



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report 2014-15

Denbighshire County Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Huw Lloyd Jones and Gwilym Bury under the direction of Jane Holownia.

Huw Vaughan Thomas
Auditor General for Wales
Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff
CF11 9LJ

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

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

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

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

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Summary report

Purpose of this report

- 1 Each year the Auditor General is required to audit the improvement planning and reporting arrangements of Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities and national park authorities, and to assess whether each authority will meet statutory continuous improvement duties¹. This work has been undertaken on behalf of the Auditor General by staff of the Wales Audit Office. **Appendix 1** provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties in local government.
- 2 In addition, the Auditor General undertakes an in-depth corporate assessment at each authority on a cyclical basis (currently at least once every four years). In the intervening years, in addition to audits of improvement planning and reporting, the Wales Audit Office, on behalf of the Auditor General, will keep track of developments and focus further improvement assessment work on a number of key themes, developed in discussion with each authority.
- 3 This Annual Improvement Report summarises the audit work undertaken at Denbighshire County Council (the Council) since the last such report was published in April 2014. The Annual Improvement Report also includes a summary of the key findings from reports and letters issued by 'relevant regulators', namely; the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW); Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn); and the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC). Nonetheless, this report does not represent a comprehensive review of all the Council's arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on the work carried out at the Council by the relevant regulators and, unless stated otherwise, reflect the situation at the point in time that such work was concluded.
- 4 Taking into consideration the work carried out during 2014-15, the Auditor General has provided an 'Overall Conclusion' in this report (see **page 6**) as to whether he believes that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2015-16.
- 5 This conclusion should not be seen as a definitive statement of organisational health or as a prediction of future success. Rather, it should be viewed as providing an opinion on the extent to which the arrangements currently in place are reasonably sound insofar as can be ascertained from the work carried out.
- 6 We want to find out if this report gives you the information you need and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by e-mailing us at info@audit.wales or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

¹ Duties and requirements contained within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure).

The Council continued to make progress in delivering improvements in all of its priority objectives and its track record in delivering its financial objectives mean it is well placed to secure continuous improvement in 2015-16

7 The Auditor General has based this conclusion on the performance audit work carried out during the year by the Wales Audit Office and the inspection work of other regulators. The projects undertaken, together with the resultant findings, recommendations and/or proposals for improvement, are summarised below.

2014-15 performance audit work

8 In determining the breadth of work to be undertaken we considered the extent of accumulated audit and inspection knowledge as well as other available sources of information including the Council’s own mechanisms for review and evaluation. For 2014-15, the Wales Audit Office undertook improvement assessment work under three themes: Performance, Use of Resources, and Governance. Individual projects undertaken by the Wales Audit Office and the other regulators during the year included:

Project name	Brief description	Dates when the work was undertaken
Wales Audit Office – Financial planning review	Assessment of the Council’s financial position and how it is budgeting and delivering on required savings.	July to November 2014
Wales Audit Office – Audit of the Council’s Improvement Plan	Assessment of the Council’s adherence to Welsh Government guidelines for the publication of its Improvement Plan.	April to June 2014
Wales Audit Office – Audit of the Council’s Performance Report	Assessment of the Council’s adherence to Welsh Government requirements for the publication of its Performance Report.	October to November 2014
Wales Audit Office –Follow up review of arrangements for affordable housing	Assessment of progress on arrangements for provision of affordable housing.	October to December 2014

Project name	Brief description	Dates when the work was undertaken
Wales Audit Office – Follow up review of arrangements for Human resource service	Assessment of progress on arrangements for provision of the Council's Human Resource service.	October to December 2014
Wales Audit Office – Follow up review of arrangements for Council's Economy Improvement Objective	Assessment of progress on arrangements for delivering the Council's Economy Improvement Objective.	October to December 2014
Wales Audit Office – Review of the Council's arrangements for distributing Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's services for the allocation, distribution, administration and use of DHP.	January to March 2015
Wales Audit Office –Review of the Council's governance arrangements for risk management	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements.	October 2014
CSSIW – Inspection of the Council's adoption service	Assessment of the effectiveness of the provision of adoption services.	November 2013
CSSIW – Inspection of safeguarding and care planning of looked-after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's services for looked-after children over 11 years of age and care leavers who were identified as being vulnerable and/or involved in risky behaviours.	April to May 2014
CSSIW – Inspection of the Council's Fostering Service	Assessment of the Service provided by the Council and the quality of life experienced by those in foster care.	January 2014
CSSIW – Review of the Social Services Department's performance in 2013-14	Assessment of the performance of the Council's Social Services Department.	April to October 2014
WLC – Review of the Council's Welsh Language Scheme	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Scheme in providing Council services to the public in Welsh.	July to August 2014

Headlines – a summary of key findings

- 9 The table below summarises the key findings of work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office, and the other regulators, in 2014-15.

Performance	<p>Wales Audit Office – The use of performance standards continues to promote a consistent culture of ambition across the Council’s services (paragraphs 13 to 16).</p> <p>CSSIW – Overall, the performance of the social care department is strong but the introduction of new models of working for both children’s and adult services will need rigorous evaluation throughout the forthcoming year. (paragraphs 17 to 30).</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – Limited progress has been made in addressing the underperformance in the provision of affordable housing but the Council has helped prevent many people from becoming homeless (paragraphs 31 to 33).</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council has improved the performance of its Human Resource service (paragraphs 34 to 35).</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The progress of initiatives to support the Denbighshire economy has been inconsistent, but improved arrangements are likely to support the Council’s ambitions (paragraphs 36 to 43).</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council is making good progress in committing its Discretionary Housing Payments and improvements in monitoring since April 2015 will help to clarify their impact (paragraphs 44 to 48).</p> <p>Welsh Language Commissioner – Further progress was made to improve the Welsh language capability of Council staff (paragraphs 49 to 51).</p>
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Use of Resources	Wales Audit Office – The Council has good financial management arrangements with no immediate shortcomings (paragraphs 52 to 63).
Governance	<p>Wales Audit Office – The Council’s risk management arrangements are robust and fit for purpose (paragraphs 64 to 68).</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council produces well informed balanced evaluations of its performance (paragraphs 69 to 70).</p>
Improvement planning and reporting audits	Wales Audit Office – The Auditor General issued audit certificates stating that the Council had discharged its duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (Appendices 2 and 3).
Audit of accounts	Wales Audit Office – On 28 November 2014, the Appointed Auditor issued an Annual Audit Letter to the Council. The Letter summarises the key messages arising from his statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. It confirmed that, on 30 September 2014, he issued an unqualified opinion on the Council’s financial statements (Appendix 4).

Recommendations and proposals for improvement

- 10 Given the wide range of services provided by the Council and the challenges it is facing, it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
- a make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
 - b make proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Council, we would expect it to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
 - c conduct a special inspection and publish a report and make recommendations; and
 - d recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 11 The Auditor General makes no formal recommendations to the Council in this Annual Improvement Report. He does, however, make recommendations that may be relevant to the Council in his Local Government National Reports. A list of recommendations contained in reports issued in 2014-15 can be found in [Appendix 5](#). We also make two proposals for improvement arising from the work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office during the year:

Proposals for improvement	
The Council should:	
P1	Ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear for the achievement of the new affordable housing objective.
P2	Review its working practices against the recommendations in the Auditor General's 2014-15 Local Government National Reports, as set out in Appendix 5 , and implement improvements as necessary.

- 12 In addition, the CSSIW, Estyn and the WLC included areas for improvement in their inspection reports and letters issued to the Council during the year. These are available at www.cssiw.org.uk, www.estyn.gov.uk and www.comisiynyddygydraeg.org.

Detailed report



Performance

The use of performance standards continues to promote a consistent culture of ambition across the Council's services

- 13 The Council has continued its approach of rejecting target-setting based on incremental improvement on the previous year's performance in favour of an approach based on achievement of the 'excellence threshold'. Excellence thresholds are usually based on the Council's performance being amongst one of the top six performing councils in Wales. If over half the other councils in Wales are achieving better performance than in Denbighshire, the Council will consider the issue concerned a high priority for improvement. The concept of the 'excellence threshold' is clearly understood by senior management and helps to instil a consistent level of ambition across the Council.
- 14 The Council's performance in 2013-14 improved, with 16 of the 25 statutory performance indicators in the top quartile. Only four were in the bottom quartile and the Council continued to achieve improvements across many of its service areas.
- 15 Our last two Annual Improvement Reports concluded that the Council's performance management arrangements were soundly based and developing satisfactorily, with clear and effective leadership by senior officers and councillors. This continues to be the case. The performance scrutiny committee and the well-established service challenges receive performance information of consistent quality and in an easily understood format. In addition to the service challenges, the Council's Cabinet reviews performance on a six monthly basis.
- 16 Despite overall staffing numbers having fallen for the last two years, we found that the Council's central policy team continues to oversee, co ordinate, and actively manage performance. This has enabled the Council to continue to deliver a well-understood and consistent system for performance management.

Overall, the performance of the social care department is strong but the introduction of new models of working for both children's and adult services will need rigorous evaluation throughout the forthcoming year

- 17 CSSIW found that the Council has set out a five year plan to modernise its social services that will involve a transformation, not just of the pattern of social care services, but also in the shape of the workforce employed to provide care and support. The Council believes that this cultural change will help it to prepare for the implementation of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and the delivery of sustainable social services. However, the introduction in 2013-14 of new models of working for both children's and adult services will need rigorous evaluation throughout the forthcoming year.

- 18 The Council continues to engage actively with people who use its services and CSSIW notes that there is evidence that users' views have been incorporated into service developments and improvements. For example, CSSIW found that the Council demonstrates commitment, creativity and pragmatism in its response to 'More Than Just Words/ Mwy Na Geiriau'², with clear evidence of forward planning designed to heighten awareness and take-up of the Welsh language, and to increase the accessibility of social services in the language of need. Innovative approaches have been introduced to support the emotional well-being of younger and older adults, integrated project work with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, (BCUHB) and early intervention for children and families.
- 19 In 2013-14, significant, planned, staffing changes within the department took place. These included changes at leadership level through the appointment of a new Director of Social Services and the re-structuring of staffing teams for many services delivered to children and adults. The Council faces substantial demographic changes within an uncertain financial climate. CSSIW found powerful evidence that the Council has adopted a strategic approach to meeting these challenges. The Council's approach includes a review of existing services; the introduction of innovative models of practice; integrated partnership development; and the exploration of the potential for regional commissioning for some services.
- 20 CSSIW concluded that there had been improvement in the provision of adult social care in the County with new initiatives promoting independence. During 2013-14, the emphasis of the Council was to enable a greater number of people aged 65 years and over to remain independent. Networks have been developed to help people with complex needs to remain in their local communities. Some examples include the delivery of targeted programmes designed to help meet the emotional well-being of older adults such as the 'Men's Sheds' and University of the Third Age, both designed to prevent social isolation, encourage the sharing of skills and interests, and to identify specific areas of help and support.
- 21 CSSIW found there was an improvement in performance in relation to the numbers of reviews of care plans carried out, although demand for reviews also increased. In 2013-14, the Council introduced a rota of visits by elected members to eight council services. Councillors spoke to service users and the staff supporting them before submitting a report which was shared with the service and an action plan developed to address any action deemed appropriate.
- 22 The Council also performed well in avoiding delays in the discharge of patients from hospital. In 2013-14, the Council began limited weekend working with BCUHB, including the provision of a social worker and health and social care support workers to deliver initial packages of care to people leaving hospital, so that discharge can be achieved in a smooth and timely manner. The rate of delayed transfer of care for social care reasons aged 75 or over was only 0.5 per 1,000 population, significantly better than the Welsh average of 4.7.

² Mwy na geiriau/More than just words: A Strategic Framework for Promoting the Welsh Language in Health, Social Services and Social Care' was published in 2012 by the Welsh Government Deputy Minister for Social Services. The aim of the framework is to ensure that organisations recognise that language is an intrinsic part of care and that people who need services in Welsh get offered them.

- 23 The Council remained committed to promoting independence for older people and the Council's intake and reablement service worked with 379 people during 2013-14, 296 of whom were supported to return to their own homes from hospital. The Integrated Community Equipment Service is delivered in partnership with BCUHB and provides a range of equipment, helping 1,923 people to live safely at home. This represents a 10 per cent increase compared to last year. However, there was little improvement during 2013-14 in the number of people using direct payments - an option that would enable people to make their own decisions about their packages of care and the purchasing aids and adaptations.
- 24 Partnership working has enabled the development and delivery of restructured services and this has led to improved quality of care in the county. The CSSIW notes that relationships with partner agencies are good at both individual and organisational levels, despite some challenges in engaging effectively at a strategic level with the new structures within the local health board.
- 25 CSSIW noted continued progress in the delivery of children's services and strong outcomes for looked-after children. Through the implementation of evidence-based tools and in partnership with health visitors amongst others, there have been performance improvements in safeguarding processes for looked-after children, with 94 per cent of reviews and 89 per cent of statutory visits conducted on time. The Council is meeting timescales in relation to children on the child protection register, with all child protection reviews held on time.
- 26 However, CSSIW reported that the Council's approach to looked after-children requires strategic focus to ensure that the experiences and outcomes for the children and young people concerned can be improved. The numbers of looked-after children who had a health care plan in place continues to place the Council's performance amongst the lowest in Wales (38 per cent compared to a national average of 81 per cent). In 2014, the Council introduced a new post of full-time designated nurse for looked-after children and has reported significant improvement and progress on this key indicator during 2014-15.
- 27 Outcomes for care leavers interviewed in Denbighshire were considered as part of CSSIW's looked after children inspection. It was reported that care leavers identified frustration with the lack of information available to them about their rights and entitlements - particularly in relation to housing and financial support - and also that the Council was not providing occupational opportunities for care leavers to attain economic independence.

- 28 There has been a significant decrease in the average external qualifications/ points score (163.9) achieved by 16 year old looked-after children. Whilst this may reflect the characteristics of the specific cohort for 2013-14, this is the lowest rating achieved by the Council over the past three years, and falls well behind the national average (261.5). The percentage of looked-after children experiencing one or more changes of school, not simply through age-related changes, increased in 2013-14. Performance also declined in relation to placement stability for looked after children. CSSIW found that the Council should seek to understand and respond to the background to this decline in performance. It should listen to the experiences of the young people, and establish a clear interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary plan for improvement.
- 29 During 2014-15, CSSIW undertook an inspection of safeguarding and care planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour. The inspection was carried out as part of CSSIW's national thematic inspection programme. The aim of the national inspection was to assess the quality of care planning across Wales and whether it effectively:
- a supports and protects looked-after children and care leavers;
 - b identifies and manages the vulnerabilities and risky behaviour of looked-after children and care leavers;
 - c promotes rights-based practice and the voice of the child;
 - d promotes improved outcomes for looked-after children and care leavers; and
 - e promotes compliance with policy and guidance.
- 30 Findings from the individual local authority inspections and the CSSIW national overview report can be found on the CSSIW website <http://cssiw.org.uk/our-reports/national-thematic-report/2014/safeguarding-and-care-planning-of-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers/?lang=en>

Limited progress has been made in addressing the underperformance in the provision of affordable housing but the Council has helped prevent many people from becoming homeless

- 31 The Council is taking action to try to ensure a sufficient supply of affordable homes but has consistently failed to meet its targets since 2011 and its performance was the worst in Wales in 2013-14. In 2013-14, of the 2,416 affordable homes built in Wales, only 16 were completed in Denbighshire. Only 61 affordable homes were completed in Denbighshire in each of the two preceding years. The Council is taking action to try to ensure a sufficient supply of affordable homes and has set a target of 570 new homes to be completed between 2012 and 2017. However, although there was progress during 2014-15, the outcome was still below the Council's target for affordable homes with an estimated 50 homes completed.

- 32 The Council recognises that it needs to improve its performance and the housing service has been recently reorganised with the Head of Planning and Public Protection taking on full responsibility for all aspects of delivering affordable housing in Denbighshire. The Council recognises that the current Housing Strategy does not set out clearly enough the roles and responsibilities for meeting the affordable homes target and a Task and Finish group of elected members and officers has been developing a new affordable housing strategy.
- 33 The Council's Improvement Priority for housing is broader than the provision of affordable housing. The Council also wants to work with partners to support people who are or are about to become homeless. The Council took effective action to prevent homelessness in 2013-14 and, as in the previous year, remained in the top quartile for performance within Wales. The number of households accepted by the Council as homeless and in priority need was one of the lowest in Wales and consequently the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation was, on average, lower than in other councils in North Wales. The average time homeless households spent in temporary accommodation in Denbighshire was also low and represented top quartile performance amongst councils in Wales.

The Council has improved the performance of its Human resource service

- 34 In our last Annual improvement Report we noted that the Council's Corporate Human Resources (HR) service had made limited progress in meeting its key internal targets during 2012-13 and we proposed that the Council needed to address these weaknesses. The revised staff appraisal system, for example, had been subject to delays and the subsequent consistency of its implementation did not appear to have been monitored effectively.
- 35 The Council has largely addressed this proposal for improvement. Follow up work by the Wales Audit Office and internal audit follow-up reports indicate that good progress is now being made in addressing key areas for improvement. The HR service has a clearer understanding of the cost of the service, and how this compares with other councils. Recent internal surveys indicate that satisfaction levels with the Corporate HR service have improved. Outcome and performance information for the Corporate HR service is more comprehensive and key performance measures for the service are in place. The new appraisals system is now fully operational across all services and subject to systematic quality review.

The progress of initiatives to support the Denbighshire economy has been inconsistent, but improved arrangements are likely to support the Council's ambitions

- 36 Strengthening the Denbighshire economy is a high priority for the Council. Six of the Council's 14 priority Themes include links to the local economy and the Annual Delivery Plan for 2013-14 included an ambitious and diverse programme of activities intended to support the local economy. In late 2013, the Council adopted a new 10-year Economic and Community Ambition Strategy (ECAS) that superseded some aspects of the Delivery Plan and refocused resources on a narrower set of economy-related activities. These changes, together with an additional in-year re-prioritisation of economy-related initiatives, make it difficult to compare progress and performance during 2013-14 against the Council's original intentions.
- 37 Nevertheless, the Council made good progress with some of its rescheduled economy-related activities, but overall performance during 2013-14 was inconsistent. Of the six priority Themes involved, the Council assessed the year-end status of three as 'Acceptable' and one as 'Good'. The other two priorities were assessed as 'Unknown' because the data needed to assess progress was not yet available. The Council expects to have more comprehensive data available from 2014-15 onwards to help demonstrate the impact of its activities. Of the 15 initiatives where economy-related activity took place during 2013-14, eight were on target, but seven were behind schedule.
- 38 Some of the activities completed or on target during 2013-14 - such as research into opportunities for social enterprises - had a relatively low profile, but others were highly visible. For example, a range of construction projects associated with the Rhyl Going Forward programme were underway or were completed during 2013-14, including an iconic new harbour bridge for cyclists and pedestrians and the construction of a hotel on the site of the former Honey Club in Rhyl.
- 39 Overall, 16 of the 31 ECAS-related activities originally scheduled for delivery in 2013-14 were either withdrawn or postponed. Some activities were withdrawn because responsibilities for delivery changed. For example, responsibility for producing a business case for the electrification of the North Wales coast rail line was withdrawn because the business case is now being coordinated by Welsh Government. Some other activities were postponed either because insufficient resources were available during 2013-14 or because further research was needed. For example, four of the six activities within the High Quality Skilled Workforce theme were postponed. With hindsight, the Council recognised that it needed a better understanding of the advanced skills needed by local and regional employers before tailoring its skills training.

- 40 The Council has established the Economic and Community Ambition Programme Board (the Board), comprising elected members and senior officers, with roles and responsibilities linked to the ECAS. The Board meets monthly and provides a strategic focus for the programme by directing, monitoring and co-ordinating economy-related activities. The Board's disciplined focus on priorities should help the Council to maintain – or where necessary, increase – the pace of activity and reduce the likelihood of project and programme slippage.
- 41 Following a review during 2014, the Board has strengthened its programme and project management arrangements. These now promote a more systematic approach to progress monitoring and reporting. Robust programme management and better management information promote good governance and should help the Board to make better-informed and more timely decisions.
- 42 The Board's 2014 review also prompted a restructuring of the Economic and Business Development Team to reflect the priorities and activities it is expected to deliver. Overall, the Council expects the restructuring exercise to contribute savings of about £200,000 to the budget savings target for 2016-17.
- 43 By the end of 2013-14, the Council was optimistic about the longer term prospects for its economic ambition priority. This was because many of the activities delivered during 2013-14 – such as mapping the regional growth locations to identify supply chain and job opportunities – provided the knowledge and infrastructure needed to target business support effectively. The Council's optimism also reflects activity during and since 2013 to strengthen the associated governance and programme management arrangements.

The Council is making good progress in committing its Discretionary Housing Payments and improvements in monitoring since April 2015 will help to clarify their impact

- 44 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 heralded a significant change to the administration and distribution of benefits and will have a major impact on many citizens. In April 2011, the UK Government embarked on a programme of reform, which will culminate with the phased introduction of Universal Credit between October 2013 and 2017. A major focus of the UK Government's plans are changes to housing benefit, which are aimed at reducing annual expenditure by around £2.3 billion. These changes will mean that millions of households in Great Britain will receive less in benefits.
- 45 In January 2015, the Auditor General for Wales published a report on how well councils were managing the impact of welfare reform changes on social housing tenants in Wales. The report reviewed the management and use of DHP by councils in Wales and concluded that the allocation, distribution, administration and use of these payments have significant inconsistencies and weaknesses. We followed up this work at individual councils.

- 46 Our review found that, in Denbighshire, the Council has clearly signposted DHP on its website and it is easy for customers to apply for assistance. The five-page DHP application form includes some additional supporting information on the Council's application process to assist customers in completing the form. However, the Council requires applicants to provide detailed information about their income and expenditure and we consider this may discourage vulnerable people from applying for DHP because it could be seen as onerous and off-putting. The Council also has no adopted policy for DHP and it is not clear how the Council uses these resources to assist people to reduce the impact of welfare reform changes such as the Spare Room Subsidy or benefit cap.
- 47 The Council has systems in place to monitor the amount spent against the amount of money provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, and the budget remaining to assist applicants. The Council also monitors the speed of processing applications as well as the number of customers that have been assisted. However, the Council does not monitor the number of landlords supported to ensure there is good coverage across all sectors and areas, nor does it monitor the impact of its DHP payments and how these resources have helped customers affected by the changes introduced under welfare reform and its impact on sustaining tenancies. The Council does monitor the reasons why an applicant requests a second DHP payment. By April 2015, most councils in Wales, including Denbighshire County Council, had implemented an agreement to adopt a uniform approach to the future distribution of DHP payments, in part to address the significant inconsistencies and weaknesses identified in our review.
- 48 At the end of November 2014, the Council had paid out £147,002 of its Department for Work and Pensions allocation of £202,519, which represents 72 per cent of its allocation. This indicates that the Council is trying to use DHP to support those who require help but needs to link DHP into a wider strategic welfare policy to demonstrate the impact of its work.

Progress was made to improve compliance with the Council's Welsh Language Scheme

- 49 The role of the WLC was created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. New powers to impose standards on organisations came into force through subordinate legislation on 31 March 2015. The WLC will continue to review Welsh language schemes by virtue of powers inherited under the Welsh Language Act 1993.

- 50 The Commissioner works with all councils in Wales to inspect and advise on the implementation of language schemes. It is the responsibility of councils to provide services to the public in Welsh in accordance with the commitments in their language schemes. Every Council is required to provide an annual monitoring report to the Commissioner outlining its performance in implementing the language scheme. The Commissioner analyses every monitoring report, provides a formal response and collects further information as required.
- 51 The Commissioner reported that, during 2013-14, the Council commissioned an independent audit of the Welsh language in Denbighshire. A report was drawn up which submitted 90 recommendations to the authority. The Council intends to respond to the audit formally in 2015 and draw up an action plan. The Council has a number of other relevant initiatives. It has identified areas for improvement as a result of a mystery shopper report by Menter Iaith Sir Ddinbych. The Council intends to formalise the work of monitoring third party contracts during 2014-15, leading to an annual report by the Purchasing Department. It intends to expand the mentoring scheme for Welsh learners to include more members of staff. Another aim is to identify language champions to promote the Welsh language throughout the organisation.

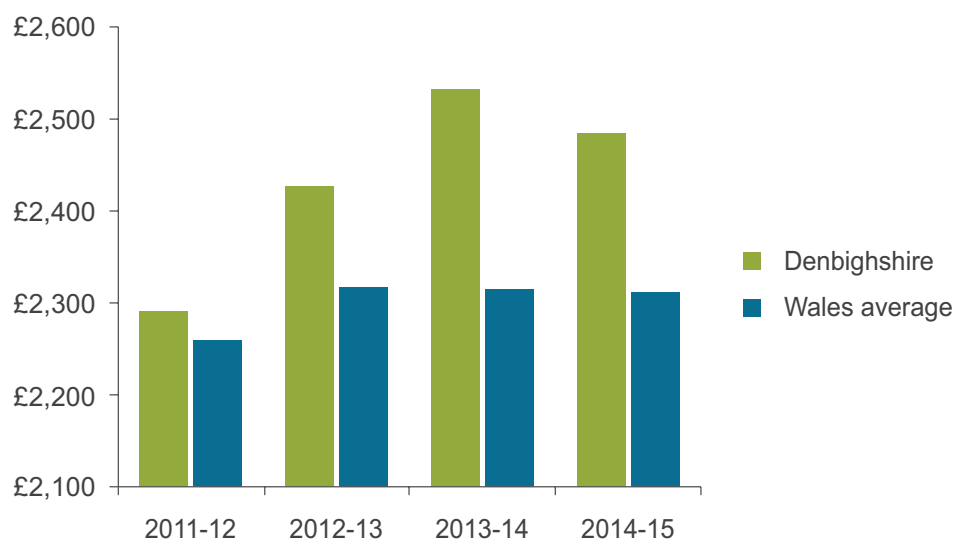
Use of Resources

The Council has good financial management arrangements with no immediate shortcomings

- 52 The Council has a good track record in delivering identified savings within year against the planned actions that it approved. The Council successfully identified, planned for and delivered a range of recurring and non-recurring savings required to meet the budget shortfall between 2011-12 and 2013-14. There were no unidentified savings that needed to be developed at the time the 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 budgets were approved and the Council's planned reductions and savings were achieved in all three years. The Council's corporate framework for strategic financial planning is effective and supports delivery of the corporate visions and the Council's aims and improvement objectives.
- 53 The Council has a number of policies supporting its financial planning arrangements, with responsibilities set out in respect of budget setting, monitoring and reporting. The Council has a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which is cross-referenced to its Improvement Objectives. The MTFP covers a five-year period. The 2014 version sets out how the remaining savings gap is to be addressed in 2015-16 and beyond, although the lack of clarity about short and medium-term future levels of Welsh Government funding hinders the Council in its planning process.
- 54 The Council's approach to setting its revenue budget has been to reduce costs incrementally, based on saving proposals from services and corporate budgets. The process has worked well in the past but the Council recognises that this approach has now run its course. For 2015-16, services are being reviewed under a Freedoms and Flexibilities programme to achieve a target of £12 million savings over the next two years. This is the most significant change to the budget process and will focus on what a service does and how much it costs, and attempt to analyse whether service provision is statutory, aligned to a corporate priority or discretionary.
- 55 The Council's financial management and control arrangements are robust and are being managed effectively. The Council's Financial Regulations include a section on budgets, covering financial planning and budgeting; budgetary control; virement and exceptional supplementary budgets. The responsibility for setting the Council's Budget is the sole responsibility of Members, after advice from Officers of the Council. This is a statutory responsibility. The Council must set a balanced budget and there must be sufficient funding available in the financial year concerned to match the expected level of expenditure. Members determine the allocation of resources between Directorates, resource centres and the associated policies. In conjunction with the Head of Finance and Assets, individual Directors are responsible for the more detailed aspects of budget setting.

- 56 A new forecasting, monitoring and reporting system has been put in place. This is called Collaborative Planning. It ensures a more consistent approach to budgetary control across the Council by collating budgetary information onto an on-line system and reducing the need for the use of various spreadsheets within different service departments. Cabinet receives a monthly budget report. The reports show the projected outturn for the year (rather than the position at a particular point in time) compared to the original budget. These reports contain details of any significant variation in spend coupled with corrective action.
- 57 The Council's 2014-15 savings and efficiencies plans are fit for purpose, are being effectively managed and are likely to be achieved. Efficiency savings plans had been developed for 2014-15 across all Council departments. The plans include clear descriptions of where savings would be made. Planned savings are monitored as an expression of how much of the annual savings have been achieved to date. Over the last three years, over 90 per cent of the required savings were achieved by the end of the second quarter. Half-yearly budget reports are presented to the full Council with any shortfall in savings reported by the Cabinet to the next full Council meeting.
- 58 The Council's 2014-15 Savings Plan takes appropriate and relevant account of the future financial pressures the Council faces. Despite a very challenging grant settlement from the Welsh Government, the Council set a balanced budget for 2014-15 which included a 3.5 per cent increase in council tax and savings of £8.5 million. The Council is also identifying further efficiency savings and prioritising possible cuts to services.
- 59 The Council forecasts that additional savings of at least £17.1 million will be required during 2015-16 and 2016-17. When setting its 2015-16 budget, the Council identified savings of £7.3 million, increased Council Tax by three per cent and funded the remaining shortfall of £0.5 million from general balances.
- 60 **Exhibit 1** below compares the Council's planned gross revenue expenditure (net of income) per head of population over the last four years with the average for councils across Wales.

Exhibit 1 – Gross revenue expenditure (net of income) per head of population



Source: Stats Wales

- 61 The graph shows that expenditure per head in Denbighshire was well above the Wales average in each of the three years prior to 2014-15. This reflects mainly the factors such as deprivation and rurality that influence the Welsh Government's distribution formula for Revenue Support Grant. However, the 2011 Census also revealed that previous population projections, on which funding levels had been based, had over-estimated the population of Denbighshire. As a result, expenditure per head appears to have increased by significantly more than the increase in the Wales average since 2012-13. Since 2011-12, we calculate that spend per head has increased by two per cent in real terms in Denbighshire compared with an average three per cent reduction across Wales.
- 62 We include in [Appendix 6](#) some information about the distribution of the Council's financial resources in 2013-14 and about trends in the Council's gross revenue expenditure and income since 2008-09. The data are drawn from the Council's Statements of Accounts.
- 63 As in all councils, the costs of education and social care form a high proportion of the Council's expenditure. A little under half its gross income for 2013-14 derived from Revenue Support Grant (36.8 per cent) and Non-Domestic Rates (8.7 per cent). These are income sources over which the Council has no control, and Revenue Support Grant is falling. Income from Non-Domestic Rates, at 8.7 per cent of total income, formed a lower than average proportion of total income. In Denbighshire, 'other income' (including fees and charges) represented 39 per cent of the Council's income for 2013-14, a little above the Wales average of 37 per cent.

Governance

The Council's risk management arrangements are robust and fit for purpose

- 64 Risk management arrangements continue to strengthen, with active roles taken by Heads of Service, Cabinet and the Corporate Governance Committee. These various groups all work together to understand and manage risk, enabling forward work plans for both scrutiny and Cabinet to have a strong focus on addressing risk issues.
- 65 The Council has recognised the importance of managing risk and a corporate risk register with supporting guidance is in place. Key risks are identified and assessed as high, medium, or low. The Council has endorsed the risk management strategy and corporate risk register and has regard to it when allocating resources. Cabinet has agreed that it should consider updates to the corporate risk register every six months. Individual service areas produce their own risk registers, which they consider alongside their service improvement plans.
- 66 Risk management is seen as a high priority in all service areas and risks are managed at a project and corporate level. The corporate risk register contains a timeframe covering the period when the risks could mature. The process for monitoring how each of the services manages its risks is consistent and accountability arrangements are clear. Risks are well managed on large individual projects and are directly managed by the head of service if it is considered that there is an additional greater corporate risk.
- 67 All decision making is documented, including where it is decided not to include low-level risks in the registers, but the new online system for monitoring risk management has not yet been subject to testing by Internal Audit to confirm that adequate audit trails and controls are in place and that they work. The risk management strategy does not stipulate the minimum frequency for the review of service-level risk registers and it is not clear at a service level if all registers are being reviewed with the same frequency.
- 68 The Council's Corporate Governance Committee plays an appropriate role in ensuring that there are suitable processes in place for the identification and management of risks to assist with its role and the development of the Annual Governance Statement. The Annual Governance Statement sets out clearly how risks are managed and monitored. There are processes to capture new accepted risks but there are no mandatory checks that all service risk registers have considered whether any service risks need to be considered by the Cabinet for inclusion as a corporate risk.

The Council produces well informed balanced evaluations of its performance

- 69 The Council's Service Challenge arrangements continue to provide elected Members and managers with comprehensive and detailed position statements drawing on the available performance data and on the progress of major projects. Senior staff and elected Members subsequently challenge the service's position statement and allow officers to set service performance in the context of known risks, and to narrow the focus of the subsequent challenge meeting to those matters that are most relevant. As we noted in last year's Annual Improvement Report the service challenges form an important strand in the Council's self evaluation process, enabling senior managers and elected Members to understand more fully how well each service is performing against targets and in the national context, and to identify what needs to be done in areas that are performing less well.
- 70 The Council has met its improvement reporting duties under the Measure and the Auditor General's November 2014 **Improvement Assessment Certificate** ([Appendix 3](#)) concluded that the Council had discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure. In particular:
- a the Council had published an assessment of its performance during 2013-14 in its **Annual Performance Report 2013/14** (the Report) before 31 October 2014;
 - b the Report assessed the Council's performance in the preceding financial year (2013-14) and set out how the Council had sought to discharge its duties under the Measure;
 - c the Report evaluated the Council's success in achieving its improvement objectives and expresses its view clearly;
 - d the Report included a short section for citizens who wanted to provide feedback or make comments on the Report;
 - e the Report included details of performance and comparisons as measured by the national statutory performance indicators; and
 - f the Report included a short section on the ways in which the Council had sought to collaborate.

Appendix 1 – Status of this report

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

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

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

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

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

Appendix 2 – Audit of Denbighshire County Council's 2014-15 Improvement Plan

Certificate

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

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

Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Auditor General

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

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

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

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

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

Scope of the Improvement Plan audit

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

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

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

Huw Vaughan Thomas
Auditor General for Wales

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business
Huw Lloyd Jones, Manager, Wales Audit Office
Gwilym Bury, Performance Audit Lead, Wales Audit Office

Appendix 3 – Audit of Denbighshire County Council’s Assessment of 2013-14 Performance

Certificate

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

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

Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Auditor General

Under the Measure, the Council is required to annually publish an assessment which describes its performance:

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

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

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

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

Scope of the audit

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

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

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

Huw Vaughan Thomas
Auditor General For Wales

CC: Leighton Andrews, Minister for Public Services
Huw Lloyd Jones, Manager, Wales Audit Office
Gwilym Bury, Performance Audit Lead, Wales Audit Office

Appendix 4 – Annual Audit Letter

Councillor Hugh Evans – Leader
Dr. Mohammed Mehmet – Chief Executive
Denbighshire County Council
County Hall
Wynnstay Road
Ruthin
Denbighshire
LL15 1YN

Dear Councillor Evans and Dr Mehmet

Annual Audit Letter – Denbighshire County Council 2013-14

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

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

It is Denbighshire County 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.

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

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

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards. On 30 September 2014, I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members of the Corporate Governance Committee in my Audit of Financial Statements report on 29 September 2014. This report also included a number of additional matters to help the Council further strengthen its systems of internal control.

I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

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

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 30 September 2014.

My work to date on certification of grant claims and returns has not identified significant issues that would impact on the 2014-15 accounts or key financial systems

My ongoing work on the certification of grant claims and return has not identified any issues to date in relation to the accounts and/or key financial systems. I will report any key issues to the Head of Finance once this year's programme of certification work is complete.

The financial audit fee for 2013-14 is currently expected to be in line with the agreed fee set out in the Annual Audit Outline.

Yours sincerely

Derwyn Owen
For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor

Appendix 5 – National report recommendations 2014-15

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

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

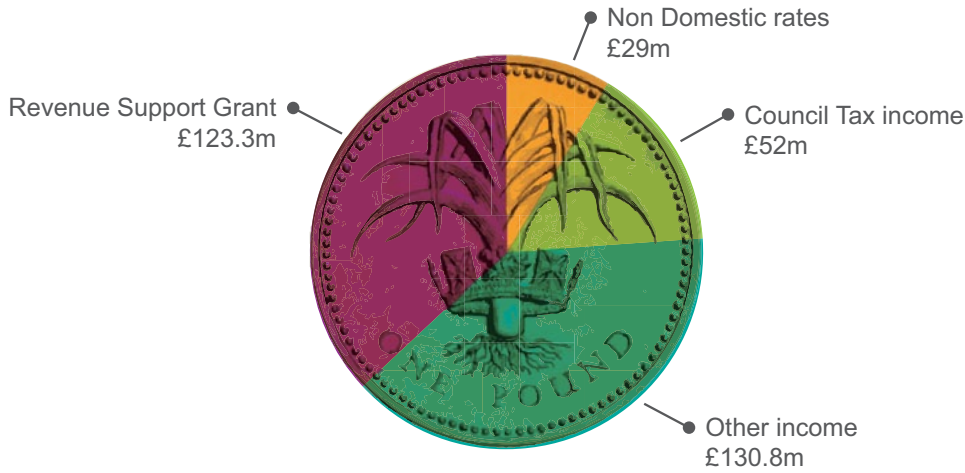
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2014	<p>Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens</p>	<p>R1 Revise the best practice standards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • align the work of environmental health with national strategic priorities;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

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

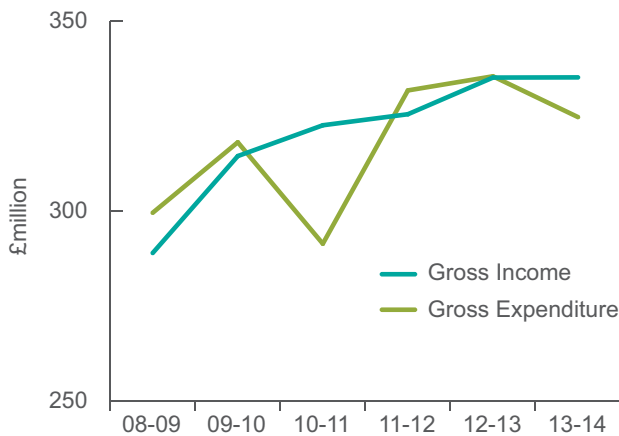
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2015	<p>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</p>	<p>R7 Improve management, access to and use of Discretionary Housing Payments by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing a clear policy or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

Appendix 6 – Information about Denbighshire County Council’s resources

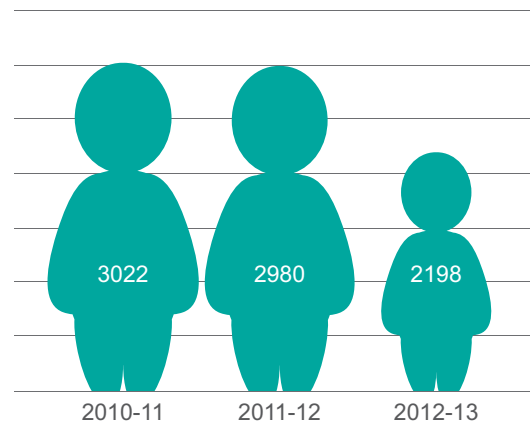
Total Gross Income 2013-14



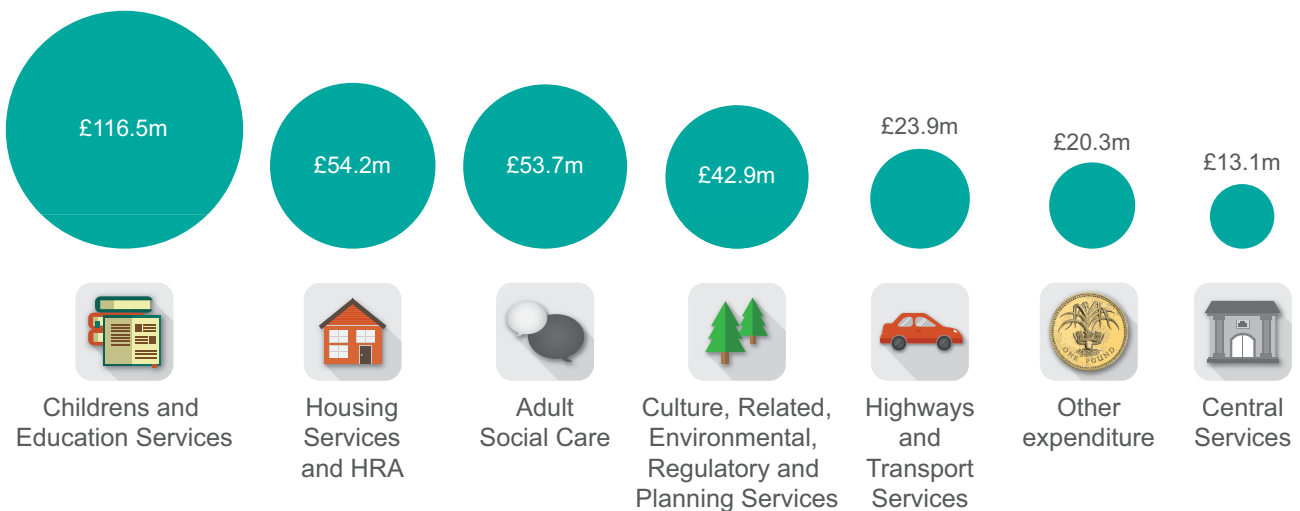
Total Income and Expenditure



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



Total Gross Expenditure by service area



Wales Audit Office

24 Cathedral Road

Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru

24 Heol y Gadeirlan

Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn Testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: post@archwilio.cymru

Gwefan: www.archwilio.cymru