



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report 2015-16

Flintshire County Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Jeremy Evans and Paul Goodlad under the direction of Jane Holownia.

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Summary report

About this report

- 1 This Annual Improvement Report (AIR) summarises the audit work undertaken at Flintshire County Council (the Council) since the last such report was published in March 2015. This report also includes a summary of the key findings from reports issued by ‘relevant regulators’, namely: the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW); Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn); and the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC). Nonetheless, this report does not represent a comprehensive review of all the Council’s arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on the work carried out at the Council by relevant external review bodies and, unless stated otherwise, reflect the situation at the point in time that such work was concluded.
- 2 Taking into consideration the work carried out during 2015-16, the Auditor General will state in this report whether he believes that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2016-17.
- 3 This statement should not be seen as a definitive diagnosis of organisational health or as a prediction of future success. Rather, it should be viewed as providing an opinion on the extent to which the arrangements currently in place are reasonably sound insofar as can be ascertained from the work carried out.
- 4 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@audit.wales or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

2015-16 performance audit work

- 5 The work carried out since the last AIR, including that of the 'relevant regulators', is set out below:

Project name	Brief description
Wales Audit Office Financial Resilience Review	Review of the Council's financial position and how it is budgeting and delivering on required savings.
Wales Audit Office Annual 'Improvement Plan' Audit	Review of the Council's published plans for delivering on improvement objectives.
Wales Audit Office Annual 'Assessment of Performance' Audit	Review of the Council's published performance assessment, including testing and validation of performance information.
CSSIW: Review of the Social Services Department's performance 2014-15	Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance of the Council's Social Services functions for 2014-15.
Estyn desk top analysis	An overview of key issues at the Council, prepared by Estyn.
Wales Audit Office Benchmarking social services costs against performance	A review across the six North Wales councils, exploring the value of current social services performance indicators and their links if any to service delivery costs.
Wales Audit Office Performance Assessment	Assessment of progress against the proposals for improvement included within the Council's Annual Improvement Report 2014 (incorporating the Corporate Assessment Report 2014), published in March 2015.
Follow-up work	To seek assurance that the Council has appropriate corporate processes for responding to Wales Audit Office reports, tracking implementation of recommendations and reporting this to the appropriate committee.
National Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The financial resilience of councils in Wales • Community safety partnerships • Income generation and charging • Council funding of third-sector services

Despite increasing financial pressures, the Council has continued to improve performance within its priority areas and to strengthen its corporate arrangements

- 6 Based on, and limited to, the work carried out by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators, the Auditor General believes that the Council complies with the requirements of the Measure and is likely to comply with the requirements of the Measure and secure improvement during 2016-17.
- 7 The Auditor General has reached this conclusion because:
 - a despite increasing budget pressures the Council continues to make good progress against its priority areas and maintains compliance with the Local Government Measure 2009;
 - b the Council is strengthening its management of financial resources, but has made less consistent progress revising other resource management strategies; and
 - c the Council has made good progress in addressing the governance-related proposals for improvement arising from our 2015 corporate assessment report.

Recommendations

- 8 Given the wide range of services provided by the Council and the challenges it is facing, it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
 - a make proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Council, we would expect it to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
 - b make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made, the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
 - c conduct a special inspection, publish a report and make recommendations; and
 - d recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 9 During the course of the year, the Auditor General did not make any formal recommendations, but other reports issued to the Council did identify lower-priority issues, known as proposals for improvement, and may be referred to later on in this report. We will continue to monitor proposals for improvement during the course of our improvement assessment work.

- 10 The Auditor General also makes recommendations that may be relevant to the Council in his Local Government National Reports. A list of recommendations contained in reports issued during 2015-16 is included in [Appendix 3](#).
- 11 In addition, the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW), and the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC) included areas for improvement/action in their inspection reports and letters issued to the Council during the year. These are available at www.cssiw.org.uk and www.comisiynyddygybraeg.org.
- 12 Estyn did not issue any inspection reports to the Council during 2014-15.

Detailed report



Performance

Despite increasing budget pressures the Council continues to make good progress against its priority areas and maintains compliance with the Local Government Measure 2009

- 13 The Council has complied with the Local Government Measure 2009. We issued compliance certificates for the Council's Improvement Plan 2015-16 in July 2015 and for the 2014-15 Annual Performance Report in November 2015.

The Council has a protocol for dealing with national reports produced by the external auditor, other regulators and inspectors and continues to strengthen its approach for responding to recommendations

- 14 The Council's Policy and Performance team is responsible for circulating all external audit and inspection reports to appropriate officers and committees. Distribution arrangements remain flexible, especially where national reports may have implications for a wider internal audience. This approach helps to ensure that officers and Members are aware of reports and associated recommendations affecting their area of responsibility.
- 15 During 2013, the Council updated its approach for reviewing and reporting its compliance with external audit and inspection report recommendations. These arrangements are still maturing. For example, there is no prescribed approach for routinely reporting progress against agreed actions; officers provide feedback to the appropriate committee, but this happens on a more ad hoc basis. However, the Audit Committee receives a comprehensive annual report, intended to provide assurance that all external regulator and inspection reports have been considered in the appropriate Member committees and action taken in response to the recommendations, where appropriate. The Internal Audit Manager presented the third annual report to the Audit Committee in January 2016.

The Council has accelerated the rate of progress against its improvement priorities

- 16 The Council prioritised the protection of frontline services when setting its annual budgets. This has contributed to an ongoing improvement in performance, as measured by national performance indicators. During 2014-15, the Council maintained or improved its performance for almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of national performance indicators. Although this was slightly below the 67 per cent achieved in 2013-14, it is still good performance, considering the significant financial pressures facing local government.
- 17 The Council's performance relative to other councils in Wales improved significantly. The proportion of indicators where performance was better than the national average improved from 51 per cent in 2013-14 to 62 per cent in 2014-15 and a higher proportion of national indicators were in the top half – 60 per cent in 2014-15 compared to 54 per cent in 2013-14. Data from the National Survey for Wales¹ reinforces this view of relative performance. The Council was one of only

¹ The National Survey for Wales involves around 12,000 people a year across the whole of Wales. The Welsh Government uses the results to help make Wales a better place to live in.

three councils in Wales where public perceptions about the quality of services² did not deteriorate between 2013-14 and 2014-15. This moved the Council up from seventh out of 22 to second in 2014-15, for that specific aspect of the survey.

- 18 The Council's Annual Performance Report routinely evaluates performance and progress against its improvement priorities³, the underlying sub-priorities and the high-level activities that support these priorities. Over recent years, our own analysis of the Council's progress and performance has confirmed that its self-evaluations are well balanced and supported by good evidence. A comparison of the Council's assessment of progress in 2013-14 and 2014-15 (**Exhibit 1**) also shows progress across the Council's hierarchy of strategic and operational improvement priorities.

Exhibit 1: Comparison of the Council's evaluation of progress in 2013-14 and 2014-15

Area of progress	Self-Assessment Data from the 2013-14 Performance Report	Self-Assessment Data from the 2014-15 Performance Report
Progress against the Council's eight Improvement Priorities	Good Progress: 2 Satisfactory Progress: 6 Limited Progress: 0	Good Progress: 7 Satisfactory Progress: 1 Limited Progress: 0
Progress against the Council's sub-priorities	Good Progress: 11 Satisfactory Progress: 13 Limited Progress: 0 (24 sub-priorities in 2013-14)	Good Progress: 16 Satisfactory Progress: 6 Limited Progress: 0 (22 sub-priorities in 2014-15)
Progress against the Council's high-level activities	Good Progress: 55 Satisfactory Progress: 41 Limited Progress: 2 (98 high-level activities in 2013-14)	Good Progress: 50 Satisfactory Progress: 28 Limited Progress: 1 (79 high-level activities in 2014-15)

Source: Flintshire County Council

- 19 The Council secured the full Welsh Government Outcome Agreement grant for 2013-14 and 2014-15; this helps the Council to demonstrate that it has continued to improve outcomes for local people within the context of national priorities.

² In both 2013-14 and 2014-15, 61 per cent of survey respondents from Flintshire either strongly agreed, or tended to agree, that their local authority provided high quality services.

³ The Council's eight Improvement Priorities focus on Housing, Living Well, Economy & Enterprise, Skills and Learning, Safe Communities, Poverty, Environment, Modern and Efficient Council.

The Council has made progress in the majority of improvement areas previously identified by CSSIW, but some areas of weaker performance remain in both children's and adult services

- 20 The CSSIW published its Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2014-15 for Flintshire County Council in October 2015. This section of the report summarises CSSIW's evaluation of the Council's performance in delivering its social services functions; the full report is available on their [website](#).
- 21 The CSSIW found that the Council is facing significant challenges in accommodating the new responsibilities created by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The Council is realistic about the risks posed by increasing demand, meeting greater complexity of need and growing budgetary pressures. In response, it has developed a number of new service models as part of a strategic transformation programme that is increasingly focused upon the goal of creating an integrated preventative system for care.
- 22 The Council accepts that the early benefits and achievements gained through its reablement programme can no longer be achieved on the same scale, and anticipates increasing numbers of older people in particular who will have ongoing support or complex care needs. As a consequence, the Council is developing improved access arrangements, investing in smarter commissioning and forging stronger and more integrated working arrangements with an outcome focus. In particular, there is more confidence that the new working structure being implemented by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) will provide a more solid locality focus.
- 23 Adult safeguarding arrangements are in transition and require strengthening in order to provide a more consistent response. Thresholds are inconsistently applied and adults at risk need to have a stronger voice and be at the centre of working practice. During mid-2015, CSSIW inspected Children's Social Services at the Council, focusing on access to services and the quality of work in children's services during the past year. In particular, the inspection looked at the impact for children, young people and their families and how well the Council responded to their needs.
- 24 The CSSIW found that the Council needs to review its early intervention and prevention arrangements to ensure a timely and consistently appropriate response. Re-referral rates have significantly increased; the Council needs to understand and then address the reasons for this increase. Full details of the inspection – which was reported in September 2015 – are available from [CSSIW's website](#).
- 25 Life chances for looked after children require sustained commitment and determination if they are to improve. Whilst recent outcomes have been good, there are indications that corporate parenting is not as effective as it could be. A significant number of placements are not in the immediate area, school placements are not as stable as they were and health assessments are not routinely undertaken. The Council needs to review how to address these issues in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for current looked after children.

- 26 During early 2015, CSSIW also inspected the Council's fostering services and found that many things were being done very well, such as good awareness of child need and a real commitment to providing high quality information. The Council is aware of the need to find more people willing to be foster carers. The report can be downloaded from the [CSSIW website](#).
- 27 As part of the Wales Audit Office Social Services Sustainability work across the six North Wales councils, we produced a document for the Council that presented:
- a future demand for social services in Flintshire through benchmarking population projections for children and older people; and
 - b a suite of graphical analyses that combined financial and performance data for social services in Flintshire over multiple years and which also placed the Council within the context of the other 21 Welsh councils.
- 28 There were no recommendations or conclusions arising from this work. Each council received a data pack containing value-for-money data and we facilitated a North Wales-wide workshop for Directors of Social Services and other key senior managers.

Estyn's evaluation of school performance

- 29 The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in Flintshire is much lower than the Wales average. This is taken into account when evaluating the performance in the authority.
- 30 Performance in the Foundation Phase indicator and the key stage 2 core subject indicator has steadily improved over the last four years. Performance in both indicators was just above the Wales average in 2015, but below that in similar authorities. At key stage 3, performance in the core subject indicator has remained well above the Wales average for the last five years and, in 2015, was broadly in line with performance in similar authorities.
- 31 At key stage 4, performance in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics has consistently been above the Wales average for the last five years. However, performance has declined for two consecutive years in 2014 and 2015 and is now lower than in similar authorities. Performance in the capped average wider points score has improved every year for the last five years, but at a slower rate than for Wales as a whole. In 2015, performance was lower than the Wales average for the first time, and much lower than in similar authorities. The authority has not met either of the benchmarks set by the Welsh Government for key stage 4 performance in 2015, having met one in the previous two years and both in 2012. The proportion of pupils achieving five A* or A grades at GCSE or equivalent has been consistently below the Wales average and well below that for similar authorities for five years.

- 32 In primary schools, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals, while gradually improving, has been below the Wales average for the last two years. In secondary schools, however, the performance of these pupils has remained above the Wales average during the same period.
- 33 Primary school attendance has improved at a slower rate than for Wales as a whole and, for the first time in five years, was lower than the Wales average in 2015. Secondary school attendance has been above the Wales average for five years and in 2015 was average, compared to levels in similar authorities.
- 34 For the last two years, the rate of exclusions in Flintshire's schools has been above the Wales average and much higher than in similar authorities. Despite this, in 2014, the authority had the lowest percentage of Year 11 leavers not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Wales.

Use of resources

The Council is strengthening its management of financial resources, but has made less consistent progress revising other resource management strategies

The appointed auditor issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts, with key matters to be addressed reported to the Audit Committee

35 The Auditor General issued an Annual Audit Letter to the Council on 2 December 2015, subsequently reported to the Audit Committee in January 2016. The letter summarised the key messages arising from his statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. The Auditor General issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements, confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Pension Fund's financial position and transactions. The Annual Audit Letter is provided in [Appendix 2](#) of this report.

The Council is strengthening its financial planning arrangements but its approach to setting budgets for 2016-17 was high risk

36 The Council's overall vision and eight strategic priorities are clearly articulated within its Council Plan. During 2015-16, the Council has responded to feedback from our March 2015 corporate assessment report by further strengthening the links between its improvement objectives, service and financial plans. The Council has also taken action to ensure that its budgets are better aligned to support the delivery of its corporate vision, aims and improvement objectives.

37 The Council's approach to budget planning is informed by comprehensive and reasonable assumptions based on robust data. Part 1 of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) provides a forecast of the resources likely to be available to the Council over three years (2015-16 to 2017-18) including the pressures on those resources. The Council set out the impacts of national funding reductions and the lack of availability of national resources to meet inflationary and other cost pressures in its MTFS. Part 2 of the MTFS sets out a three-part funding strategy to meet the £45.5 million⁴ budget reductions identified for the duration of the MTFS, these are:

- a Part 1: service reform and business planning;
- b Part 2: corporate financial stewardship; and
- c Part 3: working with the Welsh Government to obtain additional funding to bridge the remaining gap.

⁴ The MTFS identified a budget gap of £52.8 million, prior to the December 2015 provisional settlement, which subsequently reduced the budget gap to some £45.5 million.

- 38 The Council recognised that pressing the Welsh Government for an improved financial settlement from that first forecast by the Council was a high-risk approach – but it was clear that the alternative would mean the Council would have to make unacceptable cuts to front line services.
- 39 In December 2015, the Welsh Government announced a lower than anticipated reduction in Revenue Support Grant, 1.5 per cent for 2016-17, rather than the 3.5 per cent the Council forecast in the MTFS. Having already identified cost reductions in the order of £12.4 million for 2016-17 the impact of the provisional settlement, together with new and emergent pressures, reduced the remaining budget gap to £3.5 million⁵. The January 2016 report to Cabinet highlighted work to identify further budget reduction options, including workforce costs, council tax and the use of reserves and balances (£1.4 million). The agreed cost reduction areas were presented to Cabinet and Council in February 2016. The Council has now set a balanced budget for 2016-17, without the need for additional funding from the Welsh Government.

The Council is strengthening its financial controls, including the development of a comprehensive income generation and charging policy

- 40 The Council has effective budget setting and generally effective budget monitoring arrangements, underpinned by financial procedural rules that clearly define roles, responsibilities and accountability. It also has a clearly defined scheme of delegation and protocols for managing budget under or overspends.
- 41 The Council is also rolling out a new software system, intended to fully automate the budget monitoring process, promote a more consistent approach to budgetary control across the Council and reduce the number of individual spreadsheets used within different service departments. The Council anticipates that this will help the Finance function to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the support it provides by improving management access to financial information and the timeliness of information to Members.
- 42 During 2015-16, the Council has strengthened its ability to monitor and respond to budget pressures and emerging variances by establishing eight Programme Boards – involving senior officers and Members – that challenge and review performance regularly. However, in common with many of its peers, the Council does not robustly monitor its key financial ratios – so it is unable to benchmark them against similar bodies.
- 43 Maximising income generation is a key component of the Council's budget and a main strand within the MTFS. The MTFS recognises that the Council will need to develop its income policy and identify new opportunities for income generation. The Council is developing a more comprehensive income-generation strategy – which it expects to complete during 2016 – building on earlier work to develop a single and consistent fees and charges policy. The Council intends the strategy to define the arrangements for annually reviewing existing fees and charges and key principles for maximising future income. It will also take into account future government policy

⁵ Report to Cabinet: 19 January 2016 and 16 February 2016.

and wider national and local analysis including the economic position so as to establish any future risks around customer uptake or 'drop off'. The strategy will also include any implications of national reform. For example, the cap applied to health care and any impact on income generation if reviewed in Wales and what the financial implications of this would be to the Council. The Council expects the new income generation strategy, along with others, to complement the delivery of the Council's MTFs.

- 44 Traditionally, despite generally effective budget setting and monitoring arrangements, our work on the audit of the financial statements over the last few years has found that some aspects of the Council's wider financial control arrangements were not sufficiently robust. As a result we subsequently participated in a post project learning session with officers to identify opportunities to improve the Council's controls and approach. That meeting generated a range of ideas to improve the Council's processes and working methods, which the Council is now implementing.

The Council has comprehensive arrangements to review and challenge financial performance and is taking action to ensure sufficient corporate and financial capacity and improved accounts production

- 45 The Council's leadership team has a good understanding of the significant and rapidly changing financial challenges and risks facing the Council. In addition to formal arrangements for reporting and challenging budget performance, such as Cabinet and Scrutiny, the Council has developed more informal, but nevertheless robust arrangements. The Council has also restructured its chief officer team to promote collective responsibility for strategic financial planning.
- 46 As well as regular interaction between chief officers and the S151 Officer, the Council has established eight Programme Boards that meet regularly to challenge and review performance. Collectively, these arrangements encourage routine challenge of financial assumptions and performance and help to broaden Member and officer understanding of the Council's financial position.
- 47 Members receive regular, detailed budget reports that provide information on progress, variance against plans and corrective action already underway or planned. This allows members to scrutinise and challenge financial performance effectively and to hold lead members and officers to account.
- 48 The Council has continued to enhance its approach to engaging with stakeholders on budget issues. The development of the 2016-17 budget was informed by the 'This is Your Moment' consultation. Based on its experiences, the Council provided more comprehensive information on the challenges and options it faces and staged a series of seven public meetings throughout the county to listen to the views of its citizens. A total of 319 people attended these meetings and in addition approximately 6,500 people viewed the Council's online information in one form or another.

- 49 Whilst the Council has demonstrated improvements in budget setting and managing financial performance, it continues to face challenges in the preparation of its financial statements. The Council's annual accounts have been subject to amendment during the annual audit process in recent years. For the 2014-15 annual accounts several notable amendments were needed before they could be finalised for presentation for approval. Whilst there is a developed action plan in place both to improve the annual accounting process, and to widen collective responsibility for the annual accounts amongst senior officers with accountability for service resources and expenditure, the work is not complete and will be tested during the audit of the 2015-16 financial statements.

Inconsistent progress on revisions to the strategies for People, ICT and Asset Management has delayed completion of an overarching corporate resourcing strategy

Corporate Assessment Proposal for Improvement P3

The Council should ensure that, in implementing its revised strategies for People, ICT and Asset Management:

- their financial implications feed into the medium-term financial plan; and
- the links between the strategies are fully considered so that specialist staff are available when required

- 50 The Council approved a new asset management strategy in February 2016, but has made limited progress with the development of new strategies for ICT and People. However, the Council's approach has focused on aligning resources to its priority activities.
- 51 The Council's new Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan 2016-2020 (CS&) provides a clear vision for its land and building assets. The CS& strengthens the Council's medium-term approach to managing its assets by providing a structured and integrated approach for both capital and asset management.
- 52 The CS& includes robust links to the MTFS, with clear aims and principles that support effective management of the Council's assets. There are also clear links between the Council's capital programme and its service and revenue budget planning processes, both of which take account of the MTFS framework. The Council regards the CS& as a key enabler – alongside the MTFS and the Improvement Plan – to help it minimise the impact of ongoing financial pressures.

- 53 The CS& identifies the Council's 'needs and priorities' for the next five years and defines the role of the Asset Programme Board (APB), which includes senior officers from each of the Council's portfolios. The APB is responsible for developing and managing work streams associated with the Council's capital programme and wider asset base and the asset disposal strategy and plan. The APB also has a remit to promote strong links between the CS& and other corporate strategies, including the MTFS. Together, these arrangements foster an integrated approach to asset management, with the potential to support strategic and operational development and change.
- 54 The development of a new ICT strategy began in early 2015, but was delayed by a decision to restructure the service. However, the service has continued to support Council priorities and the corporate change programme. The Council now expects to finalise the new ICT strategy during summer 2016.
- 55 Our corporate assessment report acknowledged that delivery of the Council's Single Status agreement and Equal Pay Review was very demanding and affected the progress of other Human Resources and Organisational Development (HR & OD) priorities. Since then, long-term staff absences and a focus on supporting service reviews and business plans have significantly reduced the capacity of the HR & OD team, delaying progress with the new People Strategy.
- 56 The delay in developing and implementing new ICT and People Strategies could affect their potential to contribute to the Council's efficiency agenda and support other key strategies to a fuller extent. For example, the CS& recognises opportunities for using ICT as an enabler for change and efficiency savings, such as widening the scope of the Council's agile working arrangements. However, the Council may not be able to exploit some opportunities until the development of a new ICT strategy is complete.
- 57 More importantly, the delays associated with the People and ICT strategies have prevented completion of a Corporate Resource Strategy (CRS), originally scheduled for publication during summer 2015. The Council expects the CRS to provide an overarching strategic focus on capability, capacity and risks, and encourage stronger links between the enabler strategies.

The Council has made some progress to improve the consistency of its approach to workforce planning, but further work is required to complete the arrangements

Corporate Assessment Proposal for Improvement P7

The Council should ensure a consistent approach to workforce planning and use the results to inform future reductions in staff.

- 58 The Council has started to implement a range of initiatives intended to promote a more consistent approach to workforce planning, reflecting a smaller, leaner local government structure with more community-centred delivery. Some initiatives are at an early stage and work on these continues. The Council states that HR Business Partners will work with portfolio management teams to ensure the development of workforce plans which are strategically aligned and integrated with business, service, financial and corporate workforce strategies.
- 59 The Council's new staff appraisal model improves its workforce planning capability, but – as noted above – HR & OD departmental capacity pressures have limited the progress achieved in some areas. The Council has reviewed its HR & OD structure and is taking action to strengthen its arrangements during early 2016.
- 60 During 2015, the Council introduced and implemented a new staff appraisal model that encourages greater individual ownership of departmental and corporate priorities. This new model has also enhanced the Council's approach to succession and workforce planning. However, the Council did not meet its original aim to appraise all staff using the new system, by mid-2015. By the end of March 2016, the new model still excluded a minority of staff.
- 61 The staff appraisal process has benefitted from an improved IT system able to provide managers with more comprehensive data analysis. When fully rolled out, the Council expects data provided by the system to strengthen its workforce planning capability.
- 62 As well as strengthening workforce planning arrangements, the Council has sought to reduce staff absenteeism. Although year-end sickness absence data for 2015-16 is not yet available, the Council expects to improve its 2014-15 performance. At the end of December 2015, the Council's year-end forecast was 9.8 days/shifts lost per full-time equivalent employee, compared with 10.7 days in 2014-15. The Council attributes this improvement to focused work by the HR Business Partner team. The team provided customised support to reflect the context under which individual portfolios operate – to raise the profile of, and ensure a consistent approach to, the Council's sickness absence policy. The team has also started to arrange and attend case conferences with Occupational Health colleagues to explore and support more complex cases. Measures such as these are helping the Council to increase staff attendance and reinforce its efforts to strengthen workforce planning.

Governance

The Council has made good progress in addressing the governance-related proposals for improvement arising from our 2015 corporate assessment report

- 63 This section of the report focuses on the Council's progress against the five governance-related proposals for improvement arising from the corporate assessment report published in March 2015.

The Council has implemented a range of actions to improve the consistency of its business planning arrangements and to encourage wider staff ownership of key objectives and targets

Corporate Assessment Proposal for Improvement P1

The Council should develop and implement a consistent approach to business planning that promotes the ownership by staff of key objectives and targets.

- 64 The Council's revised approach to business planning has improved its ability to identify efficiency savings. Each of the Council's eight portfolio areas have produced three-year business plans, targeting cost reduction of around 30 per cent, in all areas other than education and social services. In addition to a focus on efficiency savings, the plans also take account of statutory responsibilities and their contribution to the Council's improvement priorities.
- 65 The Council's new programme boards – attended by portfolio Members and officers - cover all portfolio areas and contribute to the business planning process, by managing and monitoring the efficiency business plans and reviewing risk, capacity, engagement and resourcing needs. The Council has also started to rollout its integrated performance management system (CAMMS) which it expects to complete by mid-2016, promoting more consistent service planning.
- 66 The improved business planning arrangements provide more comprehensive support to the Council's Improvement Plan. For example, its priorities are now more clearly reflected in the service level priorities identified during business and service planning. These changes, together with an improved staff appraisal model, are helping employees and their service managers to appreciate how their contribution supports the Council's corporate and service-level priorities. The Council anticipates that this approach, when fully rolled out, will encourage greater ownership by staff of key objectives and targets.

The Council has introduced changes that have noticeably improved the quality and readability of reports that go to committees and to Cabinet

Corporate Assessment Proposal for Improvement P2

The Council should improve the quality of its reports to committees and Cabinet to ensure that:

- where necessary, reports enable councillors to refer easily to relevant policies and previous decisions and discussions;
- key messages and recommendations are clear and succinct; and
- reports to scrutiny committees include recommendations or options that committees might endorse.

- 67 The Council completed a comprehensive review of its report structures and content, during summer 2015. Officers reviewed the standard report format and produced guidance on report writing (style, layout, consultation, report clearance processes) and presentation to Committees. The Council piloted a new standard report template in September, followed by Constitutional Committee approval in October 2015. The changes introduced include:
- a A clearer report structure that provides succinct executive summary and recommendation sections.
 - b A glossary of terms to explain less familiar or technical terms used without disturbing the flow of the report.
 - c References or links to relevant policies either as an appendix or within the background/supporting documents section.
 - d Clarity about the cabinet member(s) responsible for the topic under consideration and the officer report author.
 - e Greater use of hyperlinks to appendices and for referring to background/supporting documents.
 - f A report template that promotes clarity, supported by a report clearance checklist, to explain what needs to be considered prior to 'sign off'.
 - g Senior officers ensure that reports are 'signed off' prior to receipt by the Committee Manager and inclusion on the agenda. The guidance is understood and being implemented effectively under the guidance of the governance team.

- 68 Final roll out of the new report format and the discipline behind the report content took place during the November 2015 committee cycle. There has been a concerted effort to promote a consistent approach to report drafting/signing off and to provide clear and concise content. Although it may be too soon to assess the overall impact of these changes, early feedback from Members and officers is positive. Reports are less resource-intensive to prepare and easier and quicker to read.

Despite a range of actions intended to encourage and support member development, take-up of non-mandatory member training opportunities has not increased enough

Corporate Assessment Proposal for Improvement P4

Group Leaders should strongly encourage members to take advantage of the Member Development Scheme.

- 69 The arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the Council's Member Development Strategy are clear and take place annually. In July 2015, the Democratic Services Committee provided all Members with a copy of the Competency Framework⁶ and invited them to suggest amendments to the strategy or topics for development. The committee received a few suggestions which it considered during the review.
- 70 Prior to that, in April 2015 the Chief Executive met Group Leaders to discuss the corporate assessment report and asked them to promote the take-up of Member training opportunities. Group Leaders subsequently shared this request with their respective Groups.
- 71 To encourage take-up, member training and development sessions take place at various times of the day and into the early evening; this provides flexibility for members to fit training in with their other commitments. For some training topics, the Council arranges several sessions to provide Members with a wider choice of dates and times.
- 72 For meaningful training to take place, the Council considers that at least six Members need to have confirmed their attendance – though new Members elected at by-elections receive one-to-one training, where required. Members also routinely take advantage of informal or ad hoc training sessions – in small groups or with individual members – to enhance their understanding of specific issues. To supplement the formal programme of Member training, the Council also arranges workshops on specific topic areas, to brief members on important or emerging issues of interest.
- 73 Despite renewed efforts to increase Member take-up of training opportunities, attendance at training sessions has not noticeably increased during 2015-16.

⁶ Continuing Professional Development for Councillors Draft Competency Framework, produced by the Wales Local Government Association.

The Council has used the review of its scrutiny structures to encourage and support more effective decision-making

Corporate Assessment Proposal for Improvement P5

The Council should take the opportunity of its review of scrutiny structures to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny Committees can add real value to Council decision-making by aligning agendas more explicitly to Council priorities and risks.

- 74 Following a comprehensive review of scrutiny structures, informed by input from stakeholders including political group leaders and scrutiny Chairs, the Council approved a new overview and scrutiny committee structure in May 2015. The new overview and scrutiny model reflects the Council's operating model and includes an Organisational Change Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OCO&SC).
- 75 The introduction of the OCO&SC has required members and officers to adjust to a different approach to scrutiny. Whilst five of the scrutiny committees have direct links to functional portfolios, the OCO&SC has a greater focus on developing budget and policy frameworks. This involves a more in-depth analysis of policy issues and committee involvement during the developmental stages of major work areas.
- 76 The work programmes adopted by Scrutiny Committees have improved; they now identify the type of report under consideration, such as for consultation, assurance and, monitoring, development or for information. The majority of forward work programmes include a balance of topics selected for meetings – the exception being the OCO&SC, which has a more limited forward work programme. This provides the OCO&SC with greater flexibility and the capacity to respond to opportunities, challenges and emerging issues. A recent report reminded Members that this committee, by its nature, needed to operate differently from the others if it were to make a meaningful contribution.
- 77 The Council has reinforced its guidance on forward work plans to aligning agendas more explicitly to Council priorities and risks. Committees are encouraged to apply a 'test of significance' and consider a range of questions such as; 'Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives?' Scrutiny comments and recommendations on appropriate agenda items are regularly included within Cabinet reports.
- 78 There is also a greater focus on ensuring that scrutiny committee recommendations are more active and purposeful, and include fewer items for members 'to note'. Scrutiny chairs have received additional support, including individual coaching, to help them improve the effectiveness of their committees.

The Council has strengthened its approach to risk management, to promote greater consistency, and has plans to introduce further improvements during 2016-17 and 2017-18

Corporate Assessment Proposal for Improvement P6

The Council should:

- adopt a consistent approach to managing risk, ensuring that all staff involved use a similar approach to record impact, likelihood and mitigating actions; and
- apply this approach to its future savings plans.

- 79 Following the 2014 corporate assessment, the Council's chief officer team committed to develop a more consistent approach to risk identification and management. Since then, the Council has introduced a range of actions, including the launch of a revised risk Management Policy and Strategy in January 2016.
- 80 The Council also implemented a new integrated performance management system in 2015, which includes a risk management module. This module provided a robust framework for implementing the revised approach to risk management. The Council used the module to record and monitor strategic risks within the 2015-16 Improvement Plan and to pilot a new approach to operational risk management within social services.
- 81 New reporting arrangements encourage a more consistent approach to risk management. Reports to committee and Cabinet now cover risks more prominently; the new committee report template includes a mandatory section on risk management. The anticipated impact of each risk is also more explicit, supported by a more sophisticated risk matrix. Improvements to the service planning process also support the management of operational risks.
- 82 The Council has increased the frequency with which it updates and reports on corporate risks – rather than just in the Annual Improvement Plan and Governance Statement. The chief officer team has also committed to strengthen its approach to risk management by developing a quarterly risk threat and emergence report and register; this remains work in progress.
- 83 The Council applies risk analysis to its future savings plans; the plans include sections for identifying risks and their status using a RAG⁷ rating, as well as arrangements to mitigate risk. However, the approach has not been entirely consistent; not all plans include sections that explain mitigating actions or planned responses if risks do materialise. The Council expects consistency to improve, now that roll-out of the integrated performance management system and associated tools is complete.

⁷ Council reports identify the level of risk using a RAG 'traffic light' system: Green denotes low risk, Amber denotes medium risk and Red denotes high risk. Council reports routinely provide additional information about areas designated as Red (high) risk.

- 84 The Council introduced an improved format to capture both new and emerging risks and new guidance for escalating risks and risk reporting, based on severity. Higher-level risks (categorised as 'black') are reported monthly and risks categorised as 'red' or 'amber' are reported quarterly.
- 85 Internal Audit reviewed the adequacy and effectiveness of the framework for strategic and operational risks during early 2016, to assess the system's compliance with established procedures and progress against earlier recommendations. The review identified some areas where further action is needed, but found that stakeholder ownership, understanding and consistency of approach to risk management had all improved.

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 staff of 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 Auditor General 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 – Annual Audit Letter

Councillor Aaron Shotton and Colin Everett
Flintshire County Council
County Hall
Mold
Flintshire
CH7 6NB

Dear Aaron and Colin

Annual Audit Letter – Flintshire County Council 2014-15

This letter summarises the key messages arising from the Auditor General for Wales' statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 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 2015, 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 position and transactions. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to Flintshire County Council in my Audit of Financial Statements report on 24 September 2015, and are summarised below:

- The Council changed its basis for preparing the Consolidated Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) which resulted in large unexplained variances and a significant number of errors that required correction.

- We identified some weaknesses in the strength of the Council's internal controls over payroll processing. These were consistent with the findings of Internal Audit. Whilst we were satisfied that these control weaknesses did not impact on our opinion on the financial statements, they are serious in nature as they increase the risk of error and fraud in the processing of pay.
- The level of scrutiny and review of the draft financial statements and recognition of the collective responsibility, for the preparation of the accounts and responding to the audit process, across the wider Council needs to be strengthened. This is essential if the Council is to meet the challenges resulting from the Welsh Government proposals to bring forward the timetable for the preparing and publishing the accounts of local government bodies in Wales.

As set out in my report, following the completion of the audit, it was agreed that we would hold a post project learning session with officers to identify any improvements that can be made. That meeting has already taken place and a number of actions have been agreed to improve processes and working methods relating to both the preparation and audit of the 2015-16 financial statements.

It is also worth noting, the Council lead on the preparation of the accounts of the North Wales Residual Waste Joint Committee and the Taith Regional Transport Consortia. On 30 September 2015, in respect of the North Wales Residual Waste Joint Committee, I confirmed that the information contained in its annual return was in accordance with proper practices, and in respect of the Taith Regional consortia I issued an unqualified opinion on its accounts confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Committee's financial position and transactions. The key matters arising from both these accounts audits were reported to the relevant committees. I do not need to bring anything further to your attention in this letter.

I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

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. My Annual Improvement Report will highlight areas where the effectiveness of these arrangements has yet to be demonstrated or where improvements could be made.

Historically, I have taken the opportunity to comment on the Council's financial planning in my annual audit letter. However, we have recently undertaken a Financial Resilience Assessment on the Council and I will be issuing my report in December.

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 30 September 2015

I also issued a completion certificate for the joint committees on the same date.

My work to date on certification of grant claims and returns has not identified significant issues that would impact on the 2015-16 accounts or key financial systems

In June 2015, the Audit Committee considered my Certification of Grants and Returns 2013-14 report which confirmed that the Council had generally adequate arrangements in place for the preparation of submission of its grant claims. However, 53 per cent of the claims were qualified and a further 26 per cent were amended and the Council needed to further embed and improve the arrangements which had been adopted in previous years. The Audit Committee, rightly, expressed its disappointment and concerns at the report findings.

Prior to the commencement of the preparation of the 2014-15 claims we worked with relevant officers to assist in identifying where previously agreed processes were not being consistently followed and to clarify audit expectations. We also delivered further grants training to officers involved in the preparation of grant returns. It is hoped that these actions, along with other actions taken by the Finance department, will result in an improvement in the quality of the grant claims submitted for audit.

My programme of audit work on the 2014-15 grant claims is currently underway and I will issue a more detailed report on my grant certification work, in Spring 2016, once this year's programme of certification work is complete.

In my 2015 Audit Plan I set out that I expected the financial audit fee for 2014-15 to be £216,336. As a result of the issues identified and the resultant additional work in order to allow me to form my opinion on the accounts, the fee will be slightly higher than anticipated. We will discuss this with the Corporate Finance Manager in due course and report the position to the Audit Committee once all our work is complete. All other fees are in line with those set out in the plan.

Yours sincerely

John Herniman

For and on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales

Appendix 3 – National report recommendations 2015-16

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
April 2015	<p>The Financial resilience of Councils in Wales</p>	<p>R1 Councils should ensure that their corporate plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is the core driver for the service plans and other supporting strategies including workforce, information technology and capital expenditure; • maintains at least a three to five year forward view and is aligned with the medium term financial plan and other supporting strategies; and • should clearly articulate the desired role of the council in five years - the model for delivering priority services and the infrastructure and resources needed to deliver future priorities within available finances. <p>R2 The medium term financial plan should identify the major financial risks and key assumptions and senior officers and councillors should subject them to effective scrutiny and challenge before adopting the plan.</p> <p>R3 Councils need to ensure that funding deficits are accurately projected and fully reconciled to detailed savings plans for each year over the life of the medium term financial plan.</p> <p>R4 Councils should review the adequacy of the financial assurance arrangements that underpin the delivery of annual savings plans, including the level of scrutiny and challenge provided by councillors.</p> <p>R5 Councils should ensure that they have a comprehensive reserves strategy that outlines the specific purpose of accumulated useable reserves as part of their Medium term Financial Plan.</p> <p>R6 Councils should develop corporate wide policies on income generation with a view to increasing revenue streams and relieving financial pressures.</p> <p>R7 Councils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthen budget setting and monitoring arrangements to ensure financial resilience; and • review the coverage and effectiveness of their internal and external assurance financial systems and controls to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide early warning of weaknesses in key systems.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
April 2015	<p>The Financial resilience of Councils in Wales</p>	<p>R8 Councils must review their finance teams and ensure that they have sufficient capacity and capability to meet future demands.</p> <p>R9 Council officers need to equip councillors with the knowledge and skills they need to deliver effective governance and challenge by extending training opportunities and producing high quality management information.</p>
June 2015	<p>Achieving improvement in support to schools through regional education consortia – an early view.</p>	<p>R1 To clarify the nature and operation of consortia. We found there to be continuing uncertainty about some aspects of the nature of regional consortia and their present and future scope (paragraphs 2.2 to 2.20). We therefore recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local authorities should clarify whether consortia services are jointly provided or are commissioned services (services provided under joint-committee arrangements are jointly provided services and are not commissioned services). <p>R2 To focus on outcomes through medium-term planning. We found that the development of effective regional consortia was hindered by a focus on short-term actions and uncertainty about the future of consortia (paragraphs 2.33 to 2.36; 3.16 to 3.17). We therefore recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As any possible local authority re-organisation will not be fully implemented until 2020, the Welsh Government and regional consortia should develop three-year plans for the further development, scope, and funding of regional consortia linked to appropriate strategic objectives.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
June 2015	<p>Achieving improvement in support to schools through regional education consortia – an early view.</p>	<p>R3 To develop more collaborative relationships for the school improvement system. The development of the National Model for Regional Working involved many school improvement partners but we found that this had not led to the development of sufficiently collaborative relationships (paragraphs 2.25 to 2.32). We therefore recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional consortia should develop improved arrangements for sharing practice and supporting efficiency (for example, one consortium could take the lead on tackling an issue or have functional responsibility for the development of a policy). • The Welsh Government, local authorities and regional consortia should recognise the interdependency of all partners fulfilling their school improvement roles and agree an approach to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – information sharing and consultation about developments related to school improvement; – developing collaborative relationships of shared accountability; and – undertaking system wide reviews, and an alignment of the understanding and position of regional consortia across all Welsh Government relevant strategies. <p>R4 To build effective leadership and attract top talent. Regional consortia, local authorities and the Welsh Government have all found difficulties in recruiting to senior leadership for education and we found there had been limited action to address this (paragraphs 2.37 to 2.40). We therefore recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Welsh Government and local authorities should collaborate to improve the attractiveness of education leadership roles to attract the most talented leaders for the school improvement system; and • local authorities should collaborate to support the professional development of senior leaders and to ensure appropriate performance management arrangements are in place for senior leaders.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
June 2015	<p>Achieving improvement in support to schools through regional education consortia – an early view.</p>	<p>R5 To improve the effectiveness of governance and management of regional consortia. Whilst continuing progress is being made, we found that regional consortia have not yet developed fully effective governance and financial management arrangements (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.36). We therefore recommend that local authorities and their regional consortia should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve their use of self-evaluation of their performance and governance arrangements and use this to support business planning and their annual reviews of governance to inform their annual governance statements; • improve performance management including better business planning, use of clear and measurable performance measures, and the assessment of value for money; • make strategic risk management an integral part of their management arrangements and report regularly at joint committee or board level; • develop their financial management arrangements to ensure that budgeting, financial monitoring and reporting cover all relevant income and expenditure, including grants funding spent through local authorities; • develop joint scrutiny arrangements of the overall consortia as well as scrutiny of performance by individual authorities, which may involve establishment of a joint scrutiny committee or co-ordinated work by local authority scrutiny committees; • ensure the openness and transparency of consortia decision making and arrangements; • recognise and address any potential conflicts of interest; and where staff have more than one employer, regional consortia should ensure lines of accountability are clear and all staff are aware of the roles undertaken; and • develop robust communications strategies for engagement with all key stakeholders.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
July 2015	<p>Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils</p>	<p>R1 Improve corporate leadership and comply with Welsh Government policy on safeguarding through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the appointment of a senior lead officer who is accountable for safeguarding and protecting children and young people with corporate responsibilities for planning improvements; • the appointment of a lead member for safeguarding; and • regularly disseminating and updating information on these appointments to all staff and stakeholders. <p>R2 Ensure there is a corporate-wide policy on safeguarding covering all Council services to provide a clear strategic direction and clear lines of accountability across the Council.</p> <p>R3 Strengthen safe recruitment of staff and volunteers by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and compliance with safe recruitment policies cover all services that come into contact with children; • creating an integrated corporate compliance system to record and monitor compliance levels on DBS checks; and • requiring safe recruitment practices amongst partners in the third sector and for volunteers who provide services commissioned and/or used by the Council which are underpinned by a contract or service level agreement. <p>R4 Ensure all relevant staff, members and partners understand their safeguarding responsibilities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring safeguarding training is mandated and coverage extended to all relevant Council service areas, and is included as standard on induction programmes; • creating a corporate-wide system to identify, track and monitor compliance on attending safeguarding training in all Council departments, elected members, schools, governors and volunteers; and • requiring relevant staff in partner organisations who are commissioned to work for the Council in delivering services to children and young people to undertake safeguarding training.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
July 2015	<p>Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils</p>	<p>R5 In revising guidance, the Welsh Government should clarify its expectations of local authorities regarding the roles and responsibilities of the designated officer within education services, and the named person at senior management level responsible for promoting the safeguarding.</p> <p>R6 Improve accountability for corporate safeguarding by regularly reporting safeguarding issues and assurances to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced and Council-wide set of performance information covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • benchmarking and comparisons with others; • conclusions of internal and external audit/ inspection reviews; • service-based performance data; • key personnel data such as safeguarding training, and DBS recruitment checks; and • the performance of contractors and commissioned services on compliance with Council safeguarding responsibilities. <p>R7 Establish a rolling programme of internal audit reviews to undertake systems testing and compliance reviews on the Council's safeguarding practices.</p> <p>R8 Ensure the risks associated with safeguarding are considered at both a corporate and service level in developing and agreeing risk management plans across the Council.</p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2015	<p>Supporting the Independence of Older People: Are Councils Doing Enough?</p>	<p>R1 Improve governance, accountability and corporate leadership on older people's issues through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the appointment of a senior lead officer who is accountable for coordinating and leading the Council's work on older people's services; • realigning the work of the older people's strategy coordinators to support development and delivery of plans for services that contribute to the independence of older people; • the appointment of a member champion for older people's services; and • regularly disseminating and updating information on these appointments to all staff and stakeholders. <p>R2 Improve strategic planning and better coordinate activity for services to older people by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring comprehensive action plans are in place that cover the work of all relevant council departments and the work of external stakeholders outside of health and social care; and • engaging with residents and partners in the development of plans, and in developing and agreeing priorities. <p>R3 Improve engagement with, and dissemination of, information to older people by ensuring advice and information services are appropriately configured and meet the needs of the recipients.</p> <p>R4 Ensure effective management of performance for the range of services that support older people to live independently by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting appropriate measures to enable Members, officers and the public to judge progress in delivering actions for all council services; • ensuring performance information covers the work of all relevant agencies and especially those outside of health and social services; and • establishing measures to judge inputs, outputs and impact to be able to understand the effect of budget cuts and support oversight and scrutiny.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2015	<p>Supporting the Independence of Older People: Are Councils Doing Enough?</p>	<p>R5 Ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty when undertaking equality impact assessments by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting out how changes to services or cuts in budgets will affect groups with protected characteristics; • quantifying the potential impact and the mitigation actions that will be delivered to reduce the potentially negative effect on groups with protected characteristics; • indicating the potential numbers who would be affected by the proposed changes or new policy by identifying the impact on those with protected characteristics; and • ensuring supporting activity such as surveys, focus groups and information campaigns includes sufficient information to enable service users to clearly understand the impact of proposed changes on them. <p>R6 Improve the management and impact of the Intermediate Care Fund by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting a performance baseline at the start of projects to be able to judge the impact of these overtime; • agreeing the format and coverage of monitoring reports to enable funded projects to be evaluated on a like-for-like basis against the criteria for the fund, to judge which are having the greatest positive impact and how many schemes have been mainstreamed into core funding; and • improving engagement with the full range of partners to ensure as wide a range of partners are encouraged to participate in future initiatives and programmes.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
December 2015	Delivering with less - leisure services	<p>R1 Improve strategic planning in leisure services by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting an agreed council vision for leisure services; • agreeing priorities for leisure services; • focusing on the Council's position within the wider community sport and leisure provision within the area; and • considering the potential to deliver services on a regional basis. <p>R2 Undertake an options appraisal to identify the most appropriate delivery model based on the Council's agreed vision and priorities for leisure services which considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the availability of capital and revenue financing in the next three-to-five years; • options to improve the commercial focus of leisure services; • opportunities to improve income generation and reduce council 'subsidy'; • a cost-benefit analysis of all the options available to deliver leisure services in the future; • the contribution of leisure services to the Council's wider public health role; • better engagement with the public to ensure the views and needs of users and potential users are clearly identified; • the impact of different options on groups with protected characteristics under the public sector equality duty; and • the sustainability of service provision in the future.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
December 2015	Delivering with less - leisure services	<p>R3 Ensure effective management of performance of leisure services by establishing a suite of measures to allow officers, Members and citizens to judge inputs, outputs and impact. This should cover council-wide and facility specific performance and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • capital and revenue expenditure; • income; • council 'subsidy'; • quality of facilities and the service provided; • customer satisfaction; • success of 'new commercial' initiatives; • usage data – numbers using services/facilities, time of usage, etc; and • impact of leisure in addressing public health priorities. <p>R4 Improve governance, accountability and corporate leadership on leisure services by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regularly reporting performance to scrutiny committee(s); • providing elected Members with comprehensive information to facilitate robust decision-making; • benchmarking and comparing performance with others; and • using the findings of internal and external audit/inspection reviews to identify opportunities to improve services.

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