



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough

Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Ian Phillips and Sara-Jane Byrne under the direction of Huw Rees.

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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.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.

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Summary report

2018-19 performance audit work

- 1 To decide the range and nature of the work we would undertake during the year, we considered how much we already know from all previous audit and inspection work and from other sources of information including Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's (the Council) own mechanisms for review and evaluation. For 2018-19, we undertook improvement assessment work; an assurance and risk assessment project and work in relation to the Well-being of Future Generations Act at all councils. At some councils, we supplemented this work with local risk-based audits, identified in the Audit Plan for 2018-19.
- 2 The work carried out since the last Annual Improvement Report (AIR), including that of the relevant regulators, is set out in [Exhibit 1](#).

The Council is unlikely to meet its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement without support to address some significant challenges

- 3 Our Annual Audit Letter issued to the Council in April 2019 concluded that further work is needed to assess whether the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We also concluded that whilst all local authorities in Wales face financial challenges, the challenge at Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is significant given budget pressures and reliance on diminishing reserves. We subsequently wrote to the Council in May 2019 to formally record that we continue to have significant concerns about the Council, and to suggest that the Council consider seeking support from the Welsh Government to help it address its challenges. We highlighted particular concerns about the Council's financial situation, service pressures, leadership and capacity, and governance.
- 4 Following a request from the Leader of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council to the Minister for Housing and Local Government, a package of support was agreed to be provided under section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to help address the Council's specific and current challenges. The first phase of this work included an initial scoping review to provide an independent assessment of the Council's key challenges and necessary actions required to address these challenges. The scoping review was undertaken by an external advisor, appointed by the Minister. The Minister recently published a report setting out the findings of the scoping review together with a statement about the next steps, which includes setting up a Board.
- 5 The Council's financial situation is such that it requires cohesive and collective responsibility amongst all members to take difficult decisions to address it.

Therefore, at this stage, and based on, and limited to, the work carried out by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators, the Auditor General believes that the Council is unlikely to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Measure (2009) during 2019-20 without support to address some significant challenges.

Recommendations and proposals for improvement

- 6 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:
- 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;
 - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made, the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
 - conduct a special inspection, publish a report and make recommendations; and
 - recommend to ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 7 During the course of the year, the Auditor General did not make any formal recommendations. However, as set out in [paragraph 3](#), we have raised a number of significant concerns, and a package of support has been agreed with the Welsh Government to help the Council address them. We will continue to monitor progress. We have made a number of proposals for improvement during the course of our work and these are repeated in this report. We will monitor progress against them and relevant recommendations made in our national reports ([Appendix 3](#)) as part of our improvement assessment work.

Audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2018-19

Exhibit 1: audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2018-19

Description of the work carried out since the last Annual Improvement Report, including that of the relevant regulators, where relevant.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
April and May 2019	<p>Assurance and Risk Assessment Project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources; • putting in place arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and • acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in setting wellbeing objectives and taking steps to meet them. 	<p>Our Annual Audit Letter issued to the Council in April 2019 concluded that further work is needed to assess whether the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We then issued a further letter to the Council in May 2019 setting out our views of the key risk areas for the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial situation • Service pressures • Leadership and capacity • Governance 	<p>We did not include any specific proposals for improvement but suggested the Council may want to consider requesting support from the Welsh Government under section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to help it address its challenges. See paragraph 3 above. We will continue to monitor the position.</p>

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
July 2019	<p>Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFG Act) examinations</p> <p>Examination of the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when taking the step of making skills work for Merthyr Tydfil: developing the workforce of the future, a step the Council is taking to meet its wellbeing objectives.</p> <p><u>Copy of the Auditor General's report</u></p>	<p>The Council is taking account of the sustainable development principle in its approach to making skills work for Merthyr Tydfil: developing the workforce of the future, but further work is needed to embed the five ways of working:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Council is making use of data to support the development of long-term plans, but could develop a clearer strategic vision to support long-term economic growth; • the Council has a focus on preventing further economic decline, but there is potential to develop a more 'whole system' approach to address the causes of problems; • integration is at an early stage in supporting progress to meet wellbeing objectives and there is scope to strengthen integration to meet national wellbeing goals; • the Council is collaborating with potential employers but would benefit from strengthening its strategic approach to collaboration; and • the Council is involving some key stakeholders in the delivery of the step, but could further develop its approach to involve the full diversity of the community. 	<p>Whilst our examinations did not make any proposals for improvement, we identified areas to improve under the five ways of working. These are detailed in our full report.</p>

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
April 2019	<p>Annual Audit Letter 2017-18 Letter summarising the key messages arising from the Auditor General's statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. The Annual Audit Letter is in Appendix 2 of this report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources. • Further work is needed to assess whether the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. • All local authorities in Wales face financial challenges, however, the challenge at Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is significant given budget pressures and reliance on diminishing reserves. • My certification of grant claims and returns has not identified any significant issues that would impact on the 2017-18 accounts or key financial systems. 	None.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
Local risk-based performance audit			
March 2019	<p>Service User Perspective of Food Waste Recycling Service</p> <p>Review to gain an insight into how the Council considers service users in the design and delivery of its services.</p>	<p>Service users are satisfied with the food waste recycling service, although there are some elements of the service that could be improved.</p> <p>We presented an overview of our findings to the Council in May 2019.</p>	None.
July 2019	<p>Leisure Services</p> <p>Review of the arrangements the council has put in place to deliver leisure services building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General as part of the 'delivering with less' themed studies.</p> <p><u>Copy of the Auditor General's report</u></p>	<p>Outsourcing the Council's leisure and cultural services has protected the services from cuts, but the services lack strategic direction, are restricted by the current contract and require more effective oversight. We came to this conclusion because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Council does not yet have an approved vision and strategy for its leisure and cultural services; • there are good arrangements to monitor the delivery of the leisure and cultural services contract, but both the Council and the Trust recognise that elements of the contract are restricting the Trust from achieving its commercial potential; • the Council has maintained its level of spending on its outsourced leisure and cultural services whilst during the same period reducing its expenditure on other services; 	<p>P1 The Council should act quickly to agree its outcome focussed vision for Leisure and Cultural Services. This should then shape how its leisure and cultural services will be delivered.</p> <p>P2 The Council should review its working arrangements with the Trust and agree contract amendments that will enable them to manage the leisure services whilst achieving the Council's outcome focussed vision for leisure and cultural services.</p> <p>P3 The Council should assure itself that the current delivery model is both affordable for the Council and the best model for residents and visitors to Merthyr Tydfil.</p>

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Trust is responding positively to Council concerns on its governance and financial management, but the Council's concerns remain; • the Council has not used its governance arrangements effectively to provide appropriate oversight of the Trust; and • the Council needs to learn from outsourcing its leisure and cultural services to help inform any future contracts and alternative delivery models. 	<p>P4 The Council needs to use its governance arrangements effectively so that it has appropriate oversight on the delivery of the contract. This includes providing members with appropriate information about the delivery of leisure and cultural services.</p> <p>P5 The Council needs to urgently address our previous Proposal for Improvement for the Cabinet to publish a Forward Work programme.</p> <p>P6 The Council should undertake a formal review of how it develops and manages contracts, to ensure that its arrangements deliver the intended vision in an efficient and effective way to the benefit of its residents, the Council and delivery partners.</p>

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
Local risk-based performance audit			
December 2018	<p>Environmental Health</p> <p>Review of the arrangements the council has put in place to deliver environmental health services building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General as part of the 'delivering with less' themed studies.</p> <p><u>Copy of the Auditor General's report</u></p>	<p>The Council's environmental health services resources have reduced, and it cannot demonstrate that it is delivering all of its statutory environmental health services. We came to this conclusion because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff numbers and the environmental health services budget have reduced since previous audit work in 2013-14; • the Council considers that it is meeting its statutory environmental health obligations but there is limited evidence that the Council has assessed if it is meeting these; and • the Council does not routinely assess its performance against either its environmental health statutory obligations or the Practice Standards, and there is limited member oversight of the service's performance. 	<p>P1 The Council needs to assure itself that it can deliver its statutory environmental health services.</p> <p>P2 The Council needs to put better mechanisms in place to review the delivery of its statutory environmental health services.</p>

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
Local risk-based performance audit			
August 2019	<p>Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements – follow-up review</p> <p>Follow-up review of the effectiveness of corporate safeguarding arrangements building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General in this area.</p> <p><u>Copy of the Auditor General's report</u></p>	<p>The Council has responded positively to most of our corporate safeguarding recommendations issued in 2015 but it recognises that further work is necessary to ensure that its arrangements are comprehensive.</p> <p>We came to this conclusion because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • corporate leadership has taken appropriate steps to extend its influence in order to increase awareness of safeguarding issues across the Council and its partners; • the Council has implemented clear procedures for the safe recruitment of staff but recognises that it cannot yet be certain that all relevant staff attend regular training about safeguarding issues; and • arrangements for the assessment of risk relating to safeguarding are sound but there is scope to strengthen members' oversight of the Council's safeguarding performance. 	<p>P1 In order to further extend awareness of safeguarding issues and procedures among its staff and partners, the Council should review and evaluate the impact of its Corporate Safeguarding Reference Group.</p> <p>P2 In order to further reduce the risks to children and young people, the Council should introduce systems that record whether all staff have undertaken training about safeguarding issues and procedures that is appropriate to their roles.</p> <p>P3 Elected members should receive regular opportunities to scrutinise the Council's performance in, and its arrangements for, minimising the risks to the wellbeing of children and young people in Merthyr Tydfil.</p>

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
Improvement planning and reporting			
June 2018	Wales Audit Office annual improvement plan audit Review of the Council's published plans for delivering on improvement objectives.	The Council has complied with its statutory improvement planning duties.	None.
November 2018	Wales Audit Office annual assessment of performance audit Review of the Council's published performance assessment.	The Council has complied with its statutory improvement reporting duties.	None.
Reviews by inspection and regulation bodies			
Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) June 2019	Annual performance review letter 2018-19 This letter summarises CIW's evaluation of the performance of social services (adults' and children's services) during 2018-19. It also sets out how CIW is planning to review performance over the coming year.	<u>Copy of CIW's annual performance review letter</u>	Not applicable.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
Reviews by inspection and regulation bodies			
Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) August 2018	<p>Inspection of Children's Services</p> <p>The inspection focused on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements to help and protect children and their families.</p> <p><u>Copy of CIW's report</u></p>	<p>Overview of findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's children's service has a dedicated workforce who are professionally committed to promoting the best outcomes for children and families. • safeguarding procedures and processes were understood and followed by staff ensuring children and young people were protected in a timely and consistent manner. • there is good corporate support for children's services from elected members and the wider Council. The local authority recognises there is a need to further develop its services for young people who are leaving care and is motivated to do so. • we saw examples of good practice but this was not consistent. Immediately prior to inspection, children's services had experienced a period of challenge having identified areas of poor practice exacerbated by recruitment issues. This included significant drift in assessing and providing care and support to children and their families. • the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) delivers an integrated approach which brings together a number of agencies who share information, assess vulnerability and make collaborative safeguarding decisions to ensure children and young people are protected from harm. 	<p>Areas for development:</p> <p>Access arrangements: Information, Advice and Assistance (IAA)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve arrangements for transfer of cases from the Intake Team to other teams for assessment and provision of support. <p>Assessment</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Greater consistency in the quality of assessments including detailed analysis of strengths and risks. <p>Care and support and pathway planning</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Further development of Pathway Planning to meet the requirement of the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA), particularly in relation to Personal Advisors and When I am Ready guidance.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the inability to transfer cases between some teams due to staff vacancies has impacted on staff morale, however, the commitment and professionalism of staff to continue delivering a high standard of practice to young people and families was evident throughout the inspection. • the challenges for front line staff were beginning to be addressed through the recruitment of key staff and use of agency cover. In addition, an experienced team manager had been seconded to improve practice. As such we were confident senior managers were committed to ensuring the delivery of good quality services. • the current quality assurance framework needs further development to drive consistency and incorporate any lessons learned from audit and performance management information. The implementation of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) presents ongoing difficulties for staff and has impacted on the Council's ability to produce robust performance information. 	<p>Safeguarding</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Further work is required to ensure partner agencies have a clear and shared understanding of significant harm when making referrals to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub 5. Further development is required to embed the risk management model and the multi-agency risk assessment form (MARAF) with staff and partners, with assurance mechanisms to ensure compliance, quality and impact of services to young people and families. <p>Leadership, management and governance</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Ensure strategic plans are owned and understood by staff and are used to drive practice 7. Further work is required to develop a more comprehensive quality assurance system that strengthens the link between strategy and improving practice. This should also include improved focus on the frequency, consistency and quality of front line supervision.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
			<p>8. Continue to prioritise the workforce strategy to focus on staff retention and the timely recruitment of experienced staff.</p> <p>9. Review panel arrangements to ensure there is clarity of purpose, timeliness of decision making and engagement from partners.</p> <p>10. There is a need to strengthen the transfer of cases between teams. The development of a formal transfer policy is currently being undertaken and this needs to be embedded throughout the practice and monitored as part of the quality assurance framework.</p>

Appendix 1

Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake a forward-looking annual improvement assessment, and to publish an annual improvement report, for each improvement authority in Wales. Improvement authorities (defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities) have a general duty to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions'.

The annual improvement assessment considers the likelihood that an authority will comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. The assessment is also the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. Staff of the Wales Audit Office, on behalf of the Auditor General, produce the annual improvement report. The report discharges the Auditor General's duties under section 24 of the Measure, by summarising his audit and assessment work in a published annual improvement report for each authority. 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.

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

Annual Audit Letter 2017-18

Gareth Chapman – Chief Executive
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Civic Centre
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 8AN

Reference: MTCBC AAL 17-18

Date issued: 7 April 2019

Dear Gareth

Annual Audit Letter Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council 2017-18

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 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 Merthyr Tydfil 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 financial statements in accordance with relevant requirements; and
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

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

- provide an audit opinion on the 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 financial statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards.

On 27 September 2018, I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the 2017-18 financial statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the financial statements. The key matters arising from the audit were reported to Members of the Council meeting on 26 September 2018, in my Audit of Financial Statements report. I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the financial statements has been completed on 27 September 2018.

The financial statements were provided for audit on 8 June 2018, three weeks ahead of the statutory deadline of 30 June for 2017-18 and evidences the Council's continued preparation for the early closing agenda. This is a noteworthy achievement by the finance team, preparing the accounts one week earlier than achieved last year without sacrificing their quality.

I reported to you the more significant issues arising from our audit, which are summarised below:

- the financial statements were supported by accessible and comprehensive working papers at the outset of my audit. Your officers were helpful and supplied me with all the information I requested helping me to achieve the overall completion timetable.
- I identified misstatements which were corrected, some of which were material by value but note none had an impact on the reported outturn of the Council for the year.
- I reported two non-trivial uncorrected misstatements within the financial statements. Council agreed with management's decision not to amend for these given their immaterial value with no resulting impact upon our audit opinion.
- during our audit I suggested a number of additions, amendments and deletions to disclosures within the financial statements to ensure completeness, clarity, accuracy and consistency throughout, and to comply with best practice as set out in the Code.
- two formal recommendations for improvement to the reporting of performance indicators within the Narrative Report and accounting for revenue grant income accruals were accepted by management, with implementation target dates of May 2019.

Since completion of the audit I have held a joint post project learning exercise with your finance officers. I have identified areas where we can both learn from this year, and make improvements for the future, with focus on bringing audit work forward to the interim audit stage.

The financial audit fee for 2017-18 is in line with the agreed fee set out in the 2018 Audit Plan.

Further work is needed to assess whether 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 under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Auditor General has highlighted areas where the effectiveness of these arrangements has yet to be demonstrated or where improvements could be made in his Annual Improvement Report published in September 2018 which can be accessed via:

<http://www.audit.wales/publication/merthyr-tydfil-county-borough-council-annual-improvement-report-201718>

During 2018-19, we have undertaken further work to assess the risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. Our review of the Council's Environmental Health services found that the Council's environmental health services resources have reduced, and it cannot demonstrate that it is delivering all its statutory environmental health services. We are currently doing reviews of the Council's leisure services and corporate safeguarding arrangements.

All local authorities in Wales face financial challenges, however, the challenge at Merthyr Council is significant given budget pressures and reliance on diminishing reserves

Austerity funding remains the most significant challenge facing all local government bodies in Wales and these financial pressures are likely to continue for the medium term.

Position as at 31 March 2018

In 2017-18, the Council had a net revenue surplus of £2.3 million, of which, £1.0 million was transferred to the earmarked budget reserve, £1.2 million to other earmarked reserves and £0.1 million to the general fund reserve.

As at 31 March 2018 the Council's usable reserves totalled £24.2 million (£4.7 million in the general fund reserve, £17.2 million in earmarked reserves and £2.3 million in other reserves).

Forecast outturn for 2018-19

As at 31 December 2018, the Council is forecasting a net revenue deficit of £0.1 million for the 2018-19 financial year, but only after the use of £3.5 million of earmarked reserves. The use of reserves is £1.6 million higher than budgeted at the start of the year. Significant budgetary pressures exist in departments such as Social Services £1.7 million

(looked after children, domiciliary care, supported placements) and Learning £0.4 million (enhanced provision).

Budget 2019-20

The financial outlook is extremely challenging. The 2019-20 local government funding settlement saw the Council's funding increase by 0.8%. Budget pressures experienced during 2018-19 which are considered unavoidable and recurring have been reflected in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2019-20 to 2022-23.

The Council's most recently updated MTFP, presented to the Council on 20 March 2019, indicates the use of a further £2.3 million of reserves in order to arrive at a balanced budget for 2019-20 (£0.5 million earmarked reserves, £1.3 million budget reserve, £0.5 million general reserve).

The Council's Corporate Reserves Policy's overarching aim is to maintain a general reserves balance of between 3.5% to 4% of the Council's net revenue expenditure. By utilising £0.5 million of general reserves in the budget setting process for 2019-20, the general reserve will reduce to £4.2 million or 3.5% of net revenue expenditure.

Appendix 3

National report recommendations 2018-19

Exhibit 3: national report recommendations 2018-19

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2018	<u>Procuring Residual and Food Waste Treatment Capacity</u>	<p>R1 The projections for the three residual waste projects in the Programme assume that, across the 14 councils involved, the overall amount of residual waste will increase through the lifetime of the contracts. If these projections are accurate then something significant would have to occur beyond 2040 to reach zero waste across these council areas by 2050. If the projections are not accurate then there is the risk that councils will pay for capacity they do not need. We recommend that the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• in reviewing the Towards Zero Waste strategy, considers how its ambition of there being no residual waste by 2050 aligns with current projections for residual waste treatment; and• works with councils to consider the impact of changes in projections on the likely cost of residual waste projects and any mitigating action needed to manage these costs.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R2 The Welsh Government's programme support to date has mainly focused on project development and procurement. Now that most of the projects are operational, the focus has shifted to contract management. We recommend that the Welsh Government continue its oversight of projects during the operational phase by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building on its existing model of providing experienced individuals to assist with project development and procurement and making sure input is available to assist with contract management if required; • setting out its expectations of councils regarding contract management; • ensuring partnerships revisit their waste projections and associated risks periodically, for example to reflect updated population projections or economic forecasts; and • obtaining from partnerships basic management information on gate fees paid, amount of waste sent to facilities and quality of contractor service.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
November 2018	<u>Local Government Services to Rural Communities</u>	<p>R1 Socio economic change, poor infrastructure and shifts in provision of key services and facilities have resulted in the residualisation of communities in rural Wales. We recommend that Welsh Government support public bodies to deliver a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refreshing rural grant programmes to create sustainable financial structures, with multi-year allocations; and • helping people and businesses make the most of digital connectivity through targeted and more effective business and adult education support programmes. <p>R2 The role of Public Service Boards is evolving but there are opportunities to articulate a clearer and more ambitious shared vision for rural Wales (see paragraphs 2.2 to 2.9 and 2.28 to 2.31). We recommend that PSB public service partners respond more effectively to the challenges faced by rural communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their different rural communities using the Welsh Government’s Rural Proofing Tool and identify and agree the local and strategic actions needed to support community sustainability; and • ensuring the Local Well-Being Plan sets out a more optimistic and ambitious vision for ‘place’ with joint priorities co-produced by partners and with citizens to address agreed challenges.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R3 To help sustain rural communities, public services need to think differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). We recommend councils provide a more effective response to the challenges faced by rural communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring service commissioners have cost data and qualitative information on the full range of service options available; and • using citizens' views on the availability, affordability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability of council services to shape the delivery and integration of services.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R4 To help sustain rural communities, public services need to act differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). We recommend councils do more to develop community resilience and self-help by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with relevant bodies such as the Wales Co-operative Centre to support social enterprise and more collaborative business models; • providing tailored community outreach for those who face multiple barriers to accessing public services and work; • enhancing and recognising the role of town and community councils by capitalising on their local knowledge and supporting them to do more; • encouraging a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by establishing pan-public service community hubs, networks of expertise, and clusters of advice and prevention services; • enabling local action by supporting community asset transfer identifying which assets are suitable to transfer, and having the right systems in place to make things happen; and • improving community-based leadership by developing networks of interest, training and coaching, and encouraging volunteering.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
November 2018	<u>Waste Management in Wales: Municipal Recycling</u>	<p>R1 Benchmarking work has found that the cost of certain waste management services shows surprising variation (paragraphs 1.31-1.39). The Welsh Government should work with councils to understand better the basis of the variation in spending on waste management services that are fundamentally the same and ensure that waste management costs are accounted for in a consistent way.</p> <p>R2 The Welsh Government believes that, if applied optimally, its Collections Blueprint offers the most cost-effective overall means of collecting recyclable resources but is planning further analysis (paragraphs 1.40-1.51). When undertaking its further analysis to understand better the reasons for differences in councils' reported costs, and the impact on costs where councils have adopted the Collections Blueprint, we recommend that the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explores how the cost of collecting dry recyclables may affect the overall cost of providing kerbside waste management services to households; and • compares the actual costs with the costs modelled previously as part of the Welsh Government-commissioned review of the Collections Blueprint for councils that now operate the Collections Blueprint.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R3 The Welsh Government has undertaken to consider alternatives to the current weight-based recycling targets which can better demonstrate the delivery of its ecological footprint and carbon reduction goals (paragraphs 2.38-2.45). We recommend that the Welsh Government replace or complement the current target to recycle, compost and reuse wastes with performance measures to refocus recycling on the waste resources that have the largest impact on carbon reduction, and/or are scarce. We recognise that the Welsh Government may need to consider the affordability of data collection for any alternative means of measurement.</p> <p>R4 In refreshing Towards Zero Waste, the Welsh Government needs to show that wider sustainability benefits sought through municipal recycling offer value and cannot be more readily attained in other ways and at lower cost including, but not necessarily limited to, other waste management interventions (paragraphs 2.52-2.53). The Welsh Government should demonstrate in the revised waste strategy that not only is it possible to recycle a greater proportion of municipal waste, but how doing so maximises its contribution to achieving its sustainable development objectives.</p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
November 2018	<u>Provision of Local Government Services to Rural Communities: Community Asset Transfer</u>	<p>R1 Local authorities need to do more to make CATs (Community Asset Transfers) simpler and more appealing, help build the capacity of community and town councils, give them more guidance in raising finance, and look to support other community development models such as social enterprises that support social value and citizen involvement. In addition, we recommend that local authorities monitor and publish CAT numbers and measure the social impact of CATs.</p> <p>R2 Local authorities have significant scope to provide better and more visible help and support before, during, and after the community asset transfer process. We conclude that there is considerable scope to improve the business planning, preparation, and aftercare for community asset transfer. We recommend that local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify community assets transfer's role in establishing community hubs, networks of expertise and clusters of advice and prevention services; • work with town and community councils to develop their ability to take on more CATs; • identify which assets are suitable to transfer, and clarify what the authority needs to do to enable their transfer; • ensure their CAT policy adequately covers aftercare, long term support, post transfer support, signposting access to finance, and sharing the learning about what works well; and • support community-based leadership by developing networks of interest, training and coaching, and encouraging volunteering.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
December 2018	<u>The maturity of local government in use of data</u>	<p>R1 Part 1 of the report highlights the importance of creating a strong data culture and clear leadership to make better use of data. We recommend that local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a clear vision that treats data as a key resource; • establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data; • undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests; and • create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services. <p>R2 Part 2 of the report notes that whilst it is important that authorities comply with relevant data protection legislation, they also need to share data with partners to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services. Whilst these two things are not mutually exclusive, uncertainty on data protection responsibilities is resulting in some officers not sharing data, even where there is agreement to provide partners with information. We recommend that authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and • review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R3 In Part 3 of our report, we conclude that adequate resources and sufficient capacity are ongoing challenges. However, without upskilling staff to make better use of data, authorities are missing opportunities to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. We recommend that authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify staff who have a role in analysing and managing data to remove duplication and free up resources to build and develop capacity in data usage; and • invest and support the development of staff data analytical, mining and segmentation skills. <p>R4 Part 4 of our report highlights that authorities have more to do to create a data-driven decision-making culture and to unlock the potential of the data they hold. We recommend that local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set data reporting standards to ensure minimum data standards underpin decision making; and • make more open data available.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
March 2019	<p><u>Waste Management in Wales - Preventing waste</u></p>	<p>R1 Increasing the focus on waste prevention to reflect the overall aims of Towards Zero Waste</p> <p>Available data on the amount of waste produced suggests mixed progress to deliver the Welsh Government's waste prevention targets. We recommend that the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) revisits the relative priority it gives to recycling and waste prevention as part of its review of Towards Zero Waste; b) sets out clearly the expectations on different organisations and sectors for waste prevention; and c) revisits its overall waste prevention targets and the approach it has taken to monitor them in light of progress to date, examples from other countries and in the context of current projections about waste arising through to 2050. <p>R2 Improving data on commercial, industrial, construction and demolition waste</p> <p>The Welsh Government is a partner in initial work to assess the feasibility of developing a new digital solution to track all waste. If this preferred option does not succeed, we recommend that the Welsh Government works with Natural Resources Wales to explore the costs and benefits of other options to improve non-municipal waste data in Wales, including additional powers to require waste data from businesses.</p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R3 Enhancing producer responsibility and using more legal, financial and fiscal levers</p> <p>The Welsh Government has opportunities to influence waste prevention through legislation and financial incentives. It can also influence changes at the UK level where fiscal matters are not devolved. We recommend that the Welsh Government consider whether provisions to extend producer responsibility and the use of financial powers such as grant conditions, fiscal measures and customer charges and incentives, are needed to promote and to prioritise waste prevention.</p>
June 2019	<p><u>The Effectiveness of Local Planning Authorities in Wales</u></p>	<p>R1 Part 1 of the report sets out the complexities of the planning system showing how challenging it is for local planning authorities to effectively engage with and involve stakeholders in choices and decisions. To improve involvement with stakeholders and ownership of decisions we recommend that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local planning authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – test current engagement and involvement practices and consider the full range of other options available to ensure involvement activities are fit for purpose; – use ‘Place Plans’ as a vehicle to engage and involve communities and citizens in planning choices and decision making; and – improve transparency and accountability by holding planning meetings at appropriate times, rotating meetings to take place in areas which are subject to proposed development, webcasting meetings and providing opportunities for stakeholders to address committee meetings. • the Welsh Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – review the Development Management Procedure Order 2012 and update the engagement and involvement standards for local planning authorities.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R2 Part 2 of the report highlights that local planning authorities have been subject to significant reductions in funding and struggle to deliver their statutory responsibilities. To improve resilience, we recommend that local planning authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review their building control fee regimes to ensure the levels set better reflect the actual cost of providing these services and make the service self-funding; and • improve capacity by working regionally to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – integrate services to address specialism gaps; – develop joint supplementary planning guidance; and – develop future local development plans regionally and in partnership with other local planning authorities. <p>R3 Part 2 of the report highlights that the cost of development control services is not reflected in the charges set for these services and progress in developing regional responses to strengthen resilience has been slow. We recommend that the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review development control fees to ensure the levels set, better reflect the actual cost of providing these services; and • consider how to use the powers in the Planning (Wales) Act to support and improve local planning authority capacity and resilience.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>R4 Part 3 of the report summarises the effectiveness and impact of local planning authorities' decision making and how well they are performing against national measures. We recommend that local planning authorities improve the effectiveness of planning committees by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing their scheme of delegation to ensure planning committees are focussed on the most important strategic issues relevant to their authority; • revising reporting templates to ensure they are clear and unambiguous to help guide decision making and reduce the level of officer recommendations overturned; and • enforcing the local planning authorities' standards of conduct for meetings. <p>R5 Part 4 of the report identifies the central role of planning to deliver the ambitions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We recommend that local planning authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set a clear ambitious vision that shows how planning contributes to improving wellbeing; • provide planning committee members with regular and appropriate wellbeing training and support to help deliver their wider responsibilities; • set appropriate measures for their administration of the planning system and the impact of their planning decisions on wellbeing; and • annually publish these performance measures to judge planning authorities' impact on wellbeing.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
September 2019	<u>The 'Front Door' to Adult Social Care</u>	<p>Improving access to the front door</p> <p>R1 Part 1 of the report sets out how authorities promote access to the 'front door' and provide information, advice and assistance to help people to improve their wellbeing and prevent their needs from deteriorating. To improve awareness of the front door we recommend that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – review their current approaches, consider their audience, and ensure that good-quality information is made available in a timely manner to avoid needs deteriorating and people presenting for assistance in 'crisis'; – work in partnership with public and third-sector partners to help ensure people accessing via partner referrals, or other avenues, are given the best information to help them; – ensure that advocacy services are commissioned and proactively offered to those who need them at the first point of contact; and – to take local ownership and lead on the co-ordination and editing of local information published on Dewis Cymru locally. • the Welsh Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – improve carers' awareness and understanding of their rights to be assessed for their own care and support needs, aimed at generating demand for local authorities' preventative services; and – undertake a full evaluation of the role of Dewis Cymru in the wider implementation of the Act and use the data gained to build on its potential as a national information sharing portal.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
		<p>Investing in prevention and understanding impact</p> <p>R2 Part 2 of the report highlights weaknesses in authorities' assurance of the availability and quality of third-sector, preventative, community-based services that they signpost people to. We recommend that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • local authorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – map the availability of preventative services in their area to better understand current levels of provision and identify gaps and duplication; – involve third-sector partners in co-producing preventative solutions to meet people's needs and ensure people have equitable access to these services; – work with third-sector partners to tailor and commission new services where gaps are identified; and – work with partners to improve data to evaluate the impact of preventative services on individuals and the population more generally. • the Welsh Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – improve the cost evaluation in relation to the impact of the Act in a national context, and support local authorities to ensure that the desired impact of prevention on overall social-care expenditure becomes a demonstratable reality. <p>As part of our report, we also published an interactive data tool, short film and an infographic about carers' stories. <u>These are available on our website.</u></p>

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