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Ms Alison Ward CBE  
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Reference 643A2013  
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Dear Alison

## Improvement Assessment

In my letter of 9 October 2013 I gave my opinion on whether the Council had discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning.

I am also required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) to give an opinion on whether Torfaen County Borough Council (the Council) has discharged its duties in respect of improvement reporting and met the requirements of the Measure.

**In my opinion, and based on audit work undertaken to date the Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure although there is potential to strengthen its arrangements further**

I have reached this conclusion because:

- The Council published an assessment of its performance in its report *Our Performance Report for the Financial Year 2012-13: Delivering our Corporate Plan 2* (the Performance Report) before 31 October 2013.
- The Performance Report assesses the Council's performance in the preceding financial year (2012-13) and clearly sets out how it has sought to discharge its duties under the Measure. The Performance Report is well structured and easy to follow, with the commentary assessing the Council's performance being concise and well balanced in the majority of areas.
- The Performance Report evaluates the Council's success in achieving its improvement objectives and expresses its view clearly. I set out below where this evaluation can be improved further.
- The Performance Report enables citizens to provide feedback or make comments on the Review.

- The Performance Report includes details of performance and comparisons as measured by the national statutory performance indicators.
- The Performance Report includes a short section on the ways in which the Council has sought to collaborate.

In developing its 2012 -13 Performance Report, the Council has responded well to the messages highlighted in my assessment of the Council's 2011-12 Performance Report, as issued in my letter dated 7 December 2012. My key observations and details of where the Council can improve its Performance Report further are:

- The Performance Report sets out the Council's assessment of its performance against the 10 Improvement Objectives that it selected as priorities for 2012-13. In providing that assessment, the Council now provides an overall conclusion on its rate of success against each of these areas for the year. However, this overall judgement is predominantly driven by the number of activities and measures that have been met within that Improvement Objective over the year. The Council should support its overall assessment by providing additional commentary and drawing upon wider evidence and examples of how the Council and its service areas have delivered against these Improvement Objectives in the year.
- Appendix three of the Performance report sets out the work that has progressed during 2012-13 with its significant collaborative projects along with an assessment of the impact of this activity. This impact assessment is predominantly forward looking and the Council needs to develop this further to state the actual measureable outcomes that have been achieved and whether these are in line with the Council's intended plans.
- The Performance Report provides a comparison of performance against other councils for statutory published indicators. It has also used graphs, charts and tables to summarise where measures have improved, declined or stayed the same, compared to the previous year. Whilst individual service areas routinely compare their performance by reference to available benchmarking data and other intelligence in their normal business activities, the outcomes of these comparisons are not formally documented as part of the assessment of the Council's performance. Service areas should more clearly identify in their individual performance assessments how they have considered and used comparative information and reflected on best practice and high performers to deliver continuous improvement.

## Further proposals for improvement

One new proposal for improvement is being suggested in this letter. We will continue to monitor and report on the progress made by the Council in implementing the proposals set out in my previous reports and letters.

### Proposals for improvement

P1 Service areas should formally document how they have considered and used comparative information and reflected on best practice and high performers to deliver continuous improvement.

I will undertake more detailed work on the arrangements that support the Council's performance management and reporting over the following months and report this, as well as summarising all of my work and that of relevant regulators during 2013-14, in an Annual Improvement Report for the Council that I will issue by the end of March 2014.

Yours sincerely



**HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS**  
**Auditor General for Wales**

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business

Non Jenkins – Regional Manager

Janet Villars – Performance Audit Lead