



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

Annual Improvement Report **Vale of Glamorgan Council**

January 2011



Annual Improvement Report by the Auditor General for Wales

This report is written by the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales. (An explanation of what the Auditor General does is at Appendix 1). It is a new report that he is required to publish about how well Welsh councils are improving their services. With help from other inspectors like Estyn (for education) and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales, we have brought together a picture of what the council is trying to achieve; how it is going about it; and what it needs to do to improve its approach to improving services.

This Annual Improvement Report sets out that picture and each year we will produce a report to let you know what progress the Vale of Glamorgan Council (the Council) has made. We have not covered all the services the Council provides. We have focused on a small number of things, especially those things that the Council has said are its priorities for improvement.

We want to find out what you think of the services the Council is providing in your area and will be giving you an opportunity to comment in the future. In the meantime we would like to know whether this report gives you the information you need, and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by emailing us at info@wao.gov.uk or writing to us at 24, Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ.

The Wales Audit Office study team that assisted in preparing this report comprised, Steve Barry and Janet Villars under the direction of Jane Holownia.

This report has been prepared by the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The Auditor General for Wales assesses the compliance of Welsh improvement authorities (county councils, county borough councils, national park authorities and fire and rescue authorities) with the improvement requirements of Part 1 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

The Auditor General for Wales and his staff together comprise the Wales Audit Office. For further information about the Wales Audit Office please write to the Auditor General at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ. Telephone 029 2032 0500, email: info@wao.gov.uk, or see website www.wao.gov.uk.

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What kind of area is the Vale of Glamorgan?

- 1 The Vale of Glamorgan is Wales' most southern unitary authority, bounded to the north by the M4 motorway and to the south by the Severn Estuary. It covers 33,097 hectares with 53 kilometres of coastline, including 19 kilometres of Heritage Coast. The main towns are Barry, Penarth, Llantwit Major, Dinas Powys, Cowbridge and Rhoose. Barry, the largest town with a population of nearly 50,000, is the Council's administrative centre, a seaside resort and port. Four miles to the west of the town centre, at Rhoose, is Cardiff Airport.
- 2 The Council's Corporate Plan states that: 'Overall the Vale of Glamorgan is comparatively wealthy and many of the residents enjoy a high standard of living in a good quality environment. However, there are areas within the Vale which suffer from economic, environmental and social difficulties such as high unemployment, sub-standard housing, low educational achievement, poor health and high levels of crime.'
- 3 Based on the 2009 mid-year estimate by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) the population of the Vale of Glamorgan is 124,605. The ONS projects this number will rise by around one per cent each year. The estimated number of households in the Vale is 49,770 (2006 estimate). This figure is expected to grow to over 57,000 households by 2021. The age profile of the Vale's population is also expected to change. The number of children (age 0 to 14) is forecast to rise from 22,668 in 2007 to over 24,000 in 2021, whilst the number of people aged 65+ is forecast to increase by around 39 per cent from 21,558 in 2007 to 30,000 in 2021.
- 4 The Assembly Government's Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) per head of population for the Vale of Glamorgan for 2009-10 is ranked eighteenth in Wales, consistent with recent years. The Council has traditionally set its overall revenue budget marginally below the SSA. The average band D council tax in 2009-10 for the Vale of Glamorgan was £1,043.43; this charge increased by 4.05 per cent to £1,085.67 for 2010-11.
- 5 The Council is the Vale's largest employer, with approximately 5,800 full-time, part-time and casual employees (as at 15 March 2009). Generally, employment is characterised by a high proportion of people in the service sector. Compared with the rest of south-east Wales, the Vale has a lower proportion of manufacturing jobs and a higher proportion in distribution, hotels and catering. The number of VAT registered businesses increased from 3,145 in 2006 to 3,165 in 2007.
- 6 Between 2001 and 2008 the employment rate in the Vale was above that for Wales as a whole. In 2008, the employment rate in the Vale of Glamorgan was 73.4 per cent, amongst the highest rates of the 22 Welsh local authorities. In July 2010, 3.5 per cent or 2,700 residents of the working age population declared they were out of work by claiming the Jobseekers Allowance and National Insurance credits. The Welsh average was 3.6 per cent.

coastline
53 km



population
124,605



Is the Vale of Glamorgan Council well managed?

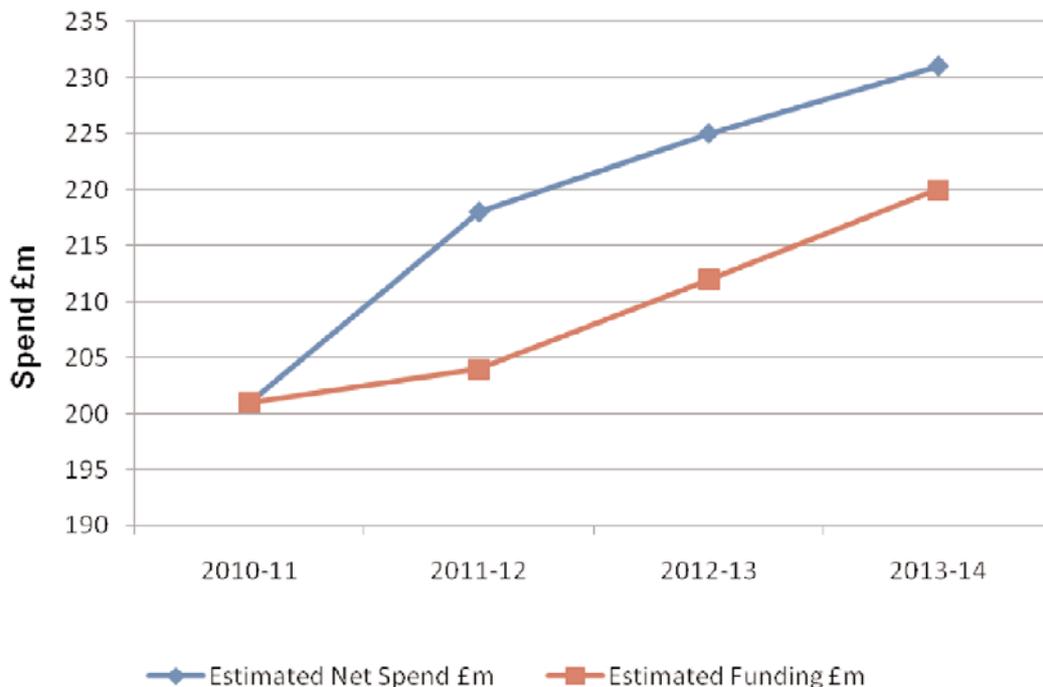
- 7 In September of last year, the Auditor General produced a report setting out how the Council is organised and managed. A summary of this report, known as the Corporate Assessment, is attached in Appendix 3. The whole Corporate Assessment Report can be found on the Council's website or on the Wales Audit Office's website at www.wao.gov.uk.
- 8 The overall conclusion in that report was that strong leadership and management were contributing to improvements in key areas but the strategic vision was not yet supported by delivery plans that were attuned to resource constraints. We found that the Council could demonstrate improvement in some important services but, although it had set out what it planned to do, it was not sure if it would have enough resources to do what was planned.
- 9 We also found that:
- The Council is making it easier for people to use its services and improving the way it uses technology. Its contact centre which provides a single point of contact for all services is providing a wider range of advice for people in the Vale. The Council is also using its local libraries to give people more access to its services.
 - The Council has tackled problems in some aspects of social services and its education service is considered to be good.
 - It knows that it will need to save money in the future and is taking action now to make better use of what it has. The Council's 'One Vale' programme of action aims to save £39 million between 2006 and 2016 by reducing revenue expenditure, reviewing the way it delivers services, making more effective use of technology to improve access to services, and improving collaborative working.
- 10 Because the Council published a new Corporate Plan and Community Strategy this year, it is currently still working on aligning its service plans with its new strategy. In the past the Council has used its service plans as the means of directing service activity towards the achievement of its objectives. We will be doing further work to determine whether service delivery arrangements are in line with the improvement objectives the Council says it intends to achieve in its Corporate Plan.
- 11 The Council works in partnership with a number of other organisations. However, it has not always been clear about what these partnerships have achieved and is working to tackle issues that we have reported in the past, such as a lack of clarity about the objectives and priorities of the partnership and the roles expected of partners. The Council owns land and buildings that it is able to use to provide services. It has not always been clear about how some land and some buildings help it deliver services and is taking a fresh look at how it uses these assets or whether it can dispose of them.
- 12 The Council set a revenue budget of £195 million in 2009-10. The actual revenue expenditure was £194 million. The auditor appointed by the Auditor General confirmed that the Council's financial statements for 2009-10 present a true and fair view of the Council's financial transactions.
- 13 Due to the financial climate, almost all public services face reductions in funding. Revenue funding is the money that councils spend running and managing their services. The Council will see a reduction of around £2.6 million (1.7 per cent) in the revenue funding it gets from the Assembly Government for 2011-12. Once inflation is factored in, that means a real terms cut of around £5.5 million (3.6 per cent). Indicative Assembly

Government figures show further real terms reductions in the Council's revenue funding for 2012-13 and 2013-14. These figures were made available in November 2010 so the Council was not able to account for them in the Corporate Plan or its Medium Term Financial Plan.

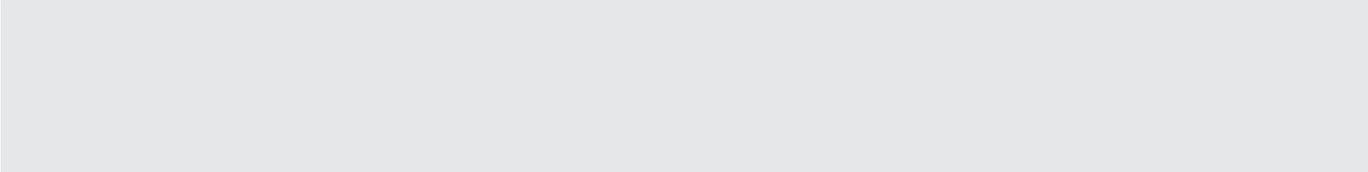
14 The Council continues to develop its approach to medium-term financial planning and how to make best use of the money it has. The Council has undertaken further work to assess its likely revenue resource requirements in the future. The Council predicts its budget requirement will grow to £202 million next year. At the same time the Council predicts a gross revenue funding deficit of £14.2 million in 2010-11 and £13.3 million in 2011-12.

Exhibit 1: Predicted budget spend requirement and resources available 2010-11 to 2013-14

The Council has identified the gap between estimated funding needs and anticipated funding which is helping it plan the savings and spending reduction necessary for the future.



Source: Vale of Glamorgan Council Medium Term Financial Plan September 2010

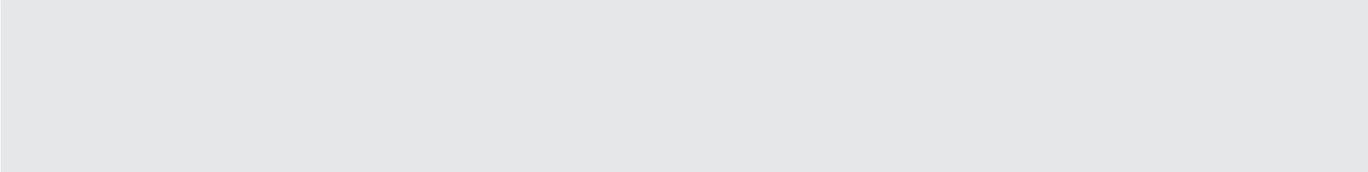
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- 15 The Council's budget has been well managed in recent years with balanced revenue budgets achieved at both directorate and corporate level. However, like all other councils, the Council has some real challenges to address if it is to secure the level of savings it envisages.
 - 16 The Council has begun working on a range of options to secure savings which are being scrutinised by members. A detailed breakdown of options to achieve these savings has been proposed and is being submitted to all scrutiny committees for consultation for responses by 21 December 2010.
 - 17 Capital funding is the money that councils spend on infrastructure, for example new buildings and new equipment. The capital funding available to local government is set to reduce considerably. Because councils make bids to the Assembly Government for capital funding, it is not possible to be clear about how much each council will get. The total sum of capital available to councils will fall by 14 per cent in 2011-12 (a real terms cut of 18.5 per cent). There are no official figures for local government capital spending beyond 2011-12 but it is likely to be in line with a general reduction in the Assembly Government's capital spending, which will be cut by around 34 per cent (around 40 per cent in real terms) between 2010-11 and 2013-14.

Does the Vale of Glamorgan Council know what it needs to do to improve?

- 18 Our review of the management arrangements at the Council and the way in which it identifies what it needs to do to improve confirms that the Council is aware of its service performance and can demonstrate that it has taken action to improve performance. At the same time, it does not clearly explain the rationale for selecting the actions outlined in its Corporate Plan. And, whilst its Improvement Plan¹ includes information about the performance of its services, the information is not presented in a way which allows the reader to easily form an overall view of services that are performing comparatively well or those where performance is relatively weak. The Council is able to show that it has sought the views of citizens although it is not always clear how it has used those views to shape its priorities for action. This makes it difficult for citizens to determine what the Council is doing to address issues they have raised or how it is acting to improve performance.
- 19 The Council says it will target those areas which suffer from economic, environmental and social difficulties such as high unemployment, sub-standard housing, low educational achievement, poor health and high levels of crime, for improvement while seeking to conserve and enhance the best features of the Vale so as to raise the quality of life for all who live in the area or visit it for work or recreation. This ambition is likely to be a challenging task given the impending cuts in the resources available to the Council.
- 20 The Assembly Government requires all councils to publish their plans for improving what they do and describe how they will do it. Assembly Government guidance requires councils to set improvement objectives for the forthcoming year. The Council set 34 improvement objectives in its Corporate Plan which it published in May 2010. These objectives are set out in [Appendix 5](#).
- 21 Given the uncertainty about resources, the Council has taken a reasonable decision to set out the action it proposes to take over a four-year period. This approach means that no action is planned for seven of the 34 objectives until 2012. However, some of the other actions are dependent wholly or partly on external funding so the Council will be reviewing its options in the light of changes to its funding base. By setting the objectives when it did, the Council has met one of the requirements of the Assembly Government, namely, to set objectives as soon as possible after 1 April.
- 22 The Assembly Government also expects councils to explain why objectives have been chosen and the outcomes that communities should expect if they are achieved. However, the Council has not made clear the rationale and expected impact of its 34 improvement objectives. A number of the actions in the Corporate Plan simply describe a process – for example, reviewing the Community Strategy – and do not indicate the outcome that will arise as a consequence. Others refer to implementing an action plan – for example, for safeguarding services for vulnerable adults – without identifying the outcomes to be delivered.
- 23 The Council is also expected to explain how communities or stakeholders may propose new improvement objectives during the year. There is some information in the Corporate Plan about the opportunities the Council has been giving people to provide their views but this does not refer to the opportunity to propose new improvement objectives. In its Improvement Plan published in October 2010, the Council provides an e-mail link explaining that new improvement objectives can be suggested or that comments can be made on the existing ones, but there is no similar statement or link in the Improvement Plan Summary, which is the document we would expect most readers to begin with.

¹ An annual report that the Council must publish by 31 October in which it explains the progress it has made against its targets for the previous year and what it intends to do in the year ahead.

- 24 The 34 objectives in the Plan link to seven corporate priorities that the Council has chosen to help it work towards its vision for the county. These priorities have a broad focus on aiming to ensure delivery of services to citizens and making sure the Council is well governed and uses its resources effectively. The seven corporate priorities are:
- Community leadership. To work with partners to promote good governance, and ensure a co-ordinated approach to delivering the shared vision for the future of the Vale.
 - Children and young people. To work with partners to ensure that children and young people in the Vale are well informed and supported to access a broad range of quality services that enable them to take full advantage of the life opportunities available in the local community and beyond.
 - Lifelong learning and skills. To work with partners to improve the skills, knowledge and abilities of the citizens of the Vale to help them maximise opportunities and improve their quality of life.
 - Health, social care and wellbeing. To work with partners to meet the diverse needs of our residents in ways that will safeguard and support those who are most vulnerable and in greatest need; help people to keep fit and healthy, and increase social cohesion and equality of opportunity for all.
 - Community safety. To work with partners to make the Vale of Glamorgan a safer environment free from crime and disorder and the fear of crime through prevention and positive action.
 - Regeneration. To work with partners to develop a sustainable community which maximises opportunities for economic growth, social improvement and environmental regeneration and protection.
 - Corporate resources. To manage the Council's workforce, money, information and assets efficiently, effectively and securely.
- 25 In 2009, the Council carried out a public opinion survey involving 1,000 interviews in peoples' homes and a further 1,000 interviews at various points around the county. In addition, on three Saturdays in September and October 2009, the Cabinet and officers met residents at Rhoose, Barry and Penarth. It also consulted a range of partners, people involved in the delivery of services, and members of the Citizens Panel about its draft Corporate Plan and improvement objectives. Providing activities and facilities for young people and dealing with crime/anti social behaviour were high priorities for those who responded to the public opinion survey and we have been advised by officers that funding has been secured for the majority of actions associated with Community Safety, so we will be evaluating the impact of delivery next year.
- 26 People consulted also raised concerns about the condition of roads, pavements and the cleanliness of streets. Whilst the Corporate Plan does not specify any particular action to target these issues, data reported in the Improvement Plan suggests that the Council intends to improve the condition of footpaths and roads and use measures to assess what citizens think of the condition of roads and pavements.

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- 27 The Council has a systematic approach to reviewing its activity to make sure certain action is implemented. It has used service plans as a means of directing the activity of services and can show that when it sets a focus, it can drive improvement. The Council is developing its service plans and proposes to ensure they state objectives that are meaningful to the community. We will be doing further work to determine whether service delivery arrangements are in line with the improvement objectives the Council says it intends to achieve in its Corporate Plan.
- 28 Every council needs to have good information and use it well if it is to provide good services and make them even better. Auditors test a sample selected from 38 national performance indicators. From this test we found that the Council has put in place comprehensive systems to produce the 2009-10 national performance indicators but found weaknesses in the data for waste management, because, like nine other councils, the Council was not able to exclude beach cleansing waste from its calculations of waste recycled or composted.

Is the Vale of Glamorgan Council serving people well?

- 29 Through the Auditor General's Improvement Assessment, we hope to gradually build a picture of how well the Council is serving local people. In order to do that, each year we will examine the Council's services and some of its objectives for improvement as they relate to three important aspects of life in the Vale of Glamorgan. We think that together these three aspects of life cover the main things that councils do. They are:
- helping to support people in need;
 - helping people develop; and
 - helping to create a safe, prosperous and pleasant place to live.
- 30 In this year's assessment we have looked at how the Council is doing so far on one objective under each of these aspects. The objectives we have chosen are:
- Health Social Care and Well Being. Improvement objective: to safeguard and protect children, young people and vulnerable adults, which we report on under 'Helping to support people in need'.
 - Lifelong learning and skills. Improvement objective: to improve outcomes for learners deemed to be vulnerable due to a range of factors affecting their general wellbeing, which we report on under 'Helping people develop'.
 - Community safety. The Council has adopted five related objectives, with actions proposed against three of these objectives in 2010, which we report against under 'Helping to create a safe, prosperous and pleasant place to live'.
- 31 We chose these objectives because together they span several key areas of the Council's responsibilities. Colleagues in the CSSIW have undertaken reviews of specific aspects of Social Services in the Vale of Glamorgan during the past two years and we make reference to their work in this report. Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for education and training, inspected the Council's education service in 2010 and we also refer to their findings in this report. These are service areas where the Council has greater direct control over the allocation and use of its resources and the results being achieved.
- 32 Delivering its community safety objectives presents more challenges because 'a safer environment free from crime and disorder and the fear of crime' means different things to different people and depends in part on how safe people feel. Success also involves strong partnership working to co-ordinate activity, provide resources and agree on how success will be measured.

Is the Vale of Glamorgan Council supporting people in need?

- 33 Although a comparatively wealthy area the Vale of Glamorgan does have areas of deprivation, mainly concentrated in Barry. The index of multiple deprivation for Wales (2008) produced by the Assembly Government showed that two areas of Barry were in the top 10 per cent and another four areas were in the next 10 per cent of the most deprived areas in Wales.

Providing affordable housing

- 34 The rate of additional affordable housing provision in the Vale of Glamorgan has decreased since 2007-08 and remained well below the Wales average in both 2007-08 and 2008-09. The level of provision of affordable housing is not entirely within the control of the Council but, as an action to support improvement, it has highlighted the need to implement its affordable housing policy in 2010. The policy is contained within planning guidance and sets targets for the provision of affordable housing on larger sites and on smaller sites should there be evidence of local need. Council projections suggest an increase in provision in the coming years, but provision is highly dependent on private sector builders considering site development to be viable and the level of Assembly Government grant available for building by housing associations. We will be reviewing the outcome of the implementation of the policy in our report next year.

Social Services in the Vale of Glamorgan

- 35 The role of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate in Wales (CSSIW) is to make professional assessments and judgments about social care, early years and social services and so encourage improvement by the service providers. Under new legislation there is a new framework in place for local authority social services inspection, evaluation and review.
- 36 The Council has been tackling significant issues in social services in recent years and its progress has been monitored by the CSSIW. The role of the CSSIW is to encourage improvement in social care, early years and social services and to make professional assessments and judgments about social services and service providers.
- 37 2009-10 is the first full year of the new framework with the purpose being to establish a baseline of current performance. The key messages of the letter issued in December 2010 are summarised below.
- 37 The CSSIW issued its 'Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance for 2009/10' for social services in the Vale of Glamorgan in December 2010. This report outlines a number of areas of strength as well as areas for improvement or development. Leadership of social services, at departmental and corporate levels was seen to be effective and there are arrangements in place to support members scrutiny of social services functions. A key area for ongoing development is ensuring that there is a focus on the outcomes and impacts of change, particularly on service users, at departmental, corporate and Member level. The full report can be found on the CSSIW website.

- 38 In adult services key strengths identified were the focus on providing public information, evidence of initial progress in modernising and improving existing services alongside reconfiguring and developing new ones through partnership working and progress in implementing systems and processes that will assist the authority to measure the outcomes and quality of services. Key areas for improvement/development are ensuring that access to adult services is responsive, timely and of sufficient quality for all users and carers, developing commissioning strategies for adults with learning disabilities and mental health needs and improving the capacity for and quality of contract monitoring.
- 39 In children's services identified strengths are the improvements in performance in key areas of access, assessment and care management, the quality assurance framework and the range of services some of which are beginning to impact positively upon the already effective management of the placement strategy for looked after children. Key areas for improvement/development are continuing to develop the initial response to children's referrals and the quality of assessment and care management services for children whilst ensuring that quality assurance processes are effectively contributing to this
- 40 In the protection of Vulnerable Adults review report, published in March 2010 CSSIW considered that the Director of Social Services had taken a strong and positive lead as both the new chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and the Adult Area Protection Committee, (AAPC). The Council had recently established a joint 'Safeguarding Unit' incorporating both children's and adult protection services. Interim arrangements were in place and additional appointments to this new unit were taking place at the time of the inspection. The inspection concluded that, since December 2008,
- emphasis upon the protection of vulnerable adults (POVA) within the authority had focused upon providing an initial response to referrals but that significant improvements were needed to support contracting and commissioning of support. Inspectors identified the monitoring of contracting arrangements and their terms and conditions in respect of providers within private or non-profit making sectors to be an area requiring further attention and development. Attention also needed to be given to staffing arrangements, systems and processes because they could not assure elected members or senior management of either compliance or service quality.
- 41 The Council had undertaken its own inquiry of its case management arrangements following a specific failure of service in early 2009. The CSSIW undertook a review to follow up progress made to the case management inquiry that the Council had published in May 2009. This looked at arrangements for specific service user groups:
- children in need of safeguarding;
 - children in need and children looked after with complex needs and/or disabilities; and
 - younger adults (under 25 years) with complex needs in receipt of leaving care services or adult services.
- 42 The CSSIW made seven recommendations in its report. It found that the Council had exercised strong leadership in responding to the issues identified in the case management inquiry and that positive and necessary change had occurred. There was however a need for the authority to address some specific issues in relation to their initial response to safeguarding children, for officers and members to be able to identify and monitor the impact and outcome of actions taken in an ongoing way and to develop more consistency in the quality of service provided.

Providing disabled facilities grants

- 43 Councils provide a disabled facilities grant to help towards the cost of adapting a person's home to enable him or her to continue to live there independently. The Council pays the grant when it considers that changes are necessary to meet that person's needs, and that the work is reasonable and practical. One of the ways of measuring a Council's performance in providing these grants is to look at how long it takes a Council to deliver a grant. For the year April 2009 to March 2010 the Council was one of the poorest performers in that it took an average of 802 days to deliver a disabled facilities grant, more than double the Welsh average of 349 days for all 22 councils and significantly longer than the 189 days reported by the best performer.
- 44 We have been told that, because the Council continues to take action to improve the delivery of grants, it did not specifically highlight improvement action in the Corporate Plan. The Council recognised that it needed to do something to improve its performance when delivering disabled facilities grants, and during 2007-08 carried out a review of the service and entered into an agreement with the Assembly Government to improve the time it was taking to deliver these grants. Performance data shows an improvement between 2008-09 when on average it was taking 1,046 days to deliver a disabled facilities grant and 2009-10 when it reduced to 802 days, although still remaining one of the weaker performers across all Welsh councils.
- 45 On 8 September 2010 officers made a presentation to members of the Housing and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee generally explaining current performance and proposing further steps for improvement which included the Cabinet authorising additional expenditure this year. The presentation to members also included a proposal to bring the service target to the Welsh average of 349 days by 2011-12, so although this would represent an improvement on the current poor position, people on the Council's waiting list will still wait for longer than many others in Wales. However, both the presentation to members on 8 September and the Director of Social Services' annual report highlight a risk of further delays due to a reduced number of occupational therapists in the future. Occupational therapists play a key role in assessing an individual's need for facilities to be provided by means of the grant, so any reduction in occupational therapists risks there being delays in assessment and a delay in the delivery of the grant. We will continue to monitor service provision and outcomes during the coming year.

Is the Vale of Glamorgan Council helping people to develop?

46 The percentage of working age adults with no qualifications in the Vale of Glamorgan was 8.6 per cent in 2008, well below the Wales average of 14.6 per cent. The percentage of working age adults with qualifications at NQF level 4 or above in 2009 was 36.5 per cent is above the Welsh average of 29.6 per cent.

47 Core subject indicator attainment at key stage 2 (7 to 11 years old) is the percentage of all year 6 pupils who achieve the expected level in English or Welsh first language, mathematics and science. The percentage of pupils achieving the standard in the Vale of Glamorgan has risen consistently and was well above the Welsh average in 2009.

48 Assembly Government figures for 2009 show that the relative affluence of the Vale is reflected in the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals. In the Vale 12.7 per cent of pupils of compulsory school age were eligible for free school meals, a lot lower than the Welsh average of 17.8 per cent. As of 31 March 2010, the Vale of Glamorgan had 185 children being looked after by the Council. There were 60 children on the Child Protection register as of 31 March 2009.

Library Services

49 The number of visits to public libraries in the Vale of Glamorgan in 2008-09 was around 7,500 per thousand population, which was one of the highest rates amongst all 22 Welsh local authorities, and higher than the Welsh average of around 5,900 visits per thousand population. In its Improvement Plan for 2010-11, the Council identifies that the number of people using its libraries has declined since 2008 (although still well above the Welsh average) and use of the library web pages had fallen. The reduction in use of the library web pages was predicted because the Vale Library Service was used to pilot an all-Wales family

history search facility. The pilot was successful and has been rolled out to all authorities, and as a consequence residents elsewhere in Wales no longer access this facility through the Vale website but through their own Library Services. It has also been undertaking improvements to its library computer system and is introducing further online services and will be continuing to look at trends in usage in the future.

Welsh Language Services

50 The Welsh Language Board works with councils to help them develop their statutory Welsh language schemes that outline the way in which they provide services to the public in Welsh. The primary responsibility for the range and standard of services rests with the councils who provide them, working in accordance with the statutory framework and guidelines of the Welsh Language Board. Every council is expected to provide the Welsh Language Board with an Annual Monitoring Report that explains how its scheme has been implemented. This allows the Board to offer advice as to how a council might improve its local arrangements. The Board also undertakes its own reviews to assess the provision of Welsh language services and to promote improvement.

51 In 2009, 18.3 per cent of the population of the Vale of Glamorgan had the ability to speak Welsh compared with 25.6 per cent of the total population of Wales. In 2009, 8.8 per cent of pupils were assessed in Welsh first language at Key Stage 2, significantly below the Welsh average of 19.1 per cent and 7.8 per cent of pupils were assessed in Welsh first language at Key Stage 3 (11 to 14 years old) well below the Welsh average of 15.9 per cent, although the percentage of pupils assessed in Welsh first language at Key Stage 3 has risen since 1999.

52 The Welsh Language Board praised the Council for its customer contact centre which had improved its ability to deal with an increasing number of requests from the public in Welsh. The Board also commented on positive developments in relation to the Council's website. The Council is due to undergo a revision of its Welsh Language Scheme shortly, and is expected to agree and implement a Linguistic Skills Strategy. These developments will allow the Council to plan its Welsh language services more effectively for the medium and long term.

Education and Training

53 Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for education and training in Wales, looks at how well councils are helping children and young people develop knowledge and skills. They carry out inspections of schools, further education colleges and training organisations as well as making judgements on how well councils support these education providers. Estyn, through its regional teams, analyses performance information, visits schools and has regular meetings with directors of education to come to a view about the role of the Council and about education performance in the area.

54 In March 2010, Estyn published a report on the quality of local authority education services for children and young people in the Vale of Glamorgan. The full report can be found on the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk).

Estyn considered that the Council was providing a good overall service because children and young people achieved good standards and made good progress. Estyn concluded that services and support were, in the main, good and were well targeted; and leadership and

management were strong. Prospects for improvement were judged as good because the quality of self-evaluation was good, this information was used well to identify and plan improvements, and there had been good progress to address recommendations from previous inspections. Overall the value for money of education services for children and young people was considered to be good. Low surplus places, and some of the highest school and pupil performance levels in Wales were being achieved from one of the lowest resource bases. However, lack of clarity around funding, entitlements and accountability impedes the demonstration of good value for money in some centrally provided services.

(Source: A report on the quality of local authority education services for children and young people. Estyn March 2010 © Crown Copyright 2010)

55 Estyn made five recommendations for improvement. The Council has produced an action plan explaining how it will respond to these recommendations. Its progress is being checked by Estyn's regional team.

56 Estyn recommended that the Council should

- improve the rigour of challenge and target setting, particularly in the secondary phase;
- strategically plan additional learning needs and inclusion provision and the resources to support this by consistently using information on the outcomes for learners well;
- improve standards and curriculum opportunities for all vulnerable pupils and in particular pupils within the pupil referral units;
- develop and agree a shared strategy for 21st Century schools with all stakeholders; and

- clarify funding arrangements and the respective roles and responsibilities of schools and individual services in order to provide better assurance of value for money.

(Source: A report on the quality of local authority education services for children and young people. Estyn March 2010 © Crown Copyright 2010)

- 57 The Council has set out a number of actions it intends to take in 2010 linked to improving opportunities for children and young people. It said it would complete the development of Cowbridge School and it opened the new development to pupils in September 2010. It plans to finalise proposals for the redevelopment of St Cyres and Llantwit Major schools in 2011 and to develop long-term strategic plans for all community schools as part of the 21st Century Schools initiative in 2012.
- 58 One of the Council's improvement objectives is to support children and young people to enjoy a healthy life free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation. By the end of 2010, the Council has undertaken to increase counselling and support services for children and young people in and out of school. The Children and Young People's Plan and the arrangements for its delivery are the means by which the Council intends to achieve this aim and we will be reviewing the outcome achieved by the Council in our next report.
- 59 The Council also has an objective to improve outcomes for learners deemed to be vulnerable due to a range of factors affecting their general wellbeing. The Council says that in 2010 it is going to continue to develop and implement safeguarding procedures to ensure that vulnerable learners are safe, secure and protected from harm. However, in its Corporate Plan it said this was subject to external funding being made available. We understand that funding is available and we will be reviewing the outcomes achieved by the Council in our next report.

Is the Vale of Glamorgan Council helping to create a safe, prosperous and pleasant place to live?

60 Data shows that average weekly earnings in the Vale of Glamorgan were the highest in Wales in 2009, with the gap between average earnings in the Vale of Glamorgan and the Welsh average widening since 1999. Gross Disposable Household Income measures the level of disposable income available to households. In 2007 Gross Disposable Household Income per head in the Vale of Glamorgan stood at £13,060 and was in the second quartile of the 22 Welsh local authorities. Between 1999 and 2007, Gross Disposable Household Income per head in the Vale of Glamorgan has been above the Welsh average. In 2009, the average weekly earnings in the Vale of Glamorgan stood at £556, the highest amongst the 22 Welsh local authorities.

Street cleanliness and highways

61 Dealing with street cleanliness was amongst the priorities of citizens who responded to the Council's public opinion survey. The cleanliness of highways and relevant land is measured by the percentage that meets an acceptable standard when inspected. In the Vale of Glamorgan, the percentage of highways and relevant land found to be of an acceptable standard had fallen since 2006 and the rate of 92.3 per cent in 2009 was lower than the Wales average. However, in its Improvement Plan for 2010-11, the Council reports that the rate had improved with 95.4 per cent of highways and relevant land meeting acceptable standards in 2009-10, moving above the Welsh average. Further, the Council proposed a target of 96 per cent for 2010 -11. It is not clear whether the percentage improvement has been achieved by planned action on the part of the Council, and we will monitor outcomes and report next year.

62 In 2008-09, there were 74 kilometres of A class county roads. The percentage of A roads in poor condition was higher than the percentage for Wales as a whole; a similar position for the previous year. In its Improvement Plan 2010-11, the Council reports data that between 2008-09 and 2009-10 there was an improvement in the condition of principal and non principal roads, although it is not clear about how this has been achieved. Targets set for future years suggest further deterioration of the condition of highways, and we will monitor the outcome of activity and report next year.

Is the Council helping to build a safer, stronger community?

63 Overall, since 2003-04, all recorded crime in the Vale of Glamorgan has reduced by 12.4 per cent. Indeed, all recorded crime has consistently fallen in comparison to the previous year, with the exception of 2006-07. Performance during 2008-09 was extremely positive compared to the previous year. Although respondents to the Council's public opinion survey felt that tackling crime and anti social behaviour should be a priority for the Council, 96 per cent thought that the Vale of Glamorgan was a safe place to live.

64 The Vale of Glamorgan's crime rate is 68.37 per 1,000 population. The highest proportion of these crimes are criminal damage (25 per cent) and violence against the person (20 per cent). Of the 13 cited crimes, only two have increased (sexual offences and wounding or other act endangering life). Crimes such as burglary, theft from a motor vehicle, and theft of a motor vehicle, have shown the largest reductions of 29 per cent, 13 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. Criminal damage has shown a reduction of seven per cent, but this criminal activity still accounts for the largest proportion of crime. Additionally drug offences

- have reduced by four per cent but this figure is still above that of the baseline figure (2003-04). The Vale of Glamorgan has a crime rate that is 15 per cent lower than the average for Wales. It has fallen reasonably steadily to three-quarters of the figure of seven years ago.
- 65 Community Safety is one of the Council's corporate priorities. The Council says it will work with partners to make the Vale of Glamorgan a safer environment free from crime and disorder and the fear of crime through prevention and positive action. The Safer Vale Partnership brings together the Council and its key partners: South Wales Police, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, South Wales Probation Service, the Vale Centre for Voluntary Services, and South Wales Fire Service. The partnership makes use of Home Office and Assembly Government funding to support local crime and disorder reduction projects.
- 66 The Safer Vale Partnership undertakes an annual strategic assessment to develop key priorities with targets and recommendations that the Safer Vale Partnership can work towards as part of its partnership plan. The assessment has been informed by review of crime data and from the views of citizens obtained by means of a survey. Work undertaken by the Safer Vale Partnership indicates that some specific types of crime are concentrated in particular areas of the county. Action being taken can be seen to be addressing the key areas of concern to the public and the issues that crime statistics identify as important. The Council's Housing and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee has responsibility for monitoring the work of the partnership and receives regular monitoring reports showing whether crime statistics are meeting local targets and the reasons and action being taken if they do not.
- 67 The Community Strategy 2010-2020 sets out the main community safety issues agreed by the Council and its partners together with their priorities for action. However, the Strategy does not indicate when action will take place, or which organisations will be involved in ensuring their delivery. Council officers have advised us that the Council and its partners are working on clarifying intentions and priorities and we will review the outcome of this activity in our next report.
- 68 The Council identifies three improvement objectives where it has proposed actions for 2010, but that, at the time it wrote the Corporate Plan, it was not clear whether specific funding would be available for the intended actions. The Council has now confirmed that the necessary funding is available and we will therefore be evaluating in 2011 the outcome of this activity. The objectives and proposed action are shown in [Exhibit 2](#).
- 69 Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Probation undertook an inspection of the Youth Offending Service and published his report in October 2010. The inspectors examined a representative sample of youth offending cases from the area, and judged how often the Public Protection and the Safeguarding aspects of the work were done to a sufficiently high level of quality.
- 70 A more detailed analysis of findings is available in the inspection report. [Exhibit 3](#) shows the result. Overall, the inspectors considered this result to be a mixed set of findings. However, the inspectors did not consider that a re-inspection was required. The report includes recommendations to assist the Vale of Glamorgan Youth Offending Service to achieve an improvement in practice over the next 12 months.

Exhibit 2: Community Safety related objectives

Improvement Objective	Proposed action in 2010
Improvement objective 23: to increase support for prolific and priority offenders with the aim of reducing offending for those groups.	Co-locate key agencies.
Improvement objective 24: to offer effective treatment and support services whilst targeting the illegal and excessive procurement of alcohol and drugs.	Implement a programme for retailers of education, training and enforcement.
Improvement objective 26: to reduce antisocial behaviour, offending and reoffending by young people.	Implement the Youth Rehabilitation Order and Scaled Approach for young offenders.

Source: Vale of Glamorgan Corporate Plan 2010-2014

Exhibit 3: Youth Offending Service Inspection Inspection findings showed mixed performance

Aspect	Vale of Glamorgan	Welsh average
Safeguarding: how often all reasonable action has been done well enough to keep to a minimum the risk of a child or young person coming to harm.	65% of the time	64%
Public Protection: how often work to keep to a minimum each individual's risk of harm to others was done well enough.	55% of the time	60%
Public Protection: how often work to make each individual less likely to reoffend was done well enough.	64% of the time	66%

Source: Core Case Inspection of youth offending work in Vale of Glamorgan HM Inspectorate of Probation © Crown Copyright

71 The inspection found a team whose performance was hampered by a number of staffing issues. The use of unqualified staff to manage complex cases to cover absences was a particular cause of concern. Although operational managers were trying hard to quality assure practice, the inspection found evidence that they were not always doing so effectively. The inspection team was encouraged by the positive way case managers reflected on their practice and responded to the inspection feedback. Whilst some important improvements had been made since the last re-inspection in December 2008, inspectors noted that further work was still required in the assessment and management of risk of harm and safeguarding.

(Source: Core Case Inspection of youth offending work in Vale of Glamorgan HM Inspectorate of Probation © Crown Copyright)

Is the Council managing waste effectively?

72 The Council provides waste collection services to around 50,000 households. The Assembly Government expects councils to help citizens recycle waste and collect information about recycling rates as well as about the different types of service provided by different councils. The Assembly Government has set targets for all councils in Wales to improve the amount of waste recycled and reduce the amount that goes to landfill. A failure to meet targets is likely to result in financial penalties.

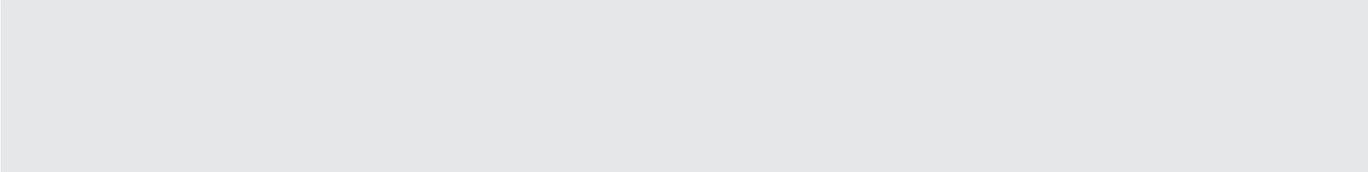
73 Public satisfaction with the waste services is surveyed bi-annually by the Council. The Council's figures from the last sample survey in February 2010 showed overall satisfaction with the waste management and cleansing service at 96 per cent;

satisfaction with refuse collection at 96 per cent; satisfaction with kerbside recycling at 96 per cent and satisfaction with civic amenity sites at 98 per cent. Complaints are monitored on a daily basis and we were advised action is taken to rectify individual problems.

74 The Council has been performing at around the average in Wales for recycling/composting for the last four years. The Council narrowly missed achieving the Assembly Government target for recycling/composting of 40 per cent by 2010. It reported 38 per cent but, like nine other councils in Wales the Council does not have a method of separating the beach cleansing waste from its general waste, and is therefore unable to exclude its value from the calculation.

75 The Council has actively engaged with the public in trying to improve the service and encourage recycling/composting. Trained agency staff have been employed to knock on householders' doors and ask them about their problems and experiences with recycling/composting. The Council have also used a web-based questionnaire to obtain the views of the public on waste services. Information gathered from these initiatives is used where possible to change the service.

76 Around 20,000 households (40 per cent) have fortnightly collections of 'black bag' waste that the Council does not re-cycle or compost. Evidence from other councils shows that fortnightly collections can significantly increase recycling rates, by encouraging householders to recycle more than is the case for weekly collection. In October 2010 the Cabinet resolved to extend kitchen food waste collection to all households between November 2010 and March 2011.

- 
- 77 The Assembly Government expects councils to recycle or compost 70 per cent of waste by 2025. The majority of the Council's proposals for action by the service are for 2010-11. In its Corporate Plan, the Council says it intends to increase waste re-cycling rates to 50 per cent and reduce levels of residual waste by 2013, the changes it has introduced should contribute to the achievement of this target.
- 78 The Council is in a partnership (Prosiect Gwyrdd) with four other south-east Wales local authorities (Cardiff, Newport, Monmouthshire, Caerphilly) to procure a residual waste treatment facility. This facility is planned to be operating by 2016 and will process the residual waste currently being sent to landfill. Materials that can be recycled will be removed, and the remaining waste treated in a process that reduces the volume and weight considerably, the aim being to reduce the amount going to landfill. The Council is also in a partnership with five south-west Wales local authorities to provide a facility by 2013 for the treatment of food and green waste. We shall report on the outcomes in our report next year.

What should the Vale of Glamorgan Council do?

79 Given the wide range of services provided and the challenges facing the Council it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:

- Recommend to Ministers of the Assembly Government that they intervene in some way. We have no reason to make such a recommendation.
- Conduct a special inspection and publish the report with detailed recommendations. We have no reason to recommend a special inspection.
- Make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must respond to that recommendation publicly within 30 days. We have no reason to make a formal recommendation.
- Make proposals for improvement – if we make proposals to the Council we would expect them to do something about them and we will follow up what happens.

80 We made proposals for improvement in our corporate assessment. In this report we have identified a number of things the Council needs to do to clarify the reason for selecting particular objectives and the way in which it communicates this rationale to citizens. The proposals we made previously about the need to demonstrate outcomes also apply to a number of the issues identified in this report. The Vale of Glamorgan Council needs to consider the following proposals to help it demonstrate improvement.

Proposals for improvement that we made in our earlier work

- set clear priorities for action in the context of reduced resource availability;
- set outcome measures that enable the Council to identify the impact of its activity for the community and service users;
- establish corporate arrangements for the funding, refreshment and development of all ICT; and
- ensure service business plans incorporate realistic estimates of financial, staff and other resources required to deliver proposed actions.

New proposals

- Clarify the reason for selecting actions associated with the delivery of improvement objectives.

Appendix 1

About the Auditor General for Wales and this report

The Auditor General

The Auditor General is independent of government and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. He leads the Wales Audit Office and is held accountable by the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly for the Wales Audit Office's work.

The Wales Audit Office helps the Auditor General by examining various aspects of how Welsh public bodies work. It was created in 2005 when the National Audit Office in Wales and the Audit Commission in Wales merged.

The Auditor General is the external auditor of the Assembly Government and its sponsored and related public bodies; the National Assembly for Wales Commission and National Health Service (NHS) bodies in Wales. He also appoints the external auditors of Welsh local government bodies, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils.

As well as carrying out financial audit, the Auditor General's role is to examine how public bodies manage and spend public money, including achieving value in the delivery of public services. The law which created the Wales Audit Office also expanded the powers of the Auditor General to follow the 'public pound' wherever it goes.

This report

The Local Government Measure (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) introduced new responsibilities for the Auditor General, including a responsibility to publish his assessment of each council/authority's arrangements to secure continuous improvement.

This report has been produced by the Auditor General for Wales to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges duties under section 19, namely; to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an audit under section 17 and an improvement assessment under section 18.

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 authorities, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

The main piece of work for the Wales Audit Office, to enable the Auditor General to fulfil his duties, is an annual Improvement Assessment.²

² This assessment will be conducted for each improvement authority, under section 18 of the Measure. For each authority, it will determine whether the authority is likely to comply with the requirements of Part 1 of the Measure. The Wales Audit Office will also undertake improvement information and planning audit, as required under section 17 of the Measure, in order to ascertain whether the authority has discharged its duties under section 15(1) to (7).



This will be informed by a:

- Corporate Assessment – a forward-looking assessment of an authority's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement; and
- Performance Assessment – 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 output(s) from these assessments will be issued by the Auditor General as Audit and Assessment Report(s), under section 19 of the Measure. In publishing this report under section 19, the Auditor General for Wales is certifying that we have undertaken a section 17 audit and a section 18 improvement assessment.

The Auditor General may also in some circumstances carry out Special Inspections (under section 21), in respect of which he will provide a report to the relevant authorities and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22).

The Auditor General will summarise Audit and Assessment Reports in this published Annual Improvement Report (under section 24). This will also summarise any reports of Special Inspections.

An important ancillary activity for the Wales Audit Office is the co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work (required by section 23), which takes into consideration the overall programme of work of all relevant regulators at an improvement authority. The Auditor General will also take account of information shared by relevant regulators (under section 33) in his assessments and this report will summarise any work undertaken by them.

The Auditor General sets out the fee for his performance audit work undertaken to discharge his duties under the Measure at each local authority in a Regulatory Programme agreed each year with the authority. The fee for November 2009 until March 2011 is currently expected to be in line with that set out in the Regulatory Programme.

Appendix 2

Useful information about the Vale of Glamorgan and the Vale of Glamorgan Council

There are 47 councillors for the Vale of Glamorgan who represent the community and make decisions about priorities and use of resources. The Council is made up of Members from the following political groups: 25 Welsh Conservative, 12 Welsh Labour, six Plaid Cymru, and four Independents.

The Council has a Cabinet of 10 councillors who make decisions on strategic and operational issues.

Cabinet

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Leader, Cllr Gordon Kemp | Finance, ICT and Property |
| • Deputy Leader, Cllr Hunter Jarvie | Legal and Public Protection |
| • Cllr Geoff Cox | Visible and Building Services |
| • Cllr Janice Charles | Human Resources and Equalities |
| • Cllr Anthony Hampton | Education and Lifelong Learning |
| • Cllr Jeff James | Planning and Transportation |
| • Cllr Anthony Ernest | Tourism and Leisure |
| • Cllr Paul Church | Housing and Community Safety |
| • Cllr Rhodri Traherne | Economic Development and Regeneration |
| • Cllr Dorothy Turner | Social and Care Services |

Corporate Management Team

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| • Chief Executive | John Maitland Evans |
| • Director of Learning and Development | Bryan Jeffreys |
| • Director of Social Services | Phil Evans |
| • Director of Environmental and Economic Regeneration | Rob Quick |
| • Director of Legal, Public Protection and Housing Services | Peter H. Evans |
| • Director of Finance, ICT and Property | Sian Davies |



National Assembly Members

- Vale of Glamorgan Jane Hutt
- Cardiff South and Penarth Lorraine Barrett

Regional Assembly Members

- Andrew R T Davies
- Christopher Franks
- David Melding
- Leanne Wood

Members of Parliament

- Vale of Glamorgan Alun Cairns
- Cardiff South and Penarth Alun Michael

For more information see the Council's own website at www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk or contact the Council on 01446 700111.

Appendix 3

The Auditor General's Corporate Assessment

The main conclusions of the Auditor General's Corporate Assessment which was issued to the Council in June 2010 are set out below.

Strong leadership and management are contributing to improvements in key areas but the strategic vision is not yet supported by delivery plans that reflect new resource constraints.

How the Council has approached improvement over time

The Council has improved outcomes in key areas and is effectively managing its OneVale transformation programme, but faces considerable challenges in the future:

- the Council has set goals for change, putting customers centre stage, and is using innovative new technologies as part of a 10 year change programme;
- the Council is implementing change and can demonstrate improved outcomes in some key areas of activity; and
- the Council faces challenges in ensuring its delivery plans adequately reflect resource reductions and support the progress it has been making in its use of ICT.

Analysis of the Council's arrangements to help it improve

Strong leadership, governance and business management processes are driving necessary change but the Council's vision is not yet supported by delivery plans that reflect new resource constraints:

- strong leadership and well-embedded financial management arrangements support the delivery of improvements;
- robust corporate performance management arrangements have contributed to success in delivering improvement but current performance measures do not reflect outcomes for service users;
- people management arrangements are largely supporting the implementation of change but the Council is yet to establish a workforce plan to enable it to match staff requirements to future needs;
- broad strategic plans are in place but the Council has not yet reflected medium-term financial plans in service plans to define how it will deliver improvement given the resource constraints it now faces; and
- the contribution of partnership working and the use of land and building assets in the achievement of objectives is unclear.

For the full report see our website at www.wao.gov.uk or contact us at Wales Audit Office, 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

Appendix 4

Appointed Auditor's Annual Letter

Our Ref JG/AAR2010

Councillor G Kemp
Leader
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Civic Offices
Holton Road
Barry
CF64 4RU

30 November 2010

Dear Councillor Kemp

Annual Audit Letter to the Members of the Vale of Glamorgan Council

The Local Government Measure 2009 has provided the Wales Audit Office with an opportunity to re think how to report the findings from both the financial audit and the performance audit work to local government bodies. As you will be aware the Auditor General for Wales will be issuing an Annual Improvement Report (AIR) to each local authority over the next few months and many of the issues that were traditionally reported in the Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter will be included in that report. Therefore, we have taken the opportunity to summarise the key messages arising from the Appointed Auditor's statutory responsibilities (the accounts, the value for money conclusion and the audit of the improvement plan) into this short letter which forms the Annual Audit Letter. The letter is designed to be a standalone document, but will be presented to the Council and the public as part of the Annual Improvement Report and therefore discharges our reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

The Vale of Glamorgan Council complied with financial and performance improvement reporting requirements but is facing significant financial pressures in the near future.

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;
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; and
- publish its Improvement Plan by 31 October.



The Code of Audit Practice issued by the Auditor General (the Code) requires us 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;
- consider whether the Improvement Plan is prepared and published in accordance with statutory requirements; and
- issue a certificate confirming that we have completed the audit of the accounts.

On 30 September 2010 we issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements, confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial transactions. Our report is contained within the Statement of Accounts.

The following issues were identified during the accounts audit:

- the Authority should complete a review of detailed insurance claim records from prior year claims, and perform an 'incurred but not received' (IBNR) calculation to enable it to predict the insurance reserve for unknown insurance claims with a higher level of assurance than currently exists;
- the adoption of IFRIC 12, Service concession arrangements, accounting for PFI and similar contracts has highlighted the inconsistency in treatment for foundation and Voluntary Aided schools across Wales. Some authorities currently account for these schools as part of Council assets whereas others do not. We will work with the Council over the next year to ensure that the accounting for such assets are reviewed;
- the accounting statements preparation processes have continued to improve, resulting in good quality draft statements, with most of the notes supported by working papers. These could be further improved with the addition of electronic files of working papers and schedules where possible, and all schedules should be cross referenced to the information we request in our Arrangements Letter for completeness; and
- the Whole of Government Account's return was prepared effectively and in accordance with the Assembly's timetable.

Our review of the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness has been based on the audit work undertaken on the accounts as well as placing reliance on the work completed as part of the LG Measure. The main findings from this latter work will be set out in the Annual Improvement Report. In addition we also bring the following issues to your attention:

- effective budgetary control arrangements are in place and medium-term financial planning is well developed, but the Council faces significant financial pressures in the future. This is referred to further in the Annual Improvement Report.

The Council's Improvement Plan 2010-2011 meets statutory requirements and provides a balanced view of its performance in 2009-2010.



We have not been able to complete the audit because there are outstanding questions raised by electors. I have an obligation to certify the audit as completed. In most respects I could do so now, but I am continuing to consider a number of questions raised by electors, which whilst not significant to the accounts, require my attention. As a result I am not yet in a position to make my certificate.

The financial audit fee for 2009-2010 is in line with that set out in the Financial Audit Strategy.

Yours sincerely

JOHN GOLDING
Appointed Auditor

cc John Maitland-Evans, Chief Executive
Sian Davies, Director of Finance (s151 Officer)

Appendix 5

The Vale of Glamorgan Council's improvement objectives

The Council published its improvement objectives in its Corporate Plan 2010-2014 which can be found on the Council's website at www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk. They are:

Corporate priority community leadership 'To work with partners to promote good governance, and ensure a co-ordinated approach to delivering the shared vision for the future of the Vale'.

Improvement Objectives:

- To tackle those issues that matter most to local people, with customer focus at the heart of the Council's service delivery.
- To provide leadership in representing and promoting the interests of the local community and engage effectively with citizens and stakeholders.
- To promote through partnership working greater co-operation with other organisations that deliver services in the Vale, thereby improving the quality of life of its citizens.

Corporate priority children and young people: 'To work with partners to ensure that Children and Young People in the Vale are well informed and supported to access a broad range of quality services that enable them to take full advantage of the life opportunities available in the local community and beyond.'

Improvement objectives

- To ensure every child has a flying start in life.
- To provide a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities.
- To support children and young people to enjoy a healthy life free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.
- To improve access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.
- To ensure children and young people are treated with respect, listened to and have their race and cultural identity recognised.
- To ensure that all children and young people have a safe home and community which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing.
- To ensure children and young people are not disadvantaged by poverty.
- To improve outcomes for learners deemed to be vulnerable due to a range of factors affecting their general wellbeing.
- To engage with parents, recognising the importance of their role in educating their children and as learners themselves.

-
- To progress plans for the development of 21st Century Schools designed to deliver an innovative curriculum within a positive learning environment.
 - To utilise pupil, school and contextual data to target interventions and initiatives to raise levels of pupil attainment.
 - To promote collaboration between schools, colleges, providers of lifelong learning and employers to extend opportunities and increase learning pathways for post-16 learners.

Corporate priority health, social care and wellbeing: ‘To work with partners meet the diverse needs of our residents in ways that will safeguard and support those who are most vulnerable and in greatest need; help people to keep fit and healthy, and increase social cohesion and equality of opportunity for all.’

Improvement objectives

- To improve the health of citizens and encourage healthy lifestyles.
- To safeguard and protect children, young people and vulnerable adults.
- To increase the range of accommodation options that enable older people to live independently in the community and develop preventative measures to delay use of residential care.
- To assess more quickly the needs of adults who require social care and help them use cost effective services.
- To improve the ‘life chance’ opportunities for children and young people in need.
- To reduce homelessness by better prevention, intervention, advice and information.

Corporate priority community safety: ‘To work with partners to make the Vale of Glamorgan a safer environment free from crime and disorder and the fear of crime through prevention and positive action.’

Improvement objectives

- To increase awareness and support for domestic abuse victims.
- To increase support for prolific and priority offenders with the aim of reducing offending for those groups.
- To offer effective treatment and support services whilst targeting the illegal and excessive procurement of alcohol and drugs.
- To increase public confidence and the engagement of local communities.
- To reduce antisocial behaviour, offending and reoffending by young people.

Corporate priority regeneration: ‘To work with partners to develop a sustainable community which maximises opportunities for economic growth, social improvement and environmental regeneration and protection.’



Improvement objectives

- To protect and enhance the Vale's natural and built environment.
- To encourage economic growth in partnership with others in order to widen employment opportunities in the Vale.
- To improve access to and within the Vale and encourage investment in local infrastructure.
- To encourage the development of a diversified and sustainable community by working in partnership to improve the quality of life of the Vale's residents.

Corporate priority corporate resources: 'To manage the Council's workforce, money, information and assets efficiently, effectively and securely.'

- To provide effective Corporate Management and to improve the use of resources in meeting our strategic objectives.
- Manage, support and develop our employees to enable them to deliver and maintain the Council's services to the highest possible standard.
- To make best use of our assets and to procure good, sustainable services and facilities.
- To deliver OneVale, the Council's transformational change programme and to put information and communications technology (ICT) to its most effective use in order to support service delivery.

Appendix 6

References

All the data referred to within the report is drawn from one of the following sources:

- Welsh Assembly Government, StatsWales
- Welsh Assembly Government, local area summary statistics
- Improvement Authority's own websites and improvement plans
- The Wales Yearbook
- The Home Office
- Members' Research Service
- Office for National Statistics