



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report 2014-15

Vale of Glamorgan Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of
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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 assessment work on a number of key themes, developed in discussion with each authority.
- 3 This Annual Improvement Report (AIR) summarises the audit work undertaken at the Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council (the Council) since the last such report was published in September 2014. This report also includes a summary of the key findings from reports 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. 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 relevant external review bodies 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 will state in this report whether he believes that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2015-16.
- 5 This statement should not be seen as a definitive diagnosis 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 continues to perform well in the context of national indicators and continues to manage its finances effectively; its forward planning arrangements and track record suggest it is well placed to secure 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 and proposals for improvement, are summarised below.

Performance audit work in 2014-15

- 8 In determining the breadth of work undertaken during the year, 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, we undertook improvement assessment work under three themes: performance; use of resources; and governance.
- 9 The work carried out since the last AIR, including that of the ‘relevant regulators’, is set out below.

Project name	Brief description	Dates [when the work was carried out]
Wales Audit Office Study: Delivering with Less: Environmental Health	All Wales review of the impact of financial pressures on Environmental Health Services and citizens.	January 2015
Wales Audit Office Review of Disabled Facilities Grant	Local study of the Disabled Facilities Grants processes.	August 2015
Wales Audit Office Review of Discretionary Housing Payments	A Review of the Council's performance and effectiveness in administering Discretionary Housing Payments.	March 2015
CSSIW Performance Evaluation Report 2013-14	CSSIW's review of the performance of the Council's Adult and Childrens' Services.	October 2014
Estyn Monitoring Letter 2014	Following an inspection of the Council's Education services in May 2013, the Letter provides an update on the Council's progress to address areas requiring improvement.	December 2014
Welsh Language Commission review	A review of the Council's adherence to Welsh Language Standards.	March 2015
Wales Audit Office: Audit of Accounts	Review of the Council's financial statements and whether they give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Council and of its expenditure and income for the year.	July to November 2014

Project name	Brief description	Dates [when the work was carried out]
Wales Audit Office Financial Planning Assessment	Review of the Council's financial position and how it is budgeting and delivering on required savings.	January 2015
Wales Audit Office Study: Local Authorities Arrangements to Support Safeguarding of Children	All-Wales review of councils' arrangements to support the safeguarding of children; includes review of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements.	November 2014
Wales Audit Office Review of Council's approach to Reshaping Services	Local study of the Council's strategic approach to re-shaping its services in times of financial constraint.	March 2015
Wales Audit Office Annual 'Assessment of Performance' Audit	Review of the Council's published performance assessment, including testing and validation of performance information.	November 2014
Wales Audit Office Annual 'Improvement Plan' Audit	Review of the Council's published plans for delivering on improvement objectives.	May 2015

Headlines – a summary of key findings

- 10 The table below summarises the key findings of reports issued since the last AIR by the Wales Audit Office, the CSSIW, Estyn and the WLC.

Performance	<p>Wales Audit Office: The Council's overall performance as measured by national indicators is comparatively strong. Whilst arrangements are capable of driving improvement of specific indicators they do not provide a clear picture of outcomes being achieved.</p> <p>Wales Audit Office: The Council is delivering environmental health services at above minimum levels despite a cut in budgets and a significant fall in staff numbers.</p> <p>Wales Audit Office: The Council has met its original objective of improving the speed of delivery of disabled facilities grants but evaluation focuses on a narrow range of information and service planning is not sufficiently strategic.</p> <p>Estyn: The Council was making progress in addressing some of its inspection recommendations.</p> <p>CSSIW: Measured against National Strategic Indicators (NSIs), there is some variability in the Council's performance although overall it is considered to be good. The Council was improving services to its vulnerable citizens but more work was needed to improve placement stability for looked after children and care for more vulnerable young people who are not in education, employment or training.</p> <p>Wales Audit Office: The Council monitors the level of and reason for Discretionary Housing Payments but its monitoring arrangements do not enable it to establish the impact being achieved.</p> <p>Welsh Language Commissioner: The Council continues to improve its Welsh-speaking provision including staff training and working closely with Urdd Gobaith Cymru.</p>
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Use of resources	<p>Wales Audit Office: The Council has effective financial management arrangements.</p> <p>Wales Audit Office: The Council is maintaining a robust approach to its Medium Term Financial Plan, it, however, continues to face significant challenges when setting future budgets in the current climate.</p>
Governance	<p>Wales Audit Office: The Council's Reshaping Services Strategy conforms to good practice and demonstrates that it is following the right processes to achieve transformation.</p> <p>Wales Audit Office: The governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children are mostly adequate but some improvements could be made.</p>
Improvement planning and reporting audits	<p>Wales Audit Office: The Council discharged its duties under the Local Government Measure 2009.</p>
Audit of accounts	<p>The Appointed Auditor issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. (Appendix 4)</p>

Proposals for improvement

- 11 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 and publish a report and make recommendations; and
 - recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 12 During the course of the year, the Auditor General did not make any formal recommendations. However, lower-priority issues, known as proposals for improvement, are contained in our other reports and referred to later on in this report. We will continue to monitor implementation of our proposals for improvement during the course of our improvement assessment work.

Proposals for improvement

Performance

- P1 Refine performance reporting arrangements to ensure data is presented in a way that provides a balanced picture of performance and of the outcomes being achieved.
- P2 Improve reporting so that cross-directorate/cross-service activity is considered in the context of delivery of priorities rather than completion of service-based actions.
- P3 Implement a disabled facilities grant (DFG) process review that assesses arrangements from the service user perspective and has regard to the implementation of change by other councils.
- P4 Establish a broader range of measures that enables the effectiveness of the DFG service to be evaluated in terms of meeting user needs and the efficiency of resources being deployed as well as monitoring the speed of delivery.
- P5 Adopt 'plain English' principles to assess revisions necessary to current DFG guidance documents and future publications/advice for service users.
- P6 Introduce measures that can be used to establish a corporate understanding of the way in which the DFG service and others contribute to supporting independent living.

Governance

Re-shaping services

- P7 The Council should ensure that staff resource is adequately assessed and relevant skills are in place before selecting any alternative model of service delivery.
- P8 The Council should consider developing its criteria for selecting alternative models of service delivery to ensure that models are selected according to corporate objectives, which will assist in helping the Council defining an agreed vision for the future.
- P9 The Council should consider the use of best practice frameworks for business case reviews and partnership working to add strength to its Reshaping Services Strategy as it moves to the next stage of transformation.
- P10 The Council should make reference to the guidance in BS11000 to strengthen its ability to enter into and ensure the management and governance of all of its partnerships are robust.

Safeguarding

- P11 Ensure that the role and responsibilities of the Local Authority Designated Officer are clarified and understood across the Council.
- P12 Develop a Corporate Safeguarding Policy that clearly specifies roles, responsibilities and procedures for safeguarding and takes into account local circumstances.
- P13 Ensure all elected members and staff who come into contact with children on a regular basis receive training on safeguarding and child protection issues and the Council's corporate policy on safeguarding.

- 13 The Auditor General also makes recommendations that may be relevant to councils in his Local Government National Reports. A list of relevant recommendations contained in reports issued in 2014-15 can be found in [Appendix 5](#).

Detailed report



Performance

The Council's overall performance as measured by national indicators is comparatively strong

- 14 The Welsh Government requires all councils to report on a common set of indicators to enable a comparison of performance in key service areas across Wales. Thirty National Strategic Indicators (NSIs) have been set that cover the Welsh Government's strategic priorities in education, social care and waste management. For 2014-15 there are also 13 Public Accountability Measures (PAMs) chosen to reflect issues of importance such as support for carers, school attendance and the condition of highways.
- 15 In 2014-15 the results for 20 of these indicators placed Council performance in the top quarter compared to the rest of Wales. Seventeen of the 20 indicators related to either education or social care. Top-quarter performance was achieved for:
 - nine out of a possible 11 education indicators;
 - eight out of a possible 18 social care indicators;
 - the number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence per full-time equivalent employee;
 - the percentage of private sector dwellings that had been vacant for more than six months at 1 April that were returned to occupation during the year through direct action by the local authority; and
 - the number of visits to public libraries during the year per 1,000 population.
- 16 The Council can demonstrate that it achieves improvement for many indicators. There is also a need to consider the 'story' behind the figures when looking at these results.
- 17 In education, for example, results for academic achievement need to be considered in the context of the proportion of pupils in receipt of free school meals. Taking account of this, there is a reasonable expectation that pupils living in the area should be achieving results that place them in the top quarter of performance. For the most part this is being achieved. Data also shows a general trend of improvement in education across most indicators. In our last annual report we noted that the Council had not met its objective of achieving top-quarter performance for school attendance – results for 2014-15 show that this has now been achieved. The Council also significantly improved and sustained its performance in issuing all statements of special educational needs within 26 weeks.

- 18 Social care indicators are available for adult care and for children's services. There are 11 national indicators for children's services. Trends show that the Council is improving performance across the majority of these indicators. The indicator for the percentage of children seen by a social worker at initial assessment appears comparatively weak but the Council uses Social Care Officers and not just Social Workers to undertake these assessments, which is not reflected in the data. In adult care, indicators show a wide variation, for example, the Council achieved the best possible performance for two of the seven indicators (effective management of risk for vulnerable adults and for carer assessments) but had a comparatively lower percentage of adult clients supported in the community and supporting people over the age of 65 in the community (although this statistic can be influenced by the effectiveness of local re-habilitation and re-ablement services).
- 19 The Council also sustained improvement in the time taken to deliver Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and we provide more information later in this report.

Reporting does not provide a clear and balanced picture of performance and of the outcomes being achieved in respect of the Council's priorities

- 20 In previous annual reports we have advised the Council that its performance reporting arrangements needed to be improved so that it was able to evaluate the outcomes arising from its activity. During the year we reviewed the DFG service and observed scrutiny arrangements. The review of the DFG service exposed more general limitations in performance reporting arising from a focus on service targets and the Council's inability to evaluate the results of cross-service activity.
- 21 Reports are currently produced to explain progress against action taken and in the context of the target selected for a specific service. The way in which the Council pursued its target to improve DFG performance was consistent in the way in which it generally seeks to improve against performance indicators by setting specific targets and adopting a range of actions for tracking. The result in this case was a focus on the indicator and activity rather than on the outcome being achieved in respect of the Council's priorities for supporting independent living. In the case of the DFG service there was no evaluation of wider information that would have given a clearer picture of performance – for example, the number of grants actually being provided in relation to expenditure and the staff resources involved in the service. The Council has an appropriate range of data available but at present this data is presented in a series of different reports and is not being brought together to provide a clear picture of performance.

- 22 When adopting priorities the Council assigns responsibility to a Cabinet Member to act as champion for an element of activity, to a Director who is held accountable for ensuring improvements are achieved and to a lead officer with responsibility for delivery. This approach has resulted in a review process which has strengths when tracking activity at service specific level but weaknesses when seeking to understand the results achieved by a range of activities with a common purpose but undertaken across a number of directorates. For example, in respect of supporting independent living:
- Responsibility for DFG delivery time lies within the Development Directorate and is reported to the Housing and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee, Corporate Resources Scrutiny and Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee. Action is included in the Development Services Business Plan.
 - Delivery of the Accessible Homes Policy is assigned to Housing and Building Services. The 2015-19 service plan indicates the policy was reviewed and changes implemented in January 2014, but there is no clear indication of the results being achieved and how well the result of implementing the policy is contributing to assisting independent living.
 - The Supporting People programme independent living actions are included in the Housing and Building Services 2015-19 service plan. The plan appropriately refers to aims to increase the numbers of people supported by the service but proposes 'success criteria' that relate to governance arrangements rather than outcomes for users.
 - Responsibility for three corporate objectives supporting more people towards independence is designated to the Social Services Directorate and action is included in the Directorate Service Business Plan.
- 23 Individual Service Business Plans identify issues and proposed actions. Performance review places reliance on action tracking and monitoring indicators at service level. There is no current arrangement that brings together outcomes being achieved to enable a strategic view to be taken, and in the case of our DFG review we found that at a time when increasing demand is forecast, decisions were being taken to reduce the resource being made available with the result that it was likely that fewer grants would be made available.
- 24 Officers have recognised the need to refine arrangements to ensure a more balanced picture of performance, and a clearer explanation of results can be reported. Officers propose to integrate necessary changes with the development of the Corporate Plan during 2016.

Proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P1	Refine performance reporting arrangements to ensure data is presented in a way that provides a balanced picture of performance and of the outcomes being achieved.
P2	Improve reporting so that cross-directorate/cross-service activity is considered in the context of delivery of priorities rather than completion of service-based actions.

The Council is delivering environmental health services at above minimum standards despite a cut in budgets and a significant fall in staff numbers

- 25 'Local environmental services' include environmental health; waste collection and disposal; street cleansing; and cemeteries, cremation and mortuary services. Stats Wales data for 2013-14 shows the gross revenue out-turn expenditure on local environmental services was £16,176,000. In real terms, revenue out-turn expenditure on local environmental services has reduced by £1,715,000² since 2011-12.
- 26 During 2014, the Auditor General undertook a study of environmental health services across Wales. The study made use of a Best Practice Standards model against which Council officers were asked to evaluate their services. These standards have been adopted by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the all-Wales Heads of Environmental Health Group to further define the range of statutory and discretionary environmental health services delivered by councils in Wales. The standards define activity in each of the service areas and set out the characteristics that constitute: a minimum standard service; a good standard of service; and best practice in each of the areas. These broadly reflect the statutory obligations for all environmental health services covering 11 areas of activity.
- 27 Our local summary report was issued to the Council in January 2015. Overall, the Council reduced expenditure on environmental health services by 2.5 per cent, lower than the average budget reduction of 4.18 per cent for all Welsh councils. The number of staff employed by the Council to deliver environmental health services has reduced by 23.4 per cent from 50.9 full-time equivalents in 2011-12, to 39 in 2013-14.

² As measured by Treasury GDP deflators April 2015.

- 28 In most environmental health areas, the Council is delivering services that are above minimum standard. Overall, the Council is delivering:
- 31.2 per cent of environmental health services to the highest standard compared to a Wales average of 37 per cent;
 - 37.3 per cent assessed as being delivered to a good standard compared to an all Wales average of 30 per cent;
 - 22.5 per cent at the minimum standard of service set compared to an all-Wales average of 22 per cent;
 - 2.3 per cent below the minimum standard; and
 - 6.7 per cent of the services covered were not included within the environmental health services audited.

The Council has improved the speed of delivery of disabled facilities grants but its evaluation focuses on a narrow range of information and service planning is not sufficiently strategic

- 29 During the year we checked on the progress being made by the Council in respect of previous proposals we made for improving the DFG service. We also looked at the way in which other Councils were delivering the service to identify any further opportunities for improvement by the Council. Our detailed report was considered by the Audit Committee on 21 September 2015 and is available on the Council's website.
- 30 The focus on time targets for key stages in the process had improved delivery times and, when comparing Council processes with others, there appeared scope for further refinement of processes.
- 31 Performance evaluation is based upon a narrow range of indicators and there is scope to utilise other service-related data such as the number of staff engaged in the service; the number of grants dealt with and the quality of information available to provide a better picture of performance.
- 32 The Council lacks a strategic plan for the service. Past performance, together with a planned reduction in the budget, suggests a probable future reduction in the number of DFGs provided, at a time when the Council forecasts increased demand.

Proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P3	Implement a process review that assesses arrangements from the service user perspective and has regard to the implementation of change by other councils.
P4	Establish a broader range of measures that enable the effectiveness of the DFG service to be evaluated in terms of meeting user needs and the efficiency of resources being deployed as well as monitoring the speed of delivery.
P5	Adopt 'plain English' principles to assess revisions necessary to current guidance documents and future publications/advice for service users.
P6	Introduce measures that can be used to establish a corporate understanding of the way in which the service and others contribute to supporting independent living.

Estyn concluded that the Council was making progress in addressing some of its inspection recommendations

- 33 Last year we reported that Estyn had published the results of its inspection of the Council in May 2013 and decided the Council required formal monitoring to follow up progress in respect of its recommendations.
- 34 Estyn evaluated progress against two of the recommendations in December 2014 and found that overall, in the areas evaluated during the visit, the authority was making good progress. Estyn will carry out a final monitoring visit in the Autumn of 2015.

The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales considered the Council to be improving in some aspects of social care and having appropriate strategies for dealing with future demand

- 35 The Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) published its Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013-2014 in October 2014. The report includes detailed findings together with recognition of successes and areas for improvement and this is available on its website: www.cssiw.org.uk.
- 36 The CSSIW considered that the Director of Social Services' own evaluation highlighted the successes and challenges during the year and sets out the Council's priorities for 2014-15. The CSSIW was of the view that the Council could demonstrate committed leadership with detailed plans in place to deal with areas where further change was necessary.

The Council monitors the level of and reason for Discretionary Housing Payments but its monitoring arrangements do not enable it to establish the impact being achieved

- 37 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 required significant changes 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 national annual expenditure by around £2.3 billion.
- 38 In January 2015, the Auditor General published his report on how well councils are managing the impact of welfare reform changes on social housing tenants in Wales. His report reviewed the management and use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP³) by councils in Wales and concluded that the allocation, distribution, administration and use of these payments have significant inconsistencies and weaknesses. Work was also undertaken to review implementation of changes by councils and feedback provided to the Council is being used to improve arrangements locally.
- 39 Our review found that the Council did not have processes in place to support vulnerable customers to easily apply for DHP. For example, it was difficult to obtain information about DHP from the website; there was no policy available online setting out how DHP is administered; and the leaflet that was available, incorrectly referred to DHP being eligible to help applicants meet the cost of Council Tax. This is incorrect, as Council Tax Benefit is an exempt area for payment in statutory guidance published by the Department for Work and Pensions. Since our feedback, the Council has amended its public information and confirmed that no payments have been made in respect of Council Tax, and is working to improve the quality and range of its public information.
- 40 Positively, through the work of its welfare reform group, the Council has created a specific welfare reform page on its website which includes links to groups which can help an applicant such as Age Concern, Communities First, and the Family Support Directory. The Council along with most other Welsh authorities was due to implement the Pan-Wales DHP initiative from April 2014.
- 41 The Council monitors the level of DHP expenditure against the amount provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, the number of customers helped, the speed of processing applications and the number of landlords assisted. The Council also monitors the impact of DHP and how it helps vulnerable people by recording the reasons for the DHP allocation. However, it is not clear how this information is used to support the development of the Council's policy on DHP and its work on addressing the impact of welfare reform.

3 A discretionary housing payment is a payment people may receive at the discretion of their local authority to provide extra help with housing costs on top of housing benefit.

- 42 The Council had paid out £207,127 of its Department for Work and Pensions allocation of £244,844 at the end of November 2014 assisting 477 applicants. This represents 84 per cent of its allocation. Because of weaknesses in the monitoring arrangements it has introduced to evaluate its performance on delivering DHP, the Council cannot know whether the payment of DHP is having the right level of impact.

The Council continues to improve its Welsh speaking provision including staff training and working closely with Urdd Gobaith Cymru

- 43 The role of the Welsh Language Commissioner (the Commissioner) 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 Commissioner will continue to review Welsh-language schemes by virtue of powers inherited under the Welsh Language Act 1993.
- 44 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 committed to providing an annual monitoring report to the Commissioner outlining its performance in implementing the language scheme. The Commissioner analyses every monitoring report, provides a formal response and collects further information as required.
- 45 The Commissioner reported that the Council had installed a Welsh-language phone service during office hours, and ensured that the language is used when responding to written correspondence as and when it is necessary to do so. Six of the frontline staff who work at the Council's contact centres can speak Welsh, and more individuals with bilingual skills will be recruited early in 2014-15.
- 46 A survey of the workforce's linguistic skills was initiated during the year. Seven staff members are currently enrolled on formal Welsh-language training. Weekly conversational sessions are held, in order to allow employees to practice their Welsh-speaking skills in less formal surroundings. Some elected Members have also enrolled on long-term Welsh-language training, after attending initial training sessions that were arranged specifically for them. The Sports and Play Development Team continues to work in partnership with Urdd Gobaith Cymru, in order to develop a Welsh-medium sport and exercise provision for children and young people.

Use of resources

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

- 47 On 10 November 2014 the Auditor General 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. The Auditor General issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. The Annual Audit Letter can be found in [Appendix 4](#) of this report.

The Council has a good track record of delivering a balanced budget within year and monitoring of service specific savings is undertaken by scrutiny committees

- 48 The Council completed a rigorous process to identify budgets and shortfalls for the periods 2011-12 to 2013-14. During this period, the Council accurately identified the level of savings required to meet the projected shortfalls. Savings plans were produced by Directorates which included detailed savings proposals for services, which were monitored by the appropriate scrutiny committees.
- 49 The Council is developing a formal corporate reporting arrangement to provide an overview of progress against planned savings.

The Council has an effective process for developing its future financial plans

- 50 Looking to 2015-16 and beyond, the Council has an effective corporate framework for financial planning, financial management and control. This framework will enable the Council to continue to review and challenge financial performance and monitor spend against budget.
- 51 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covers the three-year period to 2017 and is updated every 12 months to take account of the most recent data. The Council currently monitors measures including reserves, balances, and actual spend in comparison with budget as well as staff absence. The Council does not include these indicators within the MTFP itself, although it does monitor many of the indicators by means of other financial management arrangements. Other indicators such as schools balances and liquidity could be considered for inclusion in financial management monitoring arrangements.

The Council is maintaining a robust approach to its Medium Term Financial Plan and is preparing for significant financial challenges in the future

- 52 The Council has maintained robust in-year and medium-term financial arrangements, with the MTFP for 2014-18 being approved by Council in September 2014.
- 53 As at quarter 3 the Council is forecasting a surplus of £715,000 for the 2014-15 revenue budget. The Council has made good progress towards meeting its 2014-15 savings target with a number of savings having been met by the end of quarter 3. Progress against the detailed savings targets is now monitored quarterly by the relevant scrutiny committee as well as through the Cabinet for a Council-wide view.
- 54 The Council continues to hold a healthy reserve balance with the general fund balance, at the end of the 2013-14 financial year, being £5,709,000.00 This has remained relatively consistent with the balance at the end of the 2012-13 financial year, which was £5,781,000.00.
- 55 However, the Council now faces a major challenge in setting future budgets following a significant change in the financial climate. Following the 2015-16 local government settlement, the Council faces a 3.4 per cent cash reduction in its grant. This has led to a budget shortfall of £10,151,000.00. This gap will rise to £32,387,000.00 over the next three years if the Council does not reduce its budget. The Council has already developed and established a number of alternative ways to deliver services, in order to achieve some savings. However, it is also developing a strategic, corporate approach to the consideration and implementation of alternative models of service delivery in order to be able to make the required savings in the future. We have undertaken a review of the Council's strategic arrangements for developing alternative models of service delivery.
- 56 Following extensive consultation the Council approved a balanced budget for 2015-16 on 4 March 2015. After setting a council tax increase of 3.9 per cent it addressed the remaining shortfall through a number of measures including using £2,500,000.00 of the Council Fund Reserves. A detailed savings plan is already in place for 2015-16.

Governance

The Council's Reshaping Services Strategy conforms to good practice and demonstrates that it is following the right processes to achieve transformation

- 57 With the prospect of significant ongoing financial pressures, the Council is considering the possibility of making significant changes to methods of service delivery in order to achieve the required savings and, ultimately long-term financial sustainability. Because of the potential risks associated with adopting different ways of delivering services the Council requested a review of its arrangements during 2015.
- 58 The review concluded that the Council:
- was in the process of developing a suitable corporate vision to underpin its approach to adopting alternative methods of service delivery;
 - was following the correct processes to achieve transformation, but needed to undertake a number of steps before selecting a provider and equipping staff to deal with new arrangements; and
 - had not yet developed processes to effectively review the delivery of a service should alternative methods of delivery be implemented.
- 59 The Council is identifying examples from other authorities to benefit from any lessons learned and good practice, recognising its own working experience is limited. It has also consulted its stakeholders. Services have not yet developed individual business cases, considering the options for service delivery against the selected corporate criteria to ensure they are in a position to either select a provider or equip staff to deal with the new arrangements. The Council could also strengthen its scoring mechanism to make the business case development more robust and aligned to corporate objectives.
- 60 The Council has not yet developed processes to effectively review the delivery of services under new arrangements. It will need to be able to monitor and measure the performance of alternative forms of service delivery. It has not yet reviewed its criteria for assessing alternative models to ensure they are measured against its corporate objectives and vision. A strong governance framework will be required to underpin all the partnerships that the Council enters into. This framework should, for example, include risk management, scheme of delegation, board governance processes and management reporting on the progress of the delivery mechanism against targets.

Proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P7	The Council should ensure that staff resource is adequately assessed and relevant skills are in place before selecting any alternative model.
P8	The Council should consider developing its criteria for selecting alternative models of service delivery to ensure that models are selected according to corporate objectives, which will assist in helping the Council define an agreed vision for the future.
P9	The Council should consider the use of best practice frameworks for business case reviews and partnership working to add strength to its Reshaping Services Strategy as it moves to the next stage of transformation.
P10	The Council should make reference to the guidance in BS11000 to strengthen its ability to enter into and ensure the management and governance of all of its partnerships are robust.

The governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children are mostly adequate but some improvements could be made

- 61 Local authorities have a statutory duty to have in place safeguarding arrangements. These include strategic planning, support and guidance for all providers of relevant services in its area, and the direct provision of some services themselves. In particular, local authorities have a duty to work in partnership with others and through the Local Safeguarding Children Board to secure the safeguarding and wellbeing of children in their area.
- 62 A national study was undertaken to assess the safeguarding arrangements councils had in place. Individual reports were provided to each council. The report for the Council concluded that the governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children are mostly adequate but some improvements could be made.
- 63 Staff appeared to be aware of whom they should report safeguarding issues to but this has not been formally documented. The role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and who holds this responsibility was not consistently understood and could be improved. This was supported by our survey results which found that 32 per cent of respondents stated they did not know who was the Council's Designated Officer for child protection. The Council assured itself that policies and procedures were being followed through the Corporate Safeguarding Working Group, which had developed a safeguarding action plan.

- 64 The Council had arrangements in place to identify the information it needed to monitor its children's safeguarding arrangements and evaluate whether they are working effectively. Performance information was monitored at departmental level and discussed at team meetings, departmental and corporate management teams, and scrutiny committees on a quarterly basis. However, the Council was not able to demonstrate compliance with its safeguarding policy across the Council or the level of training undertaken, and was in the process of developing the mechanisms to enable it to monitor this.
- 65 The Council's approach to identifying and acting on improvements in its safeguarding arrangements was adequate but some improvements could be made. The Council has a Corporate Safeguarding Group (CSG) which has a strong monitoring and evaluation role and is responsible for monitoring and ensuring good safeguarding practices. The CSG also disseminates lessons learnt from audit and serious case reviews, critical incident reporting, complaints, evidence-based best practice and research. However, there were opportunities for more internal checking and challenge. For example, Internal Audit had no plans to undertake relevant work, other than checking compliance with Disclosure and Barring Services and policy requirements on school audits. The role of scrutiny had been limited to one report in the previous 12 months on allegations against professional staff. Scrutiny committees' responsibilities include safeguarding and should include specific reviews as part of their forward planning. At the time of the assessment no detailed safeguarding reviews had been undertaken by scrutiny committees.
- 66 Overall whistleblowing arrangements were sound, but could be improved by providing training for officers and members, and evaluating awareness of the revised and updated corporate Whistleblowing Policy. The Whistleblowing Policy was updated to meet current legislation following a review by Internal Audit. It is clearly written and provides reassurance to potential whistleblowers. Although there was evidence to show that officers are aware of the policy, the Council had not provided any training, although it was developing an e-learning training module. In March 2014, the Council introduced a central register of cases and going forward should ensure that the revised whistleblowing arrangements, themes, trends and outcomes are subject to member challenge and scrutiny.

Proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P11	Ensure that the role and responsibilities of the Local Authority Designated Officer are clarified and understood across the Council.
P12	Develop a Corporate Safeguarding Policy that clearly specifies roles, responsibilities and procedures for safeguarding and takes into account local circumstances.
P13	Ensure all elected members and staff who come into contact with children on a regular basis receive training on safeguarding and child protection issues and the Council's corporate policy on safeguarding.

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 Vale of Glamorgan Council’s 2015-16 Improvement Plan

Certificate

I certify that I have audited Vale of Glamorgan 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: Leighton Andrews, Minister for Public Services

Steve Barry, Manager

Helen Keatley, Performance Audit Lead

Appendix 3 – Audit of Vale of Glamorgan Council’s assessment of 2013-14 performance

Certificate

I certify that I have audited the Vale of Glamorgan 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: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business

Steve Barry, Manager

Helen Keatley, Performance Audit Lead

Appendix 4 – Annual Audit Letter

(Issued 10 November 2014)

Sian Davies
Managing Director
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Civic Office
Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4RU

Dear Sian

Annual Audit Letter – Vale of Glamorgan 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.

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

It is the Council's responsibility to:

- put systems of internal control in place to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions and to ensure that its assets are secure;
- maintain proper accounting records;
- prepare a Statement of Accounts in accordance with relevant requirements; and
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

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

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

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards. On 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 Audit Committee in my Audit of Financial Statements report on 22 September 2014:

- Schools cash balance included Schools debtors and creditors – The review of the Council's 'cash and cash equivalents' revealed that the amounts for Schools included reconciling items for debtors and creditors, and therefore the balance being shown was not simply a cash balance. The value of creditors was £601,000 and debtors was £94,000. This means that the cash and cash equivalents', debtors and creditors balance was being understated. The value is not material to the accounts but it is recommended that these elements are accounted for separately going forward. From 2014/15 it was agreed by management to account for this type of debtor and creditors separately.
- Accounting for Property, Plant and Equipment retention – At the year end the Council had retentions of £1,281,000 (2012-13 £483,000), which it deducted from payments to contractors to protect the Authority from situations such as the contractor going bankrupt. Normally a proportion is paid on practical completion as stated in the Council's accounts. Accounting convention would be to hold the £1,281,000 as a creditor at year end as it would be likely that these balances need to be paid back as a year-end creditors. The value is not material to the accounts but it is recommended that this item is accounted for correctly going forward. Management has agreed to review this accounting treatment.
- Provisions and Earmarked Reserves – A review of the Council's provisions as part of our work programme found that a significant number of items which have been accounted for as a provision did not meet the requirement of accounting standards to be treated as such. These items have been reclassified to better reflect the nature of the items to earmarked reserves and creditors. £13,725,000 was moved to earmarked reserves and £145,000 to creditors.

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.

A more detailed report on my grant certification work will follow in February 2015 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

John Golding
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.

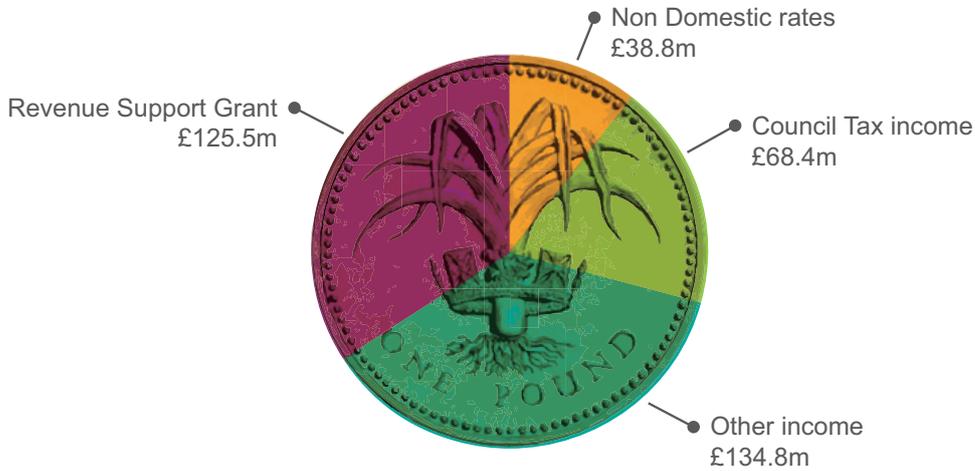
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2014	<p>Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens</p>	<p>R1 Revise the best practice standards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • align the work of environmental health with national strategic priorities; • 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	<p>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.</p>
		<p>R2 Improve governance and accountability for welfare reform by:</p> <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.
		<p>R3 Ensure effective management of performance on welfare reform by:</p> <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.
		<p>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.</p>
		<p>R5 Improve engagement with tenants affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy through:</p> <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.

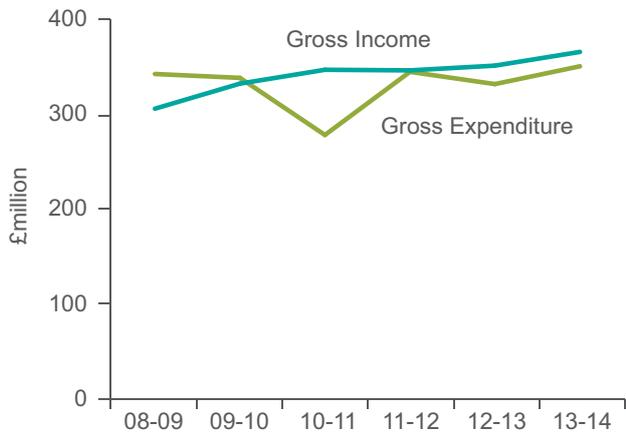
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2015	<p>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</p>	<p>R7 Improve management, access to and use of Discretionary Housing Payments by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing a clear policy or 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 – Useful information about the Council’s resources

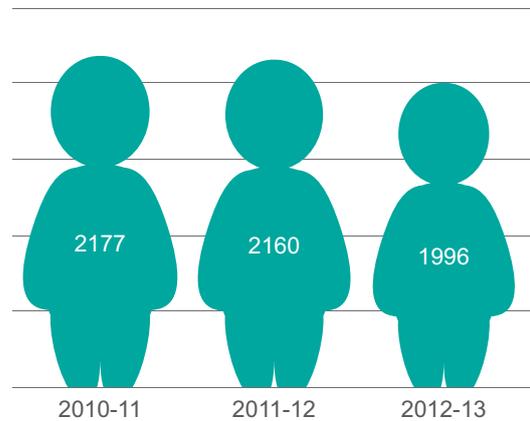
Total Gross Income 2013-14



Total Income and Expenditure



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



Total Gross Expenditure by service area



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