

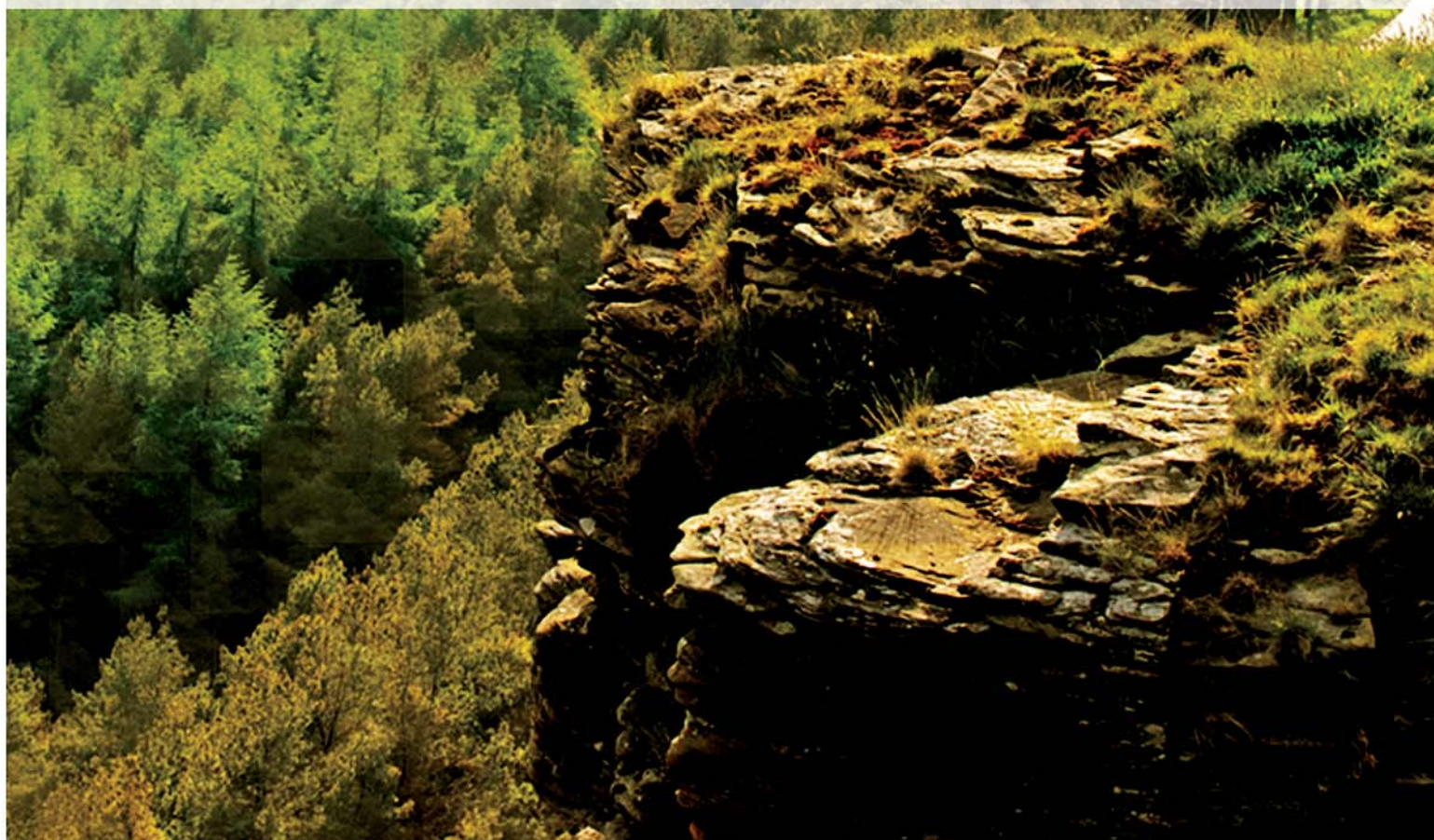


WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report

Bridgend County Borough Council

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About the Auditor General for Wales

The Auditor General is independent of government and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. He leads the Wales Audit Office and is held accountable by the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly for the Wales Audit Office's work.

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. He also appoints the external auditors of Welsh local government bodies, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. The Auditor General's appointed auditors are responsible for the annual audit of the majority of public money spent in Wales, including the £15 billion of funds that are voted to Wales annually by the Westminster Parliament. Nearly £5.5 billion of this funding is passed by the Welsh Government to local government in the form of general and specific grants. Local government, in turn, raises a further £2.1 billion through council tax and business rates.

As well as carrying out financial audit, the Auditor General's role is to examine how public bodies manage and spend public money, including achieving value in the delivery of public services. The Wales Audit Office aims to make public money count, by promoting improvement, so that people in Wales benefit from accountable, well-managed public services that offer the best possible value for money. It is also committed to identifying and spreading good practice across the Welsh public sector.

Huw Vaughan Thomas, Auditor General for Wales, was supported by Rod Alcott, Jeremy Evans and colleagues under the direction of Jane Holownia in conducting the Improvement Assessment and producing this report.

Photographs courtesy of Martin Phillips

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Summary report

- 1 Each year, the Auditor General must report on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement and delivering their services. Drawing on the work of the Wales Audit Office and that of relevant Welsh inspectorates, this report presents a picture of improvement over the last year. The report is in three main sections, which cover the planning, delivery and evaluation of improvement by Bridgend County Borough Council (the Council).
- 2 Overall the Auditor General has concluded that the Council has put good arrangements in place to deliver improvement and does well in the areas it focuses on but its evaluation and reporting of performance is not sufficiently balanced. The reasons for arriving at this conclusion are summarised below.
- 3 We found that the Council is developing good plans and putting appropriate arrangements in place to deliver its programme of improvement. We based this conclusion on the following:
 - the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to address its priorities and has responded well to previous suggestions for improvement;
 - the Council is meeting its statutory obligation with regard to the Welsh Language Act;
 - the Council's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) arrangements are likely to support improvement; and
 - the Council has good medium-term planning that is aligned with a continuing programme of change across some of its major services.
- 4 We also found that the Council has achieved much of what it set out to achieve in its identified priorities. We based this conclusion on the following:
 - Overall the Council made good progress towards achieving its Improvement Objectives in 2010-11, and in most cases the Council has an action plan in place to improve performance where that was not as good as expected.
 - The Council has improved its support for people in need. The Council performs well against some of the key adult service indicators and must now ensure that it has the necessary capacity to deliver its plans for further improvement. Progress has been made in children's social services, corporate support for delivering improvements to people in need is good and the Council is improving the way it deals with homelessness.
 - The Council is making good progress in improving physical and emotional wellbeing of people with health issues but overall, education performance is inconsistent and there are some indications of a dip in 2010-11.
 - The Council has done what it set out to do to create and maintain the area as a safe, prosperous and pleasant place. The Council has made progress in meeting its objective to build safe and inclusive communities and work to regenerate areas of the Borough is helping support its objective of promoting economic growth. The Council is amongst the best councils in Wales in managing waste.

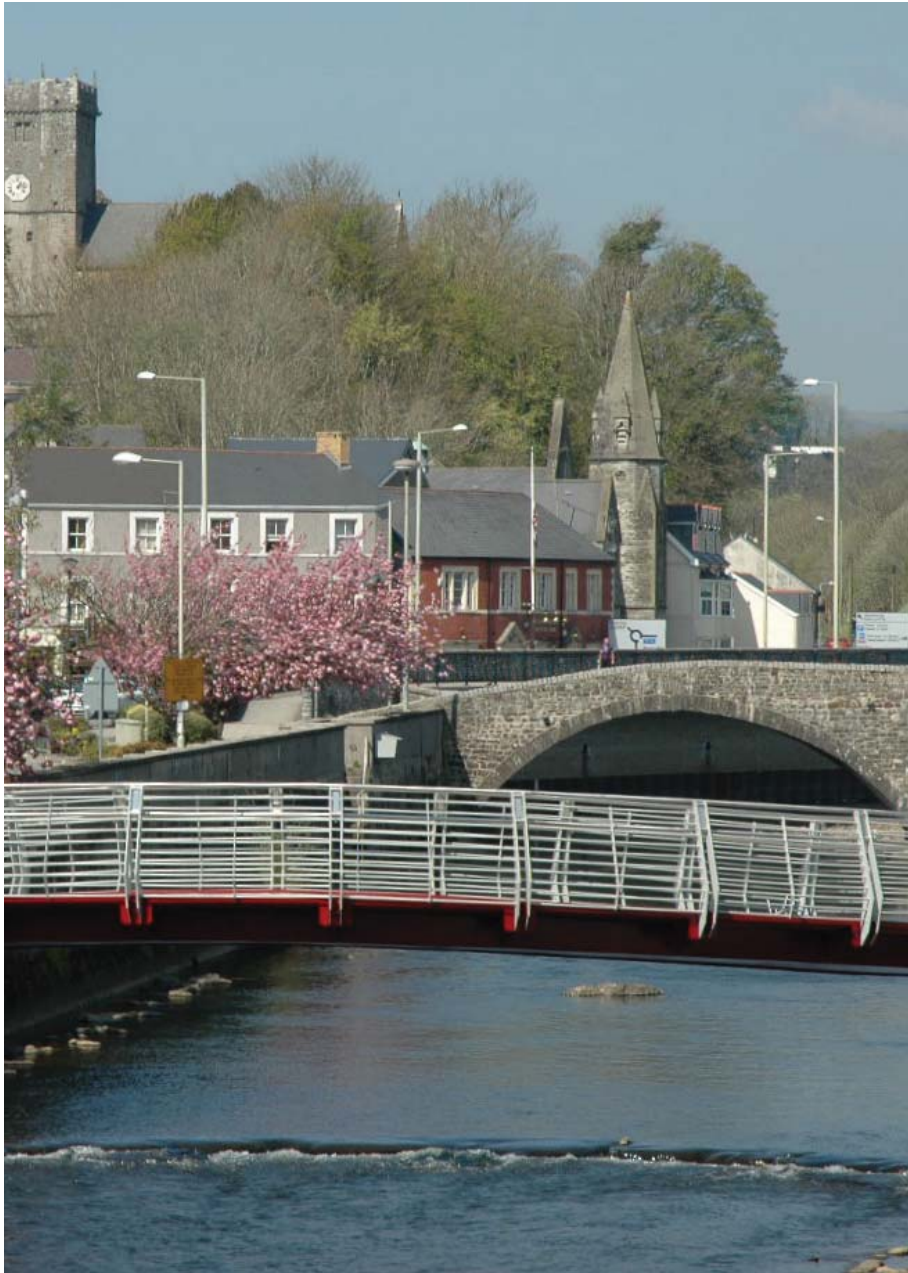
The Council has also successfully created new, or improved existing, cycleways, coastal paths and rights of way in the Borough in 2010-11.

Proposals for improvement

- 5 Finally, the report sets out our views on the Council's own assessment of its performance and arrangements. We concluded that the Council is good at monitoring performance but needs to become more balanced in its evaluation and reporting of performance. The Council has good performance information and its Annual Report is comprehensive in that it covers all the significant activities the Council has or has not achieved in the year. However, the picture represented in the report is not always balanced.

Proposals for improvement	
P1	In order to help citizens fully understand the progress the Council is making in meeting its objectives and improving performance, the Council should: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure its annual report is more balanced;• be clearer about performance that is not as good as expected, as well as where it has exceeded expectations;• set out what it intends to do as a result; and• actively seek feedback and comments from citizens and communities.
P2	The Council needs to continue to address areas for development and improvement set out in previous external audit and inspection reports.

Detailed report



Introduction

- 6 This report is written by the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales. On [page 2](#) you can find a brief explanation of what the Auditor General does.
- 7 Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure), the Auditor General must report each year on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement and delivering their services. [Appendix 1](#) provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties under the Measure. With help from Welsh inspectorates, Estyn (for education) and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW), and the Welsh Language Board we have brought together a picture of what each council or authority in Wales is trying to achieve and how it is going about it. This report also sets out the progress the Council has made since the Auditor General published his last Annual Improvement Report, drawing on the Council's own self-assessment.
- 8 Throughout the report, we set out what the Council needs to do to improve its services. Given the wide range of services provided and the challenges facing the Council it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
 - recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way;
 - conduct a special inspection and publish the report with detailed recommendations;
- 9 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@wao.gov.uk or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ.
 - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must respond to that recommendation publicly within 30 days; and
 - make proposals for improvement – if we make proposals to the Council, we would expect it to do something about them and we will follow up what happens.

The Council has put appropriate arrangements in place to deliver improvement and does well in the areas it focuses on; but its evaluation and reporting of performance is not sufficiently balanced

- 10 This report sets out the Auditor General's view of the performance of the Council in discharging its statutory duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. This view has been informed by the work of the Wales Audit Office, KPMG LLP, Estyn, the Welsh Language Board and the CSSIW.
- 11 We do not undertake a comprehensive annual review of all council arrangements or services. Our work has focused on the main objectives that the Council has set itself and some other key issues such as self-evaluation and reporting performance to the public. The report builds upon earlier Corporate Assessment and Annual Improvement reports issued to the Council and the conclusions are based on our cumulative and shared knowledge and findings from work undertaken this year.
- 12 Our overall conclusion reflects the progress made by the Council over the past year to put arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement and the specific progress that it has made in delivering against its Improvement Objectives. The challenge for the Council is to make sure that in focusing on the arrangements for future improvement and ensuring delivery against specified objectives, it does not lose sight of the need to maintain 'business as usual'. The indications of a decline in education performance in 2011 serves as a reminder to the Council of the need to balance its efforts between meeting today's needs and preparing for a better future. This need for balance is exemplified by the following quote from CSSIW's Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2010/2011: *'A considerable amount of work has been done to set out the programme for change and the council now faces the challenge of delivery whilst at the same time sustaining and improving performance'*.
- 13 In addition to having effective arrangements in place to plan for and deliver improvement, it is important that the Council has a good understanding of the extent of progress and improvement it is making. We found that the Council is generally good at monitoring its own performance. However, this monitoring does not currently translate into a balanced evaluation and reporting of performance. There is a tendency to excuse or explain away underperformance rather than acknowledge where progress has not been as good as intended and explain the remedial action that is being taken.

The Council is developing good plans and putting appropriate arrangements in place to deliver its programme of improvement

- 14 This section of the report sets out our assessment of how well the Council is delivering against the improvement objectives that it has set itself (as listed in Appendix 4) and how the Council is planning and managing its business to maintain and improve services. This section of the report also considers whether the Council has taken sufficient and appropriate action in response to issues raised in our previous reports.

The Council has appropriate arrangements in place to address its priorities and has responded well to previous suggestions for improvement

- 15 Our Corporate Assessment, issued to the Council in July 2011, reported a number of strengths in the Council's arrangements to secure improvement. These strengths included good progress in addressing weaknesses in human resources arrangements; improved medium-term financial planning; clear corporate risk management processes and good progress in addressing areas for improvement that had been identified in earlier reports.
- 16 Our assessment noted that the Council's priorities for the coming period included completing the job evaluation and equal pay projects, and further integrating business planning with financial planning. Officers and members are working closely to establish a common timetable and framework to integrate business and financial planning effectively, and responsibility for corporate performance has now been consolidated within the new post of Head of Finance and Performance. The job evaluation project moved forward in September 2011 with the release for

consultation of the Council's proposals for a new pay and grading structure. The Council has recently reached a framework agreement on Equal Pay claims with the solicitors for the claimants and the trade unions and expects to be able to settle the majority of cases in March 2012.

- 17 Some of the Council's Improvement Objectives were not sufficiently focused to allow for meaningful measurement and monitoring. The Council has recognised this shortcoming and revised its 11 Improvement Objectives down to nine for 2011-12 by streamlining and revising three improvement objectives for 2010-13, relating to children's services, into two more clearly stated improvement objectives and integrating the Improvement Objective relating to Equalities. This revision has reduced the duplication found in the original set and enabled the Council to set better success measures: in 2010-11 success measures were largely concerned with what the Council was doing rather than the outcomes from their actions. The Council is embarking on a training programme in 2011-12 to help develop outcome based measures in the future.

- 18 The Council is starting to change the way it does things to become more efficient. It successfully changed its waste collection and recycling arrangements in 2010-11 resulting in increased recycling, reduced costs of £1 million and increased income from the Welsh Government of £1.4 million. It is progressing with the redesign or change in delivery model for some of its biggest services such as adult social care and leisure services. It has started sharing some of its services such as internal audit and aspects of legal services with other councils and it is developing its relationships with other public sector partners such as health and the police. It is making more efficient use of its office accommodation and has reduced staff sickness levels.
- 19 However, some of its change programme did slip in 2010-11. The review of staff pay and grading and the remodelling of adult social care are both taking longer to conclude than originally planned.
- 20 The Auditor General has identified a number of areas for improvement for the Council in his reports covering the last two years. The Council has responded positively to these suggestions and taken action to address them, with some having been completely addressed. We intend to engage with the Council early next year to determine whether there are any matters outstanding from our earlier work in respect of audit proposals for improvement, along with any newly identified areas from this report.

The Council is meeting its statutory obligation with regard to the Welsh Language Act

- 21 The Welsh Language Board has praised the Council for significantly increasing the Welsh content on its corporate website, and for introducing a bilingual online recruitment system. The Council is now implementing its Language Skills Strategy that should identify the skills of current staff and the need for language skills within posts. The Council has made progress in relation to the provision of services undertaken on its behalf by third parties, by including linguistic need as a consideration in its Commissioning Toolkit and Delivery Plan. The Council only reported on two of the five language indicators, having reported on four in previous years. The Council is expected to present a revised Scheme to the Board for formal approval by the end of the year.

The Council's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) arrangements are likely to support improvement

- 22 Effective use of technology is essential for transforming the delivery of public services, improving outcomes for citizens and delivering efficiency savings. Technology can support different ways of working, delivering services and engaging with citizens, and enable councils to deliver more for less. The way in which technology is delivered and managed has a direct impact on the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of work undertaken across the Council and affects almost every council worker.

Poor ICT governance can lead to the use of inappropriate systems, system unavailability and frustration throughout the organisation.

- 23 Our review concluded that the Council's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support improvement if the Council puts steps in place to better sustain its ICT infrastructure and ensure it has the skills and capacity it needs to deliver its plans. Whilst there are examples of good practice the Council could exploit technology better to achieve more efficiency savings.

The Council has good medium-term planning that is aligned with a continuing programme of change across some of its major services

- 24 The Council has recognised the need to improve some areas of its medium-term financial plan and is in the process of developing a new, comprehensive financial plan that will focus on priority areas and explain how the council will deal with the financial challenges it now faces. There has been positive cross-party member involvement. The main financial risk remains the job evaluation project, and the Council needs to conclude it in order to make confident plans for its services. The current proposals will create an annual increase in the payroll bill of about £3 million, but the Council has made provision for this additional level of funding in its budgets.

- 25 The auditor appointed by the Auditor General recently gave his opinion on the Council's accounts and concluded that the financial statements had been properly prepared. [Appendix 3](#) gives more detail.

The Council is committed to public engagement

- 26 Public engagement can be defined as: 'A process that brings people together to address issues of common importance, to solve shared problems, and to bring about positive social change. Effective public engagement invites citizens to get involved in deliberation, dialogue and action on issues that they care about.'¹

- 27 Our work at the Council examined the overall corporate approach to public engagement with a specific focus on the arrangements relating to the Improvement Objectives. From our work we concluded that the Council's officers and members are very committed to undertaking public engagement and are supported by a clear vision, good level of capacity and effective partnership working. We came to this conclusion because:

- The Local Service Board and the Council have developed comprehensive Citizen Engagement Strategies which should encourage a consistent and co-ordinated approach to public engagement within the Council and across the Local Service Board partners.

¹ Definition taken from 'Public Agenda' website 2010

- The Authority is able to demonstrate a strong commitment towards using public engagement as a way to enable and encourage dialogue with the public. Both officers and Members see it as an essential process to gauge public opinion during times of change to service provision and as a means to help identify the Authority's key priorities.
- The Council invests a good level of expertise, capacity and support to deliver their public engagement activities.
- The Council provides information well through a variety of channels.
- The Council is working effectively with its partners and stakeholders to maximise the opportunities for effective public engagement that will help to improve and shape service delivery.
- Although the Council does not formally evaluate the effectiveness of its public engagement activities, some monitoring is undertaken through continuous oversight of what works well.

The Council has achieved much of what it set out to achieve in its identified priorities

- 28 This section of the report sets out our assessment of the Council's performance in:
- achieving the improvement objectives it set for itself for 2010-11;
 - supporting people in need;
 - helping people to develop; and
 - helping to create a safe, prosperous and pleasant environment.

Overall the Council made good progress towards achieving its Improvement Objectives in 2010-11

- 29 The Council established its first set of Improvement Objectives in 2010 and set them out in its Corporate Plan 2010-13. It set itself 11 objectives and these were supported by numerous aims and a collection of Performance Indicators.
- 30 Overall, in 2010-11, the Council made good progress towards achieving its Improvement Objectives. In most cases the Council has an action plan in place to improve performance where that was not as good as expected. The Council has made some notable progress in meeting its objectives related to outcomes for children, but it still has a way to go to meet fully the commitments made. For example, it has improved the allocation of social workers to children needing social care services and eliminated its backlog of initial assessments of care. It has also successfully completed several school improvement projects in the year, such as the refurbishment of Brackla Primary School. However, progress on

developing a strategy for young people not in education, training or employment, and in progressing its plans for improving inclusion have slipped. The Council also performed poorly in 2010-11 on processing statements for children with special educational needs. As a result it reviewed its working arrangements to improve performance and sought help from a neighbouring council to help reduce its backlog.

- 31 Our previous assessment identified that providing integrated services to help older people live independently was a priority for the Council. This was reinforced through the Improvement Objective *'to support vulnerable adults to live independently in their communities, promoting choice, empowerment, dignity and respect'*. The Council is making good progress against this Improvement Objective. The Council has revisited and refocused its approach to remodelling of adult social care services, to place more emphasis on re-ablement. The Council is working with the Local Health Board with the aim of developing a single service over the next 18 months. This has been a mix of logistical work and the development of an integrated service model. This means that its original timetable has slipped, but that plans will be more realistic and achievable in the medium term. It has invested in new facilities this year such as new day centres, and it has exceeded its targets for supplying telecare to vulnerable people as a way to help them remain independent and in their own home.

- 32 Our assessment also identified that providing integrated services that ensure that all children have the best possible start in life was a priority for the Council. We have not reviewed the Council's progress against this priority but will do so in 2012 and report on it in our next Annual Improvement Report.

The Council has improved its support for people in need

- 33 This part of the report sets out how well the Council is improving the way in which it supports people in need. It reflects the views of CSSIW in relation to adult and children's services and corporate support; and draws upon our own reviews of the Council's performance against relevant improvement objectives.

The Council performs well against some of the key adult service indicators and must now ensure that it has the necessary capacity to deliver its plans for further improvement

- 34 The Council performs well against some of the key adult service indicators, particularly delayed transfers of care and improving adult protection. The Council has set out a programme of change in adult services that aims to improve the service through better assessment and care management. A lot of work has been done to set out the programme for change and the Council now faces the challenge of delivering that change while at the same time sustaining and improving performance. Capacity to support the change programme is an issue and the council needs to ensure it has the additional resources which may be required in order to deliver the work programme in a timely way.

Progress has been made in children's social services

- 35 There is evidence that progress has been made in improving children's social services. The Council is adopting more effective working practice to ensure that children's needs are assessed in a timely and robust manner. There has been an improvement in dealing with child protection cases. During 2010-11 referrals increased to 1,029 from 942 the previous year, but decisions made within 24 hours remained stable at 99 per cent. The Council has also taken measures to improve staff retention.
- 36 Areas for further development include increasing placement stability for looked-after children; further increasing the numbers of looked-after children allocated to qualified social workers; and further improving the quality and timeliness of core assessments.
- 37 The Council has undertaken a comprehensive assessment of local need and has now begun a consultation with stakeholder groups on how best to transform delivery of children's services in Bridgend.
- 38 The Council's need to reduce its overall budget could increase pressure on children's service. This pressure will need to be carefully managed if it is not to adversely impact on the progress of children's services. The timescales for the realisation of important projects such as the revision of residential services have slipped but good progress has been made since April 2011.

Corporate support for delivering improvements to people in need is good

- 39 There is good corporate support for the improvement agenda overall and a sound framework in place to monitor performance. The Wales Audit Office completed a risk management assessment on the arrangements that inform the Council's management decisions during 2010-11. This assessment concluded that officers involved in service redesign understand the risks to service delivery. In the future, responding to demographic and other change factors, the Council will need to further develop its understanding of the types and costs of services it provides and how these will be allocated between different client groups in order to fully manage risk.

The Council is improving the way it deals with homelessness

- 40 The Council recognises that it performs poorly compared to many Wales councils in preventing people becoming homeless. In 2010-11 it was ranked 19th out of the 22 councils in Wales for the percentage of all potentially homeless households for whom homelessness was prevented for at least six months. But it completed an additional three units of accommodation for homelessness use in 2010-11, with a further six units completed by June 2011. It also reviewed the service it provides to make it more efficient. As a result, more people were prevented from becoming homeless in 2010-11 than in the previous year.

The Council is providing good support to help some groups develop, but there is a relative decline in education performance in 2010-11

- 41 This part of the report sets out how well the Council is improving the way in which it helps people to develop. It draws on evidence from our own reviews of the Council's performance against specific improvement objectives and Estyn's views on education performance.

The Council is making good progress in improving physical and emotional wellbeing of people with health issues

- 42 The Council made good progress in achieving its Objective relating to improving physical and emotional wellbeing by promoting active lifestyles, participation and learning. There are a number of examples where targets have been exceeded:
- Garw Valley Obesity Project - Cwm Garw Project exceeding all targets - 120 patients participated in the project (against a target of 50) with a total of over 150 stones in weight lost.
 - Community based exercise programmes with a target of 500 regular participants in which 350 adults and 497 young people took part in 2010-11.
 - Exceeded target for number of GP referrals (1,456 against target of 1,200). Achieved second highest performance in Wales relating to targets of National Exercise Referral Scheme.

43 The Council's leisure facilities play an important role in delivering its corporate health and wellbeing objectives. In 2009 the Council set out a proposed model of service provision, designed to increase overall levels of participation in sport and physical activity over a ten year period. The model recognised the ongoing need to invest in facilities to ensure they remain safe and attractive to customers. To deliver the proposed improvement the Council is developing a partnership model that will see services from its leisure centres and swimming pools delivered by an alternative provider from April 2012.

44 At the time of our review, the Council was making good progress with developing a new operating model for its leisure services. We came to this conclusion because:

- the Council is clear about the reasons for making changes to its provision of leisure services;
- decisions about the need for and shape of a new operating model have been made in an informed and considered way; and
- the project is being well managed, is on track and the emerging performance framework is clear.

Overall education performance is inconsistent and there is a relative decline in education performance in 2010-11

45 Overall, education standards in Bridgend are declining. When a range of contextual information is taken into account, the performance of pupils in Bridgend is above the Welsh average in Key Stage 1. However, they are now below average in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. Too many schools are in the bottom quartiles compared to similar schools elsewhere in Wales. In Key Stage 2, only 27 per cent of primary schools are in the top 50 per cent. In Key Stage 4, provisionally, only a third of secondary schools are in the top 50 per cent.

46 For three years until 2009, performance in Key Stages 3 and 4, based on entitlement to free school meals, had met or exceeded all of the Welsh Government benchmarks. This is no longer the case. In 2010 only one out of three benchmarks was reached.

47 Attendance in primary and secondary schools is at or close to the Welsh average. The number of permanent exclusions remains above the Welsh average but fixed term exclusions continue to fall. However, the average number of days lost to fixed term exclusions of six days or more has grown. Bridgend's performance on this indicator has declined from first in Wales to 20th out of the 22 councils in Wales.

The Council has done what it set out to do to help create and maintain the area as a safe, prosperous and pleasant place

- 48 This part of the report sets out how well the Council is improving the way in which it helps people to create and maintain the area as a safe, prosperous and pleasant place. It draws on evidence from our own reviews of the Council's performance against specific improvement objectives.
- 49 The Council has made progress in meeting its objective to build safe and inclusive communities. In collaboration with the police and other community safety partners, the Council has adopted public place orders in Bridgend, Porthcawl and Pencoed and carried out investigations to reduce sales of alcohol to under-18 year olds. This action has contributed to a reduction in alcohol-related crime in town centres. The Council has also facilitated several events in the Borough to improve community cohesion, though it is not easily able to measure what impact this has had.
- 50 The Council's work to regenerate areas of the Borough is helping support its Objective of promoting economic growth. In 2010-11 the council completed regeneration works in Porthcawl (locks common walkway) and in Bridgend and Maesteg town centres. Environmental improvement works have also been completed in some of the valley areas such as Caerau. The Council has also successfully helped improve skills of local people through training and work placements.
- 51 The Council is amongst the best councils in Wales in managing waste. It sends less waste proportionately to landfill than most other Councils. It recycles or reuses 32.3 per cent of the domestic waste it collects compared to the Welsh average of 26.3 per cent and this makes it the third best performing council in Wales. Levels of recycling at civic amenity sites in 2010-11 were lower than expected but an action plan is in place and improvements in 2011-12 are already being seen.
- 52 The Council has successfully created new, or improved existing, cycleways, coastal paths and rights of way in the Borough in 2010-11, and has promoted their use through events such as walking festivals. As a result, the Council is doing well to meet its Objective related to promoting the Borough's green spaces.

The Council is good at monitoring performance but needs to become more balanced in its evaluation and reporting of performance

- 53 Robust self-assessment is critical to the Council's ability to:
- recognise the progress it is making;
 - take remedial action when performance is not reaching anticipated levels; and
 - report its performance to local citizens in a balanced way.
- 54 To assess the progress it is making, the Council needs good performance information and robust monitoring arrangements. The Council has good performance information based on a broad range of accurately produced performance indicators that, combined with qualitative examples where performance indicators are not available or relevant, provides adequate coverage to enable the Council to make sound judgements on quality and performance. The most important means of reporting performance to local citizens is through the Council's Annual Report. The performance indicators set out in that report give a limited illustration of the progress made in that the Council does not always clearly illustrate what it is doing to improve when things are worse than last year or below target.
- 55 Performance information, including the Council's financial situation and performance on sickness absence, is reported quarterly via the Council's Quarterly Business Review process. This monitoring arrangement works well with targets, progress and any remedial action being challenged and monitored.
- 56 Within the Council's Annual Report, performance indicator data is compared against the Wales average. Comments against some (but not all) indicators show the Council's relative ranking amongst Wales's authorities. The Council used the same basis for its Annual Report in 2010-11 as in the previous year, so it did not consider the need for wider or more diverse comparative information other than with other councils in Wales. The Council recognises that its Annual Report needs to improve for next year and is already planning how it can do that. We will monitor how the revised report makes greater use of comparative data.
- 57 The Council's Annual Report is comprehensive in that it covers all the significant activities the Council has or has not achieved in the year. Where performance is less than expected, the report also tends to give excuses for the performance rather than setting out a clear picture of what it is doing to improve things. This practice understates the Council's responsiveness because it fails to demonstrate the many examples of remedial action that have been taken to address under-performance.
- 58 The Council's report lacks an overall assessment of the Council's progress and, together with its lack of balance and inconsistent use of comparisons, many citizens would find it difficult from reading this report to come to an accurate conclusion of the Council's progress in 2010-11. The report lacks a real critical appraisal of how the Council thinks it has done overall and what it is going to do differently as a result.

- 59 The Auditor General has determined that the authority has discharged all of its duties under the Local Government Measure 2009. However, the Council should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance; specifically in:
- explaining better whether it has achieved its improvement objectives;
 - better comparing its performance with other Welsh local authorities, and where applicable, to other public bodies;
 - presenting the information in its Annual Report in a more fair and balanced way; and
 - actively seeking feedback and comments from citizens and communities.

Appendices



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 the Auditor General to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges 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 informed by 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. This report also summarises the Auditor General's conclusions on the Council's self-assessment of its performance.

The Auditor General may also in some circumstances carry out special inspections (under section 21), in respect of which he will provide a report to the relevant authorities and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). The Auditor General will summarise audit and assessment reports in this published Annual Improvement Report (under section 24). This will also summarise any reports of special inspections.

An important ancillary activity for the Wales Audit Office 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

Useful information about Bridgend and Bridgend County Borough Council

Bridgend County Borough Council

The Council spends approximately £317 million per year (2010-11). This equates to about £2,400 per resident. In the same year, the Council also spent £30 million on capital items.

The average band D council tax in 2011-12 for Bridgend is £1,288.04 per year, representing an increase of 3.83 per cent. Eighty per cent of Bridgend's housing is in council tax bands A to D.

Source: Welsh Government – Stats Wales

The Council is made up of 54 elected members who represent the community and make decisions about priorities and use of resources. The political make-up of the Council is as follows:

- 27 Labour
- 10 Independent Annibynwyr
- 6 Conservatives
- 6 Liberal Democrats
- 2 Independents
- 2 Democratic Independent
- 1 Plaid Cymru

The Leader of the Council is Cllr Mel Nott; the other Cabinet members and their portfolios are:

- Cllr David Sage – Deputy Leader
- Cllr Alana Davies – Children and Young People
- Cllr Huw David – Resources
- Cllr Lyn Morgan – Wellbeing
- Cllr Phil White – Communities

Source: Bridgend County Borough Council Website

Bridgend County Borough Council's Chief Executive is Dr Jo Farrar and her management team comprises:

- Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Regulatory Services: Andrew Jolly
- Assistant Chief Executive, Performance: David MacGregor
- Corporate Director Wellbeing: Abigail Harris
- Corporate Director Children: Hilary Anthony
- Corporate Director Communities: Louise Fradd

Source: Bridgend County Borough Council Website

Other information

The Assembly Members for the area are:

- Carwyn Jones, Bridgend, Labour Party
- Janice Gregory, Ogmore, Labour Party

The Members of Parliament for the area are:

- Huw Irranca-Davies, Ogmore, Labour Party
- Madeleine Moon, Bridgend, Labour Party

For more information see the Council's own website at www.bridgend.gov.uk or contact the Council at Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend CF31 4WB.

Appendix 3

Bridgend County Borough Council's accounts and use of resources

The auditor appointed by the Auditor General issued the following auditor's report (on 30 September 2011).

Independent auditor's report to the Members of Bridgend County Borough Council

I have audited the accounting statements and related notes of Bridgend County Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2011 under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

Bridgend County Borough Council's accounting statements comprise the Movement in Reserves Statement, the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, and related notes.

The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2010-11 based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRSs).

Respective responsibilities of the responsible financial officer and the independent auditor

As explained more fully in the Statement of Responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts set out on [page 15](#), the responsible financial officer is responsible for the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, which gives a true and fair view.

My responsibility is to audit the accounting statements and related notes in accordance with applicable law and International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland). Those standards require me to comply with the Auditing Practices Board's Ethical Standards for Auditors.

Scope of the audit of the accounting statements

An audit involves obtaining evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the accounting statements and related notes sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the accounting statements and related notes are free from material misstatement, whether caused by fraud or error. This includes an assessment of: whether the accounting policies are appropriate to Bridgend County Borough Council's circumstances and have been consistently applied and adequately disclosed; the reasonableness of significant accounting estimates made by the responsible financial officer; and the overall presentation of the accounting statements and related notes.

In addition, I read all the financial and non-financial information in the Explanatory Foreword to identify material inconsistencies with the audited accounting statements and related notes. If I become aware of any apparent material misstatements or inconsistencies, I consider the implications for my report.

Opinion on the accounting statements of Bridgend County Borough Council

In my opinion the accounting statements and related notes:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of Bridgend County Borough Council as at 31 March 2011 and of its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2010-11.

Opinion on other matters

In my opinion, the information contained in the Explanatory Foreword for the financial year for which the accounting statements and related notes are prepared is consistent with the accounting statements and related notes.

Matters on which I report by exception

I have nothing to report in respect of the Governance Statement on which I report to you if, in my opinion, it does not reflect compliance with 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: a Framework' published by CIPFA/SOLACE in June 2007, or if the statement is misleading or inconsistent with other information I am aware of from my audit.

Certificate of completion of audit

I certify that I have completed the audit of the accounts of Bridgend County Borough Council in accordance with the requirements of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and the Code of Audit Practice issued by the Auditor General for Wales.

Anthony Barrett

Appointed Auditor
Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff
CF11 9LJ

30 September 2011

Appendix 4 Bridgend County Borough Council's improvement objectives and self-assessment

Bridgend County Borough Council's improvement objectives

The Council is required by the Welsh Government to make plans to improve its functions and the services it provides. Each year it must publish these plans along with specific 'improvement objectives' that set out the key things that the Council intends to do to improve. The Council must do this as soon as possible after 1 April each year.

The Council published its improvement objectives in its Corporate Plan 2010-2013 which can be found on the Council website at www.bridgend.gov.uk.

Improvement Objectives for 2010-11	Revised Improvement Objectives for 2011-2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to build safe and inclusive communities; • to develop sustainable housing solutions for those who are homeless or in need of affordable housing, and to improve private sector housing conditions; • to support vulnerable adults to live independently in their communities, promoting choice, empowerment, dignity and respect; • to provide services that meet the different needs of children and young people living in the Borough; • to develop learning communities that help children and young people achieve better outcomes; • to secure greater educational inclusion, so that all young people, including the disadvantaged and vulnerable and those with additional learning needs, benefit from earlier intervention and more effective local support; • to improve physical and emotional wellbeing by promoting active lifestyles, participation and learning; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to build safe and inclusive communities supported by an effective physical infrastructure; • to develop and support sustainable and affordable housing solutions for those who are homeless or in need; • to implement better integrated health and social care services to support independence, choice, empowerment, dignity and respect; • to work in collaboration with partners to combat poverty and provide children with the best start in life; • to help all children and young people to achieve higher standards of attainment by accessing high quality learning opportunities; • to improve physical and emotional wellbeing by promoting active lifestyles, participation and learning; • to support our disadvantaged communities by promoting economic growth, physical renewal and sustainability;

Improvement Objectives for 2010-11	Revised Improvement Objectives for 2011-2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to support our disadvantaged communities by promoting economic growth and sustainability; • to continue to promote Bridgend and its green spaces as a great place to live and enjoy; • to improve the way we work to ensure effective and efficient use of our financial, technological, physical and human assets; and • to ensure that the Authority's moral and statutory duties in respect of equalities and human rights legislation are met. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to manage and promote the natural and historical environment; and • to improve the way we work to ensure effective and efficient use of our financial, technological, physical and human assets.

Bridgend County Borough Council's self-assessment of performance

The Council's self-assessment of its performance, the Annual Report 2010-2011 can be found on the Council's website at:

<http://www.bridgend.gov.uk/web/groups/public/documents/services/015180.hcsp>

Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@wao.gov.uk

Website: www.wao.gov.uk

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
24 Heol y Gadeirlan
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn Testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: info@wao.gov.uk

Gwefan: www.wao.gov.uk