



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report 2014-15

## Carmarthenshire County Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Colin Davies and Jeremy Evans under the direction of Jane Holownia.

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The Auditor General is independent of government, and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office Board, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General. The Wales Audit Office is held to account by the National Assembly.

The Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies and assesses compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Assembly Commission and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

The Auditor General and staff of the Wales Audit Office aim to provide public-focused and proportionate reporting on the stewardship of public resources and in the process provide insight and promote improvement.

# Contents

<b>Summary report</b>	<b>4</b>
Purpose of this report	4
2014-15 performance audit work	5
The Council has continued to make good progress in its priority areas and it is working to address a range of governance issues highlighted in public reports during the year	6
Headlines – a summary of key findings	6
Recommendations	9
<b>Detailed report</b>	<b>10</b>
Use of resources	11
Governance	13
Performance	16
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1 – Status of this report	24
Appendix 2 – Audit of Carmarthenshire County Council's 2014-15 Improvement Plan	25
Appendix 3 – Audit of Carmarthenshire County Council's assessment of 2013-14 performance	27
Appendix 4 – Annual Audit letter	29
Appendix 5 – National report recommendations 2014-15	32
Appendix 6 – Useful information about the Council's resources	37

# Summary report

## Purpose of this report

- 1 Each year, the Auditor General is required to audit the improvement planning and reporting arrangements of Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national park authorities, and to assess whether each authority will meet statutory continuous improvement duties<sup>1</sup>. This work has been undertaken on behalf of the Auditor General by staff of the Wales Audit Office. **Appendix 1** provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties in local government.
- 2 In addition, the Auditor General undertakes an in-depth corporate assessment at each authority on a cyclical basis (currently at least once every four years). In the intervening years, in addition to audits of improvement planning and reporting, the Wales Audit Office, on behalf of the Auditor General, will keep track of developments and focus further assessment work on a number of key themes, developed in discussion with each authority.
- 3 This Annual Improvement Report (AIR) summarises the audit work undertaken at Carmarthenshire County Council (the Council) since the last such report was published in July 2014. This report also includes a summary of the key findings from reports issued by 'relevant regulators', namely: the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW); Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn); and the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC). Nonetheless, this report does not represent a comprehensive review of all the Council's arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on the work carried out at the Council by relevant external review bodies and, unless stated otherwise, reflect the situation at the point in time that such work was concluded.
- 4 Taking into consideration the work carried out during 2014-15, the Auditor General will state in this report whether he believes that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2015-16.
- 5 This statement should not be seen as a definitive diagnosis of organisational health or as a prediction of future success. Rather, it should be viewed as providing an opinion on the extent to which the arrangements currently in place are reasonably sound insofar as can be ascertained from the work carried out.
- 6 We want to find out if this report gives you the information you need and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by e-mailing us at [info.officer@audit.wales](mailto:info.officer@audit.wales) or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

<sup>1</sup> Duties and requirements contained within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure).

## 2014-15 performance audit work

- 7 In determining the breadth of work undertaken during the year, we considered the extent of accumulated audit and inspection knowledge as well as other available sources of information including the Council's own mechanisms for review and evaluation. For 2014-15, we undertook improvement assessment work under three themes: use of resources; governance; and performance.
- 8 The work carried out since the last AIR, including that of the 'relevant regulators', is set out below:

Project name	Brief description
<b>Wales Audit Office Financial Planning Assessment</b>	Review of the Council's financial position and how it is budgeting and delivering on required savings.
<b>Wales Audit Office Annual 'Improvement Plan' Audit</b>	Review of the Council's published plans for delivering on improvement objectives.
<b>Wales Audit Office Annual 'Assessment of Performance' Audit</b>	Review of the Council's published performance assessment, including testing and validation of performance information.
<b>CSSIW Annual Report</b>	Annual Review of the Council's Social Services function.
<b>Governance and Performance – Housing</b>	Review of the Council's governance, accountability and performance arrangements within Housing Services.
<b>Transform, Innovate and Change (TIC) Project Outcomes and Benefits Review</b>	Review whether the Council can demonstrate it has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a robust system for identifying the likely benefits of a TIC project;</li> <li>• a reliable process for assessing the viability of a TIC Project before it commences; and</li> <li>• a robust method for assessing the benefits delivered by TIC projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Performance Assessment</b>	To review whether the Council's public reporting of its performance is fair and balanced.
<b>Certification of Grants and Returns 2013-2014</b>	Review of the Council's arrangements to ensure the production of co-ordinated, accurate, timely and properly documented grant claims.

## The Council has continued to make good progress in its priority areas and it is working to address a range of governance issues highlighted in public reports during the year

- 9 Based on, and limited to, the work carried out by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators, the Auditor General believes that the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of the Measure during 2015-16. The Auditor General has reached this conclusion because:
- a the Council has improved its performance in its key priority areas, it has evaluated and reported these improvements to the public in a fair and balanced way;
  - b the Council's financial management arrangements have served it well in the past and the Financial Statements present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Dyfed Pension Fund's financial position and transactions, however, the Council's arrangements for the production and submission of grant claims still need to be strengthened;
  - c reviews of two specific areas of the Council's activities, Housing Services and the Transform Innovate and Change Programme have shown good examples of robust governance with appropriate contributions from Members and officers; and
  - d following the publication of two public interest reports in January 2014, the Council proactively engaged the Welsh Local Government Association to deliver an independent peer review of the Council's governance arrangements: responding positively the Council has established a cross-party group to address the recommendations and drive cultural change, which, whilst still at an early stage, is showing promise.

## Headlines – a summary of key findings

- 10 The table below summarises the key findings of our follow-up and monitoring work as well as reports issued since the last AIR by the Wales Audit Office, the CSSIW, Estyn and the WLC.

<b>Audit of accounts</b>	The appointed auditor issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts with key matters to be addressed reported to the Audit Committee in September 2014 (see <a href="#">Appendix 4</a> ).
<b>Improvement planning and reporting audits</b>	We issued audit certificates stating that the Council had discharged its duties under the Measure (see <a href="#">Appendices 2 and 3</a> ).

<p><b>Use of resources</b></p>	<p>The Council's financial management arrangements have served it well in the past, but the Council's ability to respond to financial challenges is hampered as service and financial planning and performance are not clearly linked, and the achievement of specific savings is not monitored or reported separately. Wales Audit Office – April 2015.</p> <p>The Council's arrangements for the production and submission of grant claims still need to be strengthened; this would avoid exposing the Council to potential risks of loss of funding or increased audit fees. Wales Audit Office – March 2015.</p> <p>The Council is delivering environmental health services at the minimum standard or above and whilst expenditure has increased, the number of staff employed in environmental health has fallen, the Council will find it a challenge to take on new statutory duties that protect the public and the environment. Wales Audit Office – September 2014.</p>
<p><b>Governance</b></p>	<p>The Council is addressing weaknesses in governance arrangements: Two Wales Audit Office reports in the public interest on <b>Senior Officers' Pay and Pensions</b>, and <b>Indemnity for Libel Counterclaim</b>: January 2014.</p> <p>One <b>Peer Review on governance</b> by the Welsh Local Government Association: November 2014.</p> <p>The governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children are mostly adequate but some improvements could be made. Wales Audit Office – February 2015.</p> <p>The Council's Housing Service is supported by an appropriate governance model and an established performance management framework, but performance data could be used more actively to drive improvement. Wales Audit Office – report currently being prepared.</p>

## Performance

The Council is making good progress in delivering its vision of an integrated health and social care service. CSSIW – [Performance Evaluation Report 2013–14](#), October 2014.

The Council's modernising education programme has continued to drive improvement in its schools' buildings. Wales Audit Office – Performance Assessment, February 2015.

The Council has continued to deliver a key ambition for the environment. Wales Audit Office – Performance Assessment, February 2015.

The Council has made good progress in raising the quality of its social housing. Wales Audit Office – Performance Assessment, February 2015.

Transform, Innovate and Change (TIC) has robust governance, clear objectives and is contributing to better outcomes and financial savings; however, there is scope to strengthen business cases, risk management, use of performance information and financial analysis. Wales Audit Office – May 2015.

There is scope for the Council to improve its performance in administering Discretionary Housing Payments.

Responding to a drop in the use of Welsh reported in the 2011 Census the Council is seeking to improve the use of Welsh in the county. Welsh Language Commissioner – January 2015.

## Recommendations

- 11 Given the wide range of services provided by the Council and the challenges it is facing, it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
  - a make proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Council, we would expect it to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
  - b make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made, the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
  - c conduct a special inspection and publish a report and make recommendations; and
  - d recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 12 During the course of the year, the Auditor General did not make any formal recommendations. However, proposals for improvement are contained in our other reports but will be referred to later on in this report. We will continue to monitor proposals for improvement during the course of our improvement assessment work.
- 13 We make no new recommendations in this report as we are going to undertake a full corporate assessment at the Council in October 2015. We will report the findings of this work in a Corporate Assessment Report and should our work indicate the need this report will include recommendations and proposals for improvement.
- 14 The Auditor General also makes recommendations that may be relevant to Councils in his Local Government National Reports. A list of relevant recommendations contained in reports issued in 2014-15 can be found in [Appendix 5](#).

# Detailed report



## Use of resources

### The appointed auditor issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts with key matters to be addressed reported to the Audit Committee in September 2014

- 15 On 29 September 2014 the Auditor General issued an Annual Audit Letter to the Council. The letter summarises the key messages arising from his statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. The Auditor General issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Pension Fund's financial position and transactions.
- 16 The Auditor General's opinion on the financial statements did, however, include an emphasis of matter which arose as there was a difference of opinion between the Council and the Appointed Auditor about two decisions the Council made which, in the Appointed Auditor's view, resulted in unlawful expenditure being included in the Financial Statements. The Annual Audit Letter can be found in [Appendix 4](#) of this report.

### The Council's financial management arrangements have served it well in the past, but the Council needs to strengthen arrangements to enable it to meet future financial challenges

- 17 The Council has a good track record in delivering budgets within year against the planned actions it approved, although it did not report against specific savings proposals making it difficult to identify areas that achieved the cost reduction targets and those that did not.
- 18 The Council's corporate framework for financial planning has served it well, although links between financial plans and improvement plans could be clearer. The Council's financial management and control arrangements are fit for purpose and are being effectively managed.
- 19 The Council's financial governance arrangements to review and challenge performance are adequate but links between financial and service performance are not always clear. This makes it difficult to assess the value for money being provided by the Council's services.
- 20 The Council's current savings plans for 2014-15 are adequate but the Council does not monitor and report on individual efficiency savings set. As financial pressures intensify there is a need for this to be done to ensure that there is effective challenge and to identify areas of under achievement and good practice.
- 21 The Council has efficiency savings plans in place for 2015-16 and 2016-17 but new funding cuts have placed additional pressure to identify further savings and some difficult decisions will need to be made. The Council has delivered a series of well-designed Member workshops, over the last few months, to look at service level budgets. These have been very well attended and Members have contributed effectively. This will help the Council extend its financial planning and further develop its medium-term financial strategy.

### The Council's arrangements for the production and submission of grant claims still need to be strengthened

- 22 We came to this conclusion because whilst the majority of claims are now submitted on time over half of claims audited are now qualified and the percentage of claims qualified remains high. Furthermore, almost half of the claims audited were amended.
- 23 There are still some weaknesses within the Council's grant management arrangements which need to be strengthened. Our overall fee for certification of grants and returns for 2013-14 has increased from 2012-13 but with fewer grants audited.

### The Council is delivering environmental health services at the required standard, but will find it a challenge to take on new statutory duties that protect the public and the environment

- 24 Councils have many statutory environmental health duties but spending is not being protected during the current period of financial austerity, which is making it more difficult for the service to deliver national strategic priorities.
- 25 The Council is delivering most of its environmental health services at above minimum levels as judged against the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Best Practice Standards. Whilst between 2011-12 and 2013-14, the Council increased expenditure on environmental health, the number of staff delivering these services reduced although not as fast as the average rate of reduction for all Welsh councils. New environmental health statutory duties are being introduced which the Council will find difficult to deliver.
- 26 A staff survey indicates that respondents are mostly positive about the current standard of environmental health service but there is a low awareness of current performance or future plans amongst citizens.

## Governance

### The Council is addressing weaknesses in governance arrangements

- 27 Responding to the Appointed Auditor's public interest reports (January 2014), which raised a number of governance issues, the Council engaged the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in March 2014 to undertake an independent peer review of its governance arrangements. The Council stated publicly its ambition to reform its governance arrangements to enable it to become the most open and transparent Council in Wales. The WLGA peer review was focused on helping the Council achieve this aim.
- 28 The WLGA Review's Terms of Reference focused on a number of specific areas of internal governance, notably the conduct of council business, the role of full Council and Overview and Scrutiny and Member Development and Support. The review team reported that:
- a despite pride in the Council's services and high regard for the workforce, there were widespread concerns about the way the Council conducted business from many internal and external stakeholders;
  - b internal systems of governance and constitutional processes were either not consistently followed or were perceived to be designed to constrain democratic debate and public engagement;
  - c internal tensions affected the way that the Council worked and was viewed externally;
  - d there was generally an inconsistency in the understanding of the respective roles of elected members and officers, and the perception has been that the Chief Executive and senior officers have dominated some of the decisions of the Executive Board to the extent that the balance of governance has become disjointed and the Council is widely perceived to be officer-led;
  - e the Council's member and officer leadership was viewed by some as defensive and did not encourage or respond constructively to challenge, but there was a clear consensus, particularly from members, that there was a need and a willingness to strengthen internal and external accountability arrangements; and
  - f there was a consensus, particularly from members, about the need to redefine and strengthen the member role and provide leadership of the openness and transparency agenda.
- 29 The WLGA made a total of 39 recommendations to the Council, these covered a number of areas:
- a Organisational Culture, Leadership and Values
  - b Council
  - c Executive Board
  - d Overview and Scrutiny

- 30 In response to this, the Council has established a cross-party working group chaired by the previous Chairman of Council. The group has met eight times since its initial meeting in December 2014 and continues to meet every two weeks. The group intends to submit a full report to a full Council meeting in mid-2015 when all constitutional changes and other recommendations and decisions will be considered by all Members.
- 31 The Council has set out an action plan to help it keep track of and maintain progress with the WLGA recommendations. This action plan was discussed in detail at the working group's first few meetings. The Council has written to those like the Local Service Board who also need to respond to a number of the recommendations.

**The governance, accountability and management arrangements for safeguarding responsibilities to children are mostly adequate but some improvements could be made**

- 32 The Council's approach to safeguarding children centres on the combined Education and Children's Service which has allowed for alignment of policies and closer working between the various areas of these two services. The Council has a clear accountability framework and all senior staff are clear on the procedures for referring suspicions and allegations. However, the Council lacks a comprehensive corporate safeguarding policy, which is a weakness and does not provide adequate assurance that corporate responsibilities for safeguarding are clearly identified and working effectively.
- 33 Safeguarding does appear on the Corporate Risk Register; however, this refers to safeguarding of adults. Whilst risk management is in place at several levels, the risk to safeguarding of children should be more prominent in the Corporate Risk Register. Members interviewed were unfamiliar with risk management as a concept.
- 34 The Council's arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its safeguarding responsibilities to children are mostly fit for purpose and effectively managed. The Council has a well-embedded performance management system and detailed performance information is reported to Scrutiny and the Cabinet. The Council recognises that member challenge, both Executive Board and Scrutiny could be more robust and it is currently looking at alternative ways of achieving this.
- 35 The Council's approach to identifying and acting on improvements in its safeguarding arrangements is adequate but some improvements could again be made. Internal Audit has not had a significant role looking at Children's safeguarding arrangements and whilst scrutiny committees regularly receive safeguarding performance reports there are no plans to do specific pieces of work on safeguarding. These issues weaken the Council's ability to satisfy itself that its safeguarding arrangements are working effectively.

- 36 Overall Whistleblowing arrangements are good, with some exemplar practice. Addressing a number of relatively minor weaknesses in policy, process and training will strengthen arrangements further.

**The Council's Housing Service is supported by an appropriate governance model and an established performance management framework, but performance data could be used more actively to drive improvement**

- 37 There is a clear governance model for the Housing Service with active and engaged leadership from the Executive Board Member. There is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, by Members and Officers, which, together with a clear decision making structure, enables good governance.
- 38 In addition there is advisory input from a Housing Services Advisory Panel which is made up of six councillors, six tenant representatives and housing managers. This panel is chaired by the Executive Board Member.
- 39 There is a productive relationship between the Executive Board and the scrutiny function, with scrutiny providing a positive challenge, and through Task and Finish activity providing recommendations for the Executive Board in a number of areas such as returning empty properties to use.
- 40 The Council has an established performance management framework. However whilst this provides members and officers with a wealth of data it is not always effectively used to manage improvement. The Council's Performance Information Management System (PIMS), an IT system, is accessible to both Members and Officers. The Service business plan actions and performance measures are included within PIMS and updated regularly. The reports presented to Executive Board and Scrutiny are generated from the PIMS system. However, there are concerns amongst Members that these reports are too complex and as such do not provide a meaningful picture, hindering effective challenge and scrutiny. Members also do not receive financial and performance information together in one report, which limits their ability to take decisions based on a rounded set of information.

## Performance

### The Council is making good progress in delivering its vision of an integrated health and social care service

- 41 The CSSIW published its [Performance Evaluation Report 2013-14](#) in October 2014. The following paragraphs (42 to 48) summarise this report.
- 42 The CSSIW reported that the Council continues to benefit from strong leadership across both children and adult services, senior officers have a clear vision and are implementing plans effectively to ensure people living in Carmarthenshire who require social care services have a better quality of life. The evidence available confirms that the Council continues to prioritise the provision of social care services and that its plans remain ambitious despite the financial constraints that it faces. Its budgets are well managed.
- 43 The Council has implemented a number of innovative projects and has provided evidence of a range of positive outcomes which have been delivered through its strategic transformation of services. It has signalled its intention to put people in control of the services they receive and to support more people to live independent lives. It is seeking to reduce dependency on its services by strengthening support in communities.
- 44 The Council's annual performance report has been structured to reflect the key components of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. It is clear that it will be in a strong position to deliver services within the new legislative framework. The Council has set out how it will deliver services that demonstrate improved commissioning and integration of services, where the well-being and the voice of citizens will be at the centre of service delivery.
- 45 The Council recognises that the current economic climate, welfare changes and demographic pressures, present significant challenges for the future. It is realistic about how to prepare for new demands and shifting public expectations. In response to the Welsh Government's expectation of integration of health and social services for older people the Council has set out its intentions. The progress that has already been made in Carmarthenshire suggests that the council is in a good position to deliver on this vision of an integrated health and social care service.
- 46 The Welsh Government's policy 'Mwy na Geiriau', 'More than Just Words' the strategic framework for the use of the Welsh language within the social care workforce, is being implemented effectively, with measures being developed to ensure people have access to the services through their language of choice.
- 47 The directors and heads of services reports have clearly set out their vision of providing more cost effective integrated services. There are clear plans to demonstrate how the lives of people in Carmarthenshire will be improved by the delivery of better coordinated services. The Council are clear as to their priorities and have continued to make improvements throughout the year.

- 48 The Council has made good progress in the areas identified for improvement in CSSIW's annual review and evaluation of performance report 2012-13.

#### Safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour

- 49 During 2014-15 the CSSIW undertook an inspection of: Safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour. The inspection was carried out as part of the CSSIW national thematic inspection programme. The methodology for the review included three and a half days' fieldwork in each local authority across Wales, between January and May 2014. The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively:
- a supports and protects looked after children and care leavers;
  - b identifies and manages the vulnerabilities and risky behaviour of looked after children and care leavers;
  - c promotes rights-based practice and the voice of the child;
  - d promotes improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers; and
  - e promotes compliance with policy and guidance.
- 50 Findings from the individual local authority inspections and the CSSIW national overview report can be found on the [CSSIW website](#).

#### The Council's modernising education programme has continued to drive improvement in its schools' buildings

- 51 The Council has continued its investment in school buildings having spent approximately £17 million and a further £14.8 million contribution from the Welsh Government. There are a number of large projects underway, for example, construction has started on the Ysgol Maes Y Gwendraeth site, Ysgol Bro Dinefwr site and the Llanelli Area Secondary – Strade Phase 1 Project. Construction is also progressing well on the Ysgol Dyffryn Aman site and Ysgol Ffwrnes is now complete.
- 52 Current performance statistics do not take into account schools being refurbished or built, as such the overall number of schools that meet the Grade 'A' status remains at 25 per cent. There has been a slight increase in the number of Grade 'B' schools, which now stands at 56 per cent. Over the next two to three years as the refurbished and new-build schools are completed the proportion of Grade 'A' schools will increase significantly.

- 53 The Council has been working on evaluating the impact of the new and upgraded buildings on pupils and teachers. As we reported last year the evaluation will be undertaken 18 months after the completion of the modernisation works and will take into account what staff and pupils think of their new environment as well as measuring outcomes in terms of improved attendance and attainment. The Council has now completed a number of these evaluations. Part of the evaluation is staff and pupil surveys, asking them for their views on their environment. The outcomes of these surveys have been very positive.
- 54 It has been more difficult for the Council to assess the impact on improved attendance and attainment as there are other factors that affect these measures. The Council acknowledges that it may take a generation to be able to fully understand the impact of the improvements in these areas. However, across the county as a whole the key measure of the percentage of pupils aged 15 achieving level 2 threshold including GCSE grades A\* to C in English or Welsh and Maths improved by 2.8 per cent to 52.7 per cent, missing the Council's target of 60 per cent but above the Welsh average and placing the Council 11th in Wales.

### The Council has continued to deliver a key ambition for the environment

- 55 As part of our performance assessment work we looked at the Council's improvement objective aimed at protecting and enhancing the environment. This assessment included an assessment of whether the Council's annual public performance report was fair and balanced in the way it portrayed the progress the Council had made.
- 56 The Council has been engaging with citizens to maintain and improve public participation in recycling. Through 'door knocking' exercises recycling advisors encouraging residents to recycle as much as possible. Where this activity has taken place the Council reports that recycling and composting participation rates have increased by around 12 per cent. The Council has also engaged with other groups such as Age Concern, the 50+ Forum and community councils to increase glass collections from the elderly and infirm. The Eco School scheme continues to promote recycling awareness in schools and introduce recycling habits early to children. Carmarthenshire now has the highest number of platinum awards for Eco Schools in Wales.
- 57 As a result of its initiatives the Council has sent less waste to landfill, however, the value of waste sent to landfill still represented 73 per cent of its landfill allowance in 2013-14. This is an increase on the previous year in percentage terms and addressing this represents a challenge to the Council as landfill allowances are reducing each year. This might be helped by the recent initiative to export residual waste by ship to Scandinavia where it is burnt and provides heat for community-heating schemes. However, hitting future targets is likely to have a cost implication for the Council.

- 58 Overall the Council has maintained its ranked position as 8th in Wales, reusing, recycling or composting 55.7 per cent of waste, exceeding the national target of 52 per cent. It has a good selection of measures to support its waste management performance; the [Welsh Government Local Authority Service Performance Report](#) indicates that the Council currently provides an above-average service for below-average spend.
- 59 The range of data available, from all sources, provides the Council with a valuable resource, supporting both an accurate evaluation of its progress and a fair and balanced portrayal of performance in this area within its public report.

### The Council has made good progress in raising the quality of its social housing

- 60 As part of our performance assessment work we looked at the Council's improvement objective aimed at improving the Council Housing Stock and assisting local people to gain access to rented and affordable homes. This assessment included an assessment of whether the Council's annual public performance report was fair and balanced in the way it portrayed the progress the Council had made.
- 61 The Council has moved forward with the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard (CHS) and is on track to complete all improvements by the end of December 2015. In its annual report for 2013-14 the Council reported a 22 per cent increase in completion with just under 75 per cent of social housing meeting the standard at the end of March 2014 and just over 88 per cent complete by the end of March 2015.
- 62 The Council is working hard to return empty properties to use but the high number of empty properties in the county means that overall its performance at 5.7 per cent is below the Welsh average of nine per cent. However, in 2013-14 the Council helped bring 115 properties back into use, more than any other Council in Wales, an improvement from the previous year and meeting the Council's own target. To help it understand the county's position in relation to empty properties a task and finish group has been set up by the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 63 The Council is focused on addressing housing need and providing good-quality affordable housing. To outline its approach the Council is developing a 10-year affordable housing plan, looking at the county ward by ward. In addition key policy decisions have been taken to improve the supply of affordable homes. For example, Carmarthenshire was the first Council in Wales to successfully gain Welsh Government agreement to the suspension of the 'Right to Buy' enabling it to retain its current social-housing stock. The Council is also, when appropriate, buying back houses that were once part of the social-housing stock but have been sold under 'Right to Buy' in the past. Furthermore, the Council has built 12 new bungalows.

- 64 The amount of time that social-housing units are left empty has been reduced by streamlining processes. This has enabled the Council to re-let 22 properties on the same day and the average re-let time is 25 days an improvement on the previous year's 86-day average. This not only provides tenants with homes more quickly but reduces the rent income lost through properties being empty; the Council estimates these savings to be approximately £200,000.
- 65 Overall we conclude that the information included in the public report has enabled the Council to publish an accurate evaluation of its progress and a fair and balanced portrayal of performance in this area.

### **Transform, Innovate and Change (TIC) has robust governance, clear objectives and is contributing to better outcomes and financial savings**

- 66 The Council is clear in broad terms about what it wants to achieve from its TIC programme. The TIC programme operates within a robust governance model with appropriate contributions from both officers and members. The TIC team consists of four dedicated staff all experienced in business analysis and in particular the 'Vanguard Systems Thinking<sup>2</sup>' approach. The team is supplemented by officers in the areas where change projects are taking place and is tasked with supporting and progressing the Council's programme of organisational change. Programme and project management is generally good but the consideration of risk is not sufficiently robust.
- 67 The TIC Programme Board is chaired by the Chief Executive whose visibility and support to the TIC programme provide significant impetus. The Executive Board member attends the monthly TIC meetings and the bimonthly TIC Programme Board meetings. This involvement and oversight provide challenge and also a mechanism to channel information to the Executive Board and engage portfolio holders in projects underway in their subject areas. To strengthen engagement of members, the TIC team intends to host a members' seminar in 2015 to provide the opportunity for all elected members to become more aware of the TIC programme in detail.
- 68 Individual project business cases are variable in the level of detail they contain. Business cases include general financial savings expectations, but how they are calculated is unclear, which makes it difficult to assess whether all the financial factors have been included. The business cases are also not detailed enough to communicate the full range of potential benefits and detriments, this seems particularly noticeable in finance/savings-driven projects.
- 69 Initially the TIC projects were tightly scoped and well contained in specific areas. However, as more projects are started, there is greater potential for individual TIC projects to impact on one another. It is unclear if the Council has the mechanisms in place to manage these interdependencies and the associated risks that might arise as it does not have a strategic forward work plan for future TIC initiatives.

<sup>2</sup> Vanguard has pioneered the translation of Taiichi Ohno's ideas behind the Toyota Production System for service organisations. The Vanguard Method transfers expertise to people (managers and staff) in the organisation. Vanguard uses sensei to apply the Method, people who are experts in both intervention theory (how you make a change) and systems theory (how to analyse and design work).

- 70 The Council has an established performance management framework, which has been extended to support TIC projects. It provides significant business intelligence. The performance monitoring used to support the lean systems approach is good, however, whilst this provides members and officers with a wealth of data it is not always used effectively to manage improvement. The Council does not undertake sufficiently detailed analysis of the data recorded, limiting its ability to use this data to support service change and to drive further service improvement.
- 71 The Council's TIC programme is helping to deliver improved outcomes for citizens, more efficient services and financial savings. For example, the Council has reduced the time taken to re-let social housing, reduced the time taken to deliver adaptations through the disabilities funding grant, reduced the time between initial contact and services being delivered to meet the needs of older vulnerable people and undertaken more council property maintenance at lower cost.
- 72 Whilst financial savings are not the main driver for the majority of projects, the Council is interested in the amount of cash savings they generate. The Council is looking at a range of financial benefits in broad terms, such as cashable savings, costs avoided, productivity improvements, and new income generated. Whilst we acknowledge the difficulty in identifying savings within a 'systems thinking' approach, there is a lack of detail within the Council's calculations, which makes it difficult to assess how accurate the Council's reported savings are.

### **There is scope for the Council to improve its performance in administering Discretionary Housing Payments**

- 73 In January 2015, the Auditor General for Wales published his report on how well councils are managing the impact of welfare reform changes on social-housing tenants in Wales. His report reviewed the management and use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) by councils in Wales and concluded that the allocation, distribution, administration and use of these payments have significant inconsistencies and weaknesses. We followed up this work at individual councils. Our work in Carmarthenshire found that:
- a it is difficult for a customer to access information about DHP on the Council's website;
  - b there are still references on the website to Council Tax Benefit being eligible for DHP which is incorrect;
  - c whilst the Council's website provides an accessible and downloadable application form it has to be completed manually and sent by post or scanned and emailed;
  - d whilst there is an internal policy document there is no published strategy or policy for DHP and it is unclear how the Council uses these funds to help local people in housing need; and

- e the Council had paid out £181,189 of its financial allocation of £346,717, which represents 52 per cent of its allocation, at the end of November 2014.
- 74 The Council has systems in place to monitor the amount spent against the amount of money provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, and also to monitor how many customers have been assisted and the amount of money remaining in its DHP budget. The Council also records how many landlords are being assisted.
- 75 The Council reviews cases where it has refused to provide DHP, to ensure that the correct decision was made. It has some systems in place to monitor the impact of DHP. For example, Housing Benefit staff liaise with Housing Services obtaining data to determine whether tenants are in arrears and subject to the Spare Room Subsidy. However, it is not clear how this information is used to support the development of the Council's policy on DHP and the Council's work on addressing the impact of welfare reform.

#### Responding to a drop in the use of Welsh reported in the 2011 Census the Council is seeking to improve the use of Welsh in the county

- 76 The role of the WLC was created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. New powers to impose standards on organisations came into force through subordinate legislation at the end of 2014. The WLC will continue to review Welsh-language schemes by virtue of powers inherited under the Welsh Language Act 1993, and will enforce standards by investigating statutory complaints, making decisions on statutory investigations, maintaining a register of enforcement action, and imposing civil penalties when appropriate.
- 77 The WLC works with all councils in Wales to inspect and advise on the implementation of language schemes. It is the responsibility of councils to provide services to the public in Welsh in accordance with the commitments in their language schemes. Every council is committed to providing an annual monitoring report to the WLC outlining its performance in implementing the language scheme. The WLC analyses every monitoring report, provides a formal response and collects further information as required.
- 78 The WLC reported that the Council provides a general Welsh-language training programme for staff as well as training that is specifically tailored to the requirements of departments. A new media course for members of the Executive Board was introduced during 2013-14, and a course for carers of the elderly was provided.
- 79 The Council developed a Health and Social Care Dementia Strategy that incorporates the needs of Welsh speakers.
- 80 An increase was recorded in the corporate website's compliance with the Welsh-language scheme. However, improving the quality of the site continues to be a priority.

- 81 The Council published a Policy Statement on the Welsh language, which outlines its vision for the language, and a cross-party working group was established to respond to the findings of the 2011 Census. The working group presented 73 recommendations for strengthening the Welsh language in the county and aims to create an action plan over the next year.

# Appendix 1 – Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake an annual improvement assessment, and to publish an annual improvement report, for each improvement authority in Wales. This requirement covers local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

This report has been produced by staff of the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges his duties under section 19 to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an improvement assessment under section 18 and stating whether, as a result of his improvement plan audit under section 17, he believes that the authority has discharged its improvement planning duties under section 15.

Improvement authorities are under a general duty to ‘make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions’. Improvement authorities are defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

The annual improvement assessment is the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. The improvement assessment is a forward-looking assessment of an authority’s likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It also includes a retrospective assessment of whether an authority has achieved its planned improvements in order to inform a view as to the authority’s track record of improvement. The Auditor General will summarise his audit and assessment work in a published annual improvement report for each authority (under section 24).

The Auditor General may also, in some circumstances, carry out special inspections (under section 21), which will be reported to the authority and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). An important ancillary activity for the Auditor General is the co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work (required by section 23), which takes into consideration the overall programme of work of all relevant regulators at an improvement authority. The Auditor General may also take account of information shared by relevant regulators (under section 33) in his assessments.

# Appendix 2 – Audit of Carmarthenshire County Council’s 2014-15 Improvement Plan

## Certificate

I certify that I have audited Carmarthenshire County Council’s (the Council) Improvement Plan in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) and my Code of Audit Practice.

As a result of my audit, I believe that the Council has discharged its duties under section 15(6) to (9) of the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

## Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Auditor General

Under the Measure, the Council is required to prepare and publish an Improvement Plan describing its plans to discharge its duties to:

- make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions;
- make arrangements to secure achievement of its improvement objectives; and
- make arrangements to exercise its functions so that any performance standard specified by Welsh Ministers is met.

The Measure requires the Council to publish its Improvement Plan as soon as is reasonably practicable after the start of the financial year to which it relates, or after such other date as Welsh Ministers may specify by order.

The Council is responsible for preparing the Improvement Plan and for the information set out within it. The Measure requires that the Council has regard to guidance issued by Welsh Ministers in preparing and publishing its plan.

As the Council’s auditor, I am required under sections 17 and 19 of the Measure to carry out an audit of the Improvement Plan, to certify that I have done so, and to report whether I believe that the Council has discharged its duties to prepare and publish an Improvement Plan in accordance with statutory requirements set out in section 15 and statutory guidance.

## Scope of the Improvement Plan audit

For the purposes of my audit work I will accept that, provided an authority meets its statutory requirements, it will also have complied with Welsh Government statutory guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

For this audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information, or whether the Improvement Plan published by the Council can be achieved. Other assessment work that I will undertake under section 18 of the Measure will examine these issues. My audit of the Council's Improvement Plan, therefore, comprised a review of the plan to ascertain whether it included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the plan complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing its plan.

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with sections 17 and 19 of the Measure cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

## I make no recommendations under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009

Huw Vaughan Thomas  
**Auditor General for Wales**

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business  
Colin Davies, Manager  
Jeremy Evans, Performance Audit Lead

# Appendix 3 – Audit of Carmarthenshire County Council’s assessment of 2013-14 performance

## Certificate

I certify that I have audited Carmarthenshire County Council’s (the Council) assessment of 2013-14 performance in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) and my Code of Audit Practice.

As a result of my audit, I believe that the Council has discharged its duties under section 15(2), (3), (8) and (9) of the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

## Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Auditor General

Under the Measure, the Council is required to publish an assessment of its performance during 2013-14 describing its performance:

- in discharging its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions;
- in meeting the improvement objectives it has set itself;
- by reference to performance indicators specified by Welsh Ministers, and self-imposed performance indicators; and
- in meeting any performance standards specified by Welsh Ministers and self-imposed performance standards.

The Measure requires the Council to publish its assessment before 31 October in the financial year following that to which the information relates, or by any other such date as Welsh Ministers may specify by order.

The Measure requires that the Council has regard to guidance issued by Welsh Ministers in publishing its assessment.

As the Council’s auditor, I am required under sections 17 and 19 of the Measure to carry out an audit to determine whether the Council has discharged its duty to publish an assessment of performance, to certify that I have done so, and to report whether I believe that the Council has discharged its duties in accordance with statutory requirements set out in section 15 and statutory guidance.

## Scope of the audit

For the purposes of my audit work I will accept that, provided an authority meets its statutory requirements, it will also have complied with Welsh Government statutory guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

For this audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information. Other assessment work that I will undertake under section 18 of the Measure may examine these issues. My audit of the Council's assessment of performance, therefore, comprised a review of the Council's publication to ascertain whether it included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the assessment complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing it.

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with sections 17 and 19 of the Measure cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

**I make no recommendations under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009**

Huw Vaughan Thomas  
**Auditor General For Wales**

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business  
Colin Davies, Manager  
Jeremy Evans, Performance Audit Lead

# Appendix 4 – Annual Audit Letter

Cllr. Kevin Madge  
Leader  
Carmarthenshire County Council  
County Hall  
Carmarthen  
SA31 1JP

Dear Cllr. Madge

## **Annual Audit Letter – Carmarthenshire County Council 2013-14**

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

**The Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources although there remains scope for improvement in some areas**

It is the Council's responsibility to:

- put systems of internal control in place to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions and to ensure that its assets are secure;
- maintain proper accounting records;
- prepare Financial Statements in accordance with relevant requirements; and
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 requires me to:

- provide an audit opinion on the Financial Statements;
- review the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; and
- issue a certificate confirming that I have completed the audit of the Financial Statements.

Local authorities in Wales prepare their Financial Statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This Code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards. On 29 September 2014 I issued an unqualified audit opinion with an 'emphasis of matter' paragraph on the Financial Statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Dyfed Pension Fund's financial position and transactions. A similar audit opinion was issued on your 2012-13 Financial Statements. The key matters arising from the audit were reported to the Audit Committee on 26 September 2014.

At this Audit Committee we reported that the quality of the Financial Statements was good and has again improved compared to last year. We reported that we did not identify any material weaknesses in your internal controls – we also reported that controls within the capital accounting fixed assets system have improved this year.

The emphasis of matter related to the Council's financial statements and not those of Dyfed Pension Fund. The emphasis of matter arose as there was a difference of opinion between the Council and us about two decisions the Council made which, in our view, resulted in unlawful expenditure being included in the Financial Statements for 2013-14. I issued two Public Interest Reports on 31 January 2014 in which I reported that, in my view, the decisions were unlawful. The Council considered these reports at an Extraordinary Council meeting on 27 February 2014 and has agreed to take the necessary action in response to the recommendations made.

Last year's Annual Audit Letter set out the governance issues arising from my Public Interest Reports. The Council has established a cross-party group to review the governance and procedural arrangements across the organisation.

My consideration of the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness has been based on the audit work undertaken on the Financial Statements, as well as placing reliance on the work completed as part of the Improvement Assessment under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. Overall the Auditor General is currently unable to conclude whether the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2014-15. This is because the Council has yet to respond to the WLGA's recently published governance review and we have yet to complete our ongoing improvement assessment work.

As for a number of years, we have again reported weaknesses in the Council's grant management arrangements which present a significant financial and reputational risk to the Council. In September 2014 we reported to the Audit Committee that based on our work on the 2012-13 claims, arrangements for the production and submission of grant claims could be strengthened, particularly for European claims. This would avoid exposing the Council to risks of loss of funding and increased audit fees. There remain opportunities for further improvements in overall grants management particularly:

- strengthening the awarding and monitoring of third party grants;
- ensuring compliance with the Council's procurement procedures;
- robustly evidencing apportionments to claims; and
- ensuring that approved plans, Memorandum of Agreements or Service Level Agreements are in place where applicable.

Internal Audit has also reported weaknesses in grants management which highlight similar issues to those we have identified.

Our grant audit work on 2013-14 claims is ongoing, but our initial findings are that the Council's grant management arrangements still need to be improved. In particular we have reported that the Council needs to improve its arrangements for the awarding of Property Development Fund grants under the European Union's Convergence grant scheme. The results of our work will be reported to the Council's Audit Committee when complete. The Audit Committee will have a key role to play in ensuring that the issues are addressed and progress is made in this area.

In 2013-14 the Council underspent by £2.8 million. At the end of the financial year the Council's useable reserves increased by £16 million to £82 million (this excludes 'ring-fenced' reserves including the Housing Revenue Account, Schools' reserves and capital receipts). At the end of the 2014-15 financial year, the Council is currently forecasting a £0.3 million overspend against the budget.

Looking forward, the recent Welsh Government budget settlement, together with a range of other cost pressures, will mean that all local government bodies in Wales will face extremely challenging financial positions. The Medium Term Financial Plan approved by Council in February 2014 for the period 2014-15 to 2016-17 established challenging efficiency savings totalling £29.7 million. The current budget outlook based on the funding settlement from Welsh Government announced recently (a 3.3 per cent reduction in funding) requires £44 million of savings over the next three years. There will be some tough decisions for the Council if these savings are to be delivered.

The Council has generally robust financial management arrangements but improvements need to be made in some areas. There is a need to ensure that links between financial and improvement plans and service performance are clear, as well as ensuring that efficiency savings targets are monitored and challenged on an individual basis.

We are currently dealing with correspondence from a number of electors and for this reason we have been unable to issue the certificate confirming that the audit of the Financial Statements has been completed. We anticipate we will be able to issue the certificate before the end of December 2014.

At the planning stage the financial audit fee for 2013-14 was £184,167. We anticipate that we will be able to stay within this fee.

Yours sincerely

Richard Harries, Engagement Lead  
**For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor**

cc Mr Mark James, Chief Executive  
Mr Chris Moore, Head of Financial Services

## Appendix 5 – National report recommendations 2014-15

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
May 2014	Good Scrutiny? Good Question!	R1 Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny.
		R2 Ensure that scrutiny members, and specifically scrutiny chairs, receive training and support to fully equip them with the skills required to undertake effective scrutiny.
		R3 Further develop scrutiny forward work programming to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide a clear rationale for topic selection;</li> <li>• be more outcome focused;</li> <li>• ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; and</li> <li>• align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements.</li> </ul>
		R4 Ensure that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation and that its activities are complementary with the work of external review bodies.
		R5 Ensure that the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and acted upon to improve the function's effectiveness; including following up on proposed actions and examining outcomes.
		R6 Undertake regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network.
		R7 Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study.
		R8 Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
July 2014	Young people not in education, employment or training - Findings from a review of councils in Wales	R1 Together with partners, map and review expenditure on NEETs services to better understand the resources required to deliver the Framework.
		R2 Clarify their strategic approach to reducing the proportion of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET as well as their approach for 16 to 18 year olds.
		R3 Focus on young people with significant or multiple barriers to engaging with education, employment or training rather than those who are more likely to re-engage without significant additional support.
		R4 Develop their objectives and targets for reducing the number of young people NEET so that they can be held to account and their work aligns with the Welsh Government's targets and objectives.
		R5 Ensure that elected members and partners fully understand that councils have a clear responsibility for leading and co-ordinating youth services for 16 to 24 year olds.
		R6 Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness and relative value for money of the services and interventions in their area that are intended to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET.

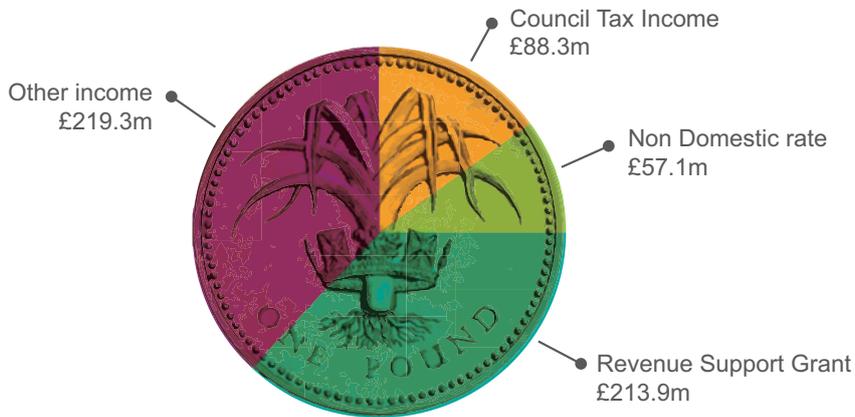
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2014	Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens	<p>R1 Revise the best practice standards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• align the work of environmental health with national strategic priorities;</li> <li>• identify the wider contribution of environmental health in delivering strategic priorities of the Welsh Government; and</li> <li>• identify the benefit and impact of environmental health services on protecting citizens.</li> </ul>
		<p>R2 Provide scrutiny chairs and members with the necessary skills and support to effectively scrutinise and challenge service performance, savings plans and the impact of budget reductions.</p>
		<p>R3 Improve engagement with local residents over planned budget cuts and changes in services by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consulting with residents on planned changes in services and using the findings to shape decisions;</li> <li>• outlining which services are to be cut and how these cuts will impact on residents; and</li> <li>• setting out plans for increasing charges or changing standards of service.</li> </ul>
		<p>R4 Improve efficiency and value for money by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying the statutory and non-statutory duties of council environmental health services.</li> <li>• Agreeing environmental health priorities for the future and the role of councils in delivering these.</li> <li>• Determining an 'acceptable standard of performance' for environmental health services (upper and lower) and publicise these to citizens.</li> <li>• Improving efficiency and maintaining performance to the agreed level through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– collaborating and/or integrating with others to reduce cost and/or improve quality;</li> <li>– outsourcing where services can be delivered more cost effectively to agreed standards;</li> <li>– introducing and/or increasing charges and focusing on income-generation activity;</li> <li>– using grants strategically to maximise impact and return; and</li> <li>– reducing activities to focus on core statutory and strategic priorities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
		<p>R5 Improve strategic planning by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identifying, collecting and analysing financial, performance and demand/need data on environmental health services;</li> <li>• analysing collected data to inform and understand the relationship between 'cost: benefit: impact' and use this intelligence to underpin decisions on the future of council environmental health services; and</li> <li>• agree how digital information can be used to plan and develop environmental health services in the future.</li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2015	<b>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</b>	<p>R1 Improve strategic planning and better co-ordinate activity to tackle the impact of welfare reform on social-housing tenants by ensuring comprehensive action plans are in place that cover the work of all relevant council departments, housing associations and the work of external stakeholders.</p>
		<p>R2 Improve governance and accountability for welfare reform by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appointing member and officer leads to take responsibility for strategic leadership on welfare reform and be accountable for performance; and</li> <li>• ensuring members receive adequate training and regular briefings on welfare reform to be able to challenge and scrutinise performance and decisions.</li> </ul>
		<p>R3 Ensure effective management of performance on welfare reform by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting appropriate measures to enable members, officers and the public to judge progress in delivering actions;</li> <li>• ensuring performance information covers the work of all relevant agencies and especially housing associations; and</li> <li>• establishing measures to judge the wider impact of welfare reform.</li> </ul>
		<p>R4 Strengthen how welfare-reform risks are managed by creating a single corporate-level approach that co ordinates activity across the Council and the work of others to provide adequate assurance that all the necessary and appropriate actions to mitigate risk are taking place.</p>
		<p>R5 Improve engagement with tenants affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the provision of regular advice and information on the options open to them to address the financial impact of the change in their circumstances;</li> <li>• the promotion of the ‘Your benefits are changing’ helpline; and</li> <li>• the provision of support to tenants specifically affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy to participate in regional/national employment schemes.</li> </ul>

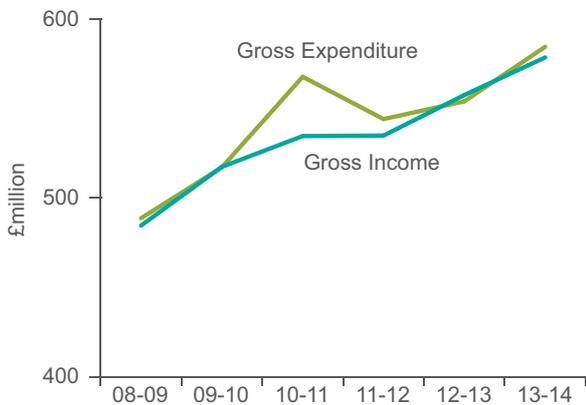
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2015	<p><b>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</b></p>	<p>R7 Improve management, access to and use of Discretionary Housing Payments by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishing a clear policy or guide that is available in hard copy and online to the public that sets out the Council's policy and arrangements for administering Discretionary Housing Payments;</li> <li>• clearly defining eligible and non-eligible housing costs covered by Discretionary Housing Payments in application forms, policy documentation and applicant guidance leaflets;</li> <li>• clearly setting out the maximum/minimum length of time that such payments will be provided;</li> <li>• setting and publishing the timescale for the Council making a decision on Discretionary Housing Payments applications;</li> <li>• including information within public literature on the Council's policy for right to review or appeal of a decision and the timescales and process to be followed in deciding on these; and</li> <li>• clearly define the priority groups for Discretionary Housing Payments in public literature to ensure that those seeking assistance, and those agencies supporting them, can assess whether such payments are a viable option to address their housing and financial needs.</li> </ul>

# Appendix 6 – Useful information about the Council’s resources

Total Gross Income 2013-14



Total Income and Expenditure



Number of whole time equivalent staff 2010-11 to 2012-13



Total Gross Expenditure by service area



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