Improvement Proposals in External Audit Reports

Key to the conclusions –

1. **Preparatory work** - hold discussions in order to determine how to respond to the recommendations and plan if/how to implement.
2. **On-going** - agreement or action plan in place in order to respond to the recommendations and work has commenced.
3. **Completed** - action plan to respond to the recommendations being realised but it can be argued that the work of achieving the recommendations will never end as it is continuous work / or: the recommendations have been realised.

PART 1 - Local or regional reports that assess the work of Gwynedd Council

1.   Gwynedd Council - Human Resources Information System
Local report to Gwynedd published November 2018
   Link to the report on the Audit Wales website

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

(i)   Establish a formal benefit realisation programme so the aims of the development project can be properly evaluated.

1. Review technology options within the project:

(i)   Improve access to enable more staff (for example those remotely based) to engage with the system.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations
The Project Board is monitoring the benefits of the project in order to assess whether the resolution offers value for money to the Council. However, the programme to introduce the IT modules has slipped substantially as a result of the lack of availability of developmental resources in the Information Technology Service. Consequently, the Board has prioritised work relating to the Recruitment and Appointment fields, as well as Sickness Absences. These are expected to be introduced later in 2023 but this is completely dependent on the availability of the necessary resources.

Progress against improvement proposals

Due to the impact of the pandemic, it was not possible to complete further work in terms of finding the IT skills levels of the workforce that are based in remote areas.   We intend to reprise the work, however, unfortunately to date no specific timetable has been drafted. This work is now comes under the supervision of the Digital Transformation Board and there is acknowledgement that it is a field that requires attention soon.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that this work will be completed by the end of March, 2024.

2.   Local government use of data: Cyngor Gwynedd
Local report for Gwynedd from Audit Wales published in January 2019
Link to the report on the Audit Wales website

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –
The Authority needs to develop a more unified and corporate approach to using data. A change in culture and stronger leadership on data is therefore crucial in Gwynedd and will support the creation of an environment that treats data as a key resource. This will help to extend the benefits of data-led decisions to all service areas and help to improve transparency and democracy.

Updating data sharing protocols and providing refresher training - focusing on what people can do rather than what they cannot do - will help to ensure that service managers know when and what they can share, thereby helping to avoid unnecessary and disproportionate risk aversion when it comes to data sharing.

The Authority should build on the work of its research and analytics unit to review the range and quality of information needed by decision makers and the format in which it is presented. This will enable the Authority to set corporate data reporting standards to ensure the data that is presented to senior officers and Elected Members is accessible, easily understandable and supports decision makers to fulfil their responsibilities as effectively as possible.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations
The report and improvement recommendations were discussed at the Information Governance Operational Panel, and the matter is included in the Council's Risk Register (Governance level): "Fails to maximise the potential of information when supporting Council

business and fails to meet statutory standards". Furthermore and as part of the Council's Digital Transformation Programme, a Data Sub-group was established to get to grips with this field with a representative from every department contributing to an ambitious work programme to improve the use of data. This sub-group has identified the priority fields and is developing a detailed action plan.

Progress against improvement proposals
The Council's Information Plan 2021-26 was adopted by the Cabinet in January 2021. Along with the associated action plan, this sets out the Council's direction in the field of information over the coming years and includes the matters noted in the report. In addition, the Council's Digital Transformation Board is developing a new Digital Strategy that will also ensure that data and the importance of data is central to all of the Council's digital developments.

Conclusion
On-going.

Timetable

A detailed action plan will form part of the Council's Digital Strategy 2023-2028, however, specific milestones will be in place for every budgetary year within that period.

3.   Inspection Report: Gwynedd Domiciliary Care Services
Local report for Gwynedd from Care Inspectorate Wales published in January 2019

Improvement Proposals arising from the report -

1. Staff training (Regulation 16 (2)(a)). We found that the frequency of staff training was inconsistent and not all staff training records had been updated. Providing staff with a consistent and equal level of training was also recommended at the last inspection. We have not issued a notice on this occasion as we did not see this had negatively impacted people's the well-being of people or upon staff development. Every staff member we spoke to stated that they believed the training provision could be improved and this was acknowledged by the management team.

2. Quality of service report (Regulation 23 (1), (2) and (3)). We found that the service had not completed an annual quality of the service report and had not consulted with people using the service and their representatives. We have not served a notice on this occasion as we did not see that this had had a negative impact on the well-being of people or on

the care and support provided.

3. There is a need to review service delivery plans and risk assessments in a timely manner.

4. The service needs to improve the way in which it documents and records formal and informal discussions with families/representatives and staff. This will ensure that a clear audit trail can be followed.

5. Ensuring staff receive timely and consistent formal supervision, an annual appraisal and to keep an updated record of the meetings held.

6. There is a need to update the service's information sheet and it needs to include the correct CIW contact details.

The trail of the discussion on the recommendations

Full consideration has been given to the six observations received in the report. The recommendations have been discussed by the Service's management team, and are being tied into the broader work programmes of the Council's in-house Domiciliary Care Service Transformation, and the Domiciliary Care project work programme which is looking at recommissioning and remodelling our way of providing services to individuals. Although this time we have not escalated the recommendations to the risk register, we are of the opinion that these recommendations and developmental points are essential to ensure that we provide care of the best possible standard, and therefore hold regular reviews as the Service's management team to look at the progress made against the work.

Progress against improvement proposals

The Department intended to ensure improvements across the internal and external provision as a part of the work programme of the Domiciliary Care Project, and the Department has responded to the recommendations by establishing short-term solutions to improve the service. Although the Domiciliary Care Project is now progressing, it must be acknowledged that there was an unavoidable slippage in the original timetable of work due to the need to respond and maintain services during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, over the past two years, a change has occurred in the service's leadership. Following the retirement of one senior manager, we have appointed a new individual to the role and we have appointed a new Assistant Head within the department, who has responsibility for the Provider services.

As a result, as a Service, we have decided to focus on improving two initial priorities, namely ensuring consistency in the frequency and records of staff training, and drawing up a regular report on the service's quality.

Work has commenced to identify which staff has received what training, and we intend to develop an electronic method of recording this information more effectively. There is one specific work stream in the broader Domiciliary Care Project which also focuses on staff training in internal and external providers, which will ensure that all staff have been offered and have received the same training.

As a result of the Domiciliary Care Project, we have been engaging with staff to provide updates of the developments, and communicating with service users. The transition period is a key part of the Domiciliary Care Project, and we hope to be able to consult with our users and their representatives over the coming months to contribute towards our quality report.

We are also aware of the four developmental points that need to be considered, and we will continue to include them on the Service's Transformation work programme, in order to realise these changes.

Conclusion:

Completed.

Timetable

These matters are now being addressed as part of the Service's on-going programme of work. The Service in question has also received a more recent inspection from the Care Inspectorate, the details of which will be discussed at the next meeting of this committee.

4. **Commissioning Placements in Care Homes for Older People - North Wales Councils and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board**
A regional report focusing on the work of North Wales authorities in the field of commissioning care homes published 16 December 2021 - Commissioning Care Homes for Older People | Audit Wales (archwilio.cymru)

This report notes the findings of the Auditor General's review of arrangements for commissioning placements in care homes across North Wales. The work was undertaken as part of the statutory programme of local audit work in each of the local authorities in North Wales and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board.

Improvement Proposals arising from the report (or recommendations as they are called in the report)

1. North Wales Councils and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to ensure that consistent use is made of contracts prior to placement throughout the region.

2. The current method of commissioning placements in care homes may cause tensions between partners and lead to poor value and a poor experience for service users. North Wales Councils and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to collaborate to review local arrangements to commission placements in care homes to erase the detrimental impacts that can be avoided to service users and to each organisation.

3. Accountability is one of the corner stones of the decision-making process in the public sector. Governance arrangements need to scrutinise decisions and bring decision makers to account. North Wales Councils and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to strengthen their governance arrangements by working in partnership to ensure appropriate accountability and effective scrutiny.

4. North Wales Councils and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, through the Regional Commissioning Board, need to develop a commissioning placements strategy in care homes that is agreed regionally, and then, develop an associated delivery plan.

5. North Wales Councils and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to review their commissioning arrangements for placements in care homes to ensure that they deliver their statutory responsibilities in relation to the Welsh language, and the Future Generations Well-being Act.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

A report was submitted to the Council's cabinet in June 2022, and the Cabinet decided to approve higher fees than the region for 2022/23 for dementia and nursing beds specifically, in response to the market and the lack of dementia and nursing beds in Gwynedd. Nevertheless, it is not true to say that we have stepped away from the standard North Wales fees entirely. We are still members of the regional fees group.

Progress against improvement proposals

The regional group has recommended fees for 2023/24, and we are in the middle of looking at our options in Gwynedd for 2023/24. It is likely that some of our fees in Gwynedd correspond with the recommendation of the regional group, but there will be a need to consider the recommendation alongside local considerations, e.g. the lack of nursing beds in Gwynedd.

In line with the recommendation, work is continuing in an attempt to reconcile contracts across the region. There has been a delay due to staffing changes within the regional team, but the new standard contract should be in place for 2023/24.

Collaborating with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and private care homes remains a priority, but the lack of nursing beds and the high fees charged by nursing providers is challenging. Gwynedd is responding to this by developing nursing beds jointly with BCUHB, in accordance with Welsh Government's strategy to *'Rebalancing Health and Social Care in Wales'*.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

It can be argued that the recommendations will be completed in full once the regional agreement is in place, since the rest will be ongoing work.

5.   Cyngor Gwynedd - Review of Performance Management
Local report for Gwynedd from Audit Wales published in February 2022
Link to the report on Audit Wales website

Improvement Proposals arising from the report -

Recommendation 1

The Council must ensure that it has a range of useful measures for all departments and functions. It needs to pay particular attention to:

• ensuring that all services identify appropriate well-crafted (SMART) performance measures that reflect the purpose of the service;

• aligning the service purpose identified in performance challenge meetings with the purpose in the departmental service plans in the Council Plan;

• incorporating ambition/service standard/target and trend information to give the Council a clear picture of the Council's ambition and its progress toward achieving it; and

• ensuring that performance management arrangements are sufficiently agile to respond to new challenges faced by services, such as the current significant workforce issues faced by some services, by implementing specific measures.

Recommendation 2

The Council needs to improve its performance reporting to aid clarity by:

• expanding the use of visual tools such as colour coding to enable the reader to quickly focus on the key issues by highlighting areas where performance is on track or is of concern;

• ensuring that reports are balanced and provide a rounded, honest and balanced picture of how the Council is performing which highlights where improvement is needed to ensure tangible results;

• ensuring that an up-to-date dashboard (or measures appendix) is produced by each service and presented at every performance management meeting;

• publishing a performance report/corporate scorecard that reports on all key measures in one accessible document.

Recommendation 3

The Council needs to improve the integration of performance and financial information by:

• using actual service demand as opposed to demographics as the base for setting demand led budgets;

• articulating the pattern of actual demand against planning assumptions used to set the budget enabling a better understanding of current resource pressures on services;

• combining performance information with financial information to present a holistic and unified view of the resource position of services;

• combining performance and financial information to ensure that savings plans delivered over the medium term are still realisable;

• assure itself that demand led budgets are set at a level which is sufficient to resource the current demand faced by services; and

• once the Council is assured that the budgets for key demand led services are set at the correct level, develop tools such as contingent funding to recognise and cope with a surge in demand of volatile budgets.

Recommendation 4

The Council should strengthen its performance management arrangements by:

• frequently communicating changes to the performance management framework to officers and Council members;

• ensuring that officers and Council members have appropriate support and training so they can deliver their respective roles effectively;

• reviewing the support arrangements for the performance management cycle;

• ensuring that all departments effectively incorporate the use of the risk register into their performance management cycle;

• embedding a 'One Gwynedd' approach that will open channels of dialogue to enable corporate learning and quickly eradicate instances where demand failure in one department increases demand on services in another;

• engaging with service users and stakeholders to understand the root cause of poor performance and unintended behaviours; and

• introduce milestones and identify project owners to track progress and ensure accountability for the delivery of projects that span several years.

Recommendation 5

The Council needs to incorporate consideration of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 sustainable development principle into service design, management, and performance review arrangements across all Council departments.

The trail of the discussion on the recommendations -

Report and recommendations have been considered as a part of the review of the corporate performance challenging arrangements that was led by the Chief Executive at the end of 2021/22. The final recommendations for the new performance challenging procedure (which incorporates the majority of the recommendations in this study), were submitted during February 2022.

Progress against improvement proposals

The new performance monitoring procedure is being implemented since the first cycle of performance challenging meetings in 2022/23. In addition, guidelines on the new procedure have been prepared for the Departments, Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Members. A series of sessions were held to raise awareness of the new arrangements, providing an opportunity to ask questions and present observations to Department representatives and Cabinet Members during May/June 2022. Further steps to be considered by the Governing Group at the end of 2022/23.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that the actions in order to respond to the recommendations will be completed by the Summer 2023.

New since June 2022

1.   Springing Forward - Cyngor Gwynedd
Audit Wales report. June 2022
Link to the report on Audit Wales website

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

Vision, strategies, delivery plans and the sustainable development principle
Recommendation 1
The Council needs to put the sustainable development principle at the heart of its considerations, building on the experience of the pandemic, as it:
• develops the Council's vision for the shape and size of its land and building assets and workforce in the short, medium, and long term;
• develops asset and workforce strategies; and
• develops costed delivery plans

Data and benchmarking
Recommendation 2
Develop the use of data and benchmarking to inform planning, budget setting and measure the longer-term success of its asset and workforce initiatives.

<u>The direction of the discussion on the recommendations</u>
A report containing the 'Management Response' presented to the Governance and Scrutiny Committee in November 2022 which outlines how it is intended to respond to the recommendations.

Vision, strategies, delivery plans and the sustainable development principle

The principle of sustainable development will be central to all considerations in the context of updating and reviewing the following plans and strategies;
1. Latest review of the Asset Strategy
2. Land and Property Asset Plan to be included as a proposed corporate improvement priority in the next Five Year Council Plan
3. Ffordd Gwynedd Plan 2022-2027 (namely the corporate Organisation Development Plan) to be adopted by the Cabinet.
4. The Council's Future Working Plan to be drawn-up following a trial period of hybrid working (ending at the end of December 2022)

Data and benchmarking

The Digital Transformation Board has been established to lead on drawing up the Council's Digital Strategy for the next five years. Three work sub-streams have been established to date, namely;
- Data
- Administration
- Customer Contact

<u>Progress against improvement proposals</u>
Vision, strategies, delivery plans and the sustainable development principle

As a part of the Council Plan for 2023-28, we will adopt a new Property Asset Management Plan. Alongside this we will confirm our flexible working and hybrid working arrangements as the Offices' Group develops the Future Working Plan over the coming months.

Data and benchmarking

The Data Sub-group is led by the Head of Corporate Support and has already established its objectives, namely;

• Ensure that the Council is clear about its information needs so that the data collected is bespoke to the needs of the Council and the residents we serve

• Ensure that the Council uses the data in its possession to; -

- Evaluate and measure the impact of interventions
- Make evidence-based decisions
- Improve the performance of services for the residents of Gwynedd
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services

• Strengthen the link with the wider world to enable the Council to contribute to national and regional developments in an effective way

• Ensure that the Council's workforce is confident when dealing with data and is able to collect it, analyse it and share it in a consistent and accurate way. This to include data being seen as an organisational resource, instead of a historical record

• Equip the Council with the ability to capture data in a safe and sustainable way. This to include facilitating the ability for services and residents to obtain information on demand

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable
Currently being developed.

2. Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), performance evaluation review of adults services in Cyngor Gwynedd.
September 2022
   Link to the report on the Care Inspectorate Wales website

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –
There are a number of proposals for improvement within the report under the following headings:
People - voices and choices
Prevention
Well-being
Partnerships

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Welsh Auditors will present their report to the Scrutiny Committee on 16 February, and a detailed programme responding to the recommendations will be introduced at that time. As a result, an update will be submitted to the Governance and Audit Committee in June.

Progress against improvement proposals

See above.

Conclusion

Preparatory work

Timetable

To be confirmed following the Care Scrutiny Committee on 16 February, 2023.

PART 2 - national or general reports that are relevant to Local Government

1. **Provision of Local Government Service to Rural Communities: Community Asset Transfer**
   National Report from Audit Wales, published in December 2018
   Link to the report on the Audit Wales website

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

1. Local authorities need to do more to make CATs simpler and more appealing, help build the capacity of community and town councils, give them more guidance in raising finance, and look to support other community development models such as social enterprises that support social value and citizen involvement. In addition, we recommend that local authorities monitor and publish CAT numbers and measure the social impact of CATs.

2. Local authorities have significant scope to provide better and more visible help and support before, during, and after the community asset transfer process. We conclude that there is considerable scope to improve the business planning, preparation, and after-care for community asset transfer. We recommend that local authorities:
    • identify community assets transfer's role in establishing community hubs, networks of expertise and clusters of advice and prevention services;
    • work with town and community councils to develop their ability to take on more CATs;
    • identify which assets are suitable to transfer, and clarify what the authority needs to do to enable their transfer;
    • ensure their CAT policy adequately covers after-care, long term support, post transfer support, signposting access to finance, and sharing the learning about what works well; and
    refer to access to funding, and share the learning regarding what works well; and
    • support community-based leadership by developing networks of interest, training and coaching, and encouraging volunteering.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations
Gwynedd Council is currently working on creating a new Regeneration Plan for the county. The county is split into 13 areas and a local area plan will be prepared for each of the 13 areas.   As the initial part of the plan we have consulted with operational community groups and town and community councils to seek the views on the important themes for communities and how a model of collaboration can be built upon to act on these priorities.

This is a combination of a number of cross-departmental consultation that are happening. Also in 2022 we have opened the consultation to the broader public, with the consultation open between March and the end of June 2022, and over 3,600 questionnaires that have been recorded and analysed were received. Reports for each of the 13 local regeneration areas have been prepared in order to summarise the observations received. During September and October 2022, workshops were established with local organisations in each of the 13 local regeneration areas. The purpose of the workshops was to report back on the outcomes of the engagement work, addressing local priorities. The workshops were also an opportunity to consider and discuss local projects and commence the work of drawing up action plans. The next step of the process will be to prepare local regeneration plans (draft) for every individual area. This is already in progress, with the intention of having draft plans in place by the end of February / beginning of March. We will also arrange a series of further workshops in the local areas in order to consider and discuss the draft action plans.

Progress against improvement proposals

Historically the Economy Department within the Council has done a lot of work in terms of transferring assets to Community Councils, Enterprises and Community Groups. We are working with several Community / Town Councils, groups or community initiatives to build their capacity to undertake more Community Asset Transfer schemes, with several schemes currently underway. We anticipate that the work of developing the area plans is a means of maximizing the number of assets whether it is a building or land that is transferred to community management for community benefit, and a means of developing more community interest and encouragement to take control of assets for the benefit of their communities. We will continue to support groups to strengthen capacity within communities to identify opportunities and support to identify funding sources for business plans and ensure a viable plan.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that the actions in order to respond to the recommendations will be completed by March 2024.

6. Direct Payments for Social Care Provision for Adults
National Report by Audit Wales published in April 2022
Link to the report on Audit Wales website

Improvement Proposals arising from the report

In part 1, the report recommends that local authorities:

- Review public information and discuss with service users and carers to ensure that they are clear, concise, and fully explain what they need to know about Direct Payments.

- Undertakes additional promotion work to encourage people to use Direct Payments.

- Ensure that advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice about Direct Payments to service users and carers.

- Ensure that information about Direct Payments are available at the front door to social care and that they are included in the initial discussion on the options in terms of the care available to service users and carers.

- Provide training for social workers on Direct Payments to ensure that they fully understand their potential and feel confident and promote them to service users and carers.

In part 2:

- Collaborate to develop a joint Recruitment and Retention Plan for Personal Assistants.

- Explain policy expectations in clear and accessible language and note: what Direct Payments can pay for; how the application and assessment processes, time-scales and review processes are working; how monitoring the direct payments and required paperwork to verify how payments work; how unused money is treated and which one can be banked; and how to administrate and manage joint budgets.

In part 3:

- Collaborate to establish a system to evaluate Direct Payments in full, and this being a system that records every element of the process - information, promotion, assessment, management and evaluating impact on well-being and independence.

- Publish information about performance annually for every element of Direct Payments in order to make it possible to have a whole system overview of how they are provided and of their impact to support improvement.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

This is a report in response to a national matter, therefore there are no specific recommendations for Gwynedd. Nevertheless, the recommendations have been discussed in-house within the Department. As a Department, we are fully aware that Gwynedd's use of Direct Payments is the lowest in Wales, and that this needs to be addressed.

Progress against improvement proposals

Part 1:
The work of reviewing public information and the material available for direct payments is continuing, and training is being developed for social workers. It is expected that this will be completed by the end of March.

Part 2:
It was noted last time that frustrating matters had arisen when working with the external company that provides the direct payment support service on our behalf at the moment. The problems with the service have continued, and have led to a number of complaints and frustration by individuals who are receiving direct payments.

Part 3:
As a result of the problems with the direct payments service at present and the lack of use made of direct payments, a group has been set up to take a whole-system view of the service, with input from Vanguard consultants. As well as looking at the whole system, the information available, how direct payments are promoted, etc., we will look again at our options over the coming months in terms of sustaining the direct payments support service. One option that will be considered will be to internalise the direct payments support service. The initial evaluation will be completed by the end of April 2023, and the recommendations will be implemented in full by the end of December 2023 at the latest.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that the actions in order to respond to the recommendations will be completed by the end of 2023.

New since June 2022

1. Time for Change - Poverty in Wales
National Report from the Auditor General for Wales November 2022

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

Recommendation 1

National strategy and targets in order to address poverty and mitigate it

This is a central matter for the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 2

Strategies, targets and reports on local performance in order to address poverty and mitigate it

In Paragraphs 2.13 – 2.23 and Paragraphs 3.33 – 3.35 we highlight that councils and partners have prioritised work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated delivery landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely. We highlight that evaluating activity and reporting performance are also variable with many gaps. We recommend that the councils use their Wellbeing Plans to provide a comprehensive focus on tackling poverty to co-ordinate their efforts, meet local needs and support the revised national plan targets and actions. This should:

• include SMART local actions with a greater emphasis on prevention;

• include a detailed resourcing plan for the length of the strategy;

• be developed with involvement from other public sector partners, the third sector, and those with experience of poverty;

• include a robust set of consistent outcome indicators and measures to increase understanding of poverty locally; and

• be subject to annual public reporting to enable a whole system view of poverty locally to help improve delivery and support.

Recommendation 3

Leadership on the poverty agenda

In Paragraph 2.23 we note that just over a third of councils have lead members and lead officers for addressing poverty. Given the importance of effective leadership in driving the poverty agenda forward and breaking silos within councils and between public bodies, we recommend that each council designate a cabinet member as the council's poverty champion and designate a senior officer to lead and be accountable for the anti-poverty agenda.

Recommendation 4

Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant-funded programmes

This is a central matter for the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 5

Map experiences to create inclusive services for people in poverty

In Paragraphs 3.2 – 3.6 we highlight that people in poverty are often in crisis, dealing with extremely personal and stressful issues, but they often find it difficult to access help from councils because of the way services are designed and delivered. We recommend that councils improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience' through meaningful involvement in decision-making using 'experience mapping' and/or 'Poverty Truth Commissions' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.

Recommendation 6
There is one landing page on the website for people who are looking for support
In Paragraph 3.14 we highlight the difficulties people in poverty face accessing online and digital services. To ensure people are able to get the information and advice they need, we recommend that councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website that:
• is directly accessible on the home page;
• provides links to all services provided by the council that relate to poverty; and
• provides information on the work of partners that can assist people in poverty.

Recommendation 7
Simplify and improve application services and information for people in poverty
In Paragraphs 3.15 and 3.16 we note that no council has created a single gateway into services. As a result, people have to complete multiple application forms that often record the same information when applying for similar services. We highlight that whilst it is important that councils comply with relevant data protection legislation, they also need to share data to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services. We recommend that councils:
• establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data;
• undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests;
• create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services;
• undertake a data audit to provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and
• review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities.

Recommendation 8
Compliance with the socio-economic duty
In Paragraphs 3.27 to 3.32 we set out that while all councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of policy choices and decisions, approaches vary and are not always effective. We recommend that councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent to:
• ensure that they draw on relevant, comprehensive and current data (nothing over 12 months old) to support analysis;
• ensure integrated impact assessments capture information on:

- involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is coproducing with;
- the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the assessment considers issues in the round and how it links across services provided across the council;
- how the council will monitor and evaluate impact and will take corrective action; and
- an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment.

<u>The direction of the discussion on the recommendations</u>

Recommendation 2
The Public Services Board decided that the focus should be on those areas where collaboration is needed in order to make a real difference. After analyzing the main messages that emerged in the Wellbeing Assessment and considering research conclusions and other assessments they have prioritized poverty as one of three specific areas to focus on in order to realize this vision. The objective is worded as follows in the consultative draft of the Wellbeing Plan 2023-28:

Wellbeing Objective 1: We want to work together to mitigate the impact of poverty on the wellbeing of our communities

The Wellbeing Plan also sets out the ambition behind the objective as follows:
We will develop a detailed understanding of how poverty affects our areas and try to ensure that the work that takes place in the field across the public bodies is more effective in order to mitigate the long-term impact of poverty. We will try to gain a detailed understanding of the implications of living in poverty in our different areas. We will continue to develop the Wellbeing Assessments to get a detailed picture of where the lack of access to services is more challenging due to poverty.

Recommendation 3
This has already been achieved - Cllr Nia Jeffreys has taken responsibility for this.

Recommendation 5
Commission done this year on the Gwynedd Poverty Experience.

Recommendation 6
Has been achieved - a specific website has been created - Cost of Living Website:
(https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Residents/Cost-of-living-help.aspx).

Recommendation 7

A number of these issues are either already in place, or plans are already in place to implement them as part of the Council's current Information Plan which was adopted by the Cabinet in January 2021.

The remaining issues will be considered when drawing up the Council's new Digital Strategy.

Recommendation 8
Cyngor Gwynedd is a part of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network. The members of the NWPSEN (the six counties, BCUHB, Eryri National Park, North Wales Police, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service), have used their expertise and knowledge, and created an integrated tool which includes equality, the socio-economic duty, the Welsh language and human rights. The guidance of Welsh Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission was followed and input was received from the offices of that Commission and the Welsh Language Commissioner. The intention of the tool is to facilitate partnership work (by having one acknowledged form), and for the use of the individual organisations. A number of NWPSEN Members use a version of this. We have adapted it slightly and are in the process of obtaining this as our new template in electronic form. It is expected that IT will have completed the work so that it becomes operational by the new financial year. To accompany this, we are preparing a resource that will include the most relevant, comprehensive and current data. Ensuring engagement is an important part of the questions in the tool and a list of organisations is available. There is a need to monitor the assessment often and the tool includes a question in order to create an action plan.

Progress against improvement proposals

This report was published in November, and some recommendations have already been delivered and with others it is premature to report on progress at present. Also, there are national recommendations for the Government, and these have been included for information, and they will be removed for the next meeting.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

Being developed at present.

2. Equality Impact Assessment: more than a tick box exercise?
National Report from the Auditor General for Wales September 2022
[Link to the report on the Audit Wales website](#)

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

Recommendation 1
Clarifying the scope of the duty to impact assess policies and practices
There is scope for confusion about which type of policies and practices must be subject to an assessment for their impact on the public sector equality duty. The Welsh Government should clarify its interpretation of the duty, including whether and how it expects public bodies to apply any test of proportionality and relevance.

Recommendation 2
Building a picture of what good integrated impact assessment looks like
Many public bodies carry out integrated impact assessments that include consideration of the PSED alongside other duties. But practice is inconsistent and often involved collating multiple assessments in one place, rather than being truly integrated, to help maximise the intended benefits of integrated impact assessments, the Welsh Government should work with key stakeholders with an interest in the areas commonly covered by integrated impact assessments and those with lived experiences, to share learning and work towards a shared understanding of what good looks like for an integrated impact assessment.

Recommendation 3
Applying the equality duties to collaborative public bodies and Partnerships
The public sector landscape has changed since the introduction of the PSED and the Welsh specific duties, with an increasing focus on collaborative planning and delivery. The Welsh Government should review whether it needs to update the Wales specific regulations to cover a wider range of collaborative and partnership arrangements. These include public services boards, regional partnership boards and other service specific partnerships.

Recommendation 4
Reviewing public bodies' current approach for conducting EIAs
While there are examples of good practice related to distinct stages of the EIA process, all public bodies have lessons to learn about their overall approach. Public bodies should review their overall approach to EIAs considering the findings of this report and the detailed guidance available from the EHRC and the Practice Hub. We recognise that developments in response to our other recommendations and the Welsh Government's review of the PSED Wales specific regulations may have implications for current guidance in due course.

<u>The direction of the discussion on the recommendations</u>
These recommendations are general and nation-wide and therefore they are not all relevant to us in Cyngor Gwynedd.

Recommendation 1 - this is a recommendation to the Welsh Government

Recommendation 2 - again a matter for the Government in the main, but it should be noted that members of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network. The members of the NWPSEN (the six counties, BCUHB, Eryri National Park, North Wales Police, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service), have used their expertise and knowledge, and created an integrated tool which includes equality, the socio-economic duty, the Welsh language and human rights. The guidance of Welsh Government and the Equality and Human Rights Commission was followed and input was received from the offices of that Commission and the Welsh Language Commissioner. The intention of the tool is to facilitate partnership work (by having one acknowledged form), and for the use of the individual organisations. A number of NWPSEN Members use a version of this. We have adapted it slightly and are in the process of obtaining this as our new template in electronic form. It is expected that IT will have completed the work so that it becomes operational by the new financial year.

Recommendation 3 - again a matter for the Government but we at NWPSEN are proposing the above procedure for partnership work.

Recommendation 4 - we have already acknowledged that we have work to do to improve the procedure and this is why we have adopted the new template that is based on the experience of all organisations. The equality officers are attending an Audit Wales Good Practice Event on 25 January to obtain guidance and discussion regarding the field. Ideas may arise from this meeting and we will keep an eye out for further recommendations from the Government.

<u>Progress against improvement proposals</u>
Work had already been done in this field before we received the recommendations but we will act further as explained above.

<u>Conclusion</u>
On-going.

<u>Timetable</u>

We anticipate that actions to respond to the recommendations will be completed by the end of April 2023, although, indeed, there will be a need for subsequent careful monitoring. We will also need to see what will emerge from the Government under Recommendations 1, 2 and 3.