

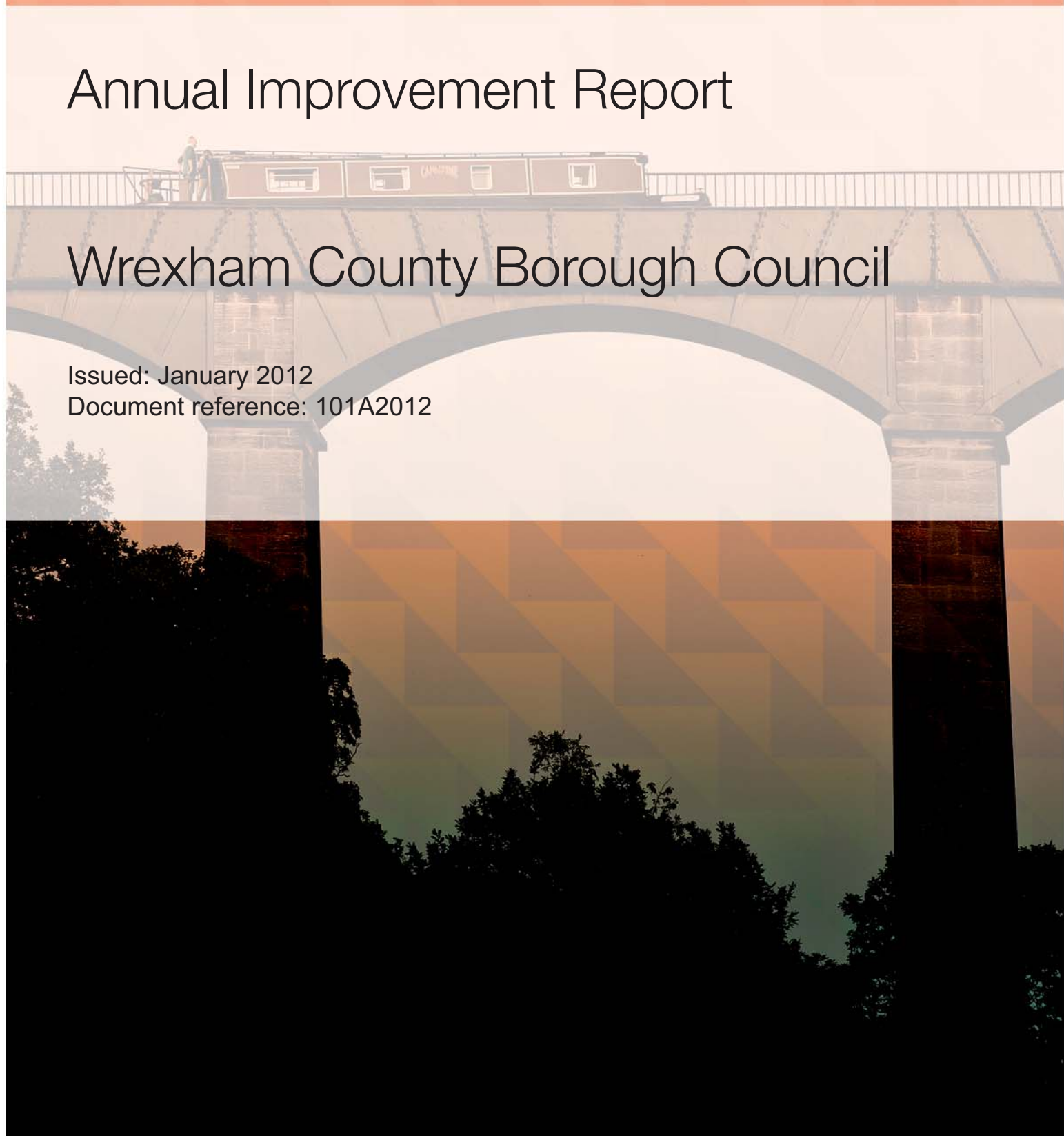


WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report

## Wrexham 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 Stephen Martin, Karen Lees and colleagues under the direction of Alan Morris in conducting the Improvement Assessment and producing this report.

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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 relevant Welsh inspectorates, and his own work, this report presents a picture of improvement over the last year. The report focuses on performance during 2010-11 and unless stated otherwise, it reflects the position in October 2011. The report is in three main sections, which cover the planning, delivery and evaluation of improvement by Wrexham County Borough Council (the Council).
- 2 In addition to its statutory duties, the Council has three council priorities of:
  - helping to increase the number of affordable homes;
  - helping people to get a better education and the skills they need for employment; and
  - reducing the amount of energy used and lowering carbon emissions.
- 3 The Council also has a set of eight 'improvement priorities' which include helping older people to live independently, safeguarding children, reducing anti-social behaviour, and delivering a *Transformation Programme* to improve the efficiency of the Council.
- 4 Overall the Auditor General has concluded that, **the Council is making slow progress in developing its arrangements to support improvement, and in improving some services.**
- 5 We found that the Council continues to have good financial management and is developing collaborative projects but it has made slow progress on improving its governance and other arrangements.
- 6 We also found that the Council is making mixed progress in improving services. We based this conclusion on the following:
  - Some of the services to support vulnerable people in need are not working as effectively as they could.
  - Estyn judged education services to be adequate in November 2010; pupil performance in 2011 was good, NEETs have been reduced and opportunities for bilingual learning have been increased.
  - Carbon emissions and energy use are being reduced and waste services improved although there is a mixed picture for reducing anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and fear of crime.
- 7 Finally, the report sets out our views on the Council's own assessment of its performance and arrangements. We concluded that extensive time and resources are used in performance monitoring but the Council is not making the best use of information to support self-assessment and performance management.
- 8 The report notes that there have been recent changes to the leadership and management of the Council including the election of a new Leader and the appointment of a new Chief Executive. It also notes that there have been recent developments that have the potential to increase the pace of improvement.

# Recommendations and proposals for improvement

9 The Auditor General will continue to review progress made on the formal recommendations made in his *Corporate Assessment Update* letter in July 2011. These were:

Recommendations	
R1	The Council should outline arrangements to review scrutiny and decision making and to streamline business processes which increase the pace of change in addressing these issues.
R2	The Council should set out how it will integrate the processes for developing future improvement objectives and allocating resources to them as part of its medium-term planning and budget setting process.

10 The following proposals for improvement are also made:

Proposals for improvement	
To support further improvement the Council should:	
P1	Pursue recent work to develop the <i>Council Plan 2012-16</i> and address issues of the ambition, governance and performance management of the Council.
P2	Increase the pace of change in meeting the Human Resources (HR) strategy and developing and workforce planning.
P3	Establish and embed in council arrangements robust methods to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assess if the public finds it easy to access council services, and take action to improve accessibility to services where needed;</li> <li>• to engage with the public, and use this information to develop future plans and council services; and</li> <li>• provide prompt feedback to the public, and where appropriate specific groups of customers, on the results of public consultations and the actions taken as a result by the Council.</li> </ul>
P4	Review its strategy to meet local housing need through affordable housing, improving the quality of its housing stock and providing support to those who present as homeless.
P5	Address weakness in target setting, data quality and performance management, and enable the Council to undertake and publish robust assessments of its performance.

# Detailed report



## Introduction

- 11 This report is written by the Auditor General supported by staff of the Wales Audit Office. On [page 2](#) you can find a brief explanation of what the Auditor General does.
  - 12 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), 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.
  - 13 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;
    - 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.
  - 14 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](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk) or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ.
- This assessment has focused on the priorities the Council set for itself**
- 15 Our work over the past year has focused on how the Council has planned to achieve improvements in services to residents, and the achievements it made in 2010-11. We do not undertake a comprehensive annual review of all council arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on our cumulative and shared knowledge and the findings of the prioritised work undertaken this year. Our work has focused on the areas the Council identified were important. These are contained in the *Council Plan 2009-2012*, which sets out how the Council will perform and improve service delivery. This focuses its efforts on making a significant improvement in the three council priorities of:
    - helping to increase the number of affordable homes that are available in the county borough;



- helping people to get a better education and the skills they need for employment; and
  - reducing the amount of energy used and lowering carbon emissions.
- 16 The Council also has a set of 'improvement priorities'. These relate to areas from existing strategies and plans where the Council wants major improvements to take place. There are eight 'improvement priorities' which we have summarised as:
- helping older people to live independently;
  - helping people to eat a more healthy diet and be more active;
  - making it easier for people to use its services, and also asking the public how its services could be improved;
  - promoting equal opportunities for children and young people to become bilingual in Welsh and English, and the Council promoting the Welsh culture;
  - reducing anti-social behaviour and substance misuse, and helping to improve the perceptions of crime;
  - reducing the amount of waste by increasing the rate of recycling;
  - delivering the *Transformation Programme*; and
  - improving the safeguarding of children (added for the year 2010-11).
- 17 Taken together, the Council's priorities and its improvement priorities are the Council's improvement objectives for 2010-11.
- 18 As well as looking at the Council's plans and actual performance, we have also looked at how well the Council understands its performance. It is important for the Council to have a good self-understanding of how effective it is and the extent to which it is improving. The Auditor General together with other inspectorates, the Welsh Government and councils are developing a common understanding of effective self-evaluation, and we have commented in more detail on self-evaluation at the Council later in this report. We found that extensive time and resources are used in performance monitoring, but the Council is not making the best use of information to support self-assessment and performance management. *The Council Plan – Part 3 Focused on our Performance 2010 to 2011* is the annual performance report for the Council and we refer in the report to the Council's own assessments from this report. However, we note that significant weaknesses, including a lack of suitable success measures for some objectives, reduce the effectiveness of this report.

### Developments at the Council since my last Annual Improvement Report

- 19 The Council has experienced a number of significant changes in its senior management over the past year. The Chief Executive resigned and left the Council in February 2011. Interim arrangements were then put in place with the three strategic and performance directors carrying out the roles of Interim Chief Executive, until the new Chief Executive, Dr Helen Paterson, took up post in September 2011.



- 20 In May 2011, Cllr Ron Davies was elected Leader replacing Cllr. Aled Roberts who had been elected to the National Assembly for Wales as a Regional Assembly Member. Cllr. David Bithell was elected as the Deputy Leader.
- 21 The Council invited the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to undertake a *Financial Peer Review*, and this was carried out in March 2011. The Council received the final report in June 2011 and is working through the recommendations for improvement.
- 22 In November 2010 Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, inspected the Council's education services for children and young people. Further information on the inspection findings is in [paragraphs 110-114](#).

## **The Council is making slow progress in developing its arrangements to support improvement and in improving some services**

- 23 Overall the Auditor General has concluded the Council is progressing more slowly than expected in its arrangements to support improvement and in some services.
- 24 The report is in three main sections, which cover the planning, delivery and evaluation of improvement by the Council.

## The Council continues to have good financial management and is developing collaborative projects but it has made slow progress in improving its governance and other arrangements

25 This section comments on the Council's arrangements for planning, and to secure improvements. This also includes aspects of two of the Council's improvement objectives:

- making it easier for people to use its services and listening to how its service could be improved; and
- delivering the transformation project, to reduce costs and make the Council more efficient.

26 The topics covered in this section are:

- previous findings by the Auditor General on the arrangements for improvement;
- governance, including decision making and scrutiny arrangements;
- HR and workforce planning;
- outcome measures to demonstrate the Council is achieving its aims;
- the use of resources and arrangements to address the financial challenges faced by all councils;
- how the Council engages with the public and local communities;
- access to services;
- the Council's arrangements to meet the requirements of the *Equality Act 2010*;
- arrangements for collaboration and partnership working with other councils and bodies;
- progress made in addressing proposals for improvement in previous reports by the Auditor General; and
- recent developments following the appointment of the new Chief Executive.

**In July 2011, the Auditor General reported that the Council has continued to seek improvement supported by a clear policy framework and sound financial position, but some of its arrangements do not fully support improvement and are likely to hinder the Council in achieving its aspirations**

27 In July 2011, the Auditor General issued a *Corporate Assessment Update* letter to the Council. He concluded that 'the Council has continued to seek improvement supported by a clear policy framework and sound financial position, but some of its arrangements do not fully support improvement and are likely to hinder the Council in achieving its aspirations'. The Auditor General confirmed that he was satisfied that the Council was discharging its duties under the Measure and was likely to comply with its minimum requirements during this financial year. However, the Council is not making the expected progress on areas previously identified for improvement. He reached this conclusion because:

- Limited progress has been made on the areas for improvement identified in the *Preliminary Corporate Assessment* in 2010.
- The Council is well placed to manage the financial challenge through savings programmes and the 'transformation' projects. However, it is less clear whether it will be able to achieve the aims of its improvement objectives.

- Whilst there are some positive examples of consultation, the Council's approach to engaging with the public does not follow a coherent methodology across the services. The Council is not consistently using evaluation from consultation to improve the effectiveness of service delivery or how it consults with the public.

**The Council is considering whether to make changes to its governance arrangements, which are not working as effectively as they could**

- 28 We have previously expressed concern about the Council's governance arrangements, including decision making, scrutiny and monitoring of performance. We said the arrangements are cumbersome, overly complex and time-consuming. Lead members were not fully fulfilling their roles as described in the Council's constitution. The Estyn inspection of education services in 2010 identified the need for executive lead members to take stronger roles in leading their areas, rather than rely on officers. The WLGA *Financial Peer Review* also reflected similar concerns.
- 29 In August 2010, the Auditor General's *Preliminary Corporate Assessment* included a proposal for improvement that the Council should ensure that Executive Board member and scrutiny roles support effective decision making and enable scrutiny to focus on priority issues. As this did not lead to change we made a formal recommendation in the *Corporate Assessment Update* letter in July 2011. This said that the Council should 'outline arrangements to review scrutiny and decision making and to streamline business

processes which increase the pace of change in addressing these issues'.

- 30 The Council was required to respond to the recommendation within 30 days and in its response the Council noted that some elected members had raised strong concerns over the evidence base for the recommendation. However, the Council undertook to establish a small group to research alternative ways of working. The response said that workshops would be held with the WLGA to explore the peer review findings, and that any proposals from the review would be considered formally by members by June 2012.
- 31 Our recent work found that the review was proceeding. The new Chief Executive had a spoken discussion with Executive Board members about their role. We also found that whilst most council business is conducted in a reasonable manner, the following issues continue:
- Arrangements are time-consuming and complex. Performance monitoring is cumbersome with numerous stages, taking up a lot of officer time and leading to committees and boards receiving different types of information.
  - The work of the Executive Board is not sufficiently focused. The time the Executive spends debating and deciding on key decisions can often be short, but sometimes they spend a disproportionate amount of time on matters with a lower impact.

- Scrutiny committees tend to hold officers to account, not lead members or the Executive Board. This can lead to a blurring of the lines between officer responsibilities and political issues.
  - Some member behaviour towards officers can be heavy handed at times. As a result, some officers are wary of being held to account in a harsh manner, and this contributes to a downward spiral of low target setting so that performance is not unduly criticised.
- 32 The Council's constitution clearly lays out the roles and responsibilities of the Leader and Deputy Lead, lead members, scrutiny chairs and scrutiny members. However, we have found the following sections were not being consistently followed:
- scrutiny committees should hold the Executive Board to account, evaluate the validity of executive decisions and challenge inappropriate decisions;
  - lead members should be accountable for political choices and performance in the lead role and appear before scrutiny committees in respect of matters within the lead role; and
  - all elected members should support, and adhere to respectful, appropriate and effective relationships with employees of the Council.
- 33 The Council is required to review the effectiveness of governance arrangements as part of the work leading to its *Annual Governance Statement*. This provides the Council with an additional opportunity to consider the arrangements and revise as appropriate.
- The management of human resources remains an area of risk, and whilst progress has been made, the pace of change has been insufficient**
- 34 In our *Preliminary Corporate Assessment* in August 2010 we commented that people management was an area of risk and that workforce planning was underdeveloped. The Council was developing a plan to address these risks. In the *Corporate Assessment Update* letter in July 2011, we noted that progress had been made in restructuring the HR function, although the Council recognised that much work remains to be done to modernise the HR service and introduce workforce planning across the Council.
- 35 Our recent work found that the restructuring of the HR service has been completed. The Chief HR Officer post had been removed as part of a wider review of senior management. The new role of Head of Corporate and Customer Services has responsibility for the HR function and for legal services, ICT, committee and member services, office support and for access to services. Five other HR service posts were lost in the restructuring of the service although the remaining officers were now co-located in the same building.
- 36 The Council has a HR strategy in place for two years, covering 2010-2012. There has been progress on most of the actions to be completed in the first year, although just under half were carried forward for completion into year two. As a result, the Council may struggle to deliver all of the planned work. This has an impact on how well the Council is able to support, manage and make best use of its employees.

- 37 The Council has decided not to undertake further staff surveys. Instead, departments will be separately gauging the opinions and views of their staff. This staggered approach may result in a loss of valuable corporate information for the Council, as it will not hear staff concerns about working for the Council. It may also lose a good source of feedback on how it operates and how it could improve, as the focus is internally related to departments. The Council will, however, continue to carry out consultations with all staff on specific issues. Surveys have recently been carried out concerning staff travel and carbon reduction.
- 38 Part of the restructure of HR service has included the transfer of some responsibilities to other departments within the Council. This includes corporate training, equalities, and health and safety. However, we found inadequate communication between the HR service and the departments now responsible for these areas.
- 39 The Council does not yet undertake workforce planning across all departments. Some initial work to gather information on future pressures on workforce requirements is planned in the near future. This leaves the Council without a robust understanding of what skills it currently has and what skills it will need to deliver high-quality, efficient services in the future.
- 40 In its principal risk register, the Council has identified not having the right capacity and skills to deliver its priorities and meet its statutory responsibilities as one of the 10 top risks for the organisation. The actions identified to reduce this risk are the HR strategy and the implementation of strategic assessments and workforce planning. As the delivery of the strategy is behind schedule and workforce planning won't be complete until 2013, delivering these improvements remains a significant area of risk.
- 41 The Council recognises that much work remains to be done to modernise the HR service and to introduce robust and meaningful workforce planning across the Council. The new Chief Executive recognises the need for further work, and this will form part of the new HR strategy that will be developed in 2012.
- Despite some progress in 2011, the Council still does not have a full set of outcome measures to enable it to monitor and manage the delivery of its improvement objectives**
- 42 We have previously reported to the Council that it does not have a complete set of appropriate outcome measures that will enable progress towards its objectives to be measured. This is because the Council focuses much of its monitoring of performance on whether tasks have been completed, rather than to review the impact the Council has made on the people of Wrexham. In July 2010, we made a proposal for improvement to the Council to further develop appropriate outcome measures for objectives. As this was not fully implemented, in July 2011 we made a further proposal for improvement. We proposed that the Council should complete the development of outcome measures for its improvement priorities and use performance reporting to highlight progress on achieving outcomes.

- 43 In the first half of 2011, the Council undertook a small amount of work looking at how to develop appropriate outcome measures. During the summer and autumn, the Council has taken this work further, and identified outcome measures for an amended objective about education (see [paragraphs 120-121](#)). However, some other improvement objectives, still lack robust outcomes measures and data. These improvement objectives include: increasing opportunities for young people to learn bilingually; reducing the fear of crime; and the impact of healthy eating and being more active.
- 44 The Council is now in the final year of its 2009-2012 objectives. It will be important that in identifying its new objectives for 2012 onwards it clearly defines the outcomes it is seeking to achieve and the measures that will be used to assess progress towards those outcomes.

**The Council continues to have strong financial management and it is taking action to improve medium-term financial planning and to increase momentum of the Transformation Programme to modernise the way the Council operates**

- 45 In the *Corporate Assessment Update* letter in July 2011, the Auditor General commented that ‘the Council is well placed to manage the financial challenge through savings programmes and transformation projects. However, it is less clear whether it will be able to achieve the aims of its improvement objectives.’ A formal recommendation was made for the Council to ‘set out how it will integrate the processes

for developing future improvement objectives and allocating resources to them as part of its medium-term planning and budget setting process’.

- 46 The Council continues to show strong financial management. The Council achieved significant savings in 2010-11, and this and late funding from the Welsh Government contributed to an overall approved carry forward of service underspends and transfers to earmarked reserves of £3.4 million. The Council is making good progress on realising the planned savings for 2011-12. These savings are mainly from departmental service reviews and include savings such as vacancy control.
- 47 On 30 September 2011, the auditor appointed by the Auditor General issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position. He noted the financial statements were generally prepared to a good standard by the statutory deadline reflecting the significant amount of work undertaken by the Finance Team staff to prepare them on an International Financial Reporting Standards basis for the first time. [Appendix 3](#) gives more detail.



- 48 The Council has a well-established budget setting process that allocates budgets based on the previous year's budget, with an uplift for inflation, and for known pressures. Savings and efficiencies are also identified and incorporated in the budget. In identifying pressures and making savings, the Council's priorities are taken into account. Members have been actively involved in the Council's budget setting process and have good opportunities to contribute. However, the Council's medium-term financial plan does not identify the resources applied to its priorities and how these are expected to be changed over a medium-term period of three or four years. The *WLGA Financial Peer Review* reflected the Auditor General's concerns about the need for resources to be identified for policy priorities.
- 49 In its response to our recommendation to allocate resources to improvement objectives through medium-term planning and budget setting processes, the Council noted that budgets are not simply rolled forward on the basis of inflation and that changes are made through service pressures, savings, and inflationary allocations to ensure that priorities are focused on. The Council is following its action plan to address the recommendations. This includes: establishing the resources allocated to current priorities; scrutiny of proposed savings to ensure they fit with emerging findings; and that the funding provided for priorities will be set out when planning and setting the 2012-13 budget. The Auditor General will continue to monitor progress in this important area.
- 50 The Council's *Transformation Programme* is intended to modernise the way the Council operates to address the 'changing financial, technological and customer environments in which the Council operates'. The programme was initially agreed in early 2010 and aims to contribute to the savings and efficiencies required through programme of projects. The projects included matters such as procurement, customer contacts, transport, office accommodation, facilities management, and design and printing. A 'Transformation Change Fund' of £1 million per year was established to support the programme. Significant initial savings were identified through departmental reviews conducted as part of the 2011-12 budget setting process and the continuing actions from this have been incorporated in the *Transformation Programme*. The Council expects to achieve a small amount of savings during 2011-12 from the transformation projects, and the projects and service reviews are expected to contribute approximately £3.5 million of savings in 2012-13 and further savings in subsequent years.
- 51 The successful delivery of the transformation work was recognised as a 'significant internal control issue' in the *Annual Governance Statement* for 2010-11, and identified as one of the top 10 risks facing the Council. The *WLGA Financial Peer Review* said the *Transformation Programme* needs to be integrated in the Council's work, rather than being seen as a standalone project. In response, the Council undertook a 'stocktake' of the programme and has agreed to alterations to the programme intended to:

- make change within the Council part of its way of life rather than a 'bolt-on';
- continue to develop projects across service boundaries;
- create an approach to change that enables more projects to be governed under one umbrella;
- increase the pace of change, raise the level of ambition and be able to 'pump prime' delivery of the 2012-2016 priority areas and make sure there continues to be a strong delivery focus; and
- introduce strategic assessments as the backbone to phase two of the *Transformation Programme*.

**Whilst there are some positive examples of consultation, the Council's approach to engaging with the public does not follow a coherent methodology across the services**

- 52 In the *Corporate Assessment Update* letter in July 2011, the Auditor General reported findings from his review of public engagement at the Council. This review was part of an all-Wales study that will lead to a report on public engagement by councils in Wales to be published early in 2012. At Wrexham, it found that there were some positive examples of public engagement, but the Council did not follow a consistent methodology and is not using evaluation to improve the effectiveness of how it consults with the public. The review proposed that the Council should develop a more coherent approach.
- 53 One of the Council's improvement objectives is to improve access to services and listen to and engage with the public in influencing services. There are some good

examples of individual council services that engage well with the public. The Housing Department has effective tenant engagement arrangements, which we have used as an example of good practice on our Good Practice website:

[www.wao.gov.uk/goodpracticeexchange.asp](http://www.wao.gov.uk/goodpracticeexchange.asp).

Children's social services is also engaging well with young people through a variety of methods including the Wrexham County Youth Forum, the 'Young Wrexham' website, and the development of a young peoples' assembly called 'Senedd Yr Ifanc'.

- 54 However, there is no clear senior leadership for public engagement activities. Public engagement is not seen as a priority area for the Council despite it being a key element in helping it to achieve its improvement objectives. The Council lacks an effective strategy for engaging with the public. The methods used are often limited to surveys or focus groups, and there is a risk of repeated engagement due to a lack of co-ordination. This can give the public the impression that the Council is working in silos and is likely to incur greater costs.
- 55 There is limited evidence of a consistent approach to evaluation and the effective use of the information obtained across the Council. Nor is there evidence of the Council learning from different tools and techniques to find the most effective approaches to engagement year on year, or sharing good practice between departments.
- 56 In its response to the proposal in the *Corporate Assessment Update* letter to develop a more coherent approach, the Council said it would identify a senior officer for engagement and prepare a report on the

strategic options for delivering improved engagement. The Auditor General will monitor progress in this area.

**The Council has increased the options available for customers to access its services, but it has not measured whether residents find it easy to access services and make suggestions for improvements to them**

57 The Council has an improvement objective to improve customer access to its services, and seek their views on services and use this to improve them. We have previously reported that the Council has developed a more user-friendly website, opened a new contact centre, known as Contact Wrexham, and developed its online presence through using social media sites to disseminate information. As part of its work to reduce costs, the Council is also trying to move people from face-to-face contact to less expensive forms of interaction with the Council such as telephone or the website.

58 In 2010-11, the Council made further progress on accessibility to services by:

- increasing the opportunities for people to pay for a further six council services through its website;
- continuing to offer a range of services through Contact Wrexham;
- dealing with more phone calls at the first contact, which reduces the need for people to contact the Council a number of times for the same issue; and
- providing facilities at the newly refurbished Ruabon library for people to pay for council services using an automated payment kiosk, or to contact the Council via a freephone service.

59 However, despite the Council wanting to reduce the number of face-to-face meetings with customers, following the closure of some local offices where residents could make cash payments, the number of visits to Contact Wrexham in Wrexham town centre increased by a third in 2010-11. As a result, the Council increased the number of staff available to help people with their visits to the centre.

60 In its annual performance report, the Council assessed itself as being on track to deliver this improvement objective during 2010-11. By mid 2011-12, it reported that it was slightly off track following failure to achieve its satisfaction target for users of its contact centre and a reduction in satisfaction with its website, although website satisfaction was still above average.

61 Through our work we have found that while the Council is able to monitor the actions it has taken, it does not have the measures to identify if it is achieving its aims. We reported on this issue in our previous *Annual Improvement Report*. The Council documents say that 'if successful, people will tell us it is easy to get in touch with the Council and find the services they are looking for. People will also tell us they get a good standard of service from the Council and feel that the Council listens and responds to them.' The Council does not have measures, or does not report, whether people are finding it easier to get in touch, are able to find the services they want, or feel the Council listens and responds to them. Monitoring information is collected and reported on the satisfaction of those who contact the Council with the telephone, website, or face-to-face contact they have

- but that falls short of fully informing the Council whether it is achieving its objective.
- 62 Despite Contact Wrexham being a key element of the plan to improve access to services, the reception is poorly signposted, has no clear theme for the literature it displays and it is not targeted at the client groups who primarily use its services. The contact centre has a number of interview rooms. These are occupied frequently during the day, and if the Council plans to expand the range of services from the centre, it will need to reconsider the availability of interview rooms.
- 63 The Council has developed a good range of web-based information for some priority areas such as on waste minimisation and recycling. However, some of the information in the Council's reception areas is a year out of date.
- 64 The Ombudsman's annual report to the Council noted that there has been a slight increase in the number of complaints to its office although this is below the average level of complaints for most councils in Wales. There was a large decrease in the number of complaints the office subsequently decided to investigate, although the proportion investigated was above the average that would be expected. The Ombudsman said he was disappointed to note that all responses to his office were received more than five weeks after they were requested from the Council, and he asked the Council to take appropriate steps to resolve this. Given that listening to people and increasing access is an improvement objective, you would expect the Council to deal with Ombudsman queries promptly, as part of a good service to its residents.
- 65 We have already described the shortcomings of the Council's public engagement approach above. These were not mentioned by the Council in its annual performance report, even through seeking customers' views and using them to improve services is part of the Council's improvement objective.
- 66 The Council's annual performance report does, however, outline plans to move the People's Voice citizen survey panel into an online panel. The Council believes this will improve the speed, value and impact of future surveys. However, its survey of the existing people's panel in 2010 showed that 80 per cent of respondents preferred the existing approach of postal surveys or questionnaires, and less than half would be interested in on-line surveys. The Council will need to ensure that its new online surveys are a valid representation of its customers.
- 67 There are improvements needed in the Council's web pages on consultations, particularly if the Council plans to move to online surveys. Its website page that lists 'current' consultations includes many older surveys where the closing date has passed. This is confusing for people visiting the site. There are also web pages that contain summary information of previous consultations. These do not always include details of when the survey was undertaken, and information is not included on what action, if any, the Council has taken as a result of the feedback.

68 The CSSIW provides an annual review and evaluation of the performance of each council's social services. The review for Wrexham for 2010-11 noted that:

- 'With the exception of people signposted to Welfare Rights, the Council does not currently have effective mechanisms to capture feedback from people signposted to other services or organisations, as to whether their needs were met. The Council is currently exploring its options to effectively manage this important information. Progress in this area will be monitored by the CSSIW over the coming months.'
- The Council has shown a commitment to engaging service users, carers and citizens in social care service development and review. The Council recognises that this is not being consistently demonstrated across all service areas, and as a result, the development of a Stakeholder Participation and Involvement Strategy has been identified by the Council as a priority for 2011-12. The strategy's main aim is to enable the Council's engagement activity to be co-ordinated and effectively managed so that the contributions made by residents are meaningful and sustainable.'

69 We have also found that the Council asks residents' views on the quality of the work undertaken on the modifications to residents' homes, but it does not yet ask if the adaptation has enabled the older person to be more independent. The Council recognises that it is not assessing the impact of its work and plans to develop this evaluation in the future.

### **The Council is preparing for the introduction of new responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010**

70 The Council is developing a revised strategy that it plans to have in place by April 2012 to meet its new duties and responsibilities under the *Equality Act 2010*. During our work, we have found officers are generally aware of the forthcoming legislation. However, there was no mention in the annual performance report on the Council's work to meet the *Equality Act 2010*.

### **The Council is continuing to develop its involvement in collaborative projects**

71 The annual performance review describes the Council's ongoing commitment to be involved in collaborative projects where there is a good business case for doing so. The review provides a short description of some of the developing arrangements; however, it provides no evaluation of the effectiveness of these developments or of the reasons for collaboration on some issues and not on others.

72 In Corporate Governance and Policy Scrutiny Committee discussions earlier in 2011, members raised concerns about collaborative projects, including the lack of information available, resource implications, potential savings and costs to the Council. It was agreed that the Scrutiny Co-Chairs Co-ordinating Group receives regular six-monthly reports on the progress of collaborative working and collaborative projects involving the Council. The Co-Chairs Co-ordinating Group could then identify any specific areas that may need to be discussed further and refer them to the relevant scrutiny committee. Following

deliberation from Co-Chairs and scrutiny committees, the Executive Board would then continue to receive twice-yearly information reports on the progress of collaborative working. The report presented to the Executive Board in October had not been discussed by any scrutiny committee and did not contain information about the savings and costs of the proposed regional projects referred to. But the report did propose an all-member workshop to consider the implications of future collaboration and the proposed compact agreements between local authorities and the Welsh Government.

### **Collaboration with other local partners and with Flintshire and Denbighshire County Councils**

73 Through collaboration and partnership rationalisation, a range of integrated or shared services and joint partnership bodies is developing. These include:

- a joint Wrexham and Flintshire Local Safeguarding Children Board, established in April 2011;
- a North East Wales Emergency Duty (social work) Team for Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire;
- the North Wales Adoption Service, hosted by Wrexham Council;
- the Council is currently investigating the potential for collaboration with Flintshire County Council in its Public Protection Services; and
- the Council and its partners in Wrexham and Flintshire produced their first joint Strategic Assessment early in 2011 and

have now produced a joint Flintshire and Wrexham Community Safety Partnership Plan 2011-14.

### **Regional collaboration projects are being developed**

74 With the five other councils in North Wales, Wrexham is part of the North Wales Regional Leadership Team and is involved in four programme boards, each of which has a number of projects for regional collaboration (see [Exhibit 1](#)).



## Exhibit 1: Regional collaboration projects

The four regional programme boards are developing a range of projects.

Programme board	Projects
<b>Education and Related Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School Improvement Service (A second phase is expected to extend the scope of the service)</li> <li>Collaboration in Library Services</li> </ul>
<b>Social Care and Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commissioning Hub</li> <li><i>Supporting People</i> services</li> <li>Telecare</li> <li>Workforce Development</li> <li>ICT support for client records (PARIS and RAISE)</li> </ul>
<b>Environment and Regulatory Services Board</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fleet Management</li> <li>Transforming Transport</li> <li>Waste</li> <li>Taith Extension</li> <li>Economic Development</li> </ul>
<b>Support Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legal Services</li> <li>ICT</li> <li>Procurement</li> <li>Single Person Discounts</li> <li>Emergency Planning</li> </ul>

### The Council has made slow progress in addressing several of the proposals for improvement made in previous reports by the Auditor General

**75** We made proposals for improvement in the *Preliminary Corporate Assessment* in 2010 and in the *Annual Improvement Report* in January 2011. As there was little progress on some of these important areas, additional formal recommendations and proposals for improvement were made in the *Corporate Assessment Update* letter in July 2011. See [Exhibit 2](#) for details of these.



## Exhibit 2: Progress on previous proposals and recommendations

The Council has made slow progress in implementing some of the previous recommendations by the Auditor General. Progress is covered in more detail in the relevant sections of this report.

Previous recommendations	Progress
<b>Proposals made in the <i>Preliminary Corporate Assessment</i>, July 2010</b>	
Further develop appropriate outcome measures for objectives.	Limited progress so additional proposal made <b>Paragraphs 42-44</b>
Ensure Executive Board member and scrutiny roles support effective decision making and enable scrutiny to focus on priority issues.	Limited progress so formal recommendation made <b>Paragraphs 28-33</b>
Develop corporate workforce planning.	Limited progress <b>Paragraphs 34-41</b>
Improve the medium-term financial strategy so that resources are increasingly linked to priorities.	Limited progress so formal recommendation made <b>Paragraphs 45-51</b>
Continue to improve business processes by streamlining arrangements to ensure they support effective management, monitoring and scrutiny.	Limited progress so formal recommendation made <b>Paragraphs 148-154</b>
<b>Additional proposals made in the <i>Annual Improvement Report</i>, January 2011</b>	
Ensure that the focus of its priorities is not so narrow that it has limited impact on the wider issues it is seeking to address.	Reasonable progress <b>Paragraphs 120 -121</b>
Develop a consistent approach to target setting in areas where improvement is required so it is recognised that targets are intended to drive improvement and may not be achieved.	No progress <b>Paragraph 151</b>
Demonstrate how consultation and feedback from users and residents is used to improve services.	Limited progress <b>Paragraphs 52-56</b>

Previous recommendations	Progress
<b>Additional statutory recommendations made in the <i>Corporate Assessment Update</i> letter, July 2011</b>	
The Council should outline arrangements to review scrutiny and decision making and to streamline business process which increase the pace of change in addressing these issues.	No significant change but review taking place in line with Council response <b>Paragraphs 28-33</b>
The Council should set out how it will integrate the processes for developing future improvement objectives and allocating resources to them as part of its medium-term planning and budget setting process.	Progress in line with Council response to the recommendation <b>Paragraphs 45-51</b>
<b>Additional proposals made in the <i>Corporate Assessment Update</i> letter, July 2011</b>	
Complete the development of outcome measures for its improvement priorities, and use performance reporting to highlight progress on achieving outcomes.	Some progress but incomplete <b>Paragraphs 42-44</b>
Improve the effectiveness of public engagement, and develop a more coherent approach across the Council.	Limited progress <b>Paragraphs 52-56</b>

**Recent steps have the potential to increase the pace of improvement**

76 After the period of Interim Chief Executive arrangements, the newly appointed Chief Executive has taken up her post and started to take a number of actions. Work has commenced on a number of important areas referred to in this report to try and secure further, more rapid improvement, including:

- Work on the development of new improvement objectives for 2012-13. A framework for the development of the new *Council Plan 2012-2016* was agreed by the Executive Board in December 2011 including plans to develop, challenge and approve proposed improvement actions, measures and targets.
- A review is underway on the role of Executive members and the decision making process.

- Implementation of a broader remit for the *Transformation Programme*, including the commencement of strategic assessments, increased drive and ambition, and pump priming to support delivery of priorities.
- A review of processes for performance management.
- Increasing the pace of delivery with the actions in action plan to deliver the HR strategy.
- Responding to several of the issues raised in the *WPGA Financial Peer Review*.

77 These steps have the potential to address some of the weaknesses in the arrangements that the Auditor General has identified previously if pursued with vigour.

## The Council is making mixed progress in improving services

- 78 We have considered the improvement of delivery of services and outcomes for the public in three sections:
- how well the Council is delivering improvement in supporting people in need;
  - how well the Council is delivering improvement in helping people to develop; and
  - how well the Council is delivering improvement in helping to create and maintain the area as a safe, prosperous and pleasant place.
- 79 We have highlighted the Council's improvement priorities that are related to each section, along with the Council's own self-assessment of its progress in delivering these.

### **Some of the services to support vulnerable people in need are not working as effectively as they could**

- 80 In this section we consider provision of social services, housing and in particular the Council's priorities for:
- helping older people to live independently;
  - improving the safeguarding of children;
  - helping people to eat a more healthy diet and be more active; and
  - helping to increase the number of affordable homes that are available in the county borough.

### **More people are receiving services to help them live independently and aspects of children's services are to be inspected by the CSSIW**

- 81 Directors of social services are required to produce an annual self-assessment report on how well services are being delivered. The CSSIW<sup>1</sup> will then undertake a review and analysis of evidence underpinning the report, including evidence from other regulators and inspectors. This analysis will result in the publication of an annual review and evaluation. The CSSIW's overall summary for 2010-11 said:
- 'Wrexham CBC has been engaged in a programme of change in both adults and children's services with a view to providing modernised sustainable services for local residents. In 2010-11, progress has been made in many of the development areas identified last year. However, children's services continue to experience some particular challenges. Whilst timely decision making in relation to referrals has shown significant improvement, initial assessments and re-referral rates remain at an unacceptable level of performance. This is the second year that the need for improvement has been identified in these aspects of children's services and whilst actions have been taken with the aim of improving performance, these have not yet had sufficient impact.

<sup>1</sup> The role of the CSSIW is to make professional assessments and judgements about social care, early years and social services and so encourage improvement by the service providers. It works on behalf of Welsh ministers, but there are a number of safeguards in place to ensure its independence. Under new legislation there is a new framework in place for local authority social services inspection, evaluation and review.

- An inspection of the Council's arrangements for the assessment and care management of children in need is scheduled for winter 2011-12.
- The Council has shown a commitment to engaging service users, carers and citizens in service development and review. The Council recognises that this is not being consistently demonstrated across all service areas and as a result, the development of a *Stakeholder Participation and Involvement Strategy* has been identified by the Council as a priority for 2011-12. The strategy's main aim is to enable the Council's engagement activity to be co-ordinated and effectively managed so that the contributions made by residents are meaningful and sustainable. The development of commissioning strategies remains another priority development area.'

**More older people are receiving services to help them live independently**

- 82 Assisting older people to live independently is one of the Council's improvement priorities. The Council says 'if we are successful in doing things in this area then older people will be able to stay in their homes for longer where this is consistent with their needs. In addition, older people will tell us they were able to get the advice, support and care they needed.' It has reported that it is 'on track' to achieve its aims and that:
- demand for telecare<sup>2</sup> has increased;

- the target for improving the completion of adaptations using a disabled facility grant has been achieved; and
- over 100 hospital admissions have been avoided.

However, it acknowledges areas for improvement include:

- completing the remaining *Supporting People* older persons' schemes reviews; and
- completing work to re-commission and restructure the in-house domiciliary care service.

- 83 The Council has introduced a reablement model as a first response to the majority of new referrals made to adult social care. The CSSIW noted that 'assessment and care management within adult services is underpinned by a reablement model of service delivery and is aimed at promoting and maintaining people's independence in the community. There is evidence that this approach is proving to be effective as 46 per cent of older people who were provided with reablement during 2010-11, did not require further services and were able to remain independent.' The CSSIW also noted that 'the Council has reduced the time taken to complete occupational therapy assessments from 13 to 10 weeks in 2011-12'.
- 84 A key enabler to older people being able to stay in their own homes for longer is the fitting of disabled facilities. Residents can apply to the Council for grants to undertake such work. The Council has had long waiting times in the past for the delivery of grant-funded adaptations. The Council

<sup>2</sup> Telecare service uses technology to provide remote monitoring and support services to enable people to live more independently in their own homes.

reported that in 2010-11 the time has reduced from 386 days in 2009-10 to 305 days. However, the time to deliver low-cost adaptations remains long, and the Council acknowledges more work is need in this area.

- 85 A new extra care housing development, 'Plas Madoc', opened in October 2011, which will provide affordable supported accommodation in 52 flats. This is a good achievement. The Council still needs to do a lot more work to achieve its aims of enabling older people to have access to a wider variety of quality accommodation, care and support services. The Council recognises it has limited suitable accommodation for older people. It is currently reviewing its sheltered housing provision, and then needs to develop plans and identify funding to address the identified shortfall in accommodation.
- 86 The use of telecare services has continued to increase, both for basic services and enhanced packages.
- Council progress in aspects of children's services will be inspected by the CSSIW and reported to the Council in 2012**
- 87 Safeguarding children is a council improvement priority and the Council has reported that it is 'on track' to achieve its objectives, although it has identified some areas where improvement is needed and planned for 2011-12. As noted above, the CSSIW reported 'this is the second year that the need for improvement has been identified in these aspects of children's services and whilst actions have been taken with the aim of improving performance, these have not yet had sufficient impact'.

- 88 An inspection by the CSSIW of the Council's arrangements for the assessment and care management of children in need is scheduled for winter 2011-12.

**The Council is delivering many activities to help people to eat a more healthy diet and be more active but it is not yet able to demonstrate the impact of this work**

- 89 The Council says it is 'on track' to achieve its objective to encourage people to eat more healthily and be more active (HEBMA). This is an objective that the Council is working on with a wide range of partners. The Council's role has included developing additional opportunities for children and adults to undertake physical activities and to improve healthy eating within schools. The Council has monitored its actions but we have previously commented that it had not clarified how it would tell if its actions were making a difference to the people of Wrexham. Because the Council and its partners did not initially clarify how they will measure their success during 2009-2012 they will be unable to do so. The aim of the multi-agency *HEBMA Strategy*, agreed during 2010, is to improve the health and well-being of the people of Wrexham by reducing the levels of obese and overweight adults and children through healthy eating and being more active. It seeks to:
- reduce the levels of obese and overweight adults and children living in Wrexham;
  - increase breastfeeding rates;
  - increase the number of people who report to have consumed five portions of fruit and vegetables the previous day; and

- increase the number of people who report to reach the recommended level of physical activity in the previous week.
- 90 These aims were included in the *Council Plan – Setting Our Targets 2010 to 2011*. However, the data necessary to assess progress with these aims is not yet fully in place or being used.
- 91 The Council’s work during 2010-11 included establishing new safe cycle and walking routes for three schools and continuing to develop the *Appetite for Life* scheme. This scheme has improved school dining areas, introduced more healthy menus and provided education to pupils on the importance of eating a healthy diet. This has been undertaken in 18 primary and nine secondary schools. Further work is underway to win over both catering staff and pupils to the new healthier menus. The Council does not have any information on the impact of these changes, on the diet of young people, or the impact of the new walking and cycling routes.
- 92 The number of people on the *National Exercise on Referral Scheme* is exceeding its target, and is more successful than the preceding year. The Council feels this is in part due to its unique welcome meetings for participants, run by its team of officers, who have been named as ‘best in Wales’ by Fitness Wales.
- 93 The Council reports that it met all its targets for 2010-11 although many of the targets relating to exercise were lower in 2010-11 than the previous year. We understand this was due to the closure for renovation of Gwyn Evans Leisure Centre, although this is not explained in its annual performance report. The Council did not put in place a range of alternative activities for residents, during this period of closure.
- 94 More than two years since adopting the HEBMA objective, officers are continuing to work on the development of measures to demonstrate that the efforts of the Council is making a difference and that by the end of the council plan in April 2012, more people are eating a healthier diet and undertaking more exercise.
- The Council is failing to meet its objectives for increasing the number of new affordable homes during 2009-2012 although some significant developments are planned
- 95 In 2009, the Council adopted a top council priority of increasing the provision of affordable housing. It identified a need to provide an average of 147 new affordable homes each year to 2021. The Council has reported that it is ‘significantly off track’ for this objective.
- 96 For 2010-11, the Council failed to meet its target, with only 83 compared with a target of 178 affordable homes were delivered in Wrexham. This is the sixth lowest number and rate per 10,000 households of council areas in Wales. It does, however, represent an increase from the 10 units achieved in 2008-09 and 41 units in 2009-10. The Council is forecasting that approximately 85 affordable housing units will be provided in 2011-12.
- 97 The emphasis since 2010 has been on the identification of council-owned sites for possible development. The Council has focused its attention on identifying plots of land which it can make available to developers to build affordable homes on. It is now in a position of having outline



planning permission on 20 sites. The largest development is the replacement of Hightown Flats with approximately 140 new units.

- 98 Despite this poor performance, the officers continue to report the progress as being slightly off track to the Executive Board and scrutiny committees. We feel this is overly positive as the original target for affordable new homes in 2010-11 was 388. Despite reducing this target to less than half, the Council still failed to achieve it.

**There are weaknesses in the quality of council housing, response to homelessness and in arrangements for payment of housing benefit and council tax benefit**

- 99 The need for affordable housing is only one aspect of housing provision and the Council also faces challenges with the quality of its housing stock, responding to homelessness in the borough, and providing efficient support for claimants of housing benefit and council tax benefit.
- 100 The Council's own housing stock is in a poor condition and Wrexham will be one of only three councils in Wales which will not meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS) for all its homes by the end of the decade. During 2010, the Council undertook a Financial Options Appraisal which confirmed that it could not meet the WHQS using its own resources. It has developed priorities for delivering its Capital Programme of Works based on surveys of tenants. Whilst it is focusing its resources on addressing some of the concerns that tenants rate as most important, the Council does not have a strategy in place for meeting WHQS and will not review options

until after May 2012 elections. Wrexham's performance by 2011 towards achieving the Welsh Government target of 100 per cent compliance with WHQS is one of worst in Wales. Although the figures for full compliance are low, the performance in three specific improvement areas is much higher. All homes now have mains powered smoke detectors, and a comprehensive window and external door replacement programme has been completed.

- 101 In Wales, the number of households accepted as homeless fell from a peak in 2004-05 through to the end of 2009 but has since been gradually increasing. In Wrexham, there has been a similar trend with the number of households accepted as homeless in 2010-11 rising to nearly 400, compared with the previous peak of over 350 in 2004-05. The Wrexham Homeless Service has witnessed a three-fold increase in the number of people seeking assistance since 2008-09 and the number continues to increase. Changes have been made to the service but Wrexham had the lowest rate in Wales for taking action within 33 days of requests for help by homeless people. Other councils in North Wales performed much better than Wrexham in the percentage of potentially homeless households where action by the Council prevented homelessness for at least six months. Wrexham only achieved 35.07 per cent, which was the poorest performance and less than half the average rate for other North and Mid Wales councils. The Council is working with the Welsh Government to look at how the service can be improved.

102 In 2009-10, some £1.08 billion was spent on housing benefit (£832.9 million) and council tax benefit (£248.9 million) across Wales to low-income households. These benefits are administered by councils and this requires significant interaction with a large volume of vulnerable customers, so it is important that the service can meet their needs. In 2009, the percentage of households within Wrexham who were in receipt of housing benefit was comparable with the Welsh average, and was slightly lower for council tax benefit.

103 In 2010, the Council was forced to replace its benefits computer system over a very short timescale as the supplier withdrew support for the system. The implementation went well and the recording and recovering of benefit overpayments has improved as a result. The opportunity was taken to further modernise the service through the introduction of document management and workflow at the same time. The Council's performance is in the second quarter of councils in Wales. The Council recognises that it needs to do better and is working with the Department for Work and Pensions to address issues.

104 The lack of direct face-to-face customer access to specialist benefit staff for more complex initial new benefit claims through Contact Wrexham may be contributing to slower service delivery and lower accuracy on claims processing. The Council is now implementing further new software to assist with electronic applications for housing and council tax benefit, and additional specialist staff are being located in Contact Wrexham.

105 The Council has made improvements to the benefits service in response to suggestions from the Wales Audit Office and the Council's Internal Audit Service. However, to support further improvement the Council should:

- introduce adequate quality checks on claim processing prior to payment of benefit;
- introduce comprehensive procedural guidance on all aspects of the prevention and recovery of overpayment debt; and
- assess the impact of its service on customers through regular surveys of customers.

**Estyn judged education services to be adequate in November 2010; pupil performance in 2011 was good, NEETs have been reduced and opportunities for bilingual learning have been increased**

106 In this section we consider council provision to support the development of people including education services and the Council's priorities for:

- helping people to get a better education and the skills they need for employment; and
- promoting equal opportunities for children and young people to become bilingual in Welsh and English, and the Council promoting the Welsh culture.

107 In November 2010, Estyn inspected the Council's education services for children and young people. A summary of the findings and the Estyn assessment of recent performance is included below.

Whilst the performance of pupils in 2011 was good, the Estyn inspection of education services in November 2010 judged the services and the prospects of improvement as adequate

### Performance

- 108 Overall, in 2011, standards in Wrexham are good. When a range of contextual information is taken into account, the performance of pupils in Wrexham is good in all key stages. From 2007 to 2010, Wrexham met or exceeded the majority of the Welsh Government benchmarks for performance in key stages 3 (aged 14) and 4 (aged 16), based on free-school-meal entitlement. Benchmark information for 2011 is not yet available.
- 109 Attendance in secondary and primary schools is above average when contextual information is taken into account. There are almost no permanent exclusions. However, the rate of fixed-term exclusions is too high.

### Inspection

- 110 Estyn, the education and training inspectorate for Wales, inspected Wrexham in November 2010.
- 111 Inspectors judged that 'the local authority's education services for children and young people are adequate because:
- children and young people make steady progress and achieve good standards at the end of key stage 3 and 4;
  - the authority has improved its support and challenge to schools;
  - the authority has not made enough progress in reducing surplus places and in making sure that sixth form provision provides value for money; and

- there are too many secondary schools with deficit budgets.
- 112 Inspectors judged that the local authority has adequate prospects for improvement because:
- elected members and senior officers have good working relationships and engage well in a range of partnerships;
  - there is an increasing emphasis on self-evaluation;
  - most individual services do not evaluate outcomes consistently enough to target support effectively and there is not a clear shared overview of performance across the authority; and
  - there is not enough clarity about the authority's priorities for education.
- 113 Inspectors recommended that, in order to improve, the authority should:
- clarify the objectives for education within the Council's priorities and reflect these within its plans;
  - make sure the roles of Executive Board and scrutiny support effective decision making to improve services to children and young people;
  - improve the quality and consistency of evaluation of services to better inform planning;
  - develop consistent arrangements for reporting performance in education services and across the Children and Young People's Partnership;

- reduce surplus places in secondary schools in line with the Council's realigned strategy for school reorganisation; and
- improve the effectiveness of arrangements to tackle secondary school budget deficits.'

114 Estyn will make a monitoring visit in March 2012 to assess progress against the inspection recommendations.

The number of 16 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) has continued to reduce and the Council has changed its objective from 'better education and skills for employment' to 'improving aspirations, learning and achievement'

115 In 2009, the Council set 'helping people to get a better education and the skills they need for employment' as one of its council priorities. The overall purpose was to support people to develop the education and skills they need to successfully find employment. The long-term target is to reduce the percentage of people of working age who are economically inactive. However, in the short to medium term, the Council decided to focus on achieving a reduction in the percentage of young people leaving school each year who are not in employment, education or training. The Council has reported that it is 'on track' to achieve this outcome.

116 In 2008, in Wrexham, nearly one in 10 young people who left school aged 16 were not known to be in education, employment or training. By 2009, this had reduced by half to be slightly better than the average for Wales. In 2010, there was a further reduction from five per cent to 4.2 per cent.

117 In April 2010, the Council decided to set extra measures to monitor and improve the level of year 12 and 13 school leavers (aged 17 to 19) who are NEETs and the proportion of pupils aged 16 remaining in full-time education. This is because the Council's performance in these areas worsened between 2008 and 2009, compared with the average for Wales.

118 In 2010, in Wrexham there were 2.8 per cent of year 12 pupils who were NEETs, which is below the Welsh average of 3.1 per cent. However, there were 7.7 per cent of year 13 pupils in Wrexham who were NEETs, which is above the Welsh average of 6.6 per cent. This remains an area for further improvement.

119 The percentage of school leavers who remain in full-time education after year 11 has improved but is still below the average for councils in Wales. The percentage that then go on to higher education after year 13 was the lowest in Wales in 2010, and has been for a number of years.

120 Last year, we said that the Council needed to widen its focus of work, as it had chosen a very narrow focus that did not fully reflect the 'better education and skills for employment' objective. The Estyn inspection recommended the Council should 'clarify the objectives for education within the Council's priorities and reflect these within its plans'. The Council decided to amend the improvement objective to look at a wider range of education issues. It chose to broaden the objective to 'all children and young people have positive aspirations, learn and achieve their potential.' This is one of the intended outcomes from its new joint plan, which sets

out the *Wrexham Children and Young People's Plan* and Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategy for 2011-14.

- 121 The Council has set targets for the measures it will use to determine if it meets its new objective, and it began reporting on progress to members in the second half of 2011. However, these measures focus predominately on school-based learning, and the Council has not included measures on year 12 or 13 NEETs, despite identifying this as an area it needed to improve. Nor has the Council set any targets on increasing the uptake of higher education, which remains the lowest in Wales.

The Council increased opportunities for people to access Welsh culture, and continues to try and increase provision for children and young people to become bilingual but lacks success measures for some outcomes

- 122 The Council has reported that it is 'on track' to achieve its objectives for promoting equality of opportunity for children and young people to become bilingual and to promote the Welsh culture. It is seeking to achieve four outcomes:

- equality of access of Welsh-medium schools at primary and secondary level;
- equality of opportunity for those who wish to pursue bilingual learning;
- equality of access to services; and
- provision of opportunities for people to enhance their understanding of Welsh culture and heritage.

- 123 In 2010-11, the Executive Board approved the consultation process on the proposal for building a Welsh-medium primary school in Gwersyllt. The consultation has been

undertaken, and a report on this went to the Executive Board in October 2011, for a school that would provide 210 pupil places. The Executive approved the proposal to publish statutory notices to establish the new school. If no objections are received, the school could be built and opened in time for the beginning of the new academic year in September 2013.

- 124 Last year, we said in our *Annual Improvement Report* that the Council is not able to know if it is increasing the opportunities to learn in Welsh, as it has not set itself specific measurable targets. This remains the case in 2010-11. The measures the Council has set do not tell them if all pupils who want to learn through Welsh can do so, or if pupils are able to become bilingual.

- 125 The Council reported high levels of satisfaction with the level of service provided in the Welsh language; however, the Welsh Language Board raised concerns about the provision of access to services in Welsh. In its annual review of the operation of the Council's *Welsh Language Scheme* it said:

- The Welsh Language Board has praised the Council's efforts to mainstream the Welsh language into its corporate planning agenda by ensuring that all of the Council's main policies and strategies will be subject to impact assessments over the next three years. Consideration of *Welsh Language Scheme* targets in the Council's business planning process is made easier by its use of the Ffynnon performance management system.

- The Council failed to achieve its target of increasing the number of Welsh-speaking staff in its employment. No front-line posts that became vacant during the year were advertised with the ability to speak Welsh as an 'essential' requirement. Internal monitoring showed that the Council's response to letters sent in Welsh to the Council was unsatisfactory. Steps have now been agreed with the Welsh Language Board to address these issues.
- 126 The difficulties experienced in increasing the number of Welsh-speaking staff were not mentioned in the annual performance report, nor are they described in the Council's report to scrutiny on customer care standards for 2010-11. The Council has had a Welsh language training programme in place for many years. During 2011-12, the Council has sought to further promote the learning of Welsh and two refresher training courses for less-fluent Welsh speakers have been provided. The Council has also decided to increase advanced Welsh language training in 2012-13.
- 127 The Council hosted a successful National Eisteddfod in the summer of 2011, with much of the preparation for this event taking place in 2010-11. Other cultural events are available through the *Wrexham Year of Culture*, and in the newly refurbished museum.
- 128 For the measures it set, the Council has been successful in increasing the percentage of pupils transferring between a Welsh-medium primary and secondary school, and increasing the number of people who attended programmes delivered through the medium of Welsh. However,
- only half of the measures were met. In some instances, the Council's performance in 2010-11 was lower than the previous year, including the number of pupils enrolling in the immersion programme at Ysgol Morgan Llwyd and entering a Welsh-medium education, or the number of pupils who sit full GCSE examinations in Welsh as a second language. The Council has prepared a plan for Welsh language education, using a format required by the Welsh Government. This plan is high level and lacks details or planned timescales for delivery. The Council intends, once feedback is received from the Welsh Government, to develop a more detailed Implementation Plan. There is a risk that without clear and robust plans, the Council may be unable to meet the likely increased demand for residents to learn through the medium of Welsh, which usually occurs following an Eisteddfod.
- 129 The Council has not set out how long it expects to take to achieve equality of access to Welsh-medium schools, or equality of access to services. This will be partly determined by the Welsh Government's *21st Century Schools Programme*. The Council is unlikely to fully achieve its objective by the end of its three-year planning period and may therefore not be 'on track' for this objective, despite the work towards additional Welsh-medium school places.



Carbon emissions and energy use are being reduced and waste services improved although there is a mixed picture for reducing anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and fear of crime

**The Council is making progress to reduce its carbon emissions and energy usage**

- 130 The Council has reported it is on track to reduce carbon emissions and energy use. We share this assessment because the Council is already achieving a reduction in carbon emissions, some financial savings and is implementing its plans for longer-term measures and for communicating its strategy.
- 131 A range of carbon reduction projects have been delivered including for housing, non-domestic buildings, street lighting and the vehicle fleet. In 2010-11, the Council achieved a 4.9 per cent reduction which is close to the average in Wales of 5.4 per cent in emissions from non-domestic public building stock.
- 132 The Council has decided to use some prudential borrowing and Welsh Government major repairs allowance funding to install solar photo-voltaic (PV) panels on up to 3,000 council housings and other buildings as part of its priority on carbon emission and energy use reduction. This major development is proceeding following a review in response to the UK Government decision to change the 'feed-in tariff' arrangements. This has been given a high priority by the Council which has chosen to borrow funds and invest in the solar panels, which will help reduce use of

carbon, provide lower costs to tenants, and is expected to provide significant income in future years. The Council has not yet determined how the income will be used including the extent to which it may be used to improve the quality of housing stock, schools or other assets.

- 133 The Council has a comprehensive strategy for communicating its work on carbon reduction. It provides a good source of web-based information on reducing carbon emissions and energy. The Council provides an informative DVD for using solar PV panels and on reducing carbon emissions and energy. Other projects include replacing street lighting with more efficient lights and upgrading boilers in its council homes.
- 134 There is an inadequate basket of performance measures for carbon emissions and energy use reduction.

**Waste services are continuing to improve**

- 135 The Council has reported it is 'on track' to achieve its objective to minimise waste and improve recycling. We share this assessment.
- 136 The Council has reported that, in 2010-11, it:
- increased the percentage of municipal waste reused, recycled or composted by five per cent;
  - increased the percentage of waste received at household waste amenity sites that is reused, recycled or composted by eight per cent;
  - reduced the total tonnage of biodegradable municipal waste sent to landfill by nine per cent; and



- reduced the percentage of waste sent to landfill by eight per cent.
- 137 The Council has continued to develop its waste services in the collection and treatment of residual waste (that which cannot be recycled). This service is part of a PFI scheme established by the Council a number of years ago. In 2010, the Council undertook a review of food collection and, following this, has now begun to pilot the weekly collection of food waste from homes.
- 138 The amount of domestic waste that goes to landfill has reduced and the amount that is reused, recycled or composted has increased. The Council's recycling facilities for the public are good. The recycling rates are close to the average for councils in Wales.
- 139 The Council reports all of its actions are on track. It has forged stronger links with schools, phased in the collection of food waste and cardboard, and held awareness-raising events. However, the uptake of the Council's trade waste service has been lower than planned.
- Good progress has been made in the objective to reduce anti-social behaviour although there is mixed progress in reducing substance misuse levels**
- 140 The Council works with its partners in the Wrexham Community Safety Partnership to reduce anti-social behaviour and substance misuse and to reduce fear of crime. For 2010-11, it reported that it was 'on track' to achieve its objective, although by mid 2011-12 it reported that it was slightly 'off track', primarily as a result of an increase in direct sales of alcohol to young people.
- 141 The level of anti-social behaviour in Wrexham went down by approximately 10 per cent between 2008 and 2009, and remained at a similar reduced level of 8,200 reported incidents in 2010. A further reduction in reported incidents has been reported during the first half of 2011.
- 142 During 2010-11, the Council met its targets for new indicators for intervention and under-age sales of alcohol and cigarettes. In 2011-12, the Council has reported a rise in sales of alcohol to underage children. Scrutiny members remain concerned about this and further work is planned to reduce sales of alcohol to underage children.
- 143 During 2010, the Community Safety Partnership reported that across North Wales as a whole there had been a rise in the proportion of residents who were concerned about anti-social behaviour, drug abuse, and drunk and rowdy behaviour in their area. The residents of Wrexham had the highest level of confidence that crime and anti-social behaviour were being dealt with by North Wales Police. The Council reported that there was no perception survey to assess fear of crime during 2010-11 but this was due to be conducted in autumn 2011.
- 144 The Council and the police continue to recruit additional police community support officers. But there has been no assessment of the impact these new posts have on the level of crime, or the fear of crime.

- 145 The September 2010 rate of reoffending whilst under the supervision of the probation service was 14.2 per cent, which is higher than the Wales average of 10.9 per cent. This is higher than predicted and the reasons why are being reviewed by the probation service.
- 146 However, the Council should consider whether it relies too heavily on demonstrating outputs and the number of actions it has taken to show progress, instead of focusing on the actual benefits and outcomes that have been achieved.
- 147 The Council has also played an important role in the development of the first joint Flintshire and Wrexham Community Safety Partnership Plan 2011-14 between the Wrexham Community Safety Partnership and the Flintshire Community Safety Partnership.

## Extensive time and resources are used in performance monitoring but the Council is not making the best use of information to support self-assessment and performance management

### **Whilst performance assessment is detailed and open, it is not sufficiently balanced or focused on achieving outcomes**

- 148 In 2010, the Auditor General identified that whilst the Council had identified a set of priorities which were focused on achieving improved outcomes for citizens, for some of the priorities, success measures had not been identified against which progress could be measured. Whilst the Council has undertaken work to improve the indicators during 2011, the lack of a complete set of success measures has limited the ability of the Council to assess its progress against several of the priorities.
- 149 Although the Council is unable to monitor the outcomes from some of its priorities, it does monitor the progress in delivering its plans and performance against the indicators it has chosen and National Strategic Indicators (NSIs). The reporting against the actions and indicators is detailed and follows a process in which performance reports are subject to challenge, agreed with the lead member, circulated to scrutiny members for feedback, considered by a scrutiny committee, then reported to the Executive Board with comments from scrutiny. Apart from detailed reports, elected members are also asked to refer to additional reports and data held on the Council's intranet system.
- 150 As reported last year, this is a long and cumbersome process. It took three months for the performance reports for April to June 2011 to be considered by the scrutiny committee and Executive Board. This reduces the ability of elected members to use the information to make timely changes to address poor performance during the year.
- 151 Many performance reports note progress against targets but we have noted previously that there is not a consistent approach to target setting. Some targets are challenging, whilst others are set at levels below current performance. This results in some performance being reported positively because targets are being met when the actual performance may be deteriorating. The Council has not made any progress in developing a clear and consistent approach.
- 152 Whilst lead members are involved in commenting on the performance reports, the scrutiny presentation is by officers and before the Executive has considered the information. This reduces the ability of the scrutiny process to hold the Executive to account.
- 153 Reporting includes providing a 'status' for progress on objectives, sub-objectives and service areas. The status is described as 'on track', 'slightly off track' or 'off track'. Whilst the status is given under a heading of 'outcome' it usually related to progress on delivering plans. In some cases, we found the status given was too positive.
- 154 The proposals for the future Council Plan Framework presented by the Leader and Chief Executive to the Executive Board in December 2011 identifies the need to populate the performance management framework with outcome measures, improvement activity actions, and progress measures. If this is undertaken at the start of the planned new four-year council plan, it has the potential to improve the ability of the Council to self-asses and manage its performance.

**The Council's published assessment of its performance in 2010-11 meets most of the requirements but significant weaknesses reduce its effectiveness**

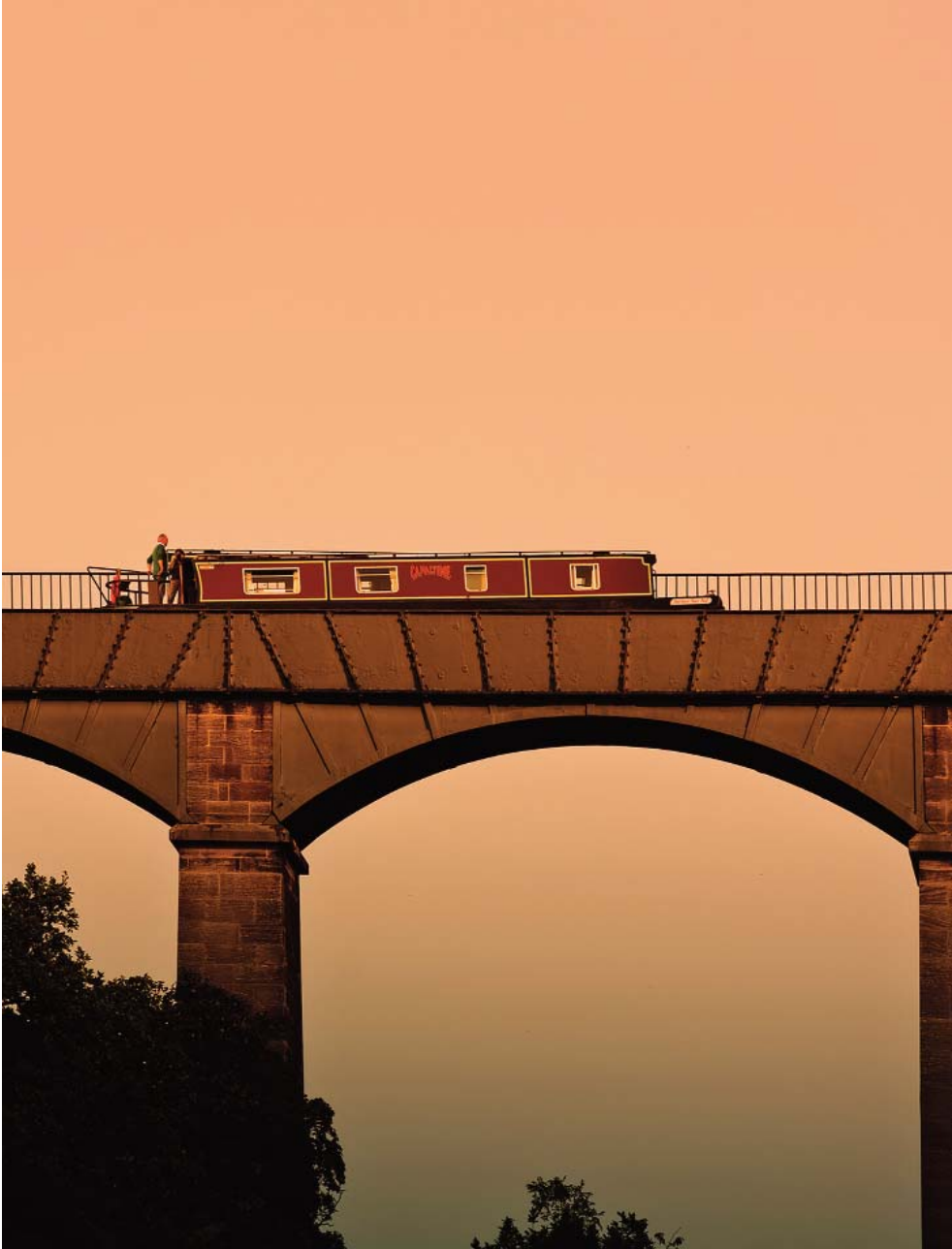
- 155 The Council has published its report *Council Plan – Part 3 'Focused on Performance' 2010 to 2011* to fulfil the requirements of the Measure. The intention of the legislation is for councils to publish a robust assessment of their performance in a form that citizens can read and understand.
- 156 The Auditor General has determined that the authority has discharged all of its duties under section 15(1) to (7) of the Measure. However, the Council should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance: specifically to:
- ensure the report presents a fair and balanced picture of performance;
  - ensure the rationale for comparison with other councils is clear;
  - indicate whether collaborations have achieved their intended objectives; and
  - ensure the report is readily available to all audiences by 31 October including through Welsh language in accordance with the Council's Welsh Language policy.
- 157 The report was published before the required date and fulfils the requirements for:
- inclusion of performance against NSIs;
  - drawing from wider evidence than just performance indicators; and
  - inviting comments and suggestions from citizens and partners.
- 158 We found that the assessment was weakened where the Council lacks suitable success measures for its improvement objectives, as noted above. Whilst the report uses progress against actions, performance indicators and other information, it does not include some expected information from regulators and inspectors or other external sources. It does not refer to the Estyn inspection published in March 2011, does not draw on the general assessments by the WLGA *Financial Peer Review* and uses Wales Audit Office comments on specific objectives but not overall comments on the Council.
- 159 Wrexham performance for the NSIs includes trend information and comparison with other councils in Wales. But, elsewhere there is limited and selective use of comparison information without any rationale for this.
- 160 The report describes the Council's engagement in collaboration with other councils and partners but does not give any information about the outcomes from such collaboration.
- 161 As noted above, the assessment for specific improvement objectives is described under the heading 'outcomes' but this is often misleading because the information is about actions rather than outcomes. Some of the data used varied from that used in other documents, differed from that used by partners or was difficult to reconcile.

- 162 The weaknesses in not drawing on some available information from Estyn and other reports, providing inconsistent comparisons with other councils and misleading references to outcomes, weaken the extent to which the report presents a fair and balanced picture of performance.
- 163 The Welsh versions of the report and the summary were not available by 31 October and whilst some copies of the report have been placed in council offices and a brief reference made in the Council magazine, it has not actively promoted awareness of the report.

**Weaknesses were identified in the accuracy of some data**

- 164 Monitoring and managing performance requires accurate performance information to be available. The Wales Audit Office carried out an audit on the data for the 2010-11 NSIs and a small group of Local Performance Indicators (LPIs). We concluded that generally the Council had put in place adequate systems to produce the 2010-11 NSIs and LPIs. However, nine of the 25 NSIs were required to be re-calculated because we identified some use of wrong definitions, and we reported reservations about the final data for three NSIs.
- 165 Whilst the majority of the data was satisfactory, over a third of the NSIs had to be re-calculated or were qualified. This suggests that more needs to be done to give assurance that the data used to help manage and assess performance is robust.

# 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 Wrexham and Wrexham County Borough Council

### The Council

Wrexham County Borough Council spends approximately £264 million per year (2011-12). This equates to about £1,977 per resident. In the same year, the Council planned to also spend £60.5 million on capital items.

The average band D council tax in Wrexham for 2010-11 was £1,101 per year. This has increased by 3.17 per cent to £1,135 per year for 2011-12. The council tax level is 2.3 per cent below the average for Wales of £1,162. Seventy-two per cent of the dwellings within Wrexham are in council tax bands A to D.

The Council is made up of 52 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:

- 13 Labour Group
- 11 Liberal Democratic/Independent Alliance
- 8 Wrexham Independent Group
- 7 Democratic Independent Group
- 5 Conservative Group
- 4 Independent Group
- 3 Plaid Cymru Group
- 1 Non-aligned

The Council's Executive Board is composed of 10 members with a balanced representation of the parties. The Council's Leader is Councillor Ron Davies.

The Council's Chief Executive is Dr Helen Paterson and her management team includes:

- Strategic and Performance Director – Clare Field
- Strategic and Performance Director – Lee Robinson
- Strategic and Performance Director – Philip Walton

## Other information

The Constituency Assembly Members for the area are:

- Lesley Griffiths, Wrexham, Labour Party
- Ken Skates, Clwyd South, Labour Party

The Regional Assembly Members are:

- Llyr Huws Gruffydd, Plaid Cymru
- Mark Isherwood, Welsh Conservative Party
- Aled Roberts, Welsh Liberal Party
- Antoinette Sandbach, Welsh Conservative Party

The Members of Parliament for the area are:

- Ian Lucas, Wrexham, The Labour Party
- Susan Elan Jones, Clwyd South, The Labour Party

For more information see the Council's own website at [www.wrexham.gov.uk](http://www.wrexham.gov.uk) or contact the Council at Wrexham County Borough Council, The Guildhall, Wrexham LL11 1AY.

## Appendix 3

### Annual Audit Letter to the Members of Wrexham County Borough Council

The auditor appointed by the Auditor General issued the following auditor's letter on 18 November 2011.

#### Annual Audit Letter to the Members of Wrexham County Borough Council

As you will be aware the Auditor General for Wales will be issuing an Annual Improvement Report (AIR) to each local authority by the end of January 2012 and some of the issues that were traditionally reported in the Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter will be included in that report. Therefore, I have taken the opportunity to summarise the key messages arising from the Appointed Auditor's statutory responsibilities into this short letter which forms the Annual Audit Letter. The letter is designed to be a stand-alone document, but will also be presented to the Council and the public as part of the Annual Improvement Report and therefore discharges my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

#### Wrexham County Borough Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources

- 1 It is Wrexham County Borough Council's (the Council) 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.
- 2 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.

- 3 On 30 September 2011 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. A number of matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members in my Audit of Financial Statements report and further details will be reported in our detailed report in due course.
- 4 From 2010-11 local authorities in Wales are required to produce their accounts on the basis of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). The introduction of these new standards imposed significant additional demands on the Council's finance staff. Despite this, the financial statements were generally prepared to a good standard by the statutory deadline reflecting the significant amount of work undertaken by the finance team staff to prepare them on an IFRS basis for the first time.
- 5 My review 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 Measure (2009). The main findings from this latter work will be set out in the Annual Improvement Report. In addition, I also bring the following issues to your attention:

  - The Council has strong financial leadership supported by effective budgetary control arrangements. Medium-term financial planning continues to develop but the Council faces significant financial pressures in the future. This will be referred to further in the Annual Improvement Report.
  - Improvements have been made within the Internal Audit function and our annual assessment identified that ten of the eleven CIPFA standards were met.
- 6 I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 30 September 2011.
- 7 The financial audit fee for 2010-11 is close to what was set out in the Annual Audit Outline. Given the impact of IFRS on Property, Plant and Equipment and the complexity of these issues, the final fee will include an additional amount of £6,622 as my team undertook additional work in ensuring sufficient information was obtained to support the entries in the financial statements.

John Herniman  
Group Director – Financial Audit

For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor  
18 November 2011

cc Dr. Helen Paterson, Chief Executive

## Appendix 4

# Wrexham County Borough 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 *Council Plan – Part 2 'Setting Our Targets' 2010 to 2011* which can be found on the Council's website at <http://www.wrexham.gov.uk>. The objectives have remained largely the same for the period of the *Council Plan – Part 1 'Defining our Direction' 2009 to 2012*. They are:

Three council priorities of:

- helping to increase the number of affordable homes that are available in the county borough;
- helping people to get a better education and the skills they need for employment; and
- reducing the amount of energy used and lowering carbon emissions.

The Council also has a set of 'improvement priorities'. These relate to areas from existing strategies and plans where the Council wants major improvements to take place. There are eight 'improvement priorities' which we have summarised as:

- helping older people to live independently;
- helping people to eat a more healthy diet and be more active;
- making it easier for people to use its services, and also asking the public how their services could be improved;
- promoting equal opportunities for children and young people to become bilingual in Welsh and English, and the Council promoting the Welsh culture;
- reducing anti-social behaviour and substance misuse, and helping to improve the perceptions of crime;
- reducing the amount of waste by increasing the rate of recycling;
- delivering the *Transformation Programme*; and
- improving the safeguarding of children (added for the year 2010-11).

### The Council's self-assessment of performance

The Council's self-assessment of its performance can be found in its *Council Plan – Part 3 'Focused on our Performance' 2010 to 2011* which can also be found on the Council's website at:

<http://www.wrexham.gov.uk>.

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