



WALES **AUDIT** OFFICE
SWYDDFA **ARCHWILIO** CYMRU



Annual Improvement Report including the Corporate Assessment 2014

Ceredigion County Council

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Summary report, recommendations and proposals for improvement

The Council benefits from strong and clear leadership and, having carried out an internal restructure, is demonstrating a corporate performance culture which has good potential to drive the necessary improvement in services and outcomes for its citizens

1 Each year, the Auditor General must report on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement in delivering their services. This report sets out the findings of the work undertaken on behalf of the Auditor General by the staff of the Wales Audit Office and Grant Thornton, with help from Welsh inspectorates, Estyn (for education), the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW), and the Welsh Language Commissioner. We have brought together a picture of what Ceredigion County Council (the Council) is trying to achieve, how it is going about it, and the progress it has made since the Auditor General published his last annual improvement report. The report also draws on the Council's own self-assessment. Finally, taking all this into account, the report records the Auditor General's conclusion on whether the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15.

2 The Auditor General has concluded that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15. This judgement reflects the conclusion of his corporate assessment, that **the Council benefits from strong and clear leadership and, having carried out an**

internal restructure, is demonstrating a corporate performance culture which has good potential to drive the necessary improvement in services and outcomes for its citizens.

3 We came to this conclusion because:

- Strong and clear leadership is driving a corporate and collaborative approach focussed upon improving service outcomes for citizens, although engagement with citizens is less than effective.
- The Council has a robust and effective governance model with clear lines of accountability in which scrutiny and challenge are developing well.
- The Council manages its resources well to support improved services for citizens although it faces difficult decisions if it is to balance its budget over the medium term:
 - strong corporate financial planning and management arrangements have enabled the Council to set a balanced budget for 2014-15 and have confidence that it will achieve the corporate savings necessary to deliver it;
 - the Council is considering how it will change service delivery in order to achieve the significant cost reductions necessary over the next three years, and better engage with service users and citizens to inform its decisions;

- the Council manages its assets well and the Human Resource function is well placed to deliver an efficient and effective role in meeting the needs of services, and
- the Council's arrangements and use of technology and information are supporting improved services for citizens.
- The Council has improved arrangements in place to manage delivery of efficiencies and positive outcomes for citizens through partnership and collaboration.
- The Council is better managing its improvement programme, and embedding a performance culture through implementing a new corporate performance management framework:
 - the Council has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure but could do more to act in accordance with Welsh Government guidance;
 - performance management arrangements are developing, but need more time to develop to a model that manages performance and drives real change in service outcomes;
 - the Council's public reporting of performance is generally fair and balanced but does not yet provide citizens with a clear evaluation of the progress the Council is making towards achieving its improvement objectives and the impact of its improvement activities on service users and citizens, and
- the Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources.
- The Council has significantly improved its processes to enable it to plan and monitor its activity in relation to its improvement agenda but progress towards achieving its planned outcomes remains variable:
 - a rolling programme of energy reduction schemes has not resulted in a corresponding reduction in the Council's CO₂ emissions although revised plans are in place to improve outcomes over the next year;
 - the Council has maintained its strong focus on waste reduction, enabling it to meet national targets;
 - the Council's education service has been assessed as the best in Wales;
 - the Council's modernisation of its support for vulnerable people is making progress, examples of good practice are offset by key risks which could affect the pace of change; and
 - the Council has taken positive steps to formalise responsibility for the Welsh language within the Council but did not achieve all its action plan targets during 2012-13.

Recommendations and proposals for improvement

- 4 We have made no statutory recommendations during previous work this year and we make none in this report. 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 following proposal for improvement stems from our corporate assessment work in February 2014.

The Council should develop a strategic plan that sets out a clear vision for the future delivery of its services within the financial constraints it faces over the medium term. This plan should consider and set out, with a clear timeframe, how the Council:

- intends to meet its service priorities, and achieve the cost reductions/improved income streams necessary over the medium term;
- will consult and engage with its citizens to inform decision-making in relation to service change proposals;
- will evaluate and decide which business operating models provide the best options for delivering future services, incorporating assessment of the social and community risks of proposed spending cuts;
- will ensure timely and robust scrutiny and other appropriate governance arrangements are put in place to manage and deliver change; and
- post change, will monitor and scrutinise financial and service performance to ensure that cost reductions are being realised and agreed service standards and outcomes are being achieved.

Detailed report

Introduction

- 5 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 in delivering their services. **Appendix 1** provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties under the Measure. This report sets out the findings of the work undertaken on behalf of the Auditor General by the staff of the Wales Audit Office and Grant Thornton, with help from Welsh inspectorates, Estyn (for education), the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW), and the Welsh Language Commissioner. We have brought together a picture of what the Council is trying to achieve, how it is going about it, and the progress it has made since the Auditor General published his last annual improvement report. The report also draws on the Council's own self-assessment. Finally, taking all this into account, the report records the Auditor General's conclusion on whether the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15.
- 6 In 2013-14, staff of the Wales Audit Office began a four-year cycle of corporate assessments of improvement authorities in Wales. This means that, in addition to an annual programme of improvement studies and audits of councils' approaches to improvement planning and reporting, each authority will receive an in-depth corporate assessment once during a four-year period. In the intervening years, we will keep track of developments through progress updates.
- 7 We undertook the corporate assessment in the Council during February 2014. This Annual Improvement Report incorporates the Corporate Assessment findings, providing a more comprehensive overview than would otherwise be the case of the Council's corporate and governance arrangements. Whilst the corporate assessment does not aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of the performance of all of the Council's services, it reports on the Council's track record of performance and outcomes as well as the key arrangements that are necessary to underpin improvements in services and functions.
- 8 Our fieldwork for the corporate assessment focused on the extent to which arrangements are contributing to delivering improved service performance and outcomes for citizens. The corporate assessment sought to answer the following question:
- **'Is the Council capable of delivering its priorities and improved outcomes for citizens?'**
- 9 The corporate assessment covers the following:
- **Vision and strategic direction:**
'Does the Council's vision and strategic direction support improvement?'
 - **Governance and accountability:**
'Do the Council's governance and accountability arrangements support robust and effective decision making?'

- **Use of resources:**

‘Is the Council managing its resources effectively to deliver its planned improvements in performance and outcomes?’

- **Collaboration and partnerships:**

‘Are the Council’s collaboration and partnership arrangements working effectively to deliver improved performance and outcomes?’

- **Managing improvement:**

‘Is the Council effectively managing its improvement programme?’

- **Performance and outcomes:**

‘Is the Council making progress on achieving its planned improvements in performance and outcomes?’

- make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
- conduct a special inspection and publish a report and make recommendations; and
- recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.

12 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.

10 The conclusions in this report are based on the findings of our corporate assessment and on cumulative and shared knowledge and the findings of prioritised work undertaken this year.

11 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:

- 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;

Strong and clear leadership is driving a corporate and collaborative approach focussed upon improving service outcomes for citizens, although engagement with citizens is less than effective

- 13 The links between the Council's strategic and service plans ensure that the Council communicates its vision clearly and effectively to its citizens and major stakeholders. A new Single Integrated Plan has been developed that outlines the Local Service Board's vision based on shared evidence from a single needs assessment. There is excellent awareness of the Single Integrated Plan amongst members, senior officers and partners. The Wales Audit Office's citizen survey¹ indicated that a high percentage (64 to 87 per cent) of the public agree that the Council's improvement priorities are appropriate areas to prioritise.
- 14 Transformational change has led to senior officers having a significantly better understanding of corporate priorities, promoting better visibility and subsequently better collaboration between services. The clear and robust accountability framework in the Learning Service is sector-leading practice. This model has been further developed and is being embedded across the Council. This is delivering better practice throughout the organisation.
- 15 There is a clear link from the Council's strategic objectives, down through the service business plans, and into the appraisal system to an individual's personal objectives. At the time of the review around 70 per cent of all staff had individual objectives set, however this masks some services where as few as 28 per cent of staff have set objectives. The Council recognises that it needs to resolve this issue and Heads of Service are driving this forward to ensure all Council staff benefit from having personal objectives and robust assessments of performance.
- 16 The Council has taken a much more rigorous approach to addressing the proposals for improvement we have identified previously. The Council now clearly demonstrates an open learning culture, seeking constructive comment at every opportunity.
- 17 The Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny and officers all demonstrate a core team ethos – *Team Ceredigion*. Sharing a common vision for improved services, all are aware of and committed to achieving appropriate aspirational targets to deliver the best services they can and improve outcomes for the citizens of Ceredigion.
- 18 There are a range of methods in place to cascade information down through the Council, but bottom-up communication is weaker and is an area for further development. The Council engages well with partners and the Welsh Government and it communicates well with stakeholders, although less well with citizens.
- 19 The Council is committed to public engagement and communicates frequently. For example, the Council regularly conducts surveys of citizens' views using an established Citizens Panel. These surveys are undertaken, and the results analysed by an external partner organisation. However, there is evidence that the Council's citizens panel is not representative of the population of the county as a whole. This, linked with sometimes misleading interpretation of

¹ Wales Audit Office Online Citizen Survey 14 February – 30 April 2014 – 301 responses

the panel's survey results, weakens the value of this engagement. For example, our citizen survey showed that 84 per cent of respondents had not seen the Single Integrated Plan. Similar percentages of citizens indicated that they had not seen the Corporate Strategy or the Improvement Plan. This was in direct contrast to the citizen panel summary which implied that around 65 to 70 per cent of the citizen panel had seen these documents. The Council recognises these weaknesses and is looking at reviewing the composition of the citizens panel and challenging the analysis of its survey findings going forward.

- 20 Whilst the Council has held a number of engagement activities out in the community, such as those associated with the budget process, a lack of timely notifications contributed to relatively low levels of attendance by citizens. The Council used these meetings to communicate its financial position and approach to budget setting, although again it is unclear how any issues raised by citizens have been considered and responded to. Similarly, the Council consulted stakeholders and citizens about its priorities, but its Improvement Plan does not make clear what the outcomes of the consultation were, or their influence on the Plan.

The Council has a robust and effective governance model with clear lines of accountability in which scrutiny and challenge are developing well

- 21 Senior Officer and Member roles and responsibilities are clearly described and detailed in the Council's constitution and supporting documents. The constitution is clear about the behaviour expected of elected members and officers. This expectation is supported by an active Ethics and Standards committee and by guidance documents and processes. Members and Officers behave in accordance with the respective codes of conduct; both feel empowered by their roles and understand the relevant responsibilities associated with each function. This approach is supported further by the sense of pride in Ceredigion both as an area and as a Council.
- 22 The Council's governance structures, following the restructure, have embedded well. There is clarity over the role and function of each group and communication between groups is clear and transparent. The Council has achieved, in a short time, a radically improved culture with a real corporate feel as well as a true sense of accountability. The Council's decision making is now much clearer and decisions are being taken with a full range of information available. However, the record of meetings and the decisions taken could be strengthened and the Council is still working on publishing its delegated decision registers.
- 23 Scrutiny and challenge are developing well, an increased focus on pre-decision scrutiny is aiding robust decision making and consensus on the way forward. Recently introduced task and finish groups and work streams are leading to scrutiny members becoming better informed about the subjects under consideration. Encouraged by the Council Leader, Cabinet meetings provide a further opportunity for scrutiny and challenge as scrutiny members are able to ask questions of both the leadership team and cabinet members.
- 24 The links between scrutiny committees and strategic partnerships have been established and minimum arrangements for annual scrutiny of partnership plans have been mandated. We identified a number of examples of partnership activity being subject to effective Council scrutiny, although the transparency and beneficial impact of this would be improved were this channelled through the formal scrutiny work programme.

The Council manages its resources well to support improved services for citizens although it faces difficult decisions if it is to balance its budget over the medium term

Strong corporate financial planning and management arrangements have enabled the Council to set a balanced budget for 2014-15 and have confidence that it will achieve the corporate savings necessary to deliver it

- 25 Councils are managing their finances in challenging economic circumstances and against a backdrop of increasing demand for services. Cost pressures have to be managed alongside substantial service demand pressures relating to, for example, the effect on services of an ageing population.
- 26 The Council has clear policies, strong financial controls and a capable finance team in place to support the management of its finances. There are appropriate and well-established arrangements for setting and managing budgets that have served the Council well. We found spend against revenue budget to be broadly in line with the revenue budget set over the last five financial years.
- 27 However, growing service demands are increasingly difficult to manage, in particular within Adult Social Care services. In 2012-13, the Adult Social Care services budget overspent by some £1.6 million. The Council responded, recognising the pressures on the service, and increased the budget for 2013-14 by £2 million. Despite this additional funding, once again these services overspent by £283,000 in overall

terms during 2013-14. Although staff costs in Residential Homes and Adult Teams were underspent, increased provision of Domiciliary Care and Direct Payments to older people led to significant overspending of some £0.5 million in these areas. There were further overspends in relation to Learning Disabilities and Mental Health services. Furthermore, the Council utilised one-off funding streams in 2013-14 that will not be recurring in the 2014-15 budget amounting to £400,000. Therefore, the true underlying overspend is some £683,000. This is partly due to delays in the service achieving outstanding efficiency savings targets.

- 28 Recognising that the costs of the current model of social services provision are unsustainable, the Council is working to modernise its services to older people. Although the Council considers that it is making good progress, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) has identified a number of areas of risk that could affect the pace of the Council's progress in this key area of activity.
- 29 The Council's financial management arrangements must also be capable of dealing with less predictable cost pressures. For example, un-budgeted expenditure during 2013-14 relating to the storm events experienced within the County during January and February 2014 led to an overspend of £634,000 at the year-end. This overspend was funded from savings made elsewhere within the Council's budget.

- 30 The overall budget performance for 2013-14 was £1.084 million better than anticipated by the Council, after allowing for net transfers from earmarked reserves. As a result the General Fund Balance reduced by only £77,000 compared to the budget which anticipated a reduction of £1.156 million. This was achieved due to an additional £1.2 million of Council Tax being chargeable and credited to the Council's accounts than was budgeted.
- 31 Having a prudent level of reserves is a key element of financial stability. The Council's policy is to maintain its General Fund Balance within a target range of between three per cent and five per cent of its revenue budget requirement. Again, over the past five financial years, the Council has maintained a relatively constant general fund balance within its target range whilst achieving a breakeven position annually. As at 31 March 2014 the overall balance on the General Fund was £5.7 million equating to 4.4 per cent of the revenue budget, and towards the upper end of the Council's target range.
- 32 Whilst the Council has a good track record of identifying and achieving the savings it needs to deliver a balanced budget, the current austerity measures mean that the scale of cost reductions necessary over the short and medium term will be very challenging indeed.
- 33 The final settlement announcement in October 2013, a 4.6 per cent decrease in the Aggregate External Finance (AEF) allocated by the Welsh Government, was far worse than anticipated by the Council, meaning that work needed to be accelerated in order to set a balanced budget for 2014-15. A thorough and corporate approach was undertaken by officers and members to protect services and fund priorities, while identifying the necessary corporate savings/ additional income of £9.4 million which, together with an agreed five per cent rise in Council Tax and planned utilisation of £1.4 million of general reserves, enabled the Council to set a balanced budget for 2014-15. The Council sought to engage citizens and communities with its budget plans through a series of workshops which were undertaken in the Council's six largest towns although, as reported earlier, these were not entirely successful in communicating the financial challenge faced by the Council or in engaging citizens with the service change/ cost reduction agenda.
- 34 The Council has identified and allocated additional resources to support the delivery of its 2014-15 savings plan, and has a high degree of confidence that it will deliver the targeted £9.4 million savings. We found that cabinet members were fully briefed in relation to the implementation of the savings plan although, at the time we conducted our fieldwork, scrutiny members were less well informed and engaged.

The Council is considering how it will change service delivery in order to achieve the significant cost reductions necessary over the next three years, and better engage with service users and citizens to inform its decisions

- 35 Going forward, the austerity measures show no signs of easing. The 2014-15 Mid Term Financial Strategy was updated and approved by the Council in February 2014. The plan identifies significant financial challenges over the next few years due to further anticipated reductions in funding from the Welsh Government. The Council currently forecasts a cumulative budget funding gap of some £22 million over the next three financial years, with £11 million of these savings needed to set a balanced budget for 2015-16. To date the Council has concentrated on making efficiency savings, by delivering more for less. However, it recognises that this approach is not sustainable given the scale of the financial challenge it faces.
- 36 The Council is currently reviewing its services, considering whether these can and should be maintained, reduced or removed; together with considering alternative options for service delivery either jointly with other partners including community groups, or by outsourcing service delivery to the private or voluntary sector. The Council recognises that it needs to work harder to engage service users and citizens in a two-way dialogue and demonstrate that their views are heard. A public consultation questionnaire is currently 'live' seeking citizens' views as to how, given the financial

constraints faced by the Council, they feel the services that they value most should be delivered in future. In September 2014, the Council plans to share citizens' responses with councillors to inform the difficult decisions they will need to take in planning a way forward. Further public consultation will take place in relation to any specific service change proposals.

- 37 Given that the Council has identified the need to plan and deliver significant cost reductions through service transformation, and within a relatively short timeframe, we feel it is appropriate that the Council review its budget/savings plan monitoring and reporting arrangements to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, and support robust officer and member scrutiny. The Council also needs to ensure that it has robust arrangements to evaluate the impact of any proposed service changes in relation to its identified improvement priorities and targeted outcomes for its citizens

The Council manages its assets well and the Human Resource function is well placed to deliver an efficient and effective role in meeting the needs of services

- 38 The Council has an up-to-date Asset Management Plan and is developing Service Asset Management Plans in conjunction with its Heads of Service. The Council's approach to asset management is cross-cutting and this is supported by its new performance management arrangements. Asset management is an integral part of the Council's Mid Term Financial Strategy, rationalising, re-modelling and co-locating services.

- 39 The Council has continued to develop its building rationalisation programme and has co-located some of its services. In addition, a 'one stop shop' already in place in Canolfan Rheidol has been replicated in County Hall, Aberaeron and in Cardigan in order to improve customer access.
- 40 The Council's Transformation Programme and the restructure of the Human Resource (HR) function have enabled HR to deliver its roles more efficiently to meet the needs of the services. HR accountability is clear and the HR function has a clear purpose and vision for delivering its services.
- 41 The Council has not identified any specific staff-related savings for 2015-16. The Council has identified areas of review but further work is needed to understand the changes to be made and the number of people that will be affected. However, some opportunities to support budget savings can be realised through the better co-ordination of training activities by establishing a corporate training group, the pooling of training budgets and raising awareness of the available training activity.

The Council's arrangements and use of technology and information are supporting improved services for citizens

- 42 The Council's arrangements and use of technology and information are supporting improved services for citizens. The Council has a clear technology and information strategy which links well to national drivers as well as the Council's own improvement agenda.

- 43 The Council has a good track record of delivering IT projects, with sound project management. The Council also has a good approach to information management with appropriate security in place. Responding well to proposals for improvement made in our previous reports the Council has strengthened information security by introducing controls on the use of removable media, issuing encrypted memory sticks and controlling the use of USB ports on its computers. The Council's Senior Information Risk Owner is kept well informed about information issues and is, following training, able to make clear and objective decisions in relation to the risks posed to the Council's information asset.
- 44 The Council demonstrates a number of examples of promising practice that could have more widespread application within the public sector, for example, the implementation and use of electronic document management and the use of technology and information in dealing with emergency situations including the recent floods and high tides.
- 45 The Council has a relatively small technology team; as such there are some concerns about the Council's capacity to deliver its technology and information plans. However, the development of new performance measures for the service will help it monitor and manage its performance.

The Council has improved arrangements in place to manage delivery of efficiencies and positive outcomes for citizens through partnership and collaboration

- 46 The Council has a long history of, and continued commitment to, delivering services to citizens in partnership and collaboration with other councils and service provider partners. Although the recommendations of the Williams Commission report have yet to be adopted nationally, the Council has a clear view on the future of partnership and collaborative arrangements. The Council continues to work in collaboration with a range of partners and other councils to the benefit of the people of Ceredigion.
- 47 The Local Service Board is chaired by the Leader of the Council and comprises 12 members. Whilst there is consensus that the right people are in place to make decisions and take action, some partners are perceived to be less engaged than they should be, often sending different representatives to Board meetings.
- 48 The Council carried out a review and assessment of strategic partnerships and regional collaborations in 2013. The review looked at the governance arrangements, financial management, performance management and impact of existing partnerships and collaborations. As a result of the review a number of smaller partnerships were ended. The Council is developing an approach to ensure that any new collaborative projects are supported by a business case and are subject to appropriate scrutiny.
- 49 There are new arrangements for partnership support and co-ordination which are good. Officers provide partnership support as part of a broader, more operational role and
- meet regularly to ensure that links are made across the different strategic partnerships.
- 50 The Council has a number of joint working arrangements, such as the Central Wales Infrastructure Collaboration Project, Shared Legal Services and the Central Wales Waste Partnership which it has continued to foster and grow producing tangible benefits for the Council such as efficiency savings and cost reductions. The Council could do more to explain the impact that some of these partnerships and joint working arrangements are intended to deliver and the impact that this will have for citizens.
- 51 There are also partnership and collaboration projects that have, and continue to deliver positive outcomes for citizens. For example, the Council worked effectively with a range of statutory, voluntary and third-sector partners in response to severe adverse weather in January and February 2014. The Council worked collaboratively across the county to ensure citizens were safe, secure and receiving essential services in particular to its young and older, more vulnerable citizens.
- 52 The Council works with community and third-sector partners to ensure residents of Ceredigion are given adequate mobility support to lead active and fulfilling lives. It works collaboratively with community councils and the Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO) to ensure transport is available for groups active within Ceredigion and residents with mobility problems.

The Council is better managing its improvement programme, and embedding a performance culture through implementing a new corporate performance management framework

53 The Council's new improvement planning arrangements are supporting robust and effective decision making and its improvement plans reflect the Council's overarching visions and goals. The Council considers the financial impact of its improvement plans well, the Medium Term Financial Strategy is well linked to the goals and there is a clear linkage between the Single Integrated Plan, the Council's corporate strategy and improvement plan and the activity services are undertaking to deliver them.

The Council has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure but could do more to act in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

54 The Council's Improvement Plan for 2013-2014 set the Council's improvement objectives in context, but there remained scope to clarify the relationships between the Improvement Plan and the Council's other strategic documents and the priorities they describe.

55 For each improvement objective, the Improvement Plan included a short section setting the scene. However, better use could have been made of quantitative and qualitative data to help the reader to appreciate why the improvement objective is important. For example, is it an area of high importance to local communities or is it an area where the Council is failing to meet its aspirations or simply wants to further improve already good performance?

56 Also the Council was not clear or consistent enough in describing its ambition. Whilst measures of success were defined for all objectives, some lacked target information, which makes it difficult for the Council and its stakeholders to assess whether or not these improvement objectives are being achieved. For example, the improvement objective relating to support for older people includes one measure of success which is to increase the percentage of people accessing community support. The level of increase planned for was not stated, leaving the reader uncertain about what the Council intended to achieve.

57 The 2013-2014 Improvement Plan was published at the end of May 2013 through Council meeting papers and more widely on 14 June 2013 when it was placed on the Council's website. The Plan was produced in both English and Welsh and met the Council's Welsh Language Scheme. Hard copies of the Plan were made available at key sites around the county.

58 Subsequently, the Council published its 2014-2015 Improvement Plan on 26 June 2014. We had anticipated that the Council would address the weaknesses noted above in the course of its preparation. However, having conducted our audit of this year's plan many of the issues identified last year remain, in particular the plan still lacks clarity in relation to the Council's ambition, continuing to make it difficult to assess the scale of improvement or change the Council intends to make and over what timescale.

Performance management arrangements are developing, but need more time to develop to a model that manages performance and drives real change in service outcomes

- 59 Performance management arrangements are developing, but need more time to turn from performance measurement to a model that manages performance and drives real change in service outcomes, although there are already some examples where this has occurred, such as stability of placements of certain groups of looked after children and care for older people in specific residential homes. The Council has significantly strengthened the level of challenge it makes in relation to performance. There is the potential for the Council to make this process even more robust by actively including scrutiny members. This would provide a wider breadth of challenge, better inform scrutiny members and potentially lead to more informed scrutiny forward work programmes.
- 60 In the past Heads of Service had not fully understood the importance of the Performance Framework. However, following the restructure with improved clarity over accountabilities and the introduction of the corporate performance management framework, they are now far more constructively engaged in the process. The use of a standard template supports consistency. This template will continue to evolve with the potential to take on examples of good practice from other councils such as clearer thinking about the impact of risks and issues affecting current actions as well as those that follow, bringing further benefit.
- 61 The Council is also developing its self-evaluation approach. Initially the Council is evaluating its services in terms of their ability to deliver improvement. This needs to be taken further to evaluate the impact the Council is having on outcomes for service users. The Council is using a two-dimensional model, current performance and an assessment of the preparedness for further improvement. This process is in its early days with only one annual cycle being completed; however, initial views on this process indicate that the Council needs a more robust evidenced based assessment and a more objective evaluation of this information.
- 62 Whilst performance management of services is rapidly improving, performance management of the administrative functions of the Council are less well developed. For example, in ICT and Human Resources (HR). Here there are a limited range of measures and few targets making it difficult to evaluate performance, although both functions are planning to review this over the next few months.
- 63 Recognising a weakness in being able to evaluate the performance of its partnerships the Council developed a new performance management framework specifically for partnerships, which was approved by the Local Service Board in January 2014. This framework contains a broad range of measures, mechanisms to report different levels of detail at different levels of the partnership, protocols for escalating

issues and clear and regular reporting arrangements.

- 64 Risk management arrangements continue to strengthen, with active roles taken by Heads of Service, Leadership Group, Cabinet and Audit Committee. These various groups all work together to understand and manage risk, enabling risk issues to focus forward work plans for both scrutiny and cabinet.

The Council's public reporting of performance is generally fair and balanced but does not yet provide citizens with a clear evaluation of the progress the Council is making towards achieving its improvement objectives and the impact of its improvement activities on service users and citizens

- 65 The Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure by publishing an assessment of its performance during 2012-13 in its *Improvement Plan – Performance 2012-13* before 31 October 2013. The performance report assesses the Council's performance in the preceding financial year (2012-13) and sets out how the Council has sought to discharge its duties under the Measure. The performance report details the Council's activity aimed at achieving its improvement objectives and expresses its performance in a generally fair and balanced way. The performance report includes brief reference and contact information for citizens who want to provide feedback or make comments on the Council's performance, although this could be enhanced and made more prominent.

- 66 The performance report includes details of performance and comparisons as measured by the national statutory performance indicators and also references the ways in which the Council has sought to collaborate. However, the breadth and quality of analysis of performance measures, qualitative information and comparative data contained within the report are too limited. Overall, it does not provide citizens with a clear evaluation of the progress the Council is making towards achieving its improvement objectives and the impact of its improvement activities on service users and citizens.

- 67 Neither does the performance report provide sufficient information on the benefits of collaborative activity to date. This should include what has been delivered and whether intended outcomes are being achieved. This type of information would enable the Council to measure, evaluate and report more transparently on the actual benefits achieved through collaborative activities.

- 68 An important test of the Council's new performance management and self-evaluation arrangements will be the quality of its public performance reporting this year. We will review this document, *Improvement Plan – Performance 2013-14*, following its publication in October 2014.

The Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources

- 69 The auditor appointed by the Auditor General issued his unqualified audit opinion on the Council's accounting statements on 25 September 2013, confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. [Appendix 3](#) gives more detail.

The Council has significantly improved its processes to enable it to plan and monitor its activity in relation to its improvement agenda but progress towards achieving its planned outcomes remains variable

A rolling programme of energy reduction schemes has not resulted in a corresponding reduction in the Council's CO₂ emissions although revised plans are in place to improve outcomes over the next year

- 70 The Council has completed a rolling programme of energy reduction schemes. However, during 2012-13 the actual CO₂ emissions reported by the Council were 8.5 per cent higher than those reported in the prior year. The Council has minimised the impact of this increase by also reporting the degree day adjusted figures, which show that during 2012-13 the Council reduced carbon emissions by 0.4 per cent.
- 71 A new Carbon Management Plan 2012-13 – 2016-17 has been completed and the narrative within the Council's *Improvement Plan – Performance 2012-13* confirms that this has helped the Council to review the current position and raise awareness of reducing carbon emissions within the various service lines of the Council. The Council does not explain that the Welsh Government has set a target reduction of three per cent per annum and that they failed to achieve this target.
- 72 Despite the difficulties the Council now has a clear understanding of the story behind its performance. In response to not achieving improved performance in this area, it has convened a task and finish group to reduce electric costs, generate income using biomass and photo voltaic panels and reduce carbon emissions. The

Council has a clear focus on how it plans to improve performance in this area and has sound arrangements in place to deliver improvement. We will continue to monitor progress and review performance figures to assess impact next year.

The Council has maintained its strong focus on waste reduction, enabling it to meet national targets

- 73 The Council's waste-related performance in 2012-13 was good, meeting the targets set by the Welsh Government. The proportion of municipal waste sent to landfill reduced in line with the national average; the Council remained third out of 22 councils for a second year. The proportion of municipal waste collected for reuse and/or recycled remained above the Welsh average; the Council's ranking slipped to eighth out of 22. In addition to the environmental benefits achieved, exceeding the national targets for waste ensured that the Council avoided potential financial penalties.
- 74 In November 2012 the Council introduced a food waste collection alongside its kerbside recycling resulting in organic waste being diverted from landfill. This waste is treated through anaerobic digestion and the output from this is then used to generate electricity and compost. This along with other recycling initiatives adopted by the Council, has ensured that the Council has met the targets for preparation of waste for recycling.

75 The Council is also working in partnership with other councils and is currently looking at short to medium-term solutions to incinerate residual non-recyclable waste whilst the regional partnership develops an approach to longer-term solutions.

The Council's education service has been assessed as the best in Wales

76 Estyn, the schools inspectorate in Wales, has assessed both the Council's current performance and their capacity to improve as excellent, providing the Council with the best outcome from an Estyn inspection in Wales during the current round of inspections.

77 Estyn judged the Council's current performance as excellent because:

- in 2013, the good standards in Ceredigion schools placed the Council in the top five authorities in Wales for all key stages for the main performance indicators;
- attendance rates in primary and secondary schools are the best in Wales;
- every pupil that left school in the last three years had at least one recognised qualification;
- the Council has very robust and efficient processes to support, challenge and intervene in its schools;
- of the excellent use of data throughout the Council, and the contribution it makes to the Council's effective monitoring, challenge and intervention in schools;

- of the effective involvement of all primary teachers in annual moderation activities and authority-wide moderation of pupils' work;
- of the highly successful way the Council meets pupils' additional learning needs;
- of the very effective way the Council promotes social inclusion and wellbeing; and
- of the joined-up approach between services in providing support and challenge to schools to improve behaviour and attendance.

78 Estyn judged the Council's capacity to improve as excellent because:

- strategic leadership of the Council is strong, both politically and corporately;
- senior officers have a very good understanding of corporate priorities and as a result there is very effective collaboration between services;
- the Council's strategic plans for education closely reflect the priorities of the Single Integrated Plan, Corporate Strategy and Improvement Plan, with strong and consistent lines of accountability to effective operational plans at all levels;
- self-evaluation is strongly embedded in the culture of the Learning Service and, increasingly, in the Council as a whole;
- the clear and robust accountability framework in the Learning Services is sector leading practice; and

- the impact of strategic partnership work on improving outcomes and provision for learners is outstanding.

The Council's modernisation of its support for vulnerable people is making progress, examples of good practice are offset by key risks which could affect the pace of change

- 79 The CSSIW published its *Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2012-13* in October 2013 and this is available on its website: www.cssiw.org.uk. The CSSIW's findings are summarised in paragraphs 80 to 89 below.
- 80 Powys County Council and Ceredigion County Council have agreed that they will not share a Director of Social Services. Instead, certain service areas will be progressed collectively, for example, collaboration in areas of commissioning and workforce development. This decision will enable the Council to move forward after a period of uncertainty.
- 81 The Council has been completing a programme of corporate transformation. This has resulted in the reduction of departments and senior managers with the result there is now one strategic director and four heads of service in the Care, Protection and Lifestyle service. The Heads of Service have assumed operational responsibility for their respective service areas.
- 82 Although there have been areas of progress and innovation, the Council faces significant budget pressures. It must increase the pace of change, particularly in relation to strategic commissioning, if it is to be able to respond to future demands and provide sustainable services. The capacity to do this appears to be limited which is a cause of concern.
- 83 Significant improvements in the reviewing of older people's care and support have been achieved. The development of a robust and effective adult protection committee achieved good commitment from partner agencies and has strengthened the Council's adult safeguarding functions. Ongoing partnership working with health and the Mid and West Wales collaboration, together with the joint work streams with Powys County Council are all important to the future development of adult services.
- 84 Within Children's Services progress has been made in responding to the recommendations of recent inspections, despite the absence of the head of service during the year. There is evidence of developments in relation to working with families and improvement in the recruitment of staff. A clearer sense of direction for the service is emerging.
- 85 Partnership working within the Mid and West Wales collaboration continues to provide opportunities to ensure the stability and sustainability of service provision to children and families.

86 In response to last year's areas of development the Council has made some progress in both adults and children's services. Several areas remain ongoing and are reflected again in this year's report. Progress has been made in the reviewing of people's needs in adult teams, the timeliness and consistency in quality of initial and core assessments for children and the timeliness of children-in-need reviews. The development of suitable nursing provision for people with dementia, and the capacity of both the reablement and domiciliary care services, continue to require attention.

87 The CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- The challenge overseeing and co-ordinating a variety of partnership arrangements across different boundaries, and ensuring this provides a coherent plan going forward. It is also important that collaboration does not stall the need for the council to make progress in addressing immediate priorities.
- Commissioning services to meet future needs and the capacity to take this forward.
- Financial resilience in the face of significant budget pressures across both health and social care.

88 CSSIW has identified the following areas of good practice:

- The COASTAL project for people with disabilities, in particular learning disability or mental health problems.

- Family support services. These play an important role and are producing good outcomes for children and families.

89 The modernisation of services for older people is progressing across the county. The Council recognises the need to progress its commissioning strategies and is engaged in delivering those strategies with its partners in health and the mid and west wales collaboration.

The Council has taken positive steps to formalise responsibility for the Welsh language within the Council but did not achieve all its action plan targets during 2012-13

90 The role of the Welsh Language Commissioner was created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. It is expected that new powers to impose standards on organisations will come into force through subordinate legislation by the end of 2014. Until that time, the Commissioner will continue to review Welsh language schemes by the virtue of powers inherited under the Welsh Language Act 1993.

91 The Commissioner works with all local authorities in Wales to inspect and advise on the implementation of language schemes. It is the responsibility of local authorities to provide services to the public in Welsh in accordance with the commitments in their language schemes. Every local authority is committed to providing an annual monitoring report to the Commissioner outlining its performance in implementing the language scheme. The Commissioner analyses

every monitoring report; provides a formal response and collects further information as required.

92 The Council has taken positive steps to formalise responsibility for the Welsh language within the Council by creating the new post of Welsh Language and Equalities Policy Officer, and placing it within the portfolio of the Council Leader. A consultative committee, the Welsh Language Committee, was also established which is accountable to the Cabinet to assist the Leader. The Council recognises that it did not achieve all the targets set out in its action plan and there is a commitment to achieve the targets in 2013-14. The Council has not succeeded in holding any language awareness training in accordance with the commitment to do so in its language scheme. The Council has succeeded in monitoring the Welsh language provision of third-party contracts but there is a need to get to grips with the use of Welsh in private sector care homes.

93 However, the appointment of the Welsh Language and Equalities Policy Officer and the establishment of the Welsh Language Committee has enabled the Council to take a more focussed approach to delivering the Welsh Language scheme. To demonstrate this improved focus the Council has also taken the following actions:

- improved data monitoring and established a more joined-up approach to language planning, thus ensuring that the Council is working continuously towards achieving the targets set in its Welsh Language Scheme;

- raised awareness amongst staff of the requirement to comply with the Welsh Language Scheme; and

- as part of its commitment in supporting and promoting the Welsh language additional smart targets to increase the use of the Welsh language have been set as part of the Council's Outcome Agreements.

94 The Council is currently producing the annual monitoring report on the implementation of its Welsh Language Scheme for the reporting year 2013-14, which will be scrutinised at both Welsh Language Committee and Cabinet ahead of submitting it to the Welsh Language Commissioner by 1 October 2014. The Council is confident that the report will demonstrate that progress is being made with its Welsh Language Scheme, and is on target to achieve the performance indicators as set out in the Scheme.

The Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15

- 95 We reached this conclusion based on the earlier findings within this report. In particular, we have reported that:
- strong and clear leadership is driving a corporate and collaborative approach focussed upon improving service outcomes for citizens, although engagement with citizens is less than effective;
 - the Council has a robust and effective governance model with clear lines of accountability in which scrutiny and challenge are developing well;
 - the Council manages its resources well to support improved services for citizens although it faces difficult decisions if it is to balance its budget over the medium term;
 - the Council has improved arrangements in place to manage delivery of efficiencies and positive outcomes for citizens through partnership and collaboration;
 - the Council is better managing its improvement programme, and embedding a performance culture through implementing a new corporate performance management framework; and
 - the Council has significantly improved its processes to enable it to plan and monitor its activity in relation to its improvement agenda.

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 staff of the Wales Audit Office and Grant Thornton 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

Useful information about Ceredigion and Ceredigion County Council

The Council

Ceredigion County Council spends approximately £172.5 million per year (2012-13). This equates to about £2,269 per resident. In the same year, the Council also spent £20 million on capital items.

The average band D council tax in 2012-13 for Ceredigion was £1,169.27 per year. This has increased by 3.1 per cent to £1,205.47 per year for 2013-14. 61.5 per cent of Ceredigion's housing is in council tax bands A to D.

The Council is made up of 42 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:

- 19 Plaid Cymru, 11 Independent, three Independent Voice: Coalition
- Seven Welsh Liberal Democrat
- Two not affiliated

The Council's Chief Executive is Miss Bronwen Morgan. She is supported by:

- Strategic Director – Learning and Partnerships: Mr Eifion Evans
- Strategic Director – Care, Protection and Lifestyle: Mr Parry Davies
- Strategic Director – Corporate Resources: Mr W. Gwyn Jones
- Strategic Director – Sustainable Communities: Mr Huw T. Morgan

Other information

The Assembly Members for Ceredigion are:

- Elin Jones, Ceredigion, Plaid Cymru
- Rebecca Evans, Mid and West Wales Region, Labour Party
- Simon Thomas, Mid and West Wales Region, Plaid Cymru
- Joyce Watson, Mid and West Wales Region, Labour Party
- William Powell, Mid and West Wales Region, Welsh Liberal Democrats

The Member of Parliament for Ceredigion is:

- Mark Williams, Welsh Liberal Democrat

For more information see the Council's own website at www.ceredigion.gov.uk or contact the Council at Ceredigion County Council, Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron, Ceredigion, SA46 0PA. Tel: 01545 570881 or e-mail reception@ceredigion.gov.uk.

Appendix 3

Annual Audit Letter

The Leader
Ceredigion County Council
Penmorfa
Aberaeron
Ceredigion
SA46 0PA

Dear Councillor Ellen ap Gwynn

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

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 a Statement of Accounts 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 accounting 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 accounts.

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting 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 25 September 2013 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members of the Audit Committee in my Audit of Financial Statements report on the 12 September 2013 and to the Council on 19 September 2013.

The most significant issue related to an adjustment required in respect of Property, Plant and Equipment that totalled £2,638,000. The Council had not accounted for an item of capital expenditure on the balance sheet relating to one particular capital project, due to the timings of completion and revaluation of the asset. The Council appropriately adjusted for this item in the final accounts.

My consideration of the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness has been based on the audit work undertaken on the accounts as well as placing reliance on the work completed as part of the Improvement Assessment under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. Overall, I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place. The Auditor General will highlight areas where the effectiveness of these arrangements has yet to be demonstrated or where improvements could be made when he publishes his Annual Improvement Report.

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 25 September 2013.

The financial audit fee for 2012-13 is currently expected to be in line with the agreed fee set out in the Annual Audit Outline.

Yours sincerely

John Golding

For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor
10 October 2013

Appendix 4

Ceredigion County Council's improvement objectives and self-assessment

The 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 *Improvement Plan – Objectives 2013/2014* which can be found on the Council website at www.ceredigion.gov.uk. They are:

| Improvement Objectives 2013-14 |
|--|
| Improve our energy management to enable the Council to be 'greener' and more efficient |
| Improve standards in Education in the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 4 |
| Helping Older People to live more independently |
| Develop the economic prospects of Aberystwyth as a regional centre |

The Council's self-assessment of performance

The Council's self-assessment of its performance can be found in the Council's *Improvement Plan – Performance 2012/2013* which can be found on the Council's website at www.ceredigion.gov.uk and in its main council offices.

Appendix 5

Case Studies identified during our Corporate Assessment work at Ceredigion County Council

Governance and accountability

Case Study - Ethics and Standards Committee

In order to raise awareness of the Code of Conduct with Community Councils, the independent members of the Ethics and Standards Committee have embarked on a series of visits to Community Councils during 2013. Following a brief introduction to the Code, the independent members circulate 'frequently asked questions' and exercises to Councillors, which have helped to trigger questions about the Code, resulting in interesting and informative discussions. Copies of the training pack are left with the Chair and Clerk of the Council for future reference.

Case Study – Webcasting and Remote Attendance

The Welsh Government has awarded funding to all 22 Councils to deliver Webcasting and to provide remote attendance facilities for Council meetings. The Council has used this funding to develop its own solution through a joint project with Theatr Felinfach, Facilities Management and ICT, utilising a low cost internet streaming service.

Council webcasts are hosted by *Livestream* and enable users to select Welsh

<https://new.livestream.com/Ceredigion/> or English <https://new.livestream.com/CeredigionEng/>

The Democratic Services Committee has piloted remote attendance. The meeting was held in Aberaeron and a Councillor attended remotely from Aberystwyth. The pilot was successful overall, with the ability to translate simultaneously what was being said in Aberystwyth. Technological and legal issues were identified and lessons learnt that can be shared with the Welsh Government and with other Local Authorities.

Use of resources

Case Study – Document Management and Internal Collaboration Tools

The Council's new offices at Canolfan Rheidol provided the opportunity to establish more electronic ways of working and to reduce the Council's need for paper records. The first initiative was the introduction of a Microsoft SharePoint based Intranet site. This gives each member of staff access to Council information, electronic file stores and shared team/project areas to aid collaboration. In its simplest form a team site or project site can contain a list of documents which can be accessed from anywhere and worked on together. Add to this a task list, a calendar and the ability to manage meetings, Microsoft SharePoint provides the building blocks to work collaboratively online across all Council locations at any time.

To support the Council's efforts to scan and record documents quickly they created ePost. ePost is not unlike Microsoft Outlook, but instead of managing email it manages the flow, processing and storage of documents.

To further support email and SharePoint the rollout of Microsoft Lync has transformed collaborative working. Allowing instant messages and visibility of user availability, means staff across the Council can keep in touch and check key data quickly. From simple queries, to detailed screen sharing Microsoft Lync has given users a greater feeling of team working.

Between them, SharePoint, email, ePost and Lync are allowing greater collaborative ways of working, supporting the drive to electronic ways of working, delivering efficiencies, better collaboration, document storage and retrieval, whilst keeping teams in touch and allowing better options for remote working.

Collaboration and partnerships

Case Study - Joint Community Care Information System (CCIS) for Health and Social Care

Ceredigion County Council is playing a lead role in a joint project between eight Local Authorities in the Wales System Consortium and the NHS Wales Informatics Service to procure a Community Care Information System (CCIS) that will deliver the ICT requirements for Social Care and Community Health services. The project is recognised as a real opportunity to provide an ICT solution that will better support integrated working in future. All Local Authorities and Health Boards in Wales will have the option to procure the preferred system; the CCIS therefore has the real potential to deliver a national solution for Wales. The contract award is planned for December 2014.

Managing improvement

Case Study – Looked After Children Placement Stability

Looking at stability of placements the Council had mapped performance of this national performance indicator over a number of years and it was clear that performance had been deteriorating steadily. As a result of this mapping of performance it was realised that this measure posed a risk to the Council and to the Local Service Board's Single Integrated Plan. The Local Service Board Executive group decided that the existing Corporate Parenting Group would be the lead multi-agency group to deal with the detail and to come up with a plan of action and costs. The following steps were taken

- An initial analysis was undertaken which revealed that the 24 per cent of children who had three or more placements were made up of a total of 19 children. Furthermore, the total number of children looked after was relatively small and had fallen in Ceredigion, which accentuated the effect of the indicator.
- A consultant was commissioned to consider the 19 cases and to see what, if any, patterns were revealed. The consultant's report revealed major trends. Many of the children had been moved due to allegations made against foster carers – some substantiated and some not. The second issue related to the behavioural issues presented by some of the children which their foster carers were unable to manage.

- An academic researcher was engaged for the purpose of providing an up-to-date review of research into what works in maintaining placements. Lessons from England and Wales were considered.
- Both experts presented their work to the task and finish group which included practitioners and foster carers as well as managers.
- This group presented their recommendations to the Corporate Parenting Group in September.
- An action plan and proposals were agreed by the Corporate Parenting Group, which are being implemented by the Children and Families Team.
- A report has recently been taken to and approved by the Leadership Group, which includes the analysis and plan as well as a business case for Specialist Fostering resources.

As the Specialist Fostering Scheme will take a little time to establish it is likely that the performance will remain high for the next year, however, the trend is improving. The plan and performance of this indicator will be regularly monitored and reviewed.

Performance and outcomes

Case Study – Teacher Centre

Teacher Centre is an in-house developed, web-based Management Information System for schools and the Council. Teacher Centre is constantly under development to keep pace with changes to working practices and technical standards.

Teacher Centre's main aim is to bring data together to form a single viewpoint helping the schools and the Council to work in partnership using the same data. Its second aim is to reduce bureaucratic burden through shared use of data, for example, admission records entered centrally mean schools do not need to manually enter data into their systems, and this theme is carried on across the board from staff details to free meals.

Teacher Centre is used throughout Powys and is being piloted in Carmarthenshire. Discussions with Pembrokeshire have just started. The Welsh Government has also had demonstrations and has highlighted the Council's work as an example of good practice.

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