the needs of people with learning disabilities was published, followed by a national position statement on reablement with frail elderly people, open [here](#). Funding was provided to support the National Commissioning Board’s work to improve commissioning practice in these years.

It was perhaps a mark of growing confidence that in 2012 SSIA set out its ways of working and its underpinning principles.

### **Ways of working**

- Running national transformation programmes, through which one or more 'demonstrator' councils and partner agencies receive support in implementing new approaches or models of service and emerging learning is shared across Wales to encourage wider adoption of effective practice
- Supporting the development of professional capacity within councils to ensure continuous improvement in the services they commission and deliver
- Coordinating learning and improvement networks (LINs), which facilitate practice exchange across a number of important service areas
- Running high quality webinars and learning exchanges to share outcomes of our programmes and broader examples of notable practice from across Wales and the UK
- Providing a range of learning and knowledge products and interactive web-based services

### **Underpinning principles**

- We operate as a voluntary partnership with the twenty-two councils
- Our programmes and engagement facilitate improvement but are not prescriptive
- Any council that benefits from SSIA support must demonstrate good governance and commit to sharing learning
- We work with managers and staff in councils and seek to build internal capacity, ensuring we leave a "legacy" of improvement when our involvement comes to an end

*"I have greatly valued working with the SSIA over the last 10 years on a range of different projects. The SSIA has had to balance a tightrope between support and critical analysis and in general has managed this admirably. Key factors seem to me to have been: Firstly a willingness to engage constantly and constructively with people in local authorities and health boards across Wales to understand what's needed; Secondly, an ability to design interventions which have an impact on both local and national issues and agendas:- and thirdly an enthusiasm to help individuals and organisations they are working with to prepare for future policy and best practice demands. Good people, good projects and good results. An impressive legacy."*

**Professor Keith Moultrie: Institute of Public Care, Oxford Brookes University**

## **Change on the horizon (2014-17)**

**These were the years of deliberations on a new architecture for social care improvement in Wales. There was a will to sustain the SSIA style, approach and methods through the changes. These were their mature years when it produced some of its most influential work. The passing of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act in 2014 and the preparation of Guidance and its successful implementation, inevitably became its main driver.**

Its major impacts in these years were aligned with three key elements of the Act:

### **1. Improved well-being**

- based on extensive consultation and a rigorous business case, the National Citizen Information Portal (shortly to be called Dewis) became a reality and grew in content and in use, as it was adopted and populated by more and more Welsh Councils
- teams were equipped with the skills they needed to engage citizens in radically different conversations (moving from deficit-based assessment to a strengths model focussed on identifying what outcomes are wanted) and to measure progress towards the outcomes identified early on in each engagement
- there was a national workshop to advance thinking about the contribution of Assistive Technology (and a LIN was supported)
- SSIA provided the engine-room for the Technical Working Groups working towards implementation of the new

Act, on Information Advice and Assistance and on Eligibility and Assessment

### **2. Service integration and transformation**

- pioneering work was done with leading Occupational Therapists and two Councils to establish the best ways to achieve reablement or enablement with people with dementia. A comprehensive toolkit was published and welcomed by the Royal College of Occupational Therapists at its webinar launch in October 2015, open [here](#) as a major UK breakthrough and learning from dementia-friendly communities was shared
- in support of commissioning: a national market position statement for social care was compiled and also a market facilitation toolkit, open [here](#); the relaunch of the national commissioning board was supported, alongside a parallel national provider forum; a model contract and quality assurance structure for commissioning care home placements was developed
- a Population Assessment Toolkit, open [here](#) was designed and published to support a strong, evidence based assessment of the care and support needs of people in Wales. An all Wales network was set up as the principal support to effective joint and regional planning for social care, with SSIA as the principal support available to local partnerships in fulfilling these new responsibilities
- a major study of Delayed Transfers of Care was published, open [here](#)

### 3. Supporting improvements within Councils

- A Peer Review process (and “critical friends”) was made available to Councils, supporting the local government family to take full responsibility for its own performance and improvement and building on the experience with annual reporting
- The three major management development programmes continued to roll-out

Even within this demanding strategic programme it was still possible to make timely help available in response to newly emerging needs. For example:

- with the election of new Councils imminent and following training needs analysis in partnership with the WLGA, on-line workbooks were produced for Elected Members on Adult Safeguarding, Child Exploitation and Corporate Parenting, open [here](#)
- children’s services were confronted with a number of models for interventions with families, each making claims for effectiveness: SSIA commissioned and published a rigorous examination of their evidence-bases, open [here](#)
- councils, with their partners, were keen to identify what were the barriers to sustaining independence for people, as old age brought more frailties. The report (Anatomy of Resilience, open [here](#)) drew on the best research evidence, but also gave a powerful voice to over 100 Welsh citizens

In readiness for the transition to Social Care Wales, SSIA was asked to carry out a major (online and face-to-face) consultation during 2016 to identify the key opportunities for improvement focus over the next few years and ways in which the service improvement role could best be carried out. This was intended to inform SCWs early priority-setting and its initial ways of working. Three key areas emerged strongly from the consultation: children who are looked after, dementia, and home care/care at home.

*“SSIA has always focused on working with Councils and other partners in delivering change and seeking continuous improvement. The innovative and ambitious outlook and approach to challenges has led to some significant transformational programmes and demonstrates that concerted efforts, with clear direction, leadership and facilitation, can lead to sustained change in practice. We have worked closely with the Care Council for Wales in managing a smooth transfer of the improvement function and staff to Social Care Wales and in developing key priorities for improvement moving forward. I wish them every success in the future.”*

**Naomi Alleyne, Director of Social Services and Housing, Welsh Local Government Association**



# 3. Game Changers

## Annual Council Reporting

**Local government pursued a goal throughout the 10 year life of SSIA of taking full responsibility for the quality, assurance and governance of its social services.** In 2006, dissatisfaction with Joint Reviews was widespread but the Welsh Government would not replace them without a commitment from Councils to a robust mechanism that would express the responsibility and accountability required to provide assurance.

Working with Directors of Social Services, SSIA devised a tool with which each Council would rigorously assess its effectiveness each year and identify key and clear priorities for improvement. It tested this tool (the Annual Council Reporting Framework, or ACRF) over one whole year with two volunteer Councils before rolling it out to the other twenty Councils, with briefing sessions delivered in each.

In 2009/10, for the first time, all 22 Councils completed an Annual Report which replaced periodic Joint Reviews. The statutory duty on every Director of Social Services to report annually to their Council on the effectiveness of its social services was

introduced in June 2009 and CSSIW adjusted its approach to provide external commentary on the thoroughness, rigour and effectiveness of these annual reports. That commentary was delivered in the form of an annual Chief Inspector's letter to each Council. Later, SSIA produced a confidential analysis of all 22 of these letters for ADSS Cymru, giving a sense of how performance was being viewed by the Inspectorate and identifying the big issues or concerns in common across a number of councils

During this journey, Wales moved from an approach which delivered an external judgement on each Council every five years or so to one in which there was commitment to continuous assessment and improvement, driven by real ownership by each Council.

The credit for this cannot be solely claimed by SSIA. Many factors came together to make it happen. Annual Reporting was delivered by a lot of hard work in Councils and honesty and courage on behalf of their political and officer leadership. However, the need to replace Joint Reviews with an effective engine for driving social services accountability and improvement locally was a principal reason for setting up the SSIA.

What learning can we identify from SSIA's approach?

- it was ready and able to act quickly on behalf of the local government social services family
- it researched what structures and processes would best support the task
- it tested out the model in real time in a close relationship with two pilot Councils
- it held tightly to the importance of ownership by Councils, whilst respecting the Welsh Government's need for assurance and accountability
- it supported the roll-out with briefing sessions delivered quickly in all 22 Councils
- it made continuous adjustments to the tools in the light of experience

In 2013, SSIA handed the baton for the ACRF to ADSS Cymru, as its development phase was complete. This willingness to let go is vital to an organisation that aims to be a driver for continuous improvement. More recently, ADSS Cymru has worked with CSSIW to develop a revised framework and methodology, but they did not start from scratch, rather from 8 years of experience of a powerful shift in accountability for improvement which was led by SSIA and one that is still unique to Wales.

*“I am about to write my 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Report for the Vale of Glamorgan. Parts of it will correspond still to the process set out in the ACRF which did so much to guide our early efforts to ensure that the reports spoke directly to and on behalf of all those with a keen interest in social care. However, the approach continues to be based on innovation and challenge. Our recent reports, for example, include digital stories in which people describe for themselves how social services have helped to transform their lives.”*

**Philip Evans: Director of Social Service, Vale of Glamorgan Council**

## Reablement

**The popular view of ageing has been that it is an inevitable process of decline, that we become more frail and as we do so we will require more and more support and care and be able to do less and less for ourselves.**

But a few Welsh Councils, as part of SSIA's 2007 "demonstrating improvement" programme, wanted to test out newly-emerging ways of thinking and working, essentially that although people may be set back by a stroke, an infection, a fall, a hospital stay, most people with the right help can regain some degree of independence. Though they may be small, there are "activities of daily living" which people can get back to doing for themselves, if the right ways to support them are found. These small gains are very important to people's sense of dignity, worth and well-being. They will also delay or reduce the need arising for care and support in the longer term and so save money.

This was the start of the momentum towards "Reablement" in Wales. SSIA researched what worked best, how it was best organised and importantly produced a model business case for investment in this new service. This was all made available on its website which elicited comments from some English Councils that it was now their chosen point of reference for all reablement issues.

Welsh Councils were actively encouraged and supported to move this approach from margin to mainstream (the tagline for a landmark conference in Aberystwyth). By

the time the Social Services and Well-being Bill was in development, every Council in Wales was offering an episode of reablement home care free-of-charge and without formal assessment for eligibility. In this way they could get to people before it was too late for them to benefit and with the minimum of official or bureaucratic obstacles. Convincing evidence continued to accumulate of the marked reduction in ongoing care needs following a spell of reablement.

There was a further big step forward when SSIA recognised that reablement thinking had focussed very much on physical frailties, and yet dementia presented a significant and increasing challenge to society, and worked closely with leading OTs in two Council areas to develop practice guidance about how to maximise reablement with people with dementia. Workbooks and training manuals were published and promoted in a webinar, open [here](#). This work was commended as an important UK-wide breakthrough by the Royal College of OTs.

This has been a truly transformational shift that has enriched the lives of, by now, thousands of elderly people across Wales. The SSIA position statement, open [here](#), brings the story up to date. It has required staff to learn a wholly different way of working – prompting and encouraging rather than doing for. Risk aversion has had to give way to positive risk management. Councils have had to shift resources and capacity into a new area, when budgets were already tight. And they have needed to take off the protective comfort blanket of eligibility criteria.

These achievements should be a source of great pride for the Welsh local government social services family. They undoubtedly gave legislators at the Welsh Government the confidence to reduce the significance of eligibility assessment in the architecture of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and to make well-being the goal.

What was SSIA's contribution?

- to be close enough to the field to pick up that early enthusiasm and an innovative outlook to identify solutions
- to have the skill and capacity to dedicate to supporting its development quickly
- to insist on a respect for evidence of what works best
- to build third sector partnerships, e.g. with the Reablement Alliance
- to facilitate information and practice exchange and mutual support between Councils as they moved into unfamiliar territory
- to recognise the need for a business-like approach to shifting investment to a "new technology" of social care

*"In 2007 it is fair to say that many councils were early in their thinking about reablement – what a difference a decade makes with reablement now being very much part of the core offer provided by councils and an essential part of early intervention and promoting independence. This in no small part is thanks to early and continued work by SSIA."*

**Vicky Poole: Regional Director,  
Care and Social Services  
Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)**



## National Training Programmes

**Among SSIA's commitments in the first few months of 2006 was to travel across Wales, talking with as many people as possible about where it should focus its early efforts on supporting workforce development.**

Amongst the answers, two were very widely expressed:

- i) team managers needed help to improve the quality and consistency of social work practice
- ii) turnover amongst Directors of Social Services was high and there was concern that the available pool was running dry and there was a need to develop and support succession planning of strategic leaders for the future

There were a number of possible training products available UK-wide and many saw themselves as potential providers to meet these needs. Welsh Councils decided they wanted programmes designed around their own needs and values. Following a competitive process the same provider was engaged to design and then (a separate stage) to deliver both the Team Manager Development Programme (TMDP) and the Strategic Leadership Programme. The provider worked to a very clear SSIA specification and the programme development was steered and governed by an effective Programme Board, providing direction and support. This helped ensure that programme content was relevant to the

pressing demands of today and tomorrow and not driven by academic or qualification issues.

The TMDP's first cohort started in 2010. At first heavily subsidised from the SSIA budget, the subsidy was progressively reduced and each council now pays in full for the people it sends on the programme. The core purpose of the programme has remained true to that first identified need i.e. a very specific focus on the quality of professional practice. But the close relationship between SSIA and the provider has meant that it has also adapted over time, e.g. to the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, to significant shifts in adult safeguarding practice and to the roll-out of outcome focused practice.

As at March 2017, over 400 managers have completed the programme and it is the only programme in the UK which has been kite-marked for professional first-line management by the whole social services community. The independent evaluation of it can be found [here](#).

The Strategic Leadership Programme started in 2014 and 14 Directors of Social Services and 12 Heads of Service have completed it. It has used a mix of methods, including coaching, action learning sets and organisational raids. The aim throughout has been to support people to learn through focussing on the issues which are pre-occupying them in the workplace, bringing new ways of thinking and fresh perspectives to bear.

2013 saw discussions take place about the development needs of “middle managers”. Often called Principal Officers or Operational Managers, they are the people who bridge between strategy and practice. Their leadership role in ‘making things happen’ was identified as crucial and it was recognised that it was from this pool that Heads of Service emerged. In September 2016 the first programme for this group was launched with the second beginning in March 2017.

While these three programmes have required a significant commitment and investment from SSIA, it can be argued that they have made an equally significant contribution to Wales’ focus on quality and improvement through its workforce and helped to build Wales’ own capacity for effective leadership at all levels. The willingness of Councils to release key staff to attend programmes and to support their participation, reflects how valued they are. Welsh Government’s support to fund the early cohorts of each of the national programmes was also important.

SSIA’s contribution and strength has been:

- to hear what was being said about the priority needs and to act on it
- to research and develop the specification for what was needed
- to bring its relationship-based commissioning skills to its work with the providers
- to sustain commitment through empowering and supporting an effective programme board
- to ensure there is continuous

evaluation and flexibility of the programmes, learning from experience and adapting to changing contexts

*“Working in partnership, the SSIA has led the design, development, implementation and evaluation of bespoke, accredited national training programmes for Senior, Middle and Team Managers. The programmes have significantly improved managerial practice and performance across Wales by equipping participants with the knowledge, skills and confidence to manage strategically and operationally within the challenging environment of Social Care.”*

**Gareth Jenkins: All Wales Heads of Children’s Services, National Programme Management Committee**

**As the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act took shape, it was clear that a vital component of the new world was to be to equip citizens with the information they need to make good decisions about their well-being. SSIA led the Welsh Government Technical Working Group on "information, advice and assistance", which came to believe a web-based portal would be crucial to achieving this (although it would not be the whole answer).**

A number of Councils were beginning to investigate products they might buy 'off the shelf' but the Welsh Government, in partnership with the WLGA, agreed that Wales needed its own design, co-produced with stakeholders and underpinned by the aims of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act.

From the start, it was important that the functional specification should be tailored to be right for Wales. SSIA led strong partnership working to achieve this, with service users, carers, third sector organisations and Public Health Wales. Officers and elected members from Councils that were particularly keen to move this forward also played a key role and there was direct work and engagement with citizens and with specialist consultancies. The Local Government Data Unit partnered with SSIA to bring their expertise to the technical specification.

After thorough testing of a prototype with North Wales Councils and many amendments to address and build on

learning points, ADSS Cymru and the Welsh Government supported the development of DEWIS as an all-Wales citizen portal. It was launched at the Welsh Social Services Conference in Llandudno in 2016 and then rolled out so that by 31 March 2017 21 Welsh Councils will be using it. *Populated centrally with advice and information about national resources, each Council commits to support the adding of very local information, which drills right down to neighbourhood level. With the completion of the development phase, leadership passed to the Data Unit on 1 April 2017.*

A Welsh citizen is now able to go to a reliable and accessible source of information which will help them to stay well, active and resilient in their local community. Advisers and advocates can also sit alongside people who need more help to make best use of the website. DEWIS plays a key part in achieving the Welsh ambition to build resilience in communities and connect citizens to the capacity and support available to them locally, again with the aim that people can take responsibility for their own well-being and stay independent of formal social services and health for as long as possible.

What did SSIA bring to this important strategic shift?

- its commitment to empowerment was the driving force
- its ability to draw together a diverse group of people and organisations to work towards a shared goal, because of the confidence they had in its skills, non-alignment and openness
- the flexibility to move skilled capacity

- quickly to a new challenge
- the strength to hold to core purpose, and not be diverted
- resist over-complicating the issues
- the intellectual clarity about how the aims could be realised

*“The development of Dewis Cymru as a holistic platform for all wellbeing services has been of great addition to our box of enablement tools for those in crisis across north Wales. The ability to direct a person with confidence to safely access the site for themselves, knowing they will find comprehensive quality information on what matters to them, has been ground-breaking. My teams have utilised it as a major resource for gathering information to provide support the vulnerable people that we work with on a daily basis. From a delivery organisation perspective it has proven a fantastic way to control our own information on the services we provide, ensuring it is always accurate, targeted and as update as it can be for people in crisis or relevant professionals who are searching for our support services.”*

**Wayne Brown: Independent Living Service Manager, British Red Cross**

*“Wales has needed a single database of resources for older people for as long as I have been working in the third sector. Even so called “experts” such as myself don’t know every resource and tool to that can help, so older people have no chance of knowing where to go to find help and Dewis is the tool they both need.”*

**Mathew Coffin: Age Concern Cardiff**



## Personal Outcomes

**The nine national well-being outcomes proved to be central to the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act. In many ways this was a radical shift: to be ambitious that communities should support people to achieve the best lives possible, not simply be cared for and safe, and that part of that debate is what we can give or how we support communities to achieve this. But how could this be expressed in the interactions that social services have with people seeking help and support? And how could we tell whether people were in fact achieving a greater sense of well-being?**

SSIA was asked by the Welsh Government to test the feasibility of recording and reporting on personal outcomes in social services interventions. SSIA identified a creative link with emerging ideas in social work practice about how to have very different conversations with people, achieving real engagement in working towards agreed goals.

A methodology both for working with people and recording outcomes was developed, drawing on the best practice evidence from Wales and the rest of the UK and this was thoroughly tested-out with 7 Councils over eighteen months. SSIA's report on this in January 2016, open [here](#), was warmly welcomed by the Welsh Government and ADSS Cymru. It confirmed that:

- these conversations moved right away from a process-driven assessment for eligibility for a service

- they achieved, at best, a real sense of co-production with the citizen
- they focussed on peoples' strengths and not their deficits and so identified what might be achieved not just what services were necessary
- progress towards the outcomes agreed early on with each person could be measured and recorded

However, staff needed to be equipped with different skills if they were to engage effectively in these new conversations and to measure progress. SSIA offered training in collaborative communication skills to one team in every non-pilot Council, followed up with mentoring support. At the same time, SSIA promoted a clear message that this radically higher quality of engagement with citizens would only be sustained and embedded if there was whole-system change to underpin it, from management and partner agencies, in IT systems, from regulators and inspectors.

In November 2016, the Welsh Government issued statutory guidance and an associated Code of Practice on the recording of personal outcomes which endorsed the practice developed through this programme.

It is important not to over-claim and to be realistic that these are first steps on a journey Wales is undertaking. Progress would not have been achieved without the ambition in the Welsh Government and amongst Council officers at all levels to be radical, to move away from the comforts of long-established ways of doing things and to embrace change.

In undertaking this work, SSIA has:

- been rigorous in looking for the evidence of what works best and then testing practice out on the ground across Wales
- been prepared to share this journey into uncharted territory with colleagues
- been honest as the learning emerged, even when some of it might not have been initially welcome
- looked for the whole-system implications of change in front-line practice
- engaged high quality expert leadership for the training programme

*“The SSIA provided 3 days training and follow-up sessions which placed emphasis on outcome focused conversations. The project encouraged staff to ask citizens ‘what matters and what are the barriers to achieving what matters’? Citizens provided direct feedback by scoring their outcomes before and after intervention, thus allowing a measurement of the service impact and their personal sense of distance travelled.*

*Our team found the project hugely supportive in translating legislation into reality. For the first time citizen feedback is used to evaluate the success of what we do and why we do it.”*

**Siobham Mathias: Afan  
Community Network Manager**

## 4. Looking to the Future

**This report does not seek to evaluate the impact of the Social Services Improvement Agency's work over the past 10 years but it has aimed to simply tell the unfolding story. Those who have been actively engaged with this world of social services in Wales may be prompted to reflect on their own views on what has been achieved, what more or different might have been achieved and what can be learned from the experience. It does however suggest some elements of learning which might inform those leading and supporting Social Care Wales as it takes on this vital improvement role and responsibility.**

Some learning points which colleagues may wish to reflect upon in developing its own approach to service improvement leadership and support include:

- i) the precious resource of deep and up-to-date intelligence about social services across Wales which was available through SSIA was not exploited by the policy community as much as it might have been
- ii) there is sometimes resistance to adopting proven learning and effective practice and so improvement is slower than it might be

Critically the following points highlight some of the key ingredients for achieving success:

- SSIA had the sector intelligence to identify early on the big issues and challenges which needed sustained focus if they were to become transformational - the five game-changers
- SSIA had the persistence to stick with those programmes through to fruition, even in the face of pressures to move on to the next 'shiny thing'
- SSIA was able to react quickly on narrower-focus issues which simply couldn't wait

- **SSIA always tested out methods and innovations in the real world of practice and refined them in a development phase, before commending them to others**
- **SSIA was ready to hand the ownership of work programmes on to others when the development phase was complete, avoiding territorialism or empire building**
- **SSIA did not waste its time on issues which though they might have been very important were simply not capable of being tackled within SSIA's remit and capacity - it knew its own limits**
- **SSIA provided an 'engine-room' for Wales to develop its own distinctive approaches and so not always be led by ideas coming from elsewhere**
- **SSIA enlisted positive engagement from social services staff in Councils, even though they were under immense pressures of the day-to-day, by showing them respect and partnership**

**It seems reasonable to conclude that these ingredients were themselves the products of:**

- **working with only a very small core staff, deploying budgets with which to engage the right skills for each new challenge and engaging Associates, who could be brought in quickly and flexibly to tackle issues on which they had particular expertise**
- **avoiding elaborate process and bureaucracy and getting bogged down in talking shops, but being relentlessly action-oriented and solution focused**
- **being able to win confidence and trust, relying on the weight of its evidence and arguments; Councils and their staff never felt judged or that they might be 'reported on' by SSIA**
- **being seen to be part of the local government family, sharing the tensions and dilemmas and not a commentator from an ivory tower**



*“The SSIA has been a massive asset to local government throughout its existence. The work that it has undertaken across a variety of policy areas has been of crucial importance to councils. Whether this be supporting them in terms of improvement, developing new approaches to transforming services for older people, dealing with dementia in communities, evolving the public facing website DEWIS and supporting regions to implement the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The transfer of the Agency to the new Social Care Wales organisation will see this work deepen and evolve. But WLGA wants to place on record our huge thanks for the contribution of SSIA to social care over the past decade and state how proud we are of its achievements.”*

**Steve Thomas: Chief Executive, Welsh Local Government Association**

*“Social Care Wales is delighted to be taking up the reigns from WLGA. SSIA have supported local authorities to deliver significant improvements in social care over many years. We want to build on that success and the expertise and experience that the SSIA team will bring to Social Care Wales. The opportunity to combine workforce regulatory and development functions, with knowledge about what works, puts us in a unique position in Wales to develop evidence based practice and service models.”*

**Sue Evans: Chief Executive, Social Care Wales**

