

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 – continuous work**. 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.
4. **Completed - 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. This work is now comes under the supervision of the Digital Transformation Board and it has been included as a project within the Draft Digital Strategy (which is likely to be presented to the Cabinet for adoption in November).

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate the work programme to respond to the recommendations 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. 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 Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to ensure the consistent use of pre-placement agreements across the region.
2. The current approach for commissioning care home places can cause tensions between partners and result in poor value and poor service user experience. North Wales councils and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to work together to review local arrangements for commissioning care home placements to eliminate avoidable adverse impacts on service users, and each other
3. Accountability is a cornerstone of public sector decision making. Governance arrangements need to scrutinise decisions and hold decision makers to account. North Wales councils and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to strengthen their partnership governance arrangements to ensure proper accountability and effective scrutiny.
4. North Wales councils and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board through the Regional Commissioning Board need to develop a regionally agreed care home commissioning strategy and following this, develop an associated delivery plan.
5. North Wales councils and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board need to review their commissioning arrangements for care home placements to ensure they fulfil their statutory responsibilities around the Welsh language, and the Well-being of Future Generations 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. For 2023/24, Gwynedd agreed on the regional fees for residential care, but Gwynedd continues to pay higher standard fees than the region for dementia and nursing beds. We are still members of the regional fees group, but residential and nursing fees continue to be a matter of concern across the north, and nationally, with several providers claiming significantly higher fees than the standards fees.

Progress against improvement proposals

The regional fees group has recommended residential and nursing fees for 2023/24. Gwynedd has accepted the group's recommendations with regard to residential placements, but has considered the recommendation alongside local considerations, e.g. the shortage of nursing beds in Gwynedd, and decided to keep higher fees in Gwynedd for specialist nursing and dementia placements. Variations (e.g. geographical) across the north make it difficult to reconcile fees/procedures.

In line with the recommendation, the pre-placement agreement has been standardised across the region, and has been sent out to providers across the north. The providers have not yet signed the agreement, and meetings have been arranged to discuss and respond to questions.

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. Only four homes offer an EMI Nursing service in Gwynedd, and three of those charge significantly higher fees than the standard fees that the Council can fund. 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

Completed – continuous work

Timetable

The work will be continuous, and the commissioning of residential and nursing placements will continue to be addressed for years to come, until there are national changes to care services.

4. 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 most 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 were prepared for the Departments, Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Members at the beginning of 2022/23 and were updated for 2023/24. 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. With the new arrangements having now had a year to take root there is an intention to carry out a light review over the next few months, making any further adjustments if necessary.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

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

5. **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.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

A report containing the 'Management Response' was 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. The Corporate Asset Strategy, which is led corporately, sets the direction for the Property Asset Management Plan. Our ability to draw up a Property Asset Management Plan will be dependent on ensuring that the Corporate Asset Strategy is in place.
2. Land and Property Asset Plan to be included as a proposed corporate improvement priority in the next Five Year Council Plan. The Property Asset Plan is included as an improvement priority in the Council's Plan 2023-28.
3. Ffordd Gwynedd Plan 2023-2028 (namely the corporate Organisation Development Plan) has been adopted by the Cabinet on the 7th of March.
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). A report will go to the Cabinet in September to receive a decision about the new way of working, and a bid for funds from the Corporate Asset Management Plan has been submitted to implement the changes resulting from that report.

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. Four work sub-streams have been established to date, namely;

5 headings have been established within the strategy with a view to the plan being adopted by the Cabinet in November:

- Information and Data
- Administration and Business Systems
- Customer Contact
- Workforce
- Resilience

Progress against improvement proposals

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. The Future Working Plan will be presented to the Cabinet for adoption on the 19th of September. The 'Adoption of a new Property Asset Management Plan' is included as a priority in the Council's Plan 2023-28. Our ability to proceed with drawing up a Property Asset Management Plan will be dependent on ensuring that a Corporate Asset Strategy and Strategic Asset Management Plan are in place.

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.

6. Inspection Report: Performance Evaluation Inspection of Cyngor Gwynedd
Local report for Gwynedd from Care Inspectorate Wales conducted in September 2022.
[Dolen i'r adroddiad ar wefan Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru](#)

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 trail of the discussion on the recommendations

Full consideration has been given to all the recommendations received in the report and they are crucial to ensure that we meet our duties of care and well-being towards the residents of Gwynedd by providing services of the best possible standard. We carry out regular reviews as the service management team to look at progress against the work and prepare a progress update to be discussed every six months with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). We have also incorporated several of the recommendations into the department's improvement priorities and in the Gwynedd Council Plan 2023-28 and several the themes that appear also receive attention as part of the corporate risk register.

Progress against improvement proposals

Overall, we are making positive progress on the Home Care Program with our performance data over the last few months showing a reduction in the number of home care hours that we cannot meet. There are several developments by the care providers which are to be commended and which have contributed to the progress but having said that, it must be recognized that problems continue to arise in some areas which have affected the number of hours which we cannot meet, and these specific areas are receiving attention. Many of the other plans to reduce pressure on the home care service are challenging as they require an additional resource of occupational therapists and social workers, but work will take place to prioritize the review of 2 carers' packages.

We have developed a new workload management system to try to tackle our lack of ability to review care packages within statutory timescales and we also extended the work contracts of some individuals for a further six months to assist with the review work. However, a budget to continue with this is challenging. Likewise, the department's ability to strengthen our care quality assurance systems is extremely challenging and changes to staffing the service have further destabilized things for a while. We are continuing to review the situation.

We are seeing progress in relation to collaboration with the Health Board in terms of developing home care and hospital discharge arrangements and this remains a priority. The Council has re-engaged in discussions with the Health Board under the guidance of the corporate director, to re-look at the placement of integrated teams in areas of the County.

In relation to Unpaid Carers, we are currently reviewing the relevant policy, trying to identify the type of support carers receive and how that is recorded, and engaging with a number of stakeholders although to draw up a comprehensive Unpaid Carers Scheme. Work also continues to review our direct payment arrangements, with a specific project board looking at transforming the service, and implementation of the new direct payment arrangements is expected by the Autumn of this year.

From the point of view of our workforce plan we have now acted on the results of the re-evaluation of the care workforce jobs. A work program is also in place for the Social Services Professional Salaries Task and Finish Group; with work having begun to look at the age profile of staff within different services to try to identify areas of concern in terms of a sufficient workforce for the future. In addition, we are revising the Social Work Practitioner job descriptions to further support the work of Occupational Therapists.

Following the recommendations of CIW in relation to our supervision and safeguarding arrangements, training programs are ongoing on various issues including reflective staff supervision, collaborative conversations, advocacy, and mental capacity assessments.

The department has put a departmental Public Relations and Communications Manager in place to lead on the development of a communication and engagement strategy and this is a priority improvement project in the Council's Plan. We have already been working on improving our services website pages and a new version will go live in September 2023. Next, we will map all the communication and engagement activity in progress, identify the gaps and look at our internal communication as well. This mapping and identification of gaps will be done by March 2024.

Conclusion:

Ongoing.

Timetable:

There is a different timetable for different elements of the work, and the timetables are noted above where relevant. By the end of the 2023-24 financial year in March 2024, it is expected that the work of responding to the recommendations will have been done, and there will then be ongoing work to improve our services in accordance with the recommendations of CIW.

Additional reports since February 2023

1. Inspection Report: Gwynedd Domiciliary Care Services - Older People, Supported Living & DERWEN

Local report for Gwynedd from Care Inspectorate Wales published in January 2019

[Link to the report on the CIW website](#)

Priority Action Notice(s)* arising from the report –

The provider needs to:

- Ensure there is effective communication between care staff and managers.
- Ensure records of communication include important information in regard to timeframes.
- Ensure people are supported and checked when waiting for assistance from health care professionals e.g. waiting for an ambulance.
- Ensure there are enough staff available to provide support for people when required.

*(CIW respond to non-compliance with regulations where poor outcomes for people, and / or risk to people's well-being are identified by issuing Priority Action Notice (s). The provider must take immediate steps to address this and make improvements. Where providers fail to take priority action by the target date we may escalate the matter to an Improvement and Enforcement Panel.)

The trail of the discussion on the recommendations

Full consideration has been given to the recommendations received in the report. The recommendations have been discussed by the Service's management team, and are being tied into the broader work programme of the Service. 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

a) Ensure that there is effective communication between care staff and managers.

Ensuring effective communication is one of our main priorities as a Service. Since lockdown, we now ensure that 'Cylchoedd Bro' is held quarterly in our sub-areas, ensure that staff receive regular face to face supervision sessions, and hold specific sessions to update staff of any developments within the service.

We have also taken the opportunity to review and update our service questionnaires, and have sent them out in the middle of July to gather staff feedback regarding our arrangements, whilst giving them the opportunity to share their opinions and recommendations with us, which will contribute to our quality reports.

In addition, we have been collaborating with the Residential Service and Human Resources to establish a Residential and Day Staff Forum. The forum's intention is to give staff the opportunity to voice their opinion, express concerns or ask for clarity, through their Panel representatives. We have received names of those eager to be a part of the forum, and therefore, the next step is to establish a regular timetable to begin the discussions.

b) Ensure that communication records include important information regarding timetables.

If appropriate, we make every effort to ensure that we share timetables within any communication record that we circulate through our Service.

c) Ensure that people are supported and checked whilst waiting for support from professional health care workers e.g., waiting for an ambulance.

By now, as a Service, we have developed specific guidelines for our Community Care Coordinators and Community Care Workers to follow to be able to support and check individuals whilst they wait for support from professional health care workers e.g., waiting for an ambulance. The guidelines include a situation assessment form, check list with specific steps to follow, risk assessment, and a recording form, to record any updates on the situation.

We have ensured that our Community Care Coordinators understand the process and expectations by hosting meetings with them. The Community Care Workers have received a copy of the documentation that is appropriate to them, and there are discussions within 'Cylchoedd Bro,' and supervision discussions have been organised with staff to give them the opportunity to further discuss the process, and check anything that they are not certain about.

We are also in discussions with the 'Galw Gofal' company for them to support us as a service during the period outside of our operating hours. The intention is that we could ask the company to host the individual's well-being check calls if they have to wait long for support, and that they could keep in contact with the ambulance service to receive an update on the situation.

d) Ensure that enough staff are available to provide support to people when needed.

As a service, staff shortages continue to be challenging at this point in time. Recently, a review was undertaken of the job description of a Community Care Worker which led to an increase in their salary scale. We are also continuing to operate within the Care Home Project's requirements which also looks at remodelling our way of providing services to individuals. This includes looking at the Care Worker's work pattern and offering them a better balance regarding work and leisure time. We are also collaborating with our Marketing and Care Careers Development Officer, and are looking at developing plans such as Work Experience, and have tried to recruit staff through the Council's Corporate Apprenticeships Scheme too.

Nevertheless, recruiting continues to be very challenging, and we still need to increase our staff numbers throughout the County.

Conclusion:

Completed – continuous work.

Timetable:

These matters are now being addressed as part of the Service's on-going programme of work.

2. Arrangements for responding to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
[Gwynedd Council – Arrangements for responding to the Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#)

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

- i) Confirm and implement the plans for completing the external panel's performance assessment
- ii) Complete the process of preparing and adopting a Participation Strategy
- iii) Update on the Petitions Scheme
- iv) Update on recruiting all the necessary lay members
- v) Arrangements for the provision of training for Committee members
- vi) On a regional North Wales level, confirm the scrutiny arrangements, borrowing powers and the VAT status of the Corporate Joint Committee

The trail of the discussion on the recommendations

- i) Initial discussion held with WLGA about the possible timetable and a discussion held in the internal Governance Group.

An intention to hold a further discussion in the Governance Group having been through the self-assessment for 22/23 in order to present recommendations and a proposed timetable to the Leadership Team for the completion of the panel's assessment.

- ii) A public consultation was held on the Participation Strategy in January 2023 in order to ensure that there was input from the public.

There is a specific report to the Governance and Audit Committee on this element. It is intended to submit the Strategy to the Full Council on 2 March 2023.

- iii) The Full Council adopted the Petitions Scheme at its meeting on 1 December 2022. We are now undertaking the practical administrative steps prior to its publication on the website. The Scheme is operational in practice.

- iv) The Full Council approved the appointment of a fifth lay member on 1 December 2022. One lay member seat remains vacant, and we aim to fill this in the Council meeting on 2 March 2023

- v) This programme is continuing to evolve. The Members have received personal training from the Ombudsman in November 2022 and treasury advisers in January 2023. A series of headings are currently in development

- vi) Information has been shared regionally regarding the statutory scrutiny arrangements for the CJC. In preparing for the transfer of the Growth Deal and

the completion of the CJC's Constitution, the regional scrutiny model will be identified and agreed with the Councils.

Welsh Government is in discussions with UK Government to agree upon the details of various amendments to UK legislation to support the four CJC's through a Section 150 Order, including in relation to the CJC's taxation status. A draft S150 Order has been prepared and is intended to be tabled in Westminster early in 2023. Subject to agreement, the changes to UK legislation would be made by the end of the current financial year.

Progress against improvement proposals

- i) A discussion has been held in the Management Team and the Leadership Team during June with the intention of presenting a recommendation to the Council/Cabinet (depending on the confirmation of constitutional elements in terms of establishing arrangements for a Panel) in the Autumn that we carry out an assessment by a Panel in October 2024.
- ii) The Participation Strategy was adopted by the Council at its meeting on the 2nd of March 2023.
- iii) The Full Council adopted a Petitions Scheme at its meeting on the 1st of December 2022.
- iv) One lay member's seat remains empty so there will be an effort to fill the seat.
- v) It is intended to request the Committee's decision during the autumn term in relation to carrying out a self-assessment in accordance with CIPFA guidelines. This will be an opportunity to identify specific training needs that are additional to what has already been programmed.
- vi) Information has been shared regionally regarding the possible statutory scrutiny arrangements for the North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC). In preparation for handing over the Growth Plan and finalizing the Constitution of the CJC the regional scrutiny model will be identified and agreed with the Councils and the CJC. The necessary Orders were made to address the issues and VAT and access to loans for the CJC on the 1st of April 2023.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

It is anticipated that the recommendations will be completed by the end of 2023/24.

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. Local regeneration plans (draft) were completed during February/March for every individual area. During May and June 2023, a series of further workshops were organized in the local areas to consider and discuss the draft action plans giving the communities an opportunity to add and confirm local plans. The next steps which will take place during the Autumn will be to establish local action partnerships and share the plans with other Council departments to ensure that the plans incorporate any departmental plans that will take place across the county's communities.

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 to respond to the recommendations will be completed by March 2024.

2. 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 considered by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, and are being implemented. As a Department, we are fully aware that Gwynedd's use of Direct Payments is the lowest in Wales, and this is being 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.

We have held discussions with service users, carers and personal assistants regarding the service and including them in the review.

We need to be clear about what is being offered in terms of payroll support/service before developing final versions of the materials and providing training etc. It is expected that this will be completed by the end of December 2023.

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. The future of this service is currently being reviewed, and there will be clarity on the way forward by the end of August 2023.

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., the group has been looking at our options 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 group's 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 December 2023.

3. Time for Change - Poverty in Wales

National Report from the Auditor General for Wales November 2022

[Link to the report on the Audit Wales website](#)

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

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 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 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:

- i. establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data;
- ii. undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests;
- iii. create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services;
- iv. 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
- v. 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.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

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.

The Wellbeing Plan - which includes the Poverty Objective - has now been adopted by the 5 statutory Board members and was published at the National Eisteddfod in August.

Recommendation 5

Over the past 12 months we have engaged with a large number of people who are in poverty and who contact the Council's services when they are in crisis. At present, we prioritise dealing with the emergency (whether that might be vouchers for food, fuel, or essentials) and when time or circumstances allow, we follow up with a number of those individuals to gather feedback. We have also undertaken work to understand the people of Gwynedd's experiences of living in poverty – people who do not necessarily engage with services at present, to understand the barriers that they face. We have used those messages to produce our communication plan, review some of our arrangements and shape our short-term work programme to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. Residents have told us that accessing the latest information on all the support that is available in one place is useful, therefore our Help with Living Costs website is maintained and updated regularly with our own information and that of our partners; residents have also told us that they are required to contact more than one service through usual methods such as on the phone, visiting offices is difficult, therefore we have organised a series of events jointly with our partners taking services to village halls, etc. throughout the county.

Recommendation 7 -

A number of these issues are either already in place, or plans are 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 are being considered by the various sub-groups that are involved in drawing up the Council's new Digital Strategy, and it is intended that that Strategy will be completed and adopted during the autumn of 2023.

Recommendation 8 -

Cyngor Gwynedd is a part of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network. The members of the NWPSSEN (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 adopting this as our new template in electronic form. We are currently piloting the new template. 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 (reported to the Committee in February) and updates on the remaining ones are provided above.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

Being developed at present.

4. 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.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

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 NWPSSEN (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 NWPSSEN 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. Although there has been a delay with this work, the new template is currently being piloted.

Recommendation 3 - again a matter for the Government but we at NWPSSEN 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 attended an Audit Wales Good Practice Event on 25 January to obtain guidance and discussion regarding the field. Following this meeting we are of the view that we are on the right track with the new template, although we are ready to make changes if guidance to that effect is received from the Government.

Progress against improvement proposals

Work had already been done in this field before we received the recommendations, but we will act further as explained above.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that actions to respond to the recommendations will be completed by the end of April 2024, 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.

Additional reports since February 2023

5. Gwynedd Council – Decarbonisation Progress

Letter from Audit Wales, December 2022

[Link to the report on the Audit Wales website](#)

Recommendations arising from the report:

- R1 The Council should ensure that the high-level actions in its decarbonisation plan are:
- prioritised based on clear criteria, including carbon and financial impact;
 - aligned with its Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Capital Programme; and
 - integrated into business plans
- R2 The Council should develop a robust set of metrics to measure and report progress on its decarbonisation journey

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Recommendation 1

Developing the projects in the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan (CNEP), and monitoring their performance, is the responsibility of the Climate and Nature Board (a member of the Communities Scrutiny Committee sits on the board). Where substantial financial investment is required to realise projects, then a business plan is submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet to be approved or otherwise – such as the Phase 4 PV Scheme and the Green Fleet Strategy.

Some projects are included in the CNEP because we already have data that shows they will have a positive impact on reducing carbon emissions or increasing carbon sequestration. If there is no data available, projects have been included because there is sufficient evidence that they will lead to a positive outcome – e.g. installing charging points in public places for use by the residents of Gwynedd. Nevertheless, we are refining our internal processes of prioritising the timescale for starting and delivering projects.

Recommendation 2

The Council collects data on its carbon emissions and carbon sequestration levels and presents the data to the Welsh Government annually, following a reporting template that is used by most public organisations in Wales.

We can use the data to measure the effect of a number of the schemes in our Climate and Nature Emergency Plan – e.g. energy use, fleet emissions – but it is more difficult to make the link with others – e.g. encouraging active travel amongst residents and visitors, fostering and preserving residents and visitors' interest in ecological matters.

Progress against the recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Council has allocated £3M as a medium-term revenue budget to fund projects in the CNEP, and an additional £2.8M from the Council's reserves will be spent on the Phase 4 PV Scheme by the end of 2024/25, leading to substantial carbon and revenue savings. Various grant bids for external funding have also been/will be submitted. Work is ongoing to cost some of the projects in the CNEP, therefore we will review our budgets annually when the costs are known.

The work of reviewing the Council's strategies, policies and business plans is underway, which will be continuous work. 50 members of staff and elected members, including Cabinet Members, have received carbon literacy training, and we will also develop a training e-module for the rest of our members and staff by the autumn. This will lead to integrating the principles of sustainability and carbon-saving across the Council's departments. There is specific work being undertaken to improve how our procurement arrangements can reduce our suppliers' carbon emissions.

Recommendation 2

We are continuing to submit data on levels of emissions and carbon sequestration to the Welsh Government annually. We will also publish an annual report on the progress of our CNEP in the autumn.

We received an information pack or a toolkit from the Welsh Local Government Association to try to better measure the carbon emissions that stem from procurement arrangements, and we are currently reviewing our procurement arrangements using the information contained in it. We are also awaiting a guidelines pack from the Welsh Local Government Association to measure the effect of land use carbon.

Work is also underway internally to establish a baseline to measure biodiversity, and work has been completed to measure the effect of carbon that stems from working from home, commuting and business travelling.

Conclusion:

On-going.

Timetable:

The task of measuring the financial and carbon cost of some of the projects in the CNEP has been completed, but work is ongoing with the remainder. We are constantly reviewing the costs and success of projects as we monitor progress, therefore the work under R1 is also continuous work.

It is ongoing work to assess new methods of measuring the carbon value of projects, and we are keeping up with developments in this field by the Welsh Government's Energy Service.