

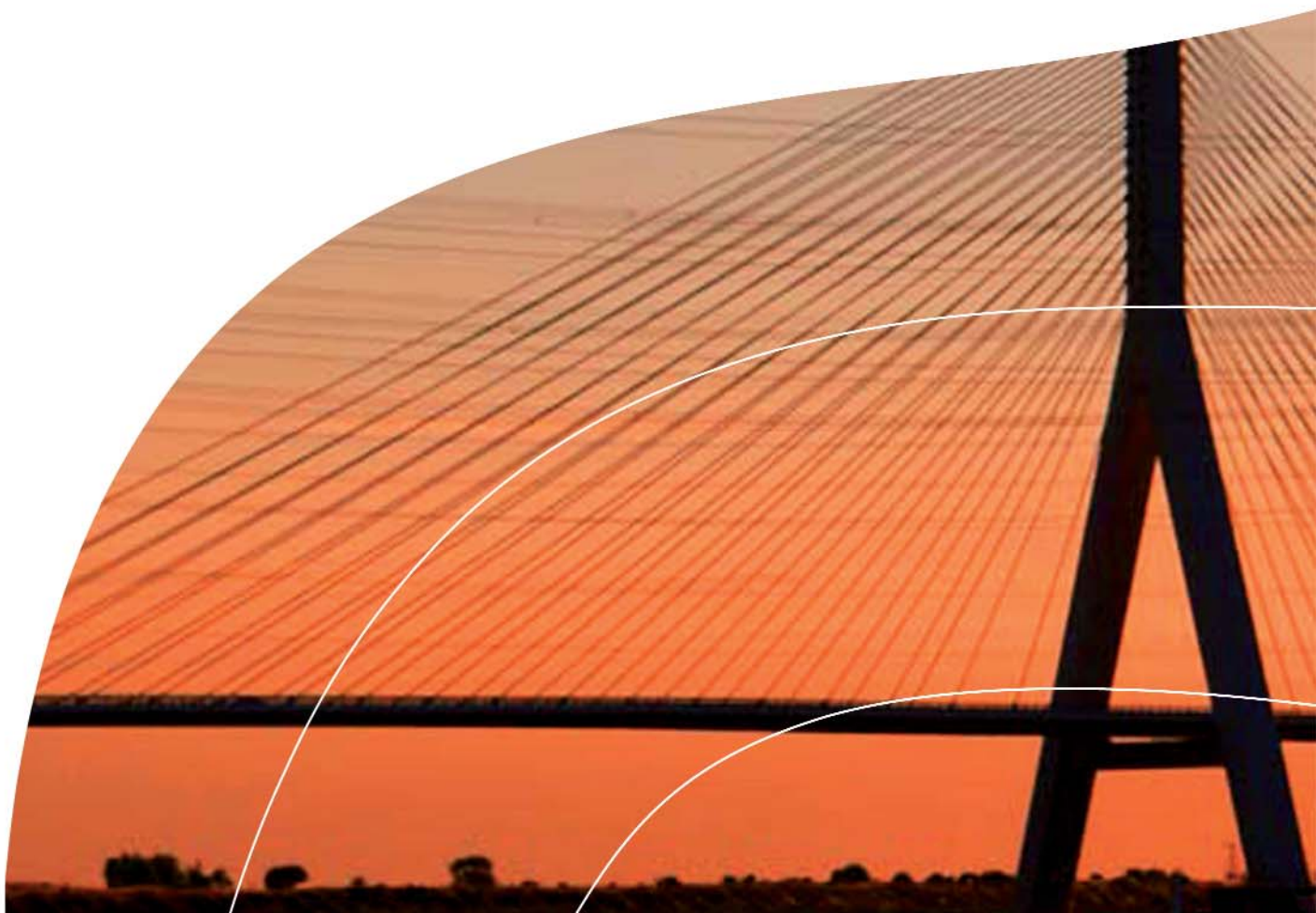


WALES **AUDIT** OFFICE  
SWYDDFA **ARCHWILIO** CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report

## **Flintshire County 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 Flintshire County 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. The report reflects the position at the end of October 2010 (unless otherwise stated).

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](mailto: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 Stephen Martin and Karen Lees under the direction of Alan Morris.

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](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk), or see website [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk).

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# What kind of area is Flintshire?

## Background information

- 1 Flintshire has a population of about 148,900. There are around 25,800 people aged 65 and over and 28,200 children. The population of the county is projected to increase to 152,120 by 2033.
- 2 Flintshire has a mixed landscape of coastal towns such as Flint and Mostyn, the old market town of Mold and the hills around Hope Mountain in the south of the county. Parts of Flintshire have major manufacturing industries and the area is known for its internet companies.
- 3 In 2008, the employment rate in Flintshire was 78.8 per cent; this was the highest amongst the 22 Welsh local authorities. In 2008, Flintshire had the second lowest rate of children living in workless households amongst Welsh local authorities. As well as employment levels being good, the average weekly earnings of £538 were one of the highest in Wales.
- 4 Life expectancy in Flintshire is slightly higher than the average for Wales and some other aspects of health are also a little better than average. These include mental health and well-being and Flintshire has a lower-than-average rate of teenage pregnancy.
- 5 You can find out more about Flintshire and Flintshire County Council (the Council) in [Appendix 2](#).

population

148,900

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28,200 aged 0-16

25,800 aged >65

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employment rate

78.8%

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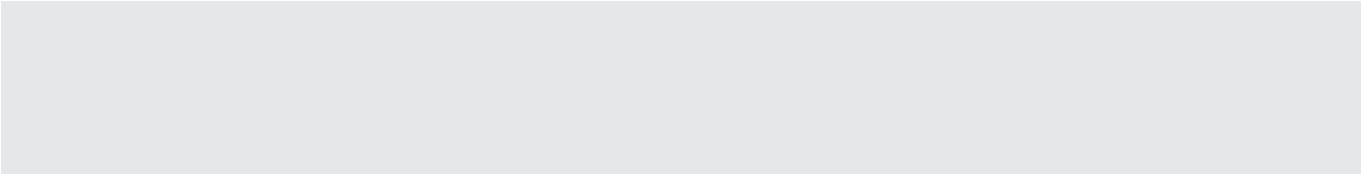
## Is Flintshire County Council well managed?

- 6 **The Council is actively promoting improvement whilst some arrangements are not fully developed.** This was the overall conclusion of a report the Wales Audit Office produced in August 2010 called the Preliminary Corporate Assessment which gives some detail on how the Council is organised and managed. Our findings are set out in [Appendix 3](#). If you want to read the whole Corporate Assessment Report you can find it on the Council's website or on the Wales Audit Office's website at [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk).
- 7 The report said that in the last couple of years the Council has started to tackle some issues that it had failed to address. There have been many good improvements in the way the Council is run but the political position is fragile and arrangements to manage its money and staff are not yet fully developed.
- 8 We found that councillors and senior officers were trying to make improvements but the many political groups and difficult relationships amongst some councillors were sometimes a problem. The priorities and policies of the Council are becoming clearer and there is a good approach to working in partnership with other organisations.
- 9 The Council has usually managed its money well but there have been some overspends in the last two years. Plans are being made to address the likely cuts in government funding through the 'Flintshire Futures Programme'. Planning what the Council needs to do and monitoring progress has greatly improved but could still improve further. Despite some improvement, there is still a need for arrangements for the management and support of staff to be better.
- 10 Since then, the political composition of the Council has altered with the creation of a new group of nine councillors called the 'New Independents'. The Council continues to be led by a multi-party coalition.
- 11 The way the Council tracks progress is being improved as a result of changes to the Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges (SARC). This is a working document which sets out approximately 60 issues where there is a need for a big improvement or a major change is taking place, needed or is planned. The changes will give more attention to checking whether the original risk issue is still valid as well as following whether actions have been carried out.
- 12 Almost all public services face reductions in funding. Revenue funding is the money that councils spend running and managing their services. Flintshire County Council will see a reduction of around £3.2 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 £6.7 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.

- 13 Capital funding is the money that councils spend on capital projects and infrastructure works, for example new buildings, road improvements, etc. The capital funding available to the Council is set to reduce considerably. Councils are allocated a general sum for capital expenditure, and make bids for additional capital grants for specific capital projects. 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 2014-15.
- 14 The Council has been aware for some time that it needs to make sure it uses the resources it has as effectively as possible and in some cases to scale back on what it is doing. The Council has carried out further work to develop its 'Flintshire Futures Programme' to plan how it can adjust to a period of significantly reduced funding through changes to make the Council more efficient and choices over which services might be provided in different ways or reduced. A Programme Manager, jointly appointed with Wrexham County Borough Council, is now in post and a project team of people on secondment from their departments has been established. A programme of efficiencies and changes has been informally discussed with councillors prior to formal consideration in December 2010. Taking into account the expected changes in funding by the Assembly Government and pressures on expenditure, this identifies the need for £12 million savings for 2011-12 and a further £14 million in each of the following two years.
- 15 An important first step for the Council is to collect the council tax it is due. In 2009-10, the Council had an above average rate of council tax collection and had the lowest rate of arrears in Wales. However, the existing pressure on funding has been shown by continued difficulty in managing the budget for placements for children in the care of the Council (known as looked after children). Overspending in this demand-led area has contributed to a forecast in November 2010, that the Council will overspend by £0.6 million by the end of March 2011, although efforts will be made to make changes to reduce this level.
- 16 The auditor appointed by the Auditor General has given his opinion on the Council's and the Pension Fund's accounts. His Annual Audit Letter, which provides information regarding the accounts, use of resources and the Council's Improvement Plan is included in this report as **Appendix 4**. The Appointed Auditor found that the Council complied with financial and performance improvement reporting requirements but there is scope to improve financial controls in a few areas and the Council needs to further develop its future financial planning to help it meet the significant financial challenges ahead.
- 17 There is more information about people's rights in relation to council accounts in the Wales Audit Office leaflet, *Council Accounts: Your Rights*, which you can find on our website at [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk).

# Does Flintshire County Council know what it needs to do to improve?

- 18 **The Council has set out a statement of its priorities which cover its internal arrangements as well as its objectives for improving services for residents in Flintshire. Its priorities and planning arrangements meet the legal requirements.**
- 19 The Assembly Government requires all councils to publish their plans for improving what they do and how they do it. They must also publish a list of the priorities that they are aiming to improve each year – their improvement objectives. Councils do not have to use the titles ‘improvement objectives’ and ‘improvement plan’ as long as they make clear that they are discharging their statutory duty.
- 20 In May 2010, the Council Executive agreed a statement of the ‘Priorities of the Administration’ for the period 2010 to 2012. It did so to clarify expectation, make sure that the political and officer leadership work to a consistent set of priorities, and to meet comments from the Wales Audit Office that the Council’s key ambitions should be clearer. We have taken these priorities to be the ‘improvement objectives’ the Council is required to publish.
- 21 The Priorities of the Administration statement has 10 priorities about its internal arrangements and 30 concerned with public services. These priorities are listed in [Appendix 5](#) and summarised under the main headings in the next section. The public services priorities fit under the ‘County Vision’ in the Flintshire Community Strategy which aims for Flintshire to be a county where there is:
- economic prosperity;
  - health improvement through everything we do;
  - learning and skills for life;
  - living sustainably; and
  - safe and supporting communities.
- 22 The Council must publish its improvement objectives as soon as practical after the beginning of April each year. The Priorities of the Administration were published with the papers for the Executive meeting in May 2010 but were not presented to the full Council, have not been placed on the Council website or published in the Council newsletter *Your Community, Your Council*. We think that the Council could have done more to share its priorities with the public and partners. The priorities are listed in the *Annual Performance Report 2009-10* presented to the full Council in October 2010. This notes that the statement of the Priorities of the Administration will be reviewed by the Executive and published following the review.
- 23 Most of the priorities are existing concerns and already included in the SARC, strategies and plans. However, some of the directorate and service plans list the relevant priorities but it is not clear what place they have alongside many other existing priorities.
- 24 All of the priorities cover one or more of the seven criteria expected by the Assembly Government – that they should be concerned with strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency or innovation. We found that the priorities are written in a way that is generally reasonably clear.
- 25 If the Council has chosen to make something a priority, it will be able to measure how this will affect the local people. For most, but not all of its priorities, the Council should be able to measure the actions they are taking to achieve them. It is not clear how the Council will report on the progress of its work on some of the priorities.

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- 26 The Assembly Government guidance says that councils should develop an ongoing dialogue with the communities it serves and consult widely on its priorities. We examined how well the Council involved local people and those that work with and for it, in deciding what it should make a priority. Most of the priorities are drawn from existing plans over which there was some form of consultation or are statutory requirements. However, a small number are new priorities. There was consultation amongst councillors about the priorities but it is not clear that staff, other than very senior officers, partners or the wider community were involved. This is important because staff and partners who deal directly with providing services often have good ideas about how to change things for the better and in the absence of consultation how can they be sure of public support what they want to do.
- 27 Finally we examined how well the Council's plans support its efforts to improve and if it could afford to pay for these improvements. There has not been any specific work to clarify the overall cost of delivering the programme of priorities. However, some priorities have been costed as part of other plans and some priorities are about attracting income or taking steps that will reduce council costs. The report to the Executive with the Priorities of the Administration said there were no direct financial implications but noted that the Council faces an extremely challenging financial future. A review of the priorities will follow further consideration of the initial Flintshire Futures work.
- 28 The Council has not yet developed a process to monitor and report progress against the set of Priorities of the Administration although, as they have only recently been adopted, it is to be expected that this should be developed over the coming months.
- 29 Through its various documents, the Council meets the statutory requirements for its improvement objectives and plans. However, it could do more to improve consultation, make them easier to understand and ensure that success measures are clear, robust and drive policies and service planning.



# Is Flintshire County Council serving people well?

30 **The Council has made progress in improving its services and this has been reflected in above-average performance against targets for many services. However, there are also many services that do not currently perform to high standards.**

31 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 their objectives for improvement as they relate to three important aspects of life in Flintshire County. We think that together, these aspects cover most of the services that councils provide for citizens. They are:

- helping to support people in need;
- helping people develop; and
- helping to create a safe, prosperous and pleasant place to live.

32 In this year's assessment, we have looked at how the Council is doing so far on Flintshire's priorities. We have chosen to look at all the priorities but not in any great detail as we will look at some of them in more detail in our report next year. Apart from its priorities for services, the Council also has corporate priorities to improve its internal arrangements and these are considered below.

## Is the Council improving its internal arrangements?

33 The Council has adopted 10 priorities for improving its internal governance and performance arrangements. These are (summarised):

- to promote and maintain a positive and confident reputation for the Council and the county locally, regionally and nationally;
- to continue to make progressive change in the culture, efficiency, effectiveness, adaptability and performance of the organisation;
- to develop and follow a resilient medium and longer term financial strategy whilst maintaining an affordable level of council tax for local taxpayers;
- to cope and prosper in the coming years of reductions in revenue and capital for public services;
- to attain high and consistent levels of customer service;
- to achieve the aims and objectives of The People Strategy with an emphasis on people management practice, management performance, attendance management and agile working;
- to achieve a legal, acceptable and affordable Single Status Agreement<sup>1</sup>;
- to implement effective business continuity plans to protect key services;
- to modernise and improve council procedures and performance in procurement practice; and
- to maximise the use of the Council's land and asset base for the achievement of council priorities and to maximise capital receipts or income.

<sup>1</sup> Single Status is the title given to a national agreement reached in 1997 aiming to harmonise terms and conditions of service for employees, removing any unfairness in the pay and reward arrangements.

- 34 These are all appropriate priorities for the Council and cover issues where there are changes to respond to, where there have been identified weaknesses, or continuing important matters. Improving in these areas will help the Council to deliver more efficient and effective services. None are new priorities for the Council.
- 35 The Council does many things to promote the reputation of the Council and the county, for example by entering and achieving many national awards. It has also sought to develop positive relationships with local newspapers and media. However, there is more that senior managers and Executive members could do to prepare the communications approach to be taken over difficult issues.
- 36 Some of the priorities (such as improving the efficiency of the organisation, medium-term financial planning, coping in years of funding reductions, procurement, and use of land and buildings) are linked to the work of the Flintshire Futures Programme. This will be developed over the coming year and set out the programme of change that the Council will make in response to the financial challenges.
- 37 The Council has plans to improve the ways in which it can be contacted and people can use services. These include improving the website and telephone arrangements. A project has started that will be identifying ways to improve the customer experience when dealing with the Council face to face. As the Council enters a period of reduced funding it will be important that people find that contacting the Council is straightforward and that the Council hears and listens to concerns.
- 38 The Council has developed emergency planning with Denbighshire County Council to assist the response in the event of a critical event outside the Council.
- 39 The completion of the process of achieving an appropriate Single Status Agreement during 2011 will be important for enabling the Council to move forward in many areas as well as releasing the time and effort currently going into the process. The Council is reviewing its position on how it would meet any equal pay claims should this arise.
- 40 The Welsh Language Board (WLB) works with councils to help them develop Welsh language schemes that guide the way in which a council provides services to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language. The WLB and the Council have identified eight priority areas that require action to enable the Council to address fundamental weaknesses and risks in implementing its Welsh Language Scheme. However some priority targets have not been achieved within the set timescales, and the actions required for addressing other priority areas are not clear. The Council continues to support a large number of staff to learn Welsh and this year saw an increase in numbers on previous years. The WLB has found that the Council's website, electoral documentation and statutory and recruitment adverts comply with the Welsh Language Scheme. The Council was also praised for piloting a Welsh language impact assessment tool to mainstream the Welsh language into the process of developing new policies, plans and initiatives.

## Is Flintshire County Council supporting people in need?

- 41 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. It works on behalf of Welsh Ministers, but there are a number of safeguards in place to ensure its independence. Under new legislation there is a new framework in place for local authority social services inspection, evaluation and review.
- 42 Directors of social services are required to produce an annual self-assessment report on how well services are being delivered. The CSSIW will then undertake a review and analysis of evidence underpinning the report, including evidence from other regulators and inspectors. This analysis will result in an individual inspection and review plan for each council. The CSSIW's analysis, and the inspection and review plan, are set out annually in a published letter. 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.
- 43 For adults, the Council and its partners provide effective and timely discharge from hospital. There is a growing range of services to support independence and timely provision of aids and equipment and home and day care services. The effectiveness of re-ablement services was illustrated by 82 per cent of the older people who used the service requiring less or no ongoing support. The Shotton Extra Care Housing Scheme won an award from the Association of Public Service Excellence. Access to direct payment options have increased and are providing people with improved opportunities to exercise personal choice and control.
- 44 The Council needs to do more to complete care plans promptly and to give quicker access to mental health, substance misuse and occupational therapy support. There is also a need to strengthen the commissioning of services for older people and for learning disability services.
- 45 For children, the Council provides timely assessments and previously high re-referral rates have been significantly improved. The indicators for care management arrangements are amongst the best in Wales. The Council provides good quality foster care services and has been successful in promoting the achievements of looked after children and care leavers.
- 46 However, the Council needs to improve the allocation of social workers to looked after children and children in need and to reduce waiting times for assessment of children with disabilities by paediatric occupational therapy. The Council and its partners are working to strengthen the Local Safeguarding Children Board and progress in this will be subject to ongoing monitoring by CSSIW.
- 47 The Council is using analysis of unmet needs to drive strategic planning for future services and has developed award-winning service initiatives for children, young people and adults. Operational plans for children have clear links to the *Children and Young People's Partnership Plan* but the links between operational plans for adults and the *Health, Social Care and Well-being Strategy* are less consistent. A culture of co-operation with partner councils is being achieved through various North Wales partnership bodies. There are also a number of jointly provided services including advocacy and independent visitor services and the regional adoption consortia.

- 48 Social work recruitment has increasingly been successful and action is being taken to tackle high levels of staff absence. A 'People Plan' has been developed for the directorate to drive progress on a range of staff issues and to help align systems, people and skills to enable improved services. This will include ensuring that robust supervision and appraisal systems are in place and followed.
- 49 The Chief Executive is providing strong leadership while the Director post is vacant. The social care agenda benefits from good corporate and political support and councillors are active participants in a programme of visits to front-line services. Feedback from the visits is used to inform quality assurance information and service planning.

### Are youth justice arrangements supporting young people and the community?

- 50 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) undertook an inspection of youth justice arrangements in Flintshire and reported in May 2010. The Chief Inspector of Probation commented that: 'Overall, HMIP consider this a very creditable set of findings. Management oversight of Risk of Harm being the main area to need some attention to detail, otherwise this inspection identified much good work being delivered.'
- 51 Safeguarding aspects of the work were done well enough 82 per cent of the time; public protection and management of risk of harm to others was done well enough 77 per cent of the time; and work to reduce the likelihood of reoffending was done well enough 87 per cent of the time. These scores were excellent when compared with the rest of Wales, and well above the all-Wales averages.

- 52 As part of a regional and sub-regional consolidation of partnerships, it is planned that the Youth Offending Team will be provided as a shared service across Flintshire and Wrexham.

### Is the Council improving health, social care and well-being?

- 53 The priorities the Council has agreed to help improve health and social care are (summarised):
- to safeguard vulnerable adults, older people and children in partnership with statutory agencies and other partners;
  - to promote independent and supported living in the community through sustainable and affordable domiciliary care, flexible care support packages, integration of services with other partners;
  - to provide flexible supported living choices including extended extra care housing provision;
  - to plan to meet the diverse and complex care needs of society including extended provision of dementia services;
  - to develop a sustainable and affordable policy for out-of-county places; and
  - to work in partnership with the health board to extend and improve access to primary health care, to invest in preventative services and to improve the integration of health and social care.
- 54 These are appropriate improvement objectives for Flintshire because they link well to its priorities for improving its services and the needs of residents. None of the objectives are new and all are covered in the SARC. They are consistent with the County Vision aim of 'health improvement through everything we do' and 'promoting and protecting

health and well-being'. They are also reflected in the plans the Council has agreed with its partners – the *Flintshire Children and Young People's Plan 2008-11* and the *Flintshire Health Social Care and Well-being Strategy*.

55 The key messages from CSSIW (above) provide some information about progress for some of these priorities. In addition, we have also noted the following points:

- The Council and Wrexham County Borough Council have agreed to develop a joint Local Children's Safeguarding Board (LCSB). This is one of a number of measures to improve the operation of the LCSB.
- The implementation of the new client information and workflow system (PARIS) has had a significant impact upon the day-to-day working of practitioners and has also meant the Council has not been able to produce accurate performance information for some parts of the service.
- The Council, like many other councils, has been affected by a rising need to take children into care and it has not yet been able to identify sufficient placements that it can afford to use and stay within the allocated budget. The financial monitoring report for the period to the end of September 2010 said the budget for such placements was projected to be overspent by £1.3 million. A consultancy firm has been commissioned to provide expertise to ensure the Council gets the best value from its use of independent providers. Addressing the need for stable and cost-effective placements is also the top priority of the North West Regional Partnership Social Care Programme Board.

- The Council has helped support the independence of people with disabilities by improving the time taken to make adaptations to properties where these are required. The time taken to deliver an adaptation funded through a Disabled Facilities Grant has reduced from over 600 days in 2007-08 to 347 days last year. This is now slightly better than the average for Wales although this still represents a long delay.

## Is the Council improving housing in the county?

56 The improvement objectives the Council has set itself to improve its housing are:

- to deliver an affordable housing supply through an 'Affordable Housing Strategy';
- to make a marked and rapid improvement in the quality, flexibility and performance of housing management and repairs and maintenance services;
- to determine the future of the Council housing stock through a tenant ballot and a strategy to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS); and
- to declare the Council's first Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA).

57 These improvement objectives are appropriate for Flintshire because these are all matters where progress had been slow. There is a need for clear and concerted leadership from councillors to ensure that some of the long-standing issues are addressed.

58 In the last two years, fewer units of affordable housing have been provided in Flintshire than in most council areas. Provision of affordable housing has not been included in the main set of targets for the Council and was not addressed in the Local Housing Strategy. The Council is right to increase focus in this area and it has now developed plans to improve the supply of affordable housing. It anticipates exceeding the 180 units forecast to be delivered in 2009-2011 in its Affordable Housing Delivery Statement submitted to the Assembly Government in September 2009.

59 There has been long-running low performance in the housing management and repairs and maintenance services. The Head of Housing, appointed in 2009, is re-structuring several areas of the department and radically changing the repairs service. Many aspects of performance are still poor. Further work remains to tackle delays when properties are empty, the speed of repairs and some maintenance services including gaining access to carry out gas safety checks.

60 Much of the Council housing stock is not in good condition and does not meet the WHQS. All local authorities and housing associations are expected to adopt the WHQS and devise realistic programmes for bringing their homes up to this standard by the end of 2012. The Council is unable to bring its housing up to the standard with its current funding.

61 In 2008, the Council adopted a plan to ballot residents on the Large Scale Voluntary Transfer of its housing stock. The stock transfer would provide a possible means by which the major investment to improve homes to the WHQS could be secured. The ballot is due to take place in the autumn of 2011 and progress to date, when compared with the stock transfer process in other council areas,

has been slow. The Council will remain neutral on the question of recommending a 'yes' vote in the ballot. The 'Choices' document that will be provided for tenants will show the plans in the event of a 'yes' vote and a 'no' vote. Ensuring that local authority housing units in Flintshire are of good quality remains a challenging objective.

62 In February 2010, the Council declared its first NRA for an area of Deeside. This has received £0.9 million from the Assembly Government and the Council and other funding to improve local housing and the environment. It is part of a programme by the Assembly Government to support and finance the improvement of private housing by encouraging councils to work with local communities and partners. Flintshire has been relatively late in establishing an NRA. By September 2009, there were 57 completed or active NRAs in other areas of Wales.

## Is the Council helping to reduce poverty?

63 The priority the Council has agreed to help reduce poverty is (summarised):

- To reduce extreme poverty, and make the best use of local resources to provide advice and extend benefits take-up, in partnership with others.

64 The Community Strategy acknowledges that around 25 per cent of children in Flintshire live below the official poverty level and this objective links closely with the County Vision aims. The Local Service Board (LSB)<sup>2</sup> has set up a group to focus on tackling poverty and disadvantage reduction and this has identified 'maximising income' as a key project area. It is an appropriate objective for the Council and its

<sup>2</sup> LSBs are public and voluntary sector leaders within each county who will work collectively to improve the county and its services for the benefit of its residents, visitors and businesses. An LSB for Flintshire was set up in 2008.

partners but not enough has been done to bring together the many ways in which the Council can contribute. This objective is referred to in some directorate and service plans; every council report has a statement about its 'anti-poverty impact', but it has no SARC risk entry and there is no reporting of progress.

- 65 There are many ways in which the Council can contribute to reducing poverty ranging from its charging policies for care services to the ways in which it supports employment opportunities and its support for vulnerable children and their families. Another element is how it deals with people entitled to claim housing and council tax benefit – here the Council's performance is not good with the Council taking the second longest of all councils in Wales to deal with new claims and changes of circumstances. There is a lack of clarity about what is expected, insufficient co-ordination of activity, and no overall reporting or accountability for the priority of reducing poverty.

## Is the Council encouraging healthy living?

- 66 The priorities the Council has agreed to encourage healthy living are (summarised):
- to achieve the aims and objectives of its 'Actif Leisure Strategy'; and
  - to agree and fund a scheme to remodel Deeside Leisure Centre.
- 67 The objectives are appropriate ones for the Council which faces rising costs of providing leisure facilities with the quality of the buildings for the nine centres getting worse. Deeside Leisure Centre is the largest and most used centre but there is an urgent need to improve the buildings and facilities.
- 68 In 2009, the Council agreed its leisure services

strategy *An Actif Future 2008-2013*. This set out the vision that in 2013, Flintshire is to be a great place for people to live, work, visit and enjoy. This vision will be realised by using leisure to develop physical education and sport, thereby promoting health and well-being. It set three objectives:

- increasing participation in physical activity and enabling the Flintshire community to develop its potential in sport;
  - quality management of facilities; and
  - regeneration of the county's leisure portfolio.
- 69 There is a five-year work programme to deliver the strategy and the Council has made progress in some of the actions – for example, it has replaced the pool roof at Flint Pavilion. However, the quality of the buildings is such that there remains a risk that some may be closed at short notice and may not be repairable. So far it has only been able to address some of the very highest priorities at the centres. The Council has also been unable to afford to fully maintain the 176 play sites in the county. The updated Play Strategy notes that the annual repair and maintenance budget for play areas is insufficient in terms of long-term sustainability of the sites.
- 70 An agreement has been reached with a company who will work with the Council to re-develop Deeside Leisure Centre. So far, outdoors facilities have been much improved and re-opened in November 2010. Further work will be carried out to develop and agree plans for the main buildings and site.
- 71 In the current financial situation, these objectives remain a significant challenge for the Council.

# Is Flintshire County Council helping people to develop?

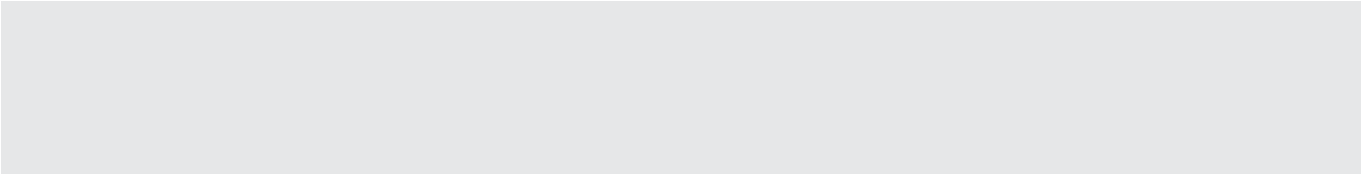
## Background information

- 72 Flintshire currently has approximately 24,000 school pupils. There are 74 primary schools and one nursery school. Five of the primary schools provide education through the Welsh language. One is a Foundation school. There are 12 secondary schools one of which is a Welsh medium school.
- 73 In July 2009 the three existing special schools closed and two new, purpose-built specialist schools opened in September 2009. There is one Pupil Referral Unit located on eight separate sites.
- 74 Flintshire receives lower funding per pupil for education from the Assembly Government than most councils where the funding may be higher in recognition of greater rurality or deprivation. Over the last five years, Flintshire has increased its total education budget to £105.3 million and the amount per pupil has risen at a faster rate than the average. The Council provides a greater level of support and services for pupils than most authorities and the proportion of funding delegated to schools is lower than for most councils.
- 75 Education attainment is often closely linked to how well-off pupils' families are – children from poorer families often get below-average results. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals in Flintshire in January 2010 was the fourth lowest in Wales at 12.8 per cent compared with the Wales figure of 18.9 per cent. This would suggest that attainment for children in Flintshire should be above the average for Wales.
- 76 Results for pupils in Flintshire and across Wales have risen in recent years. At the end of primary education, the overall results for children in Flintshire are close to the Welsh average. Results for secondary school pupils were below the expected levels but this gap has been narrowed. By 14, the results are now well above average. The overall results for young people at 16 and 18 getting GCSEs and 'A' levels, or equivalents, show Flintshire as amongst the top group of councils in Wales. For some measures, the results for Flintshire children are the best.
- 77 Estyn, the inspectorate of 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. Estyn will be undertaking an area inspection on the quality and standard of provision for 14-19 year olds in Flintshire in January 2011.



## Is the Council improving learning and skills for life?

- 78 The priorities the Council has agreed to help learning are (summarised):
- to develop and implement the School Modernisation Strategy whilst securing the highest possible level of 'spend per pupil';
  - to achieve the aims and objectives of the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF);
  - to achieve the aims and objectives of the 14-19 Transformation Strategy and to be an effective educational and economic partner with higher and further education sectors;
  - to further develop the Foundation Phase for pre-school age; and
  - to achieve the objectives of the action plan adopted after the last Estyn inspection.
- 79 These are all appropriate priorities for the Council which address areas of change and improvement. They are partly reflected in the SARC which includes School Modernisation, and Learning and Development. The priorities were adopted after the Lifelong Learning Directorate Plan for 2010 was drafted and whilst the priorities are included, the Directorate Plan includes a range of other priorities as well.
- 80 The Council has agreed a School Modernisation Strategy and is making some progress, particularly with the organisation of primary schools. However, uncertainty with funding for secondary and post-16 modernisation has delayed the development of detailed plans.
- 81 Whilst the number of unfilled school places in Flintshire is lower than in many councils, approximately one in five primary schools and four of the 12 secondary schools have a significant proportion of surplus places. The Council has assessed that it needs to spend approximately £40 million to repair problems with the condition of its schools.
- 82 Agreement has been reached on amalgamation of some primary schools with other proposals going through formal consultation processes. A 'School Buildings Improvement Grant' of £4.5 million from the Assembly Government and £1.9 million of Council capital spending is supporting plans for the re-organisation of primary schools at Shotton. Work is also due to start on a new school to replace separate infants and junior schools in Connah's Quay in January 2011.
- 83 Flintshire is one of only a few councils who have considered the future of their special schools as part of their overall strategic planning for school improvement. In September 2009, the Council closed its three all-age special schools for pupils with moderate, severe and profound/complex learning needs, and replaced them with two new special schools, one primary and one secondary, located close to each other in Flint. This development has already brought about improved special educational provision and better value for money.
- 84 The modernisation of secondary schools and post-16 provision has made less progress. A 'Strategic Outline Case' setting out the principles and options for secondary school and college arrangements for young people aged 14-19 has been submitted to the Assembly Government but uncertainty over future capital funding is a barrier to rapid progress. It will not be possible to decide on specific proposals for change until the funding available is clearer.

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- 85 The SEF is an ambitious Assembly Government programme that aims to improve schools so they can improve results. The Council successfully piloted the Professional Learning Community element of the SEF in all its schools and the SEF will guide its school improvement arrangements. It is working closely with other North Wales councils to develop a regional school improvement service which will be closely aligned to the development of the SEF across the region.
- 86 There are four schools in the county that Estyn has reported as causing concern and needing special measures, significant improvement or are subject to follow-up. The effectiveness of the SEF approach to school improvement will be seen in the way the Council identifies, challenges and supports schools and helps achieve better education for children and young people.
- 87 The Council and its partners have accepted that to meet new national targets it needs to transform education for young people aged 14-19. It has made good progress in helping schools and Deeside College to work together to offer a better range of courses. It has also established a 14-19 Programme Board to develop proposals to organise schools more efficiently and effectively, raise standards and improve buildings for pupils.
- 88 Work in this area also contributes to the Council's priority of developing the local economy through transport, communications, land and asset use, and education. The Estyn inspection in January 2011 will provide further information on progress.
- 89 The Foundation Phase of education for children aged three to seven involves children learning through activities and play, and has been fully introduced in Wales from September 2010. The Council has supported this development and has put particular energy and resources into training adults who work with children in the Foundation Phase.
- 90 When we next report, we hope to be able to comment in more detail on how the Council is helping children and young people develop skills.

# Is Flintshire County Council helping to create a safe, prosperous and pleasant place to live?

## Background information

- 91 Flintshire has a lower crime rate than the average for Wales at 59.17 crimes per 1,000 population. The highest proportion of these crimes is accounted for by criminal damage (26 per cent) and violence against the person (21 per cent). The reported crime rate has fallen to 70 per cent of the figure of seven years ago.
- 92 In 2009-10, in Flintshire, the proportion of roads in poor condition was amongst the lowest in Wales.
- 93 In 2008, the proportion of the population in employment in Flintshire was one of the highest amongst the 22 Welsh local authorities. In July 2010, 3.3 per cent or 3,100 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.
- 94 In 2009, the average weekly earnings in Flintshire stood at £538, which was the third highest amongst the 22 Welsh local authorities.

## Is the Council helping economic prosperity?

- 95 The improvement objectives the Council has set itself to promote economic prosperity are:
- to protect, promote and develop the local economy through the transport and communications infrastructure, land and asset use, and the educational system;
  - to agree a strategy with the Assembly Government to reduce traffic congestion on the A494/A55 interchange and the connecting county road network; and
  - to agree a scheme to remodel Clwyd Theatre Cymru and campaign for national capital funding support.
- 96 The Council can have a significant role in supporting and developing the local economy and this is an appropriate objective. There are SARC risk entries for economic regeneration, town regeneration, transport infrastructure and the skills of employers.
- 97 Whilst some progress has been made on the development of a Regeneration Strategy and support for local business, the clarity of what it is intended to achieve, the responsibilities and the monitoring of progress could be improved. The Flintshire Regeneration Strategy 2009-2020 was agreed by the Council in October 2009 and also agreed by the Flintshire Regeneration Partnership (the Partnership). The roles for the Partnership include discussing and agreeing the prioritisation of bids for funding to support the strategy and the monitoring and reviewing of progress. Although established in 2005, the Partnership was not a strong body and the Council has led work to review and strengthen it. This is continuing.

98 The Regeneration Strategy includes a number of targets but progress on these has not yet been reported to the Council. The Council's performance monitoring focuses on a small set of objectives for attendance at Flintshire Business Week and local business satisfaction. It has been intended that the strategy would be reviewed annually. We think that this should be done in the next six months, clearer outcome measures agreed and the reporting of progress to the Council improved. The Council has said that the strategy will be reviewed in February 2011.

99 Traffic congestion on the A494/A55 interchange has been a long-standing issue and the Council and its partner councils in 'Taith', the regional transport group for North Wales, has pursued the issue with the Assembly Government. The next step will follow the completion of a consultant's report on transport issues in the area early in 2011.

100 Clwyd Theatr Cymru is a Council-owned theatre partly funded through the Arts Council of Wales. It is run by its own board on which the majority of members are councillors from Flintshire County Council. The theatre has not had a SARC risk entry and there are currently no regular reporting arrangements to ensure that councillors and the public are aware of the cost and risks associated with the theatre. It is expected that a report will be presented setting out some of the issues and proposals for a feasibility study in the near future.

## Is the Council helping improve the environment?

101 The improvement objectives the Council has set itself to improve the environment and sustainable living are:

- to achieve our waste minimisation and recycling targets with high levels of public support and participation;
- to adopt the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) and progress the replacement Local Development Plan with urgency;
- to reshape and improve the street scene services;
- to further improve the quality, flexibility and performance of planning development control services; and
- to reduce the Council's energy use and carbon emissions.

102 These are all important and mainly long-term issues for the Council which have been included in the SARC.

103 The Council is making good progress in addressing the medium and long-term issues in waste management. They have led the North Wales Residual Waste Treatment procurement project with four other North Wales councils. The Assembly Government has announced a grant of £142 million to support this project.

104 A partnership to develop an anaerobic digester plant to treat food waste in North East Wales is underway with Denbighshire and Conwy. This facility is expected to open in April 2012 and will treat the food waste collected by all three councils.

- 105 The Council has also produced a revised waste strategy which sets out how it will achieve future waste targets. However, the strategy relies on assumptions about the collection rates, costs and Assembly Government grant funding. There are inevitably some risks associated with these assumptions.
- 106 Current performance against the national performance indicators for waste treatment is mostly close to the averages for Wales. Significant changes are planned in collection arrangements in the coming year which are intended to improve performance.
- 107 There have been many delays in the adoption of a UDP for Flintshire to update existing local plans for Delyn (from 1993) and Alyn and Deeside (2003). Development plans provide a basis for making decisions on planning applications. Councils should reach decisions in line with their development plan unless there are other significant considerations. Councils have been expected to adopt a new UDP and most have done so. Councillors agreed in principle to adopt a plan subject to some elements being reviewed. However, at November 2010, the Council had not completed the process of adopting its UDP.
- 108 The Council has identified the need to improve its street scene and environmental enforcement services and programmes of action are taking place. Street scene services aim to provide clean, safe, accessible and attractive streets and work closely with enforcement services which tackle litter, dog fouling, graffiti and other problems. The performance of enforcement services had been affected by reduced staffing in the enforcement team. This has improved and a backlog of cases is being addressed. The Council has agreed with North Wales Police that police community support officers would support enforcement action on dog fouling and littering, and a new programme of enforcement started in July 2010.
- 109 The Council has continued to make progress in improving its planning development control services which deal with all aspects of planning applications. The Council had a poorly performing service that was criticised in an auditor's report in 2007. A further review in 2009 noted there had been substantial improvement. Progress has continued following a review of processes in the department although there are still delays in dealing with some major planning applications and some other aspects of the service.
- 110 The Council shows good understanding and commitment to managing its carbon emissions now and in the future although some further improvements could be made in carbon and energy management across all departments. The Council has made progress in tackling carbon reduction and most areas of performance are improving. The LSB has made a commitment that carbon management is one of its priorities although it is not clear how this is proceeding. A Wales Audit Office review in 2010 was positive about progress in this area but also noted that many Council departments were not yet showing their own contribution to energy use and carbon reduction in their own plans.

## Is the Council helping to build safe and supportive communities?

- 111 The improvement objectives the Council has set itself to build safe and supportive communities are:
- to improve council enforcement particularly in environmental services, the cleanliness of the 'public realm' and in planning development control;
  - to extend the impact of public protection services to safeguard communities and public health;
  - to achieve a higher level of public confidence in the safety of communities in partnership with North Wales Police and other partners; and
  - to promote citizen responsibility to support the work of the public services, for example crime prevention, enforcement, community participation and community action.
- 112 This group of priorities include important concerns of residents such as the way public spaces are kept pleasant and how wrongdoing is prevented or addressed. They are appropriate priorities but it is not always clear what it is intended to achieve. There are no SARC risk entries for the main public protection services or for the community safety and citizen participation priorities.
- 113 Some weaknesses in the public protection service are being tackled and improvements made to support the wider public health agenda and to be more responsive to its users. The public protection service is responsible for inspecting places where food is prepared and sold, and enforcing animal health, health and safety and trading standards laws and regulations. It plays a part in minimising and dealing with any outbreaks of infections such as E.coli and contributes to wider issues such as reducing smoking and alcohol abuse by young people.
- 114 A key part of ensuring a good service is how the different elements work together. The public protection service is being re-organised to improve these arrangements. A consultation process (known as SERVQUAL) has been introduced to find out how far residents and businesses felt the service meets their expectations. This found an overall satisfaction rate of 78 per cent but it also gave useful information about expectations of the service which can be used to help it improve.
- 115 The Council achieved the requirements to inspect all high-risk food and animal health premises in 2009-10 although performance dropped for trading standards and health and safety work.
- 116 The priorities for confidence in community safety and for promoting citizen responsibility have not previously been shown as key priorities. The Council and its partners will need to develop clear plans for these and arrangements for monitoring progress.

# What should Flintshire County Council do?

117 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;
- conduct a special inspection and publish the report with detailed recommendations;

- make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must respond to that recommendation publicly within 30 days; and
- 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.

118 In the light of our work the Auditor General recommends that the Council should consider our proposals to help it improve:

## Proposals we made in the Preliminary Corporate Assessment

The Council should:

- review arrangements to ensure that appropriate behaviour standards of councillors are maintained;
- complete work on the Council (Governance) Plan Framework;
- develop the process to enable the allocation of resources to priorities; and
- complete the People Strategy 2009-2012 and action plan.

## Additional proposals

The Council should:

- complete the review of the Priorities of the Administration, formally adopt these as the priorities of the Council, and publish them widely; and
- establish that there are clear leadership and accountability arrangements, success measures, and reporting processes for progress against all of its priorities.

# 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.

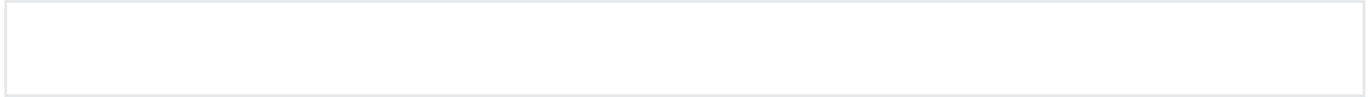
This report has been produced by the Auditor General for Wales to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges duties under section 19, namely; to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an audit under section 17 and an improvement assessment under section 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.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 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 Flintshire and Flintshire County Council

In 2008-09 the Council spent £288 million, equating to £1,909 per resident. In that year it also spent £37 million on capital items.

The average band D council tax in 2009-10 for Flintshire was £1,080 per year, which will increase by 3.25 per cent to £1,115 per year for 2010-11. Sixty-nine per cent of Flintshire's housing is in council tax bands A to D.

There are 70 councillors for Flintshire 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:

- 22 Labour
- 18 Independent Non-Aligned
- 10 Liberal Democrats
- 9 Conservatives
- 9 New Independents
- 1 Plaid Cymru
- 1 other Independent

The Leader is Councillor Arnold Woolley.

The Chief Executive is Colin Everett, and the Directors are:

- Director of Environment – Carl Longland
- Director of Lifelong Learning – Ian Budd
- Director of Community Services – vacant (Chief Executive covering)

The Assembly Members for Flintshire are:

- Sandy Mewies, Delyn, Labour
- Carl Sargeant, Alyn and Deeside, Labour

The Members of Parliament for Flintshire are:

- David Hanson, Delyn, Labour
- Mark Tami, Alyn Deeside, Labour

For more information see the Council's own website at [www.flintshire.gov.uk](http://www.flintshire.gov.uk) or contact the Council at Flintshire County Council, County Hall, Mold, Flintshire CH7 6NB (Tel: 01352 752121).

# 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 August 2010 are set out below:

### Overall conclusion

Flintshire County Council is actively promoting improvement whilst some arrangements are not fully developed.

### How the Council has approached improvement over time

The Council has taken initiatives to improve after a period of inconsistent progress but whilst there has been progress, some corporate arrangements are not yet fully developed.

- before 2007, there was clearer political control but corporate management was inconsistent and the Council failed to address some key challenges;
- since 2007, more effective and professional leadership has improved corporate management and helped to promote improvement despite a fragile political position; and
- the Council is beginning to establish its priorities and arrangements to address the financial future but the political position and the capacity for change present continuing risks.

### Analysis of the Council's arrangements to help it improve

Council leadership has positively promoted change and there have been many improvements in arrangements whilst some risk areas have not yet been fully addressed.

- elected member and senior officer leadership is actively supporting improvement but the political position remains fragile;
- governance arrangements are generally effective but some issues remain to be addressed;
- a constructive approach to working in partnership will support future improvement;
- a clearer strategic policy framework is emerging although some aspects are still developing;
- the Council has benefited from sound financial control but there have been significant service pressures and some overspends in 2008-2010; the Council is beginning to develop the framework to address financial challenges and develop financial planning linked to priority objectives;
- business processes have improved considerably in the last three years but there is room for further development to support improvement more effectively; and
- despite some improvements in the human resources service, arrangements for people management include continuing risks that may hinder securing improvement.

For the full report see our website at [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk).

## Appendix 4

### Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter to the Members of Flintshire County Council

The Measure 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 I 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 stand-alone document, but will be presented to the Council and the public as part of the AIR and therefore discharges my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice (the Code).

**Flintshire County Council complied with financial and performance improvement reporting requirements but there is scope to improve financial controls in a few areas and the Council needs to further develop its future financial planning to help it meet the significant financial challenges ahead**

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 issued by the Auditor General 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;
- consider whether the Improvement Plan is prepared and published in accordance with statutory requirements; and
- issue a certificate confirming that I have completed the audit of the accounts.

On 30 September 2010 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements, confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Pension Fund's financial transactions. My report included an emphasis of matter on the Clwyd Pension Fund. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts.



The following issues were identified:

- we did not identify any material weaknesses in your internal controls although a number of control weaknesses have been reported in relation to payroll, housing benefit, asset verification, pensions reconciliation and cash management procedures;
- the accounting statements were prepared by the deadline and were generally well supported, although some delays were experienced and improvements were identified which have been reported separately; and
- the emphasis of matter in the pension fund accounts was required to refer to the inherent uncertainty of valuing unquoted investments carried in the balance sheet at £139 million and we referred to the need for the Council to develop arrangements to obtain assurance of the valuations of these assets.

My 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 Measure. The main findings from this latter work will be set out in the AIR. In addition I also bring the following issues to your attention:

- Budgetary control arrangements are sufficiently robust to provide us with material assurance on the financial statements but there is scope for further improvements to be made.
- Future financial planning is developing and will need to progress rapidly to support the Flintshire Futures programme and support the Council in meeting the significant financial challenges ahead. This is referred to further in the AIR.
- Our assessment of Internal Audit against the CIPFA standards indicated that the function fully complied with seven of the 11 standards and partially complied with the remaining four.

The Council's Improvement Plan 2010-2011 meets statutory requirements and the Improvement Assessment Report will include suggested further improvements.

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts had been completed on 30 September 2010. The financial audit fee for 2009-10 is currently expected to be in line with those set out in the Financial Audit Strategy.

John Herniman  
Partner  
For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor  
29 November 2010

# Appendix 5

## Flintshire County Council's improvement objectives

*From the Statement of the Priorities of the Administration 2010-2012 report, Flintshire Council Executive Board, 12th May 2010.*

The Council aims to protect and improve the quality of life of its communities. With our local partners we have committed to a Vision for the County under five themes. What follows is a set of priorities for 2010-12 as our contribution to achieving that Vision.

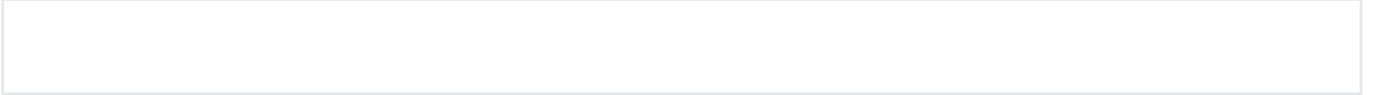
### Corporate Governance and Performance

- 1 To promote and maintain a positive and confident reputation for the Council and the county locally, regionally and nationally.
- 2 To continue to make progressive change in the culture, efficiency, effectiveness, adaptability and performance of the organisation both corporately and in service planning and delivery.
- 3 To develop and follow a resilient medium and longer term financial strategy whilst maintaining an affordable level of Council Tax for local taxpayers.
- 4 To cope and prosper in the coming years of reductions in revenue and capital for public services and continue to improve and perform as a public services organisation.
- 5 To attain high and consistent levels of customer service, and to develop more flexible personal and remote customer contact services through an ambitious Customer Services Strategy.
- 6 To achieve the aims and objectives of The People Strategy with an emphasis on people management practice, management performance, attendance management and agile working.
- 7 To achieve a legal, acceptable and affordable Single Status Agreement.
- 8 To implement effective business continuity plans to protect key services.
- 9 To modernise and improve Council procedures and performance in procurement practice, to meet the aims of the Opening Doors Policy of the Assembly Government for small and medium sized businesses and to achieve cashable and non-cashable efficiency targets.
- 10 To maximise the use of the Council's land and asset base for the achievement of Council priorities and to maximise capital receipts or income.

### Local Public Services

- 1 To protect, promote and develop the local economy through the transport and communications infrastructure, land and asset use, and the educational system.
- 2 To reshape and improve the Street Scene Services.
- 3 To improve Council enforcement particularly in environmental services, the cleanliness of the 'public realm' and in planning development control.

- 
- 4 To extend the impact of Public Protection Services to safeguard communities and public health.
  - 5 To achieve our waste minimisation and recycling targets through the local and regional strategies, thereby avoiding infraction penalties, with high levels of public support and participation.
  - 6 To adopt the Unitary Development Plan (UPD) and progress the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) with urgency.
  - 7 To further improve the quality, flexibility and performance of planning development control services.
  - 8 To reduce the Council's energy use and carbon emissions.
  - 9 To agree a strategy with the Welsh Assembly Government to reduce traffic congestion on the A494/A55 interchange and the connecting County road network as a key part of the national and regional transport plans.
  - 10 To deliver an affordable housing supply through the Affordable Housing Strategy.
  - 11 To make a marked and rapid improvement in the quality, flexibility and performance of housing management and repairs and maintenance services and to improve the financial performance of the Housing Revenue Account.
  - 12 To determine the future of the Council Housing Stock through a tenant ballot and a strategy to achieve the Welsh Housing Quality Standard.
  - 13 To declare the Council's first Neighbourhood Renewal Area (NRA).
  - 14 To achieve a higher level of public confidence in the safety of communities in partnership with North Wales Police and others partners.
  - 15 To safeguard vulnerable adults, older people and children in partnership with statutory agencies and other partners.
  - 16 To promote independent and supported living in the community through sustainable and affordable domiciliary care, flexible care support packages, integration of services with other partners.
  - 17 To provide flexible supported living choices including extended extra care housing provision.
  - 18 To plan to meet the diverse and complex care needs of society including extended provision of dementia services.
  - 19 To reduce extreme poverty, and make the best use of local resources to provide advice and extend benefits take-up, in partnership with others.
  - 20 To develop a sustainable and affordable policy for Out of County Places.



- 21 To work in partnership with the new Betsi Cadwalladr University Health Board to extend and improve access to primary health care, to invest in preventative services and to improve further the integration of health and social care.
- 22 To develop the School Modernisation Strategy and to achieve, in phases, its aims and objectives whilst securing the highest possible level of 'spend per pupil'.
- 23 To achieve the aims and objectives of the School Effectiveness Framework.
- 24 To achieve the aims and objectives of the 14-19 Transformation Strategy and to be effective educational and economic partners with the higher and further education sectors and notably Deeside College and Glyndwr University.
- 25 To further develop the Foundation Phase for pre-school age.
- 26 To achieve the objectives of the action plan adopted by the Council in response to the Estyn Inspection of Local Education Services.
- 27 To achieve the aims and objectives of the Actif Leisure Strategy.
- 28 To agree and fund a scheme to remodel Deeside Leisure Centre.
- 29 To agree a scheme to remodel Clwyd Theatre Clwyd and campaign for national capital funding support.
- 30 To promote citizen responsibility to support the work of the public services e.g. crime prevention, enforcement, community participation and community action.



# 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
- The Authority's own website and improvement plans
- The Wales Yearbook
- The Home Office
- Members' Research Service
- Office for National Statistics