



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report

Monmouthshire County Council

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About the Auditor General for Wales

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Together with appointed auditors, the Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies and assesses compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Assembly Commission and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

The Auditor General and staff of the Wales Audit Office aim to provide public-focused and proportionate reporting on the stewardship of public resources and in the process provide insight and promote improvement.

This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Non Jenkins and Alex Rawlin under the direction of Alan Morris.

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Summary report

- 1 Each year, the Auditor General must report on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement in delivering their services. This report draws on the work of the relevant Welsh inspectorates, as well as work undertaken on the Auditor General's behalf by the Wales Audit Office. The report covers delivery and evaluation of services of Monmouthshire County Council (the Council) in relation to 2012-13, its planning of improvement for 2013-14 and, taking these into account, concludes whether the Auditor General believes that the Council will make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15.
 - the Council's 2012-13 accounts were unqualified and the financial statements were of a good standard;
 - the Council improved its approach to improvement planning in 2012-13 but further alignment with strategic plans and clearer links between activities and measures were needed;
 - the Council's arrangements to evaluate its performance during 2012-13 started to improve but there were some weaknesses in arrangements for local indicators,
 - there were some examples of good scrutiny but overall scrutiny and challenge of performance was patchy and the Council's assessments of performance were not always balanced; and
 - the Council discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure for 2012-13, however, it should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance.
- 2 We found that, in 2012-13 the Council made mixed progress in delivering improvements in priority areas and performance levels were mixed when compared with other councils. We came to this conclusion because:
 - the Council made mixed progress in 2012-13 in delivering improvements in its priority areas; and
 - performance was also mixed on the further measures and services that are comparable with other councils in Wales.
- 3 We also found that the Council's improvement planning arrangements for 2012-13 improved and there were some examples of good scrutiny, but some weaknesses remain in arrangements for local indicators, assessments and scrutiny of performance. We came to this conclusion because:
 - the Council failed to discharge some of its improvement planning duties under the Measure and should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance; and
- 4 Finally, we found that the Council failed to discharge some of its improvement planning duties for 2013-14 and it was uncertain whether the Council was likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2013-14. We came to this conclusion because:
 - the Council failed to discharge some of its improvement planning duties under the Measure and should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance; and

- it was uncertain whether the Council is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement during this financial year.

5 Taking the above into account, the Auditor General believes that it is uncertain whether the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15.

Recommendations

Over the course of our work in 2013-14 we made one statutory recommendation which has previously been published and reported to the Council in the Auditor General's Improvement Assessment Letter dated September 2013 and is set out below for information.

R1 Put in place arrangements that enable the Council to formulate, scrutinise, approve and publish its improvement objectives in a timely way to meet its statutory obligations under the Measure and make it more accessible to citizens.

Detailed report

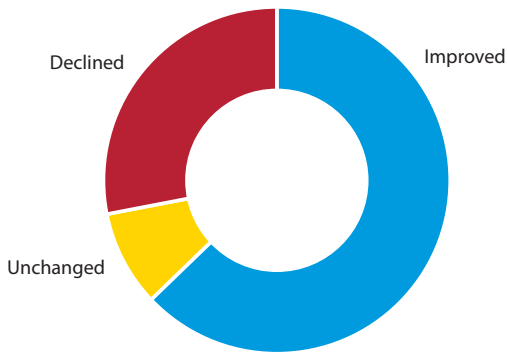
Introduction

- 6 Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure), the Auditor General must report each year on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement in delivering their services. **Appendix 1** provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties under the Measure. With help from Welsh inspectorates, Estyn (for education), the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW), and the Welsh Language Commissioner, we have brought together a picture of what each council or authority in Wales is trying to achieve, how it is going about it, and the progress the Council has made since the Auditor General published his last annual improvement report. The report also draws on the Council's own self-assessment. Finally, taking all this into account, the report concludes whether the Auditor General believes that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15.
- 7 We do not undertake a comprehensive annual review of all Council arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on our cumulative and shared knowledge and the findings of prioritised work undertaken this year.
- 8 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:
- make proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Council, we would expect them to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
 - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
 - conduct a special inspection and publish a report and make recommendations; and
 - recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 9 We want to find out if this report gives you the information you need and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by e-mailing us at info@wao.gov.uk or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

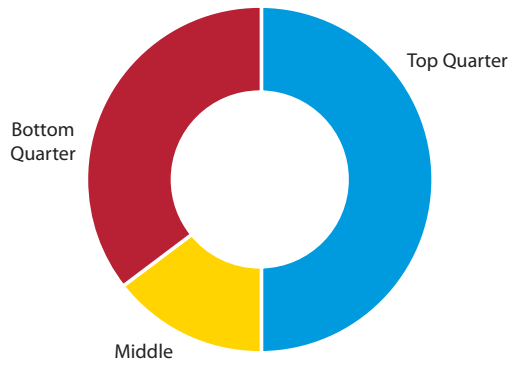
The Council made mixed progress in 2012-13 in delivering improvements

- 10 In the Council's Annual Performance Review 2012-13, the Council reported that service performance improved in nearly two-thirds of its comparable performance indicators.
- 11 Whilst the Council noted in its Annual Performance Review 2012-13 that National Strategic Indicators and Public Accountability Measures do not always reflect the priorities of the Council, it also states that compared with other councils, Monmouthshire was ranked in the top quartile for half of the published national indicators. The Council's own evaluation of performance against its priority areas and other key local services covered by the national indicators is show below.

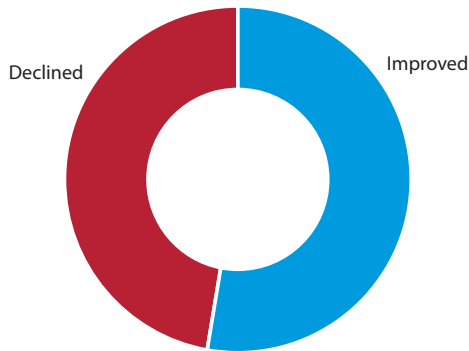
Monmouthshire Performance Indicators 2012/13



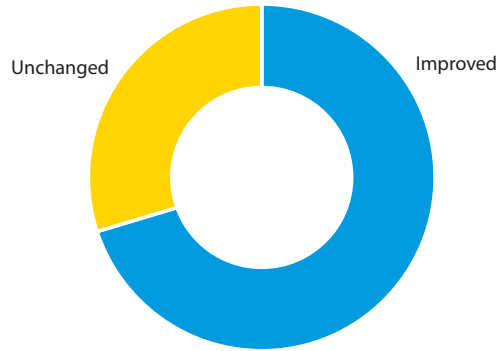
Monmouthshire Comparative Performance



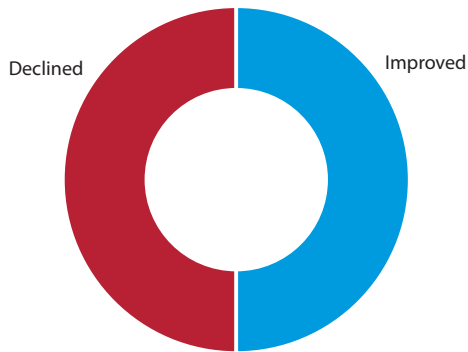
Protecting Vulnerable People



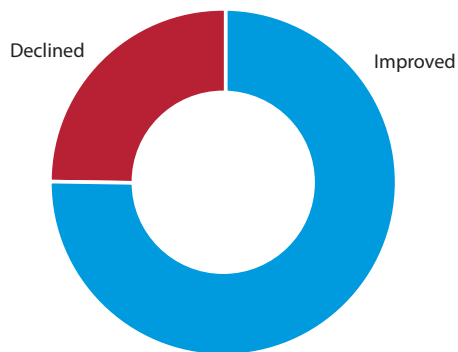
Education



Economic Development



Other Key Local Services



Source: Monmouthshire County Council's Annual Performance Review 2012-13

12 Our analysis of the 44 national strategic indicators and public accountability measures for 2012-13 is set out below.

	Current Year	Previous Year
National Strategic Indicators:		
Number of NSIs	30	30
Number with actual value that have got BETTER	12	
Number with actual value that have got WORSE	6	
Number with RANKING that have got BETTER	9	
Number with RANKING that have got WORSE	6	
Number ABOVE Welsh average	15	9
Number BELOW Welsh average	14	12
Number with TARGET aiming to get BETTER	5	
Number with TARGET aiming to get WORSE	1	
Public Accountability Measures:		
Number of PAMs	14	14
Number with actual value that have got BETTER	8	
Number with actual value that have got WORSE	5	
Number with RANKING that have got BETTER	7	
Number with RANKING that have got WORSE	5	
Number ABOVE Welsh average	9	10
Number BELOW Welsh average	4	4
Number with TARGET aiming to get BETTER	0	
Number with TARGET aiming to get WORSE	0	

13 In June 2012, the Council published its Improvement Plan which set out its priorities and actions for 2012-13. The Council's Improvement Objectives for 2012-13 are summarised below:

- Bring together health, social care and independent agencies in a single model of community based care (Gwent Frailty Programme) and instigate the 'Missing link' programme to improve our response to missing children.
- Improve the prosperity of our county and its attractiveness to business, supporting existing and new businesses and maximising the return on investment in our tourism economy.
- Provide a joined-up and comprehensive approach to area regeneration and development working in partnership to develop plans for our key towns of Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth and smaller communities.
- Improve the way we provide education to ensure the best learning opportunities for our children, young people and community. Implement the Education Achievement Service, start to improve school sites to deliver 21st century education and improve the ICT infrastructure in schools.
- Increase the amount of waste treated in a sustainable manner and work towards a long-term sustainable alternative to landfill. Progress Prosiect Gwyrdd to offer a long-term and sustainable way of treating residual waste.

- Modernise the way the council is run to improve the way we work. Change the culture of our organisation to make sure that we listen to what our communities want and become more responsive and innovative in meeting those needs.

14 Below we provide a brief assessment of how well the Council is performing in delivering improvement against these priority improvement objectives. More detailed information about progress and achievements is provided in the Council's Annual Performance Review 2012-13 which is available on the Council's website.

The Council made mixed progress in delivering improvement in its priority areas

Whilst some improvements in reducing delayed transfers of care, improving user satisfaction and the results of reablement were made, performance in social care was mixed:

15 The Council identified a range of key actions to help it achieve the following improvement objective: 'We will continue to bring together health, social care and independent agencies in a single model of community based care called the Gwent Frailty Programme. More specifically this year we will continue to operate multi-disciplinary teams to deliver integrated practice and instigate the 'Missing link' programme aimed at improving our response to missing/runaway children.' Actions included implementing the Gwent Frailty Programme and the Missing Link programme.

- 16 The Council identified six specific performance measures it would use to assess whether it has achieved its objective in its Improvement Plan 2012-2015; *Looking to the Future, Your County, Your Way*. The Council's evaluation of its own performance says that its performance was very good for this Improvement Objective, with major strengths.
- 17 Our evaluation shows that one of the six indicators was not reported, four met or exceeded targets and one did not achieve the target. The Council's performance on the number of people using the Frailty Service was not reported. The service exceeded its targets on user satisfaction (achieving 96 per cent compared with a target of 93 per cent), the percentage of people independent at the end of reablement (achieving 54 per cent compared with a target of 52 per cent), and the rate of delayed transfers of care from hospital (achieving 1.77 compared with a target of 5.29). This put the Council significantly better than the Wales average and ranked seventh in Wales, although this indicator was universally qualified across Wales. The Council also exceeded its target on the numbers of older people receiving community-based care packages (achieving 1,167 compared with a target of 1,263). The Council failed to achieve the target for the average size of care package received by people getting support to keep them independent (achieving 10.7 hours compared with a target of under 10.4 hours).
- 18 The CSSIW has provided mixed feedback on the performance of the Council's Social Services. In October 2013 the CSSIW published its *Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance for 2012-13* for the Social Services department in Monmouthshire. The evaluation report sets out the key areas of progress as well as areas for further improvement. The report can be found on the [CSSIW website](#). The following paragraphs are drawn from the report.
- 19 'Monmouthshire County Council has set out a strategic vision and priorities for social care services and continues to progress its ambitious change programme across adult and children's social care in order to achieve this vision. The aim is to shape services in order to focus on prevention, early intervention and supporting people to remain independent. Its strategy seeks to draw on social enterprise, partners and communities to deliver services.
- 20 The Council has demonstrated a commitment to further collaboration and integration with neighbouring authorities and partners across Gwent to develop and commission services. Strategies have been developed for the delivery of integrated services for adults with learning disabilities and people with mental health needs.
- 21 In adult services, integrated health and social care teams deliver reablement services through the Gwent Frailty model. Performance data suggests this is having a positive impact, with more people being supported to remain independent. The Council has redesigned how it responds to

initial contacts so that people who contact adult social services are spoken to by qualified staff who can facilitate solutions through advice, signposting or referral for further assessment.

22 In children's services, performance against national indicators has been stable or has improved in a number of areas, however, the Council has struggled to maintain performance in some areas. The number of looked after children increased in 2011-12 and has remained at this higher level this year which has created some resourcing pressures.

23 Considerable progress has been made during 2012-13 in restructuring children's services and redesigning processes to streamline and improve the effectiveness of services. This includes: the delivery of the Joint Assessment Families Framework via hubs located around secondary schools; the development of a new simplified single assessment form; and the redesign of the transfer policy to improve decision making and to ensure cases are progressed appropriately.

24 The Council has taken steps to strengthen its children's safeguarding arrangements within children's services, taking responsibility for all safeguarding matters in relation to education. This has been an important element of the Council's response to concerns highlighted in Estyn's review of Monmouthshire County Council's education services in November 2012.

25 CSSIW has identified the following potential risks:

- ability to implement change at a rate that keeps pace with increasing demand for both adult and children's services;
- capacity to take forward and implement the modernisation agenda whilst continuing to deliver ongoing operational demands; and
- capacity to develop a quality assurance and performance management framework that will enable the council to assure itself that the service structures and new ways of working are delivering the desired outcomes.

26 CSSIW has identified the following good practice:

- The Council has a clear vision for the future shape of services in order to meet demand and is proactively taking forward a modernisation agenda in order to achieve its vision.
- In adult services, a fully integrated model of care is supporting the delivery of reablement and the Gwent Frailty model. The number of people supported in the community is stabilising indicating that more people are being enabled to remain independent.
- People find it easier to contact adult services and receive timely and responsive services.'

27 Our analysis of the National Strategic Indicators and Public Accountability Measures shows that performance is mixed.

28 Performance improved on two measures: the percentage of adult referrals where the risk is managed (although the Council is still ranked 21st in Wales); and the percentage of carers offered an assessment in their own right (though again, the Council still ranked 19th in Wales). The percentage of adults supported in the community decreased. Performance deteriorated on two measures; the percentage of care plan reviews completed in time; and the rate of older people supported in care homes (although the Council is still ranked first in Wales on this indicator).

29 Around half of the key performance measures for children's services deteriorated during 2012-13 and half improved, with the majority now performing worse than the Wales average. There were four measures where performance was not directly comparable over time or between councils.

30 Performance improved on four indicators. Three of these concerned looked-after-children, including numbers having three or more placements in a year (the Council's rank also improved from 11th in Wales to first), or a change of school (the Council's rank also improved from 12th to 6th) and external qualifications aged 16 (again, rank improved from 19th to 7th). The percentage of young carers also improved and the Council's rank improved from 22nd to 19th, still worse than the Wales average.

31 Performance deteriorated on four measures: the percentage of children seen by a social worker at the initial assessment (where the Council's rank worsened from first in Wales to 6th); the percentage seen alone by a social worker (where ranking worsened from 16th to 22nd); the percentage of statutory visits in accordance with the regulations (ranking worsened from 11th to 22nd); and reviews of children carried out within timescales (ranking remained at 21st in Wales).

The Council's performance on businesses and tourism was mixed

32 The Council identified a range of key actions to help them achieve the Improvement objective: 'We want to improve the prosperity of our county and its attractiveness to business. This year we will build on the progress we have made in supporting both existing and new businesses and also turn our focus to maximising both the financial and social return on investment in our tourism economy.' Actions included driving up job and training opportunities via the community interest company CMC2 and turning seasonal tourism into a year-round business.

33 The Council identified seven specific performance measures it would use to assess whether it had achieved its objective. The Council evaluation of its own performance said that performance was good for this Improvement Objective, with important strengths and some areas for improvement.

34 Our evaluation shows that the Council did not report on one measure, achieved its targets on two measures and failed to meet targets on four measures. The Council did not report on the percentage of the workforce employed in the tourism sector. Targets were achieved on the number of new jobs created that were supported by Monmouthshire enterprise and partners, and the number of job seekers allowance claimants. The Council did not achieve its targets on the number of business start-ups supported by Monmouthshire enterprise and partners, the total number of tourists and income generated by tourism, and the average weekly earnings of Monmouthshire residents.

The Council's performance in Area Regeneration was mixed with many measures not achieving targets but significant improvements in affordable homes

35 The Council identified a range of key actions to help them achieve the objective: 'We want to provide a joined-up and comprehensive approach to area regeneration and development. Continuing from last year, we will work in partnership with key organisations to either review existing or develop new holistic area regeneration plans for our key towns of Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth. We will also use this approach in developing smaller communities starting in Llanelly Hill and Overmonnow.' Actions included developing the Whole Place approach, and delivering regeneration projects in Severnside and Abergavenny.

36 The Council identified eight specific performance measures it would use to assess whether it has achieved its objective. The Council's evaluation of its own performance said that performance was good for this Improvement Objective with important strengths and some areas for improvement.

37 Our evaluation shows that the Council did not report on two measures, achieved its targets on two measures and failed to meet targets on four measures. The Council did not report on the number of micro-enterprises in the county and the number of active enterprises as this information was not available from the national data source (NOMIS). It achieved targets on the number of working age people with a qualification equal to NVQ4 or higher (achieving 38.5 per cent compared with the target of 36.7 per cent), and the number of additional housing units provided (achieving 101 units compared with a target of 20). But this indicator was universally qualified across Wales. The Council failed to meet its targets on the numbers, and percentages of Monmouthshire residents that work in the county, number of affordable homes built, and the number of work-based placements secured with local employers. We found errors associated with this indicator in our data quality review in summer 2013.

Performance on Education is being monitored by Estyn following the shortcomings identified in its inspection in February 2013

- 38 The Council identified a range of key actions to support the objective: 'We want to improve the way we provide education to ensure the best learning opportunities for our children and young people but also, the wider community. More specifically this year we will put the wheels in motion to improve the school sites so they are fit to deliver 21st century education, we will implement the Education Achievement Service as a joint authority approach to develop better teaching and learning practices and we will continue our programme of building a modern ICT infrastructure within our schools. We will also continue improving our support to children and young people who struggle within the education system'. Actions included using 21st Century School funding to improve comprehensive and primary schools, working with the Shared Resource Service (SRS) to improve ICT capacity and other important activities.
- 39 The Council identified 12 specific performance measures it would use to assess whether it has achieved its objective. The Council's evaluation of its own performance said that performance was adequate for this Improvement Objective and that strengths just outweigh weaknesses.
- 40 Estyn inspected the Council's education services in November 2012 and they were judged to be unsatisfactory. Capacity to improve was also judged to be unsatisfactory. The report recommended that the service should be placed in special measures and a Ministerial Recovery Board was established.
- 41 The Council is working closely with the Ministerial Recovery Board to address the shortcomings identified in the inspection. Estyn will continue to monitor the authority's progress against its post inspection action plan throughout the year.
- 42 During February 2014, Estyn undertook its first monitoring visit since the inspection, and has recently issued the Council with a letter which sets out the progress made by the authority against the Safeguarding recommendation arising from the 2012 inspection, considers the current performance of the authority and identifies any additional areas for improvement. Further monitoring visits are scheduled to evaluate progress against the remaining five recommendations. Estyn will also review the overall progress made against all recommendations from the previous inspection and the current performance overall.

43 Estyn reported in its letter to the Council that 'the local authority has made some good initial progress in addressing the shortcomings around safeguarding identified at service and practitioner level. However, the most challenging and significant shortcomings identified in the strategic management of safeguarding have not been addressed well enough. The local authority still does not have effective enough management information systems and processes to enable it to receive appropriate and evaluative management information about safeguarding. It is not able to routinely identify how well the actions taken impact on the safeguarding of all children and young people in Monmouthshire or to prioritise actions for improvement well enough'.

44 Estyn's new overall judgements will be presented at the end of the monitoring period which is expected to conclude in 2015.

The Council's performance on waste was mixed as there were improvements in waste and recycling measures, but the Council did not achieve its targets

45 The Council identified a range of key actions to support the Improvement Objective: 'We want to work with our partners and the community to increase the amount of waste treated in a sustainable manner and work towards a long term sustainable alternative to landfill. As part of this, the Council aims to progress Prosiect Gwyrdd¹ to offer a long term and sustainable way of treating residual waste.'

46 The Council identified nine specific performance measures it would use to assess whether it achieved its objective. The Council evaluation of its own performance says that performance was good for this Improvement Objective and that there are important strengths with some areas for improvement.

47 Our evaluation shows that the Council did not report on three measures, achieved its targets on two measures and failed to meet targets on four measures. The Council did not report on recycling satisfaction (which is based on a biennial survey) and the percentage of households using weekly dry recycling and food waste recycling. This issue was raised in our data quality review in the summer of 2013.

48 The Council achieved its targets on the number of households where domestic waste is collected and kilogrammes of waste collected per person. The Council failed to meet targets on tonnes of biodegradable waste sent to landfill and the standards of cleanliness of adopted highways. The Council also failed to meet its target on the percentage of municipal waste recycled or composted but was still better than the Wales average, met the Welsh government target and is rated green in the Welsh Government's rating of recycling in Wales. Finally, the Council failed to meet its target on the percentage of municipal waste sent to landfill. It was worse than the Wales average although the Council only used 46 per cent of its landfill allowance in 2011-12, the third lowest in Wales. Other key performance

¹ Prosiect Gwyrdd is a partnership between five councils (Caerphilly, Cardiff, Monmouthshire, Newport, and the Vale of Glamorgan) that aims to look for the best environmental, cost effective and practical solution for waste after recycling and composting have been maximised in each council area.

measures for waste improved, including the clearing of fly tipping within five days, and the percentage of highways of a high and acceptable standard of cleanliness.

The Council made good progress on ‘The Way We Work’

- 49 The Council identified a range of key actions to support the Improvement Objective: ‘We want to modernise the way the council is run to improve the way we work. More specifically we will focus on changing the culture of our organisation to make sure that we listen to what our communities want and become more responsive and innovative in meeting those needs.’ Actions included implementing agile working, systems thinking and systems doing, intrapreneurship, go find, come play and developing effective listening tools.
- 50 The Council identified four specific performance measures it would use to assess whether it achieved its objective, although eight were eventually reported on. In the Scorecard for this Improvement Objective. Our data quality review in summer 2013 found that some data had been inconsistently reported and no explanation for changes in targets or reported performance levels were provided. The Council’s evaluation of its own performance said that performance was good for this Improvement Objective and that there are important strengths with some areas for improvement.
- 51 Our evaluation shows that the Council did not set targets for three measures, achieved its targets on three measures and failed to meet targets on one measure. The Council did not set targets for the measures on: savings released as a result of whole systems approaches and applied innovation (it achieved £1.77 million – this was also inconsistently reported, as raised in our data quality review in summer 2013); the percentage of planning applications approved (it achieved 93.7 per cent); or the number of days to process a planning application (it achieved 104 days). The Council met its targets on: the number of people engaging with the Council through social media (achieving 6,949 compared with a target of 3,947); the number of staff ideas used in formulating the budget (achieving 33 compared with a target of 20, although this was inconsistently reported as raised in our data quality review); and the number of people involved in the Your County, Your Way programme (achieving 480 compared with a target of 400). The Council did not achieve its target for the number of people who have been through the intrapreneurship programme, achieving 54 compared with a target of 60. Again, this was inconsistently reported as raised in our data quality review.

The Council made mixed progress in delivering improvement on measures that are comparable with other councils in Wales

- 52 The Council was too slow in processing housing benefit claims. Its caseload reduced by one per cent (compared with an average three per cent drop across Wales) and the average time taken to process new claims remains the same in 2011-12 and 2012-13 at 34 days. This is significantly worse than the Wales average of 20 days. Time taken to process changes in circumstance remained at 12 days but this is double the Wales average at six days. Accuracy in processing had improved to 88 per cent in 2012-13, which was also worse than the Wales average of 94 per cent.
- 53 Performance in housing was mixed. The Council's speed of processing disabled facilities grants improved, was better than the Wales average and ranked sixth in Wales. But performance on preventing homelessness deteriorated, was much worse than the Wales average and ranked 20th in Wales.
- 54 Performance on transport and highways was mixed. Condition of roads improved, was better than the Wales average and ranked fifth in Wales. But fewer older people held concessionary bus passes, this was worse than the Wales average and the Council ranked 19th in Wales.
- 55 Performance on leisure and culture was mixed. The number of visits to sport and leisure centres was below the Wales average and ranked 18th in Wales but visits to libraries were above the Wales average and ranked second in Wales. The Public Service Ombudsman received fewer complaints about the Council than the previous year but responses to requests for information were still too slow.
- 56 The Council's Welsh-language provision improved but further improvement is needed. It has taken further steps to increase Welsh-language provision on the website and has developed internal guidelines on publishing Welsh and English content. Further work needs to be done to report on the workforce's Welsh-language skills and the implementation of the Language Skills Strategy will be a priority for the next period. The Council intends to use an external agency to undertake a telephone survey in order to prove compliance with the Language Scheme. The Council will need to analyse the results of the assessment and ensure that it acts on any findings for improvement. The Council was good at managing its overall budget and whilst it continues to deliver essential services with less money, approved savings targets are not always being realised and some local services are becoming increasingly unsustainable.

57 Councils are under increasing pressure to reduce costs but still have a duty to have arrangements to secure continuous improvement. The scale of cost reduction required means that councils will have to look beyond immediate short term savings and think more radically about how to take cost out of the business and how to sustain this longer term whilst still improving services. Cutting spending effectively requires departments to take a strategic overview to avoid an erosion of service quality in priority delivery areas. Councils should clearly prioritise what services matter most, based on an accurate, realistic assessment of the costs, benefits and risks of the options.

58 During 2012-13 we reviewed how well the Council was managing with less resources. We concluded that the Council is good at managing its overall budget and whilst it continues to deliver essential services with less money, approved savings targets are not always being realised and some local services are becoming increasingly unsustainable.

59 Overall, the Council's expenditure on Environmental Health, Housing and Waste Management is reducing and performance is mostly being maintained, the long term sustainability of these services is unclear and some services are managing increasing risks. We looked at these three areas specifically to understand how well these services are planning and delivering savings. Environmental Health and Waste Management service budgets have fallen whilst expenditure on Housing

Services has marginally increased in recent years. Environmental Health services are managing with reduced budgets and performance is mostly improving but it is unclear if the service is sustainable in the medium to long term. Housing services' performance remains mixed and the limited capacity within the service and the increasing demand it faces suggest there are growing housing risks in Monmouthshire. Waste services are managing well with less resources and performance is mostly improving although this could be difficult to sustain.

60 At a time of diminishing resources and growing budget pressures, it is important for councils to engage with local people about their services and to understand how changes in service delivery, as a result of budget decisions, are impacting on those that receive them. We found that residents in Monmouthshire use a wide range of Council services and, overall, most of the residents we spoke to are satisfied with the quality of most Council services although a small number are viewed as poor. The residents we spoke to felt that the quality of most Council services have neither improved or declined in the last year and remain broadly the same. There is mixed awareness amongst residents we spoke to of the Council's plans for the future and changes in how services will be provided.

The Council's improvement planning arrangements for 2012-13 improved and there were some examples of good scrutiny, but some weaknesses remain in arrangements for local indicators, assessments and scrutiny of performance

The Council's 2012-13 accounts were unqualified and financial statements were of a good standard

- 61 The auditor appointed by the Auditor General issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's accounts which were prepared to a good standard. [Appendix 3](#) gives more detail.

The Council improved its approach to improvement planning in 2012-13 but further alignment with strategic plans and clearer links between activities and measures were needed

- 62 The Council developed a Single Integrated Plan based on a Unified Needs Assessment. Partnerships and collaboration were considered as part of the Council's improvement planning process, but the benefits and outcomes from these partnerships and collaborations have not been clearly defined. There were some gaps in baseline information and the measures that the Council used to evaluate, monitor and report progress.
- 63 Improvement planning was not yet aligned with all other strategic planning activities and some of the development processes across the different plans were out of sync. This was preventing the Council from making the links across all of its strategic plans.
- 64 Through the Whole Place approach, the Council improved the way that partners and communities were engaged in planning for improvement and setting priorities.

- 65 It was not always clear what the Council wanted to achieve through activities associated with each improvement objective, how activities and performance measures linked or what the timescales and milestones for delivery were. The Council did not always develop a broad or comprehensive range of measures to evaluate the success of its activities for each improvement objective.

The Council's arrangements to evaluate its performance during 2012-13 started to improve but there were some weaknesses in arrangements for local indicators

- 66 The Council's central performance team supported service areas to manage their performance. Some services used performance information to improve their services, for example, social services.
- 67 The Council was developing a new performance management framework with better arrangements to evaluate and score performance against improvement objectives, a suite of corporate health indicators and a new (Ffynnon) performance data repository and reporting mechanism. It was also developing a self-evaluation framework based upon 10 questions with supporting evidence informed by the three directors' annual reports. The framework will also include reviews of governance and political and corporate capacity. We will assess the robustness and effectiveness of this framework as part of our 2014-15 Improvement Assessment work.

68 During summer 2013 we looked at a sample of performance measures and data systems to assess whether data was appropriate, robust and accurate. We examined the data systems for two National Strategic Indicators (NSIs) and four local indicators. Corporate arrangements for co-ordinating and reporting performance were developing but some systems for managing performance and ensuring data quality within services were not robust. The Council's arrangements using Internal Audit to check NSIs were well established and worked well.

69 However, local indicators were not subject to independent checks. Accountability for the quality of performance information within service areas was not always clear. We found avoidable errors in local indicator information that should have been corrected before being reported. Introducing checks would help to improve the accuracy and quality of the information being reported by services and support more effective performance management arrangements. Member involvement in scrutiny of performance data was limited and members were not involved in agreeing changes to performance targets. The Council needs to improve arrangements for setting and making changes to performance information and targets, to ensure that actual performance against targets is not being distorted and that there is sufficient justification for making changes during the year.

70 Of the sample of six indicators audited we found errors in one and another could not be audited because no data had been collected. A number of data reporting issues were also outlined in CSSIW's annual letter to the Council particularly in terms of child protection reviews carried out within timescales and adults receiving services for longer than 12 months.

There were some examples of good scrutiny but overall scrutiny of performance was patchy and assessments of performance were not always balanced

71 Challenge and scrutiny of performance was patchy. Cabinet members recognised that they need to challenge more and that existing relationships and ways of working had some key weaknesses in terms of diluting members' ability to challenge officers effectively and hold them to account in relation to progress and performance. Cabinet members were not always clear about their role and role descriptions were developed as a result. Cabinet members recognised the need to have a more formal approach to appraising officers of their performance. There were some examples of good evaluations against activity reviews in Service Improvement Plans, for example, in Housing. There were some examples of strong scrutiny but scrutiny committees need to seek assurance that the information they are provided with is accurate and consistently reported.

72 In 2012-13 members and officers took part in our Scrutiny Study. This provided opportunities to learn from each other by observing scrutiny meetings of neighbouring councils and providing feedback to each other. The Council undertook a self-evaluation of its Scrutiny function which was subsequently peer reviewed by the other councils. The Council then produced a final scrutiny self-evaluation reflecting their experience and peer feedback, and prepared an action plan to address the issues identified for improvement. The findings from the self-evaluation, and action plan (integrated into the scrutiny business plan) were received by the Council's Audit Committee in September 2013. The action plan identifies all of the key issues for Scrutiny and these have been reported regularly. Good progress has been made. But it is not clear what is left to do or by when, and all of the actions in the plan are the responsibility of one officer, which is a risk.

73 Assessments of performance against Improvement Objectives were not always balanced. Some of the Council's assessments were overly positive, for example, on the Improvement Objective on waste, the Council reports good performance overall, despite the fact that no usage or satisfaction ratings were carried out and of the eight measures of performance, three were not collected and three failed to meet targets. Actual performance declined on two measures and improved on one.

74 The Council did not systematically compare itself with others with a similar demographic profile in addition to looking for global solutions. Whilst it has compared itself with the Wales average for all NSIs, and in some cases with the UK average, it has not compared its performance to other councils with a similar profile, or used a broad range of comparative information.

The Council discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure for 2012-13; however, it should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

75 The Council published an assessment of its performance before 31 October 2013 which assessed performance and set out how the Council sought to discharge its duties under the measure. It included details of performance and comparisons as measured by NSIs.

76 The report also included a section on partnerships and collaboration, although only two key partnerships were specifically mentioned. The performance report could be improved by setting out the intended benefits and outcomes of partnerships and collaboration and their timescales and milestones.

- 77 The report was promoted in the press and on the homepage of the Council's website. It was available in Welsh and English and other formats on request. Summaries of the report were also available. The report included a section for citizens who wanted more information or wished to get involved in the future. However the report could be made more accessible by using plain language and less jargon.
- 78 In addition to the annual performance report, bi-annual outcome based score cards were reported to senior leadership team, Cabinet and Scrutiny.

The Council failed to discharge some of its improvement planning duties for 2013-14 and it was uncertain whether it was likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2013-14

In 2013-14, the Council failed to discharge some of its improvement planning duties under the Measure and should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

- 79 In our Improvement Assessment Letter dated 24th September 2013, we reported that the Council's 'Improvement Plan Stage 1 Forward Looking Plan 2013-16', (the Plan), met most of the requirements of the Measure but it was not published until 10 July 2013, which was not within a reasonable timescale. The Council planned to publish the report by the end of June 2013 but needed to make changes following comments at a Council meeting on 27 June, delaying publication. The Council needs to allow appropriate time in its plans to allow members to comment fully on the proposed final Plan and respond to any agreed amendments arising through the democratic process.
- 80 The Plan was not easily accessible to citizens, it is available in hard copy and this states that it is also available in English and Welsh to download from the Council's website, but we had difficulty finding it on the Council's website, and a Welsh version was not available. The Council needs to make the Plan more easily accessible on its website and more readily available to specific interest groups.
- 81 For 2013-14, the Council revised its improvement objectives and merged two improvement objective themes from previous years into one. For the five improvement objectives, the Plan includes an explanation of why and how they were chosen and how they reflect the key priorities for the Council. The basis and rationale for selecting each improvement objective was clearly set out and included context and stakeholder information. For each improvement objective, the resources available, activities planned and measures of impact were included (using an Outcomes Based Accountability² framework).
- 82 For some improvement objectives, for example, improving educational attainment, the evidence to judge impact was clear, with actions and measures on attendance and attainment. In others, however, the measures were not as robust. For example, in modernising the Council, the Council identifies 'cost effective ICT provision and strengthening absence management' as its focus. From the measurers identified, it was not clear how the improvement objective would be achieved, or how the measures of success linked to the activities and intended outcomes. There was no measure of sickness absence although we understand baseline information was being established. The measure, 'the number of times information is accessed from the website', was not robust. It is not possible to determine if the website was achieving efficiencies without other measures to compare with, such as the number of phone calls and face-to-face contacts. In addition,

² Outcome Based Accountability is focused on judging impact and outcomes and the difference services can make to people's quality of life.

the Council did not use a range of measures to evaluate website success (such as why it was accessed, customer satisfaction, and repeat visits) but focused only on the number of times it was accessed.

- 83 The Council undertook an equalities impact assessment for each of its five improvement objectives and brief information relating to protected groups under the Equality Act was provided in the Plan. For example, improvement objectives focused on young people fulfilling their potential within the education system, and protecting young people and their families, older people and people with disabilities. The activities contained within the Plan will be subject to an equality impact assessment prior to implementation.

It was uncertain whether the Council was likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement during 2013-14

- 84 The Council's 'Your County Your Way' approach to delivering better and more efficient services is being embedded across the Council. It is based on five interconnected approaches designed to deliver better and more efficient services for Monmouthshire citizens. They focus on: innovation and creativity, agile working, using excellent practice, using customer and citizen engagement, and using systems thinking. The Council has told us that these approaches have already delivered significant service improvements that have led to better services and cost efficiencies.

The Council's new arrangements to monitor progress against proposals for improvement made by the Wales Audit Office are not yet effective and progress on addressing proposals is mixed

- 85 In our Improvement Assessment Letter dated 24th September 2013, we reported that the Council has recently revised arrangements to monitor and report progress against our findings and proposals for improvement. The Council's Senior Leadership Team³ is now responsible for providing oversight and ensuring actions are taken to address proposals for improvement. These arrangements are still being embedded and further work is required to strengthen these processes. For example, the new reports that the Council has developed to track progress do not set out clear lines of accountability or timescales for delivery of actions and improvements. They also do not provide an evaluation of progress in addressing the proposals for improvement. This means that it is not possible to assess whether progress is being made or to determine if this is on track. Without clear lines of accountability it is also not possible for members and senior officers to effectively challenge progress and hold those responsible to account.
- 86 The Council has not accepted all of the areas for improvement we identified in our recent work. Its progress in addressing those that it has accepted is mixed. The Council reports that progress has been made in some areas, for example: its work on ensuring services comply with the Welsh Language Act; strengthening of its equalities

³ Outcome Based Accountability is focused on judging impact and outcomes and the difference services can make to people's quality of life.

impact assessment process; the update and sharing of its medium-term financial plan; the development of the Children's Services scorecard; and the improvements to the accessibility and publicity of the Council's performance assessment. Work in other areas, such as the implementation of the Ffynnon performance management system to support the Council's performance and programme management framework is on-going.

The Council is improving the way it identifies and monitors savings targets

- 87 In our Improvement Assessment Letter dated 24th September 2013, we reported that the Council is taking steps to address the difficult financial challenges it faces. The Council needs to save £2 million in 2013-14, increasing to £10 million in 2014-15. Historically, the Council has agreed percentage reductions in the budget, but for 2013-14 it has revised how it monitors the delivery of identified savings targets. Previously, the Council focused its monitoring on financial performance against the global departmental budget, but has now amended quarterly monitoring reports to specifically track progress against individual savings targets. During 2013-14, the Council aims to strengthen arrangements to monitor its progress in achieving the savings required.
- 88 In preparation for the medium-term financial plan, the Leader presented a 'state of the county speech' to full Council, setting out the context in which the Council will be

operating in the future with projected 20 to 40 per cent cuts in non-statutory services.

A Ministerial Education Recovery Board has been appointed following Estyn's judgement that the Council's education services for children and young people are unsatisfactory

- 89 In our Improvement Assessment Letter dated 24th September 2013, we reported that the Council is working closely with the Ministerial Recovery Board to address the shortcomings identified in the Estyn inspection of February 2013. Estyn will continue to monitor the authority's progress against its post inspection action plan throughout the year.

The Council's social services department has undertaken significant restructure both in adult and children's services over the last two years

- 90 The restructure in adult and children's services has resulted in staff vacancies at times and lack of capacity to achieve everything it set out to. Changes to assessment processes and ways of working in children's services and, in particular, referral and assessment teams have resulted in more effective decision making which has reduced caseloads to a more manageable level. However, increased numbers of looked after children and court proceedings created pressures in this area. The Council supported the team with additional temporary staff and further recruitment of staff to this team. The head of children's services reports an overall increase in staffing levels in children's services.

Some arrangements for planning and management of collaborative projects could be improved and that the lack of information on costs and benefits for many projects makes it difficult to assess value for money

91 In our collaboration report in February 2014, we reported the findings of our review of collaborative working across four councils in Gwent: Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire and Torfaen. The reviews sought to assess whether the councils' approaches to collaboration were robust and delivering what they intended.

92 We found that councils we surveyed are involved in many collaborative projects and Monmouthshire has fewer of these projects than the other councils. We also found that the planning and management of some projects could be improved by clearly setting out the rationale for collaborating, nominating a lead officer and specifying clear timescales for the project. And finally, we found that collaboration projects in the councils we surveyed generally lack information on the costs and benefits of collaboration, which has made it difficult to assess value for money.

The Council's review of its governance arrangements was reasonably robust

93 We reported our findings on the Council's review of its governance arrangements in April 2013 in our 'Joint Progress Report' which was too late to fully address all of the findings and recommendations as part of preparing the 2012-13 Annual Governance Statement. We are monitoring progress in

implementing the agreed actions within this report and will update the Council's Audit Committee on the following matters:

- whether the 2013-14 Annual Governance Statement not only meets the high-level requirements of the accounting code and 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework' published by CIPFA/SOLACE in June 2007; and
- whether formal evidence has been retained that shows whether the specific assurance measures stated in the Corporate Governance Code have been delivered satisfactorily.

94 We will also assess whether there is an increased officer and member understanding of the principles underpinning the Annual Governance Statement and their roles in identifying and assessing the effectiveness of each element of the governance framework as set out in the Corporate Governance Code. This would lead to greater challenge of the Annual Governance Statement content by SLT/Members to ensure broad ownership and that that it takes into account wider issues affecting the Council. It would also lead to broadening the commentary in the Annual Governance Statement concerning the governance arrangements of the Council's involvement in collaborative projects.

It is uncertain whether the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15

- 95 The Council has made some improvements to its arrangements in 2012-13 and 2013-14, particularly in the way it engages citizens in improvement, works in partnership with other organisations and manages its finances and savings. A senior management restructure is currently taking place to create capacity that is fit for the future. The Council has improved the timeliness of its improvement planning and the 2014-15 Improvement Plan was approved by at the Council meeting on 23 May and published on 30 May 2014.
- 96 In the current challenging financial climate, all councils are being encouraged to challenge existing service delivery models, to develop more efficient and effective ways of working and to take well managed risks. Monmouthshire has developed and introduced a number of new approaches, including demand management and local area co-ordination as part of its drive to reshape the Council to be fit for the future. We are not yet in a position to judge the success and impact of these changes and will continue to monitor the Council's progress in improving its arrangements and performance.
- 97 But there are still areas for improvement that are not being addressed effectively, for example, in delivering improvements in some priority areas and in self-assessing and challenging the Council's performance.
- 98 Our previous Annual Improvement Report published in April 2013 reported positively on the strength of the Council's financial leadership which has dealt well with the budgetary challenges of the last few years. The Council continues to set and manage its budget well but now faces further significant challenges following fundamental changes in the financial climate.
- 99 Despite a very challenging grant settlement from the Welsh Government, the Council has set a balanced budget for 2014-15. Following a period of consultation and public engagement this has been achieved by identifying savings of £7.2 million, utilising general and earmarked reserves of £2.1 million and increasing council tax by 3.95 per cent. A £11.3 million funding gap has been identified for 2015-16 to 2017-18. To bridge this gap, the 3.95 per cent increase in council tax is expected to generate £4 million, with £6.9 million being sourced from recurring and additional savings with the balance coming from reserves.
- 100 At the nine-month point the Council is projecting a £0.336 million overspend on its 2013-14 revenue budget and the potential consequences of this will need to be monitored in regard to the impact on reserves, in particular in ensuring that general balances are retained at a prudent level.

- 101 Capital expenditure is also under pressure. Future investment in capital schemes, particularly in regard to the Council's 21st century schools programme, is dependent on the future success of the Council receiving expected capital receipts and there are significant risks attached to this.
- 102 The increasing financial challenges put significant pressure on officers and members, but we remain confident that the Council will continue to manage its financial position robustly and responsibly. We will continue to monitor how the Council develops its detailed proposals to manage its financial position.
- 103 Estyn will continue to monitor the Council's progress against its post inspection action plan throughout the year.
- 104 Based on this and taking into account the conclusions in this report, the Auditor General for Wales believes that it is uncertain whether the Council will meet the requirements of the Measure in making arrangements to secure continuous improvement.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake an annual improvement assessment, and to publish an annual improvement report, for each improvement authority in Wales. This requirement covers local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

This report has been produced by the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges his duties under section 19 to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an improvement assessment under section 18 and stating whether, as a result of his improvement plan audit under section 17, he believes that the authority has discharged its improvement planning duties under section 15.

Improvement authorities are under a general duty to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions'. Improvement authorities are defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

The annual improvement assessment is the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. The improvement assessment is a forward-looking assessment of an authority's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It also includes a retrospective assessment of whether an authority has achieved its planned improvements in order to inform a view as to the authority's track record of improvement. The Auditor General will summarise his audit and assessment work in a published Annual Improvement Report for each authority (under section 24).

The Auditor General may also in some circumstances carry out special inspections (under section 21), which will be reported to the authority and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). An important ancillary activity for the 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 may also take account of information shared by relevant regulators (under section 33) in his assessments.

Appendix 2

Useful information about Monmouthshire and Monmouthshire County Council

The Council

The Council's budget is £179.8 million for 2013-14. This equates to about £1,965 per resident. In the same year, the Council also had a capital budget of £18.4 million.

Band D council tax in 2012-13 for Monmouthshire was £1,229 per year. This has increased by 0.6 per cent to £1,236 per year for 2013-14. 46.6 per cent of Monmouthshire's housing is in council tax bands A to D.

The Council is made up of 43 elected members who represent the community and make decisions about priorities and use of resources. The political make-up of the Council is as follows:

- 19 Conservatives
- 10 Independent
- 11 Labour
- 3 Welsh Liberal Democrats

Monmouthshire's Chief Executive is Paul Matthews. There are three Chief Officers: for Education (Simon Burch), Enterprise (Kellie Beirne) and Social Care and Health (Sarah McGuinness). The Strategic Leadership team is made up of the Chief Executive, the three Chief Officers, and the Head of Finance (Joy Robson), Head of Democracy (Tracey Harry), Head of Partnerships (Will McLean), Head of Operations (Roger Hoggins) and Head of Innovation (Peter Davies).

Other information

The Assembly Member for Monmouthshire is:

- Nick Ramsey, Monmouthshire, Conservative

The Regional Assembly Members for Monmouthshire are:

- Mohammad Asghar, South Wales East, Conservative Party
- Jocelyn Davies, South Wales East, Plaid Cymru
- Lindsay Whittle, South Wales East, Plaid Cymru
- William Graham, South Wales East, Conservative Party

The Members of Parliament for Monmouthshire for 2010-15 are:

- David Davies, Monmouthshire, Conservative.

For more information see the Council's own website at www.monmouthshire.gov.uk or contact the Council at PO Box 106, Caldicot, NP26 9AN.

Appendix 3

Annual Audit Letter

Councillor Peter Fox
Leader
Monmouthshire County Council
County Hall
Rhadyr
Usk
Monmouthshire
NP15 1GA

Dear Councillor Fox

Annual Audit Letter

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

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

It is the Council's responsibility to:

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

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

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

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This Code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards.

On 30 September 2013 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members of the Audit Committee and to the full Council in my Audit of Financial Statements report on 19 and 26 September 2013 respectively.

We reported that a small number of amendments were made to the draft Statement of Accounts and that none of these were material. We also reported that whilst some misstatements were identified they were also not material and therefore they had no adverse impact upon the audit opinion.

A further report, Joint Progress Document, which summarised all of the issues identified from our audit was reported to the Audit Committee on 7 November which the Council should address as part of the 2013-14 accounts production arrangements. During our 2103-14 audit we will be tracking the progress made by officers to address these issues and we will keep members of the Audit Committee appropriately informed of the outcome of this work.

During the year, we have reported weaknesses in the Council's grant management arrangements. Our 2012-13 grants certification work is ongoing and the results of our work, including the follow-up of our recommendations, will be reported to the Council's Audit Committee early in 2014.

My consideration of the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness has been based on the audit work undertaken on the accounts as well as placing reliance on the work completed as part of the Improvement Assessment under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. Overall, I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place. The Auditor General will highlight areas where the effectiveness of these arrangements has yet to be demonstrated or where improvements could be made when he publishes his Annual Improvement Report.

Going forward the recent budget settlement will mean that all local government bodies in Wales will face extremely challenging financial positions. The Council has identified a £22 million funding gap over the next four years and whilst the Council are in the process of updating its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and identifying the potential savings areas to bridge this gap, it should be ensured that appropriate arrangements are established to closely monitor the extent to which the Council meets the finalised savings targets.

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 30 September 2013

The financial audit fee for 2012-13 is currently expected to be in line with the agreed fee set out in the Annual Audit Outline.

Yours sincerely

Richard Harries

For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor
21 November 2013

cc. Mr Paul Matthews, Chief Executive
Mrs Joy Robson, Head of Finance

Appendix 4

Monmouthshire County Council's improvement objectives and self-assessment

The Council's improvement objectives

The Council is required by the Welsh Government to make plans to improve its functions and the services it provides. Each year it must publish these plans along with specific 'improvement objectives' that set out the key things that the Council intends to do to improve. The Council must do this as soon as possible after 1 April each year.

The Council published its improvement objectives for 2013-14 in its *Sustainable and Resilient Communities 2013-2016* which can be found on the Council's website at www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Stage-1-Improvement-Plan-2013-16_2.01.pdf

2012-13 Improvement Objectives	2013-14 Improvement Objectives
We will continue to bring together health, social care and independent agencies in a single model of community based care called the Gwent Frailty Programme. More specifically, this year we will continue to operate multi-disciplinary teams to deliver integrated practice and instigate the 'Missing link' programme aimed at improving our response to missing/runaway children.	We will provide an improved education provision for Monmouthshire.
We want to improve the prosperity of our county and its attractiveness to business. This year we will build on the progress we have made in supporting both existing and new businesses and also turn our focus to maximising both the financial and social return on investment in our tourism economy.	We will work to help people live their own lives by building flexible and responsive services building on people's strengths and helping people find local connections and lasting solutions to their needs.
We want to provide a joined-up and comprehensive approach to area regeneration and development. Continuing from last year, we will work in partnership with key organisations to either review existing or develop new holistic area regeneration plans for our key towns of Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow and Monmouth. We will also use this approach in developing smaller communities starting in Llanelly Hill and Overmonnow.	We will help to regenerate our towns and create employment opportunities within the county.

2012-13 Improvement Objectives	2013-14 Improvement Objectives
<p>We want to improve the way we provide education to ensure the best learning opportunities for our children, young people and the wider community. More specifically this year we will implement the Education Achievement Service as a joint authority approach to develop better teaching and learning practices, we will put the wheels in motion to improve the school sites so they are fit to deliver 21st century education and we will continue our programme of building a modern ICT infrastructure within our schools.</p>	<p>We want to work with our residents to reduce the impact we have on the environment and use our resources more sustainably.</p>
<p>We want to work with our partners and the community to increase the amount of waste treated in a sustainable manner and work towards a long-term sustainable alternative to landfill. As part of this we will progress Prosiect Gwyrdd to offer a long-term and sustainable way of treating residual waste.</p>	<p>We want to remain an efficient and effective organisation, delivering our priorities in conjunction with key partners, stakeholders and citizens, amidst significant ongoing financial constraints.</p>
<p>We want to modernise the way the Council is run to improve the way we work. More specifically we will focus on changing the culture of our organisation to make sure that we listen to what our communities want and become more responsive and innovative in meeting those needs.</p>	

The Council's self-assessment of performance

The Council's self-assessment of its performance can be found in the *Looking at the Future: Your County Your Way. How we performed 2012/13 Improvement Plan – Stage 2* located on the Council's website at: www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/2013-14_Improvement-Plan_Stage-2_2.0-Published.pdf

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