

Date: Winter 2020-21

Regenerating Welsh Towns

Background

- 1 This project is being undertaken under Section 41 of the Public Audit Wales Act 2004. This Act places a duty on the **Auditor General** to work on studies that will help him make recommendations for improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of local government in Wales. This project also supports the Auditor General in discharging some of his responsibilities under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other.
- 2 Further information about our [work](#) and our privacy notice is available on our [website](#).
- 3 If you would like any further information about this work or to speak to the study team, please email council.studies@audit.wales

Why are we doing this review?

- 4 Town centres have been at the heart of Welsh society for a long time. Regardless of where you are from and how old you are, we all have a sentimental memory of visiting our local town centres: buying our first record or CD from Woolworths, buying a pencil case for a new school term or just going for a milky coffee with an aunt.
- 5 But what will the future look like? A growing proportion of shoppers buy online. Many shoppers do their 'big shop' in out of town supermarkets. A vast number of our high street shops are closing. People are also preferring to visit areas where there is more on offer than just retail.
- 6 Town centres have been changing for decades and some have kept pace with this. But we can all think of town centres that have been left behind and face considerable challenges. The impact of COVID19 will result in further change.
- 7 Our aim for this work is that it provide policy makers, businesses and the public with the opportunity to refocus regeneration: not just the physical condition of an area but also the social, environmental, health and economic wellbeing of communities who use, live and visit Welsh towns.

What is the focus of the work?

- 8 The review will seek to answer the question: **Are local authorities and their partners regenerating Welsh town centres and creating sustainable and resilient places?**

How we will do the work?

- 9 Our methods for this work will include:
- review of past Welsh Government and local authority town centre regeneration programmes;
 - interviews and discussions with key stakeholders for example, local Chambers of Commerce, Town and Community Councils, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Welsh Government, Royal Town Planning Institute, Bevan Foundation, City and Growth Deals, Wales Council of Voluntary Action, Community Housing Cymru and other key representative bodies;
 - analyse key data sets and other key information sources including the Thriving Towns Index, Centre for Towns, National Survey for Wales, WIMD data sets, ONS and other sources to help understand the 190 towns in Wales;
 - telephone interviews with local authorities;
 - citizens survey; and
 - surveys of councillors from Unitary Authorities and Town and Community Councils to understand the 'USP' of their towns and communities and why some towns thrive, and others do not.

How has covid-19 changed our audit approach?

- 10 Like everyone, Audit Wales has been closely monitoring the situation around the COVID-19 virus. While we have to ensure we deliver our statutory responsibilities, the Auditor General's priority has been to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of Audit Wales staff and those of our partners across Wales at this incredibly challenging time. We will seek to ensure wherever possible that our audit work does not have a detrimental impact on the public body and its staff at a time when public services are stretched and focused on more important matters. We will continue to be as supportive and flexible as possible in the delivery of our work. We will engage with stakeholders and public bodies to agree how we will deliver our interviews and fieldwork. Whilst we are conscious that our audit must not detract from the important work of public bodies at this critical time, we also believe it can add value and insight to support organisations to become more resilient.

When will we do this work?

- 11 Most of this work will take place between September 2020 and March 2021. We will aim to issue the report in Summer 2021.

What we will do with our findings?

- 12 The findings from this review will be set out in a report that will include proposals for improvement and comparison and commentary on approaches for town-centre regeneration across Wales. We will highlight noteworthy practice and develop support materials that will highlight what 'good' might look like and what is possible. We will openly publish data where it may help to support improvement.

How you can get involved?

- 13 If you would like to contribute to our work please look out for our surveys, which include:
- a. Citizens and business survey;
 - b. Councillors' survey; and
 - c. Regeneration officers' survey.
- 14 **[Please click on the link here to go to our citizens and business survey](#)** [opens in new window]. All surveys will be open until 31 January 2021.