

Improvement Proposals - External Audit Reports 2019-2022

Key to the conclusions –

1. **Not commenced** - the report has not yet been considered.
2. **In the planning stages** - hold discussions in order to determine how to respond to the recommendations and plan if/how to implement.
3. **On-going** - agreement or action plan in place in order to respond to the recommendations and work has commenced.
4. **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 Audit Wales website](#)

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

- (i) Establish a formal benefit verification programme to be able to appropriately evaluate the aims of the development project.
 1. Review technology options within the project:
- (ii) Improve access to enable more staff (for example, those who are in a remote location) 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. As a result, it is proposed to submit a report in the near future that will make an assessment of this progress and outline what is to be achieved again. Due to the increasing demand on the time of developmental staff in the in-house IT Service and also the complexity of developing key modules there is an increasing possibility that we will need to look externally for some aspects of the solution.

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. It is proposed to resurrect the work, however, unfortunately to date no specific timetable has been drafted. However, as a sign of wider use it is good to note that over 90% of the Council workforce now has access to their wage slips by using the staff self-service portal.

Conclusion

On-going.

2. Local Government Use of Data – Gwynedd Council

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 it is presented in. 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.

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.

Conclusion

On-going.

3. Inspection Report – Gwynedd Domiciliary Care Services

Local report for Gwynedd published by Care Inspectorate Wales 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 well-being or upon staff development. Each staff member we spoke with told us they believed training provision could be improved and this was acknowledged by the management team.
2. Quality of service report (Regulation 23 (1), (2) & (3)). We found that the service had not completed an annual quality of service report and had not consulted with people using the service and their representatives. We have not issued a notice on this occasion as we did not see this had negatively impacted upon people's well-being or the care and support being provided.
3. Service delivery plans and risk assessments need to be reviewed in timely fashion.
4. The service needs to improve the way in which they document and record formal and informal discussions with families/representatives and staff. This will ensure a clear audit trail.
5. Ensure that staff receive formal supervision sessions that are timely and consistent, minutes of these sessions should be kept up to date, and staff should also receive an annual appraisal.

6. The service's information page needs to be updated, and it should include the correct contact details for CIW.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

The six recommendations from the report have been given full consideration. The recommendations have been discussed in the service's management team meetings, and they're being integrated into the Council's wider Domiciliary Care Transformation programme. They will also be considered as part of the work programme for the Home Care Project, which explores the possibility of re-commissioning and re-modelling the way we provide services to individuals. Although the recommendations from this report have not been raised to the corporate risk register, we feel that the recommendations have an important role to play in ensuring that we provide services of the highest possible standard. Thus, we as a management team will be reviewing our progress against the recommendations on a regular basis.

Progress against improvement proposals

The Department's intention was to ensure improvements across both internal and external provisions as part of the Home Care Project, and the Department has responded to the recommendations by establishing short term measures to improve the service. Although the Home Care Project is progressing by now, we must acknowledge that we experienced significant slippage to the original timeline due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, during the last two years there have been changes to the leadership of the service. Following the retirement of one senior manager, we have appointed a new individual to the role, and also appointed a Deputy Head of Department which oversees the Provider service.

As a result, we as a service have made the decision to focus on initially improving two key priority areas, which are: ensuring consistency in frequency and recording of staff training, and developing a consistent report of service quality.

Work has started on finding which members of staff have attended which training courses, and our intention is to develop an electronic method of storing this information more effectively. There's also a specific work stream of the Home Care Project that focuses on training for staff from internal and external providers, which will ensure that all members of staff have been offered the same level of training.

As part of the Home Care Project we have been engaging with staff and service users to update them on developments. The transition phase is a key part of the Home Care Project, and we hope to engage further with service users and their representatives during the Winter of 2022 to gather feedback for our quality report.

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

Conclusion

On-going.

4. The Well-being of Future Generations: Audit of 'Establishing a New Youth Service to Support Young People' - Gwynedd Council

The Local report for Gwynedd from Care Inspectorate Wales published in September 2019

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

1. Although it had responded to the opinion of service users, the Council's approach is mainly reactive and it is steered by a changing operational context - specifically, financial constraints. The Council's perception of the benefits of establishing an implementation model that can be increased or reduced in response to needs, is mainly involved with helping to respond easier to budgetary pressures.
2. Data sources used to enlighten the new model mainly focused on understanding the needs of current service users and not much use of data was made to model the service demand in future.
3. The newly remodelled mobile service is more able to be present on a temporary basis, as and when required and it has more ability to be more dynamic in terms of responding to social matters, helping to prevent them from exacerbating.
4. Increasing the effective use of data will give the Council a better understanding of fundamental cases, issues and service demand. This will help the Council to think more widely and use a more integrated method in terms of early intervention and prevention.
5. There is limited evidence to reflect that the Council has considered how this step contributes towards its wider well-being objectives, those of its partners or the seven national well-being aims. The Council did not use an integrated method when remodelling its youth service. Although the well-being objectives of the Council and partners had not been confirmed when the remodelling process commenced, its reactive method in nature, which was stimulated by financial considerations, meant that wider priorities were not considered effectively.

6. The Council places great emphasis on applying a 'citizen-focused' method, namely 'Ffordd Gwynedd', when implementing the action. However, in the action reviewed, the Council could not fully show that 'Ffordd Gwynedd' incorporated the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working. Doing so would facilitate more integration.
7. Although it created more opportunities to collaborate on an operational level, the Council cannot show that it has considered how to work strategically with partners to achieve the step. This reflects our findings in relation to integration.
8. One partner stated that a negative change had been seen in terms of engaging with the Council's youth service after it was newly remodelled, as this had unfavourably affected the preventative objectives and activities of the partner. Again, this reflects our findings in relation to integration.
9. The absence of a clear message stating the intention to close all the existing youth clubs in the 'Gwynedd Youth Service for Tomorrow' video is a key weakness in terms of how the Council conveyed potential changes to service users and citizens.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

In the previous reports that have been presented to the Audit Committee in November 2019 and October 2021, it was noted that the Council had noted a desire to seek a further discussion with Wales Audit Office on the outcomes and improvement proposals of the Youth Service audit. See the minutes of the Full Council dated 3 October 2019.

A Progress Report on remodelling the Youth Service was submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 23 January 2020. This report did not refer to the improvement recommendations as the discussion with the Audit Office continued.

Progress against improvement proposals

Audit Wales agreed to undertake a follow-up review of the implementation of the new youth service model as a response to the concerns of the Full Council that their original report had not considered the quality of the new youth model.

It had been intended to complete the review during 2020-21 but due to the Covid-19 crisis, the work has been postponed. An agreement was made on a brief for the review in January 2021 but a completion timetable is yet to be confirmed. The review intends to examine the quality of the provision under the arrangements of the new model. The Youth Service has not implemented the new model since the beginning

of the crisis due to the need for them to adapt to respond to the needs of young people, and due to the fact that pandemic restrictions prevented them from providing some elements of the service entirely. Recovery work is already afoot but we do not anticipate that the Youth Service will fully recover to the new model for some time yet.

Conclusion

In the planning stages.

5. 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 Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

A report was presented to the Cabinet on the 28/06/22 following a review of the affordability of residential and nursing fees in 2022/23. The sustainability of the care provider market has been included on the Department's risk register.

Progress against improvement proposals

We are part of regional discussions on commissioning residential and nursing placements, and we expect to receive a regional contract to be used prior to placement in September 2022. Despite this, in order to ensure the sustainability and stability of the care market in Gwynedd, we will be stepping away from the North Wales Standard fees.

We are working closely with officers from the Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board to strengthen our governance arrangements for cases that are co-commissioned. Initial discussions have also begun among Council officers regarding language and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Conclusion

In the planning stages.

6. Review of the Council's 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 -

R1 - 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.

R2 - 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.

R3 - 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.

R4 - 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
- introducing milestones and identifying project owners to track progress and ensuring accountability for the delivery of projects that span several years.

R5 - 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 direction of the discussion on the recommendations -

The report and its recommendations have been considered as part of a wider review of the corporate performance scrutiny arrangements, this review was led by the Chief Executive at the end of 2021/22. The final recommendations for the new corporate performance scrutiny arrangements (which included the majority of the recommendations presented in this report) were presented in February 2022.

Progress against improvement proposals

The new arrangements will be made operational following the election in May 2022, our aim is for the arrangements to be in place for the first set of performance scrutiny meetings in 2022/23. Guidance on the new arrangements will be prepared for the Departments, Cabinet Members and members of the Scrutiny Committee. In addition, a series of sessions will be organised to raise awareness of the changes to the scrutiny arrangements. During these sessions Cabinet Members and representatives from the various Departments will have the opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback on the changes, these will be held in May/June 2022.

Conclusion

On-going.

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

1. How does Local Government Manage Demand – Homelessness

National Report by Audit Wales published in January 2018

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

1. We recommend that local authorities should do the following:
 - ensure that their staff are sufficiently able to deal with the new requirements of mediation, problem-solving, negotiating and influencing with homeless people; and
 - review and reorganise their services to engage more effectively with homeless people and those who could be homeless in order to prevent homelessness.

2. We recommend that local authorities should do the following:
 - draw up services to ensure that there is early contact with service users;
 - use triage methods to note and filter individuals who ask for help in order to determine the most appropriate response to address their needs; and
 - test the effectiveness of first point of contact services in order to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

3. We recommend that local authorities publish service standards that clearly note what their responsibilities are and how they will provide services in order to ensure that people know what they have the right to receive and what they have to do for themselves. Service standards should:
 - be written in accessible and simple language.
 - be accurate in terms of what applicants can expect and not expect, and when they can expect it to be resolved.
 - note clearly the role of the applicant in the process and how they can help the process to run more smoothly and quickly.
 - be drawn up on a joint basis with experts in the field and include people who use the service(s).
 - integrate effectively with the individual assessment process.
 - offer viable alternative options to authority services.
 - note the appeals and complaints processes. These should be based on fairness and equality for everyone in question and they should be available for all.

4. In order to improve current performance, we recommend that local authorities make better use of their websites in order to help manage demand by:

- testing the usefulness and effectiveness of existing information on websites by using our enquiry phone lines noted in Appendix 5;
 - increase and improve the range, quality and scope of on-line information; make better use of on-line programmes; and
 - link more effectively with information from specialist providers and advice experts, such as Citizens' Advice Bureau.
5. We recommend that local authorities note and agree on what they expect from partners, noting how they will collaborate in order to alleviate homelessness. This agreement should be reviewed regularly and the performance of partners should be reviewed in order to note fields for improvement.
6. We recommend that local authorities address weaknesses in their equality monitoring method and ensure that their homelessness service records and evaluates appropriate data correctly in order to show equal access for service users of which the local authority has a duty towards.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Our working arrangements in relation to homelessness have been the subject of many internal and public meetings recently including the Care Scrutiny Committee in March 2021 and the Cabinet on 20 April 2021. The recommendations of the report have underpinned the restructuring within our Homelessness units, which are currently being implemented following the Cabinet's approval in April.

The number of homelessness presentations has substantially increased during the pandemic and the restructuring will enable us to respond and increase our capacity to provide support and early intervention to those who present as homeless.

Progress against improvement proposals

In July 2019, the Cabinet approved our Housing Strategy. Furthermore, our Housing Action Plan was approved by the Cabinet at its meeting on 15 December 2020 noting how we would proceed to achieve the objective that no one is homeless in Gwynedd. Collaborating with partners is a key part of realising this objective.

We have planned on a joint basis with experts to ensure that our service standards and the information we provide, which includes our responsibilities, is understandable.

One of the projects of the Housing Action Plan, which is currently being developed, is the establishment of a 'One Stop Shop' for housing matters and, as a result, our website and engagement arrangements will further evolve over the next few months.

Conclusion

Completed.

2. Housing Adaptations

National Report by Audit Wales published in February 2018

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

1. We recommend that local authorities should work with partner authorities (health bodies, housing associations and Care and Repair) to reinforce their strategic focus when providing adaptations by:
 - setting appropriate strategic objectives for adaptations that focus on well-being and independence;
 - improving the quality of information on the demand for adaptations by using a wide range of data to assess need, including seeking and using information by partners working in the local authority area; and
 - connecting the system to manage and deliver adaptations with policies and adapted housing registers in order to make the best use of homes already adapted.
2. We recommend that supply organisations should provide information on housing adaptation in Welsh and English, in accessible forms including Braille, large fonts, audio versions and other languages. Information should be promoted widely via a range of media, including social media, websites, and published information, and through key partners. Ideally, information should be produced on a joint basis and policies should be aligned between supply bodies in order to extend their scope and increase their use.
3. As there is a vast number of pathways to follow in order to access services, supply organisations need to ensure that they have robust systems to deal with applications quickly and effectively. However, we saw that the processes used by supply organisations varied greatly, and that they often created difficulties for disabled people and older people who seek support (paragraphs 2.16 to 2.19). We recommend that supply organisations should simplify the application process by creating one comprehensive application form for every organisation within a local authority area. The form should be available via partners and on-line.
4. A variety of factors can cause delay when undertaking adaptations (paragraphs 2.20 to 2.33). In order to improve the timeliness of supply, we recommend the following:

- that local authorities provide or use home improvement agency services to assist disabled and older people to pursue their DFG applications efficiently;
- that supply organisations work with planning authorities to speed up and simplify the process for adaptations that require approval;
- that supply organisations use Trusted Assessors to undertake assessments for adaptation work of a simpler nature.

5. We recommend that supply organisations:

- introduce formal systems to accredit contractors to deliver adaptation work. These should include:
 - customer care standards such as keeping appointments, keeping the site tidy, noise control etc.;
 - auditing the financial position, tax status and VAT;
 - promoting good health and safety practices;
 - a requirement to use guarantee schemes;
 - ensuring sufficient insurance cover; and
 - requesting references.
- use framework agreements and contracts through a partnership to deliver adaptations;
- address weaknesses when issuing adaptations on a contract, update the Rates List used to tender out work and undertake competitive tendering exercises in order to support value for money when tendering work out in a contract;
- develop effective systems to manage and evaluate the performance of contracts by:
 - determining an appropriate range of information in order to determine the performance and achievement of the work, including the timeliness of the work; quality of the work; feedback of applicants/tenants; cost of the work (including variations); record in terms of health and safety; and customer feedback.
 - evaluating and reporting on performance regularly in order to find opportunities to improve services; and
 - providing formal feedback to contractors on their performance, discussing key matters such as client satisfaction, the level of any variation and how acceptable it is, work that is accurate the first time, post-inspection assessment and completing on time in accordance with the budget.

6. We recommend that local authorities should collaborate with partner authorities (health bodies, housing associations and Care and Repair) to develop and improve collaboration arrangements. The aim will be to increase the maximum use and benefit associated with adaptations in terms of supporting independence by merging resources, co-locating staff and creating integrated delivery teams.

7. In order to improve the use and number of people who take advantage of adaptations with health bodies, we recommend that supply organisations should jointly agree on joint service standards to deliver adaptations in every local authority area, and publish those joint-standards. It should be clearly noted in the service standards how every agency will proceed to deliver adaptations, and provide services to ensure that people know what they have the right to receive. Service Standards should:
- be in an accessible and comprehensible language;
 - be accurate in terms of what people can expect/not expect to receive;
 - be drawn up on a joint basis to include all adaptation services within an area;
 - note eligibility for the different funding streams, the application and assessment processes, time-scales and review processes; and
 - offer the potential options and the alternative choices to adaptation, which include linking with adapted housing registers to make the best possible use of homes that have already been adapted.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

The Housing Action Plan was submitted to Gwynedd Council Cabinet in December 2020, which includes our commitment to housing adaptations over the coming years. It was also discussed in detail at the Scrutiny Committee in January 2020.

We hold quarterly meetings with partners (Council departments, Health Board, Care and Repair) that encompass those recommendations.

Progress against improvement proposals

In December 2020, the Housing Action Plan was approved by Gwynedd Council Cabinet with £7.2m earmarked for 6 years for DFG and £600k for smaller adaptations (Enable).

The recommendations have been considered when drawing up our working arrangements. We are collaborating with partners such as Care and Repair, other Council departments, and the Health Board, with referrals being made via the Authority's Occupational Therapists. Supply organisations by now use Trusted Assessors to undertake assessments for adaptation work of a simpler nature.

We have appropriate systems in place to administrate the housing adaptations. Our contractors have been verified through a robust process and we are currently in the process of establishing a new framework of qualified and accredited contractors to undertake the adaptations. We appoint agencies to facilitate the process for applicants in cases that require substantial adaptations, as well as undertaking these internally when possible. We have established a standard Work Programme, with attached competitive prices to facilitate the tendering process for construction work. We have also adopted an e-tendering system, that includes a robust and safe system of sharing tender documents as well as receiving prices back from

Contractors, in accordance with the current NJCC practice, to ensure an alternative time-schedule.

We always provide formal feedback to contractors on their performance, discussing key matters such as client satisfaction, and we are very pleased that we are able to maintain a very good relationship with the Contractors who undertake work on our behalf, with many client writing to us to state their satisfaction with the process of receiving adaptations.

One of the projects of the Housing Action Plan, which is currently being developed, is the establishment of a 'One Stop Shop' for housing matters and, as a result, access to this service via our website and engagement arrangements will further evolve over the next few months.

We have amended our Private Sector Housing Policy to reflect the demand from the Welsh Government to remove any requirement for a means test for minor and medium adaptations, and hope to act on this as soon as the amended document has received formal approval.

Conclusion

Completed.

3. Provision of Local Government Service to Rural Communities: Community Asset Transfer

National Report by Audit Wales published in December 2018

[Link to the report on 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, and training, 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 convergence of several different cross-departmental consultations that are happening. Also, during 2022 we have opened the consultation out to the wider public, with the consultation closing at the end of June 2022, with the intention of holding workshops in each of the 13 areas in the next few months to develop the local area plans. This will be a way for us to respond cross-departmentally to the challenges that face communities and joint plan with the communities to ensure that we place the resources and support behind the activities/matters that are important to these local communities.

Progress against improvement proposals

- A great number of plans to support rural communities are implemented, and some of these deal with providing resources that are fit for purpose. This does not always mean the transfer of assets that belong to the Council, however, the needs will become more evident when completing the work on drafting Regeneration Plans.
- Cyngor Gwynedd led a great deal in the Social Enterprise field in 2013. With the Social Enterprise Manager. Gwynedd received the first designation of being a Social Enterprise County in Wales by Social Enterprise UK and there was a Forum for the Enterprises. Since then changes have been seen within departments and within Social Enterprises that has seen the end of the Forum and no one directly leads the agenda.
- The Economy and Community Department has worked very closely with Arloesi Gwynedd Wledig to create community hubs. We are now developing a maker space

and repair cafés in 8 communities in the County. Each one will be a little different; however, the main aim will be to offer hot desking facilities and creation and maker spaces; repair cafés; interweaved with other community activities.

- Historically, the Department has undertaken a great deal of work in terms of the transfer of assets to Communities/Community Groups - e.g. Rhyd Ddu Outdoors Centre to be transferred to Antur Nantlle to be run as a bunk house business; former Library in Deiniolen transferred to Menter Fachwen. An Assets Transfer Procedure was created but has not been adopted. With changes in budgets and priorities there is no one who leads on this.

Conclusion

In progress.

4. Rough Sleeping in Wales - Everyone's Problem; No One's Responsibility

National Report by Audit Wales published in July 2020

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

Public bodies and third sector partners should ensure they use data to plan the right future services, and to put in place effective data sharing protocols to ensure they respond effectively and safely to people sleeping rough. We recommend that councils and their partners:

- invest in data analytical skills to better understand the current situation and predict future demand to prevent future homelessness;
- review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities; and
- introduce a single data capture and risk assessment process to help support safe decision-making in dealing with people sleeping rough.

Because public bodies are responding to people in crisis, they often deal with acute issues in isolation and rarely address the fundamental cause of the crisis. Doing this requires public bodies to design and create responsive service delivery models. We recommend that public bodies use our complex needs self-reflection tool to improve how they can jointly address complex needs in the future (the tool is set out in Appendix 2).

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Homelessness and rough sleeping is discussed at a number of meetings including our Emergency Planning Action Panel and other internal and cross-departmental meetings by collaborating to ensure that no one sleeps rough in Gwynedd.

The recommendations of the report have underpinned the restructuring within our Homelessness units, which are currently being implemented following the Cabinet's approval in April, and were discussed in detail by the Cabinet at its meeting on 20 April 2021, and by the Scrutiny Committee in March 2021.

Progress against improvement proposals

We collaborate with a number of third sector agencies to provide support to individuals. We analyse data to identify trends and we will build on this work following the appointment of a new data officer to support the department.

The recommendations have been relevant to restructuring our homelessness units and we are working closely with the health board including joint-employing a specialist staff member to provide mental health support to individuals.

Conclusion

Completed.

5. Regenerating Town Centres in Wales

National report published in September 2021

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report -

R1 - Non-domestic rates have not been reviewed in recent years, and the levels charged do not reflect the current rents being achieved in many town centres. We recommend that the Welsh Government review Non-domestic Rates to ensure the system better reflects town-centre conditions when the payments holiday ends in March 2022.

R2 - Many town-centre businesses are impacted adversely by charging for car parking, access to public transport and poor transport infrastructure. We recommend that the Welsh Government work with local authorities to review transport challenges facing town centres and agree how best to address these.

R3 - The Welsh Government has directly provided and levered in just under £900 million through 13 funding schemes to help regenerate town centres. However, some aspects of the Welsh Government's management of the funding are considered problematic. To ensure local authorities are able to maximise the impact of funding

and tackle the more difficult and longstanding problems that would help transform their town centres, we recommend that the Welsh Government:

- consolidate funding to reduce bureaucracy by streamlining processes and grant conditions and keeping requests for information and supporting materials to a minimum;
- move away from annual bidding cycles to multi-year allocations; and
- rebalance investment from capital to revenue to help local authorities address staff capacity and skills shortages.

R4 - The Welsh Government has provided all 22 local authorities with training on how best to use existing enforcement, financial assistance and debt recovery powers, but they are not being consistently nor effectively utilised to support regeneration. We recommend that local authorities take appropriate action, using these existing powers and resources available to achieve the best possible outcome for town centres by:

- using alternative methods of enforcement before using Compulsory Purchase Orders as a last resort;
- integrating enforcement strategies with wider departmental strategies across housing, environmental health, planning and regeneration teams to make more effective use of existing skills and resources; and
- ensuring there is capacity and the right expertise to use the full range of powers, working in collaboration with other councils to achieve good outcomes.

R5 - The Welsh Government's 'Town Centres First' approach looks to put the health of town centres at the heart of the decisions taken by the Welsh Government, local authorities, the wider public sector, businesses and communities. This requires a high degree of integration between cross-cutting policy frameworks and decision making to promote town centres above much else. We recommend that the Welsh Government set out how it plans to deliver this in practice, its expectations of partners and the practical steps it will take to make this ambition a reality.

R6 - Town centres are changing, and local authorities need to be receptive to these changes and plan to manage these shifts. We recommend that local authorities use our regeneration tool to self-assess their current approaches to identify where they need to improve their work on town-centre regeneration (the tool is here).

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations -

The report/recommendations have not been discussed at any formal Council committee. It is noted that some of the recommendations are relevant to matters

and further actions from the Welsh Government. The Council contributes to the work of the Regional Regeneration Officers Group who have discussed the recommendations. The fact that town centres and high street areas are facing a period of change and uncertainty has been identified by the Economy and Community Department within the risk register.

Progress against improvement proposals

It is anticipated that recommendations R1, R2 and R3 will be considered by the Welsh Government initially. R4 - Training sessions (one for the Cabinet and one for officers) organised by the Welsh Government have already been held. The Council has established a Cross-departmental Empty Property Group and has prepared an action plan approved by the Welsh Government.

R5 - Further information is expected from the Welsh Government

R6 - The report recommends a regeneration tool to self-assess existing approaches, that make use of data from the Understanding Welsh Places website. However, the Council has identified the need for additional data to identify and understand trends within town centre areas and has commissioned further work. The Council also contributes to joint work between the six North Wales authorities to develop the regional town centre regeneration framework that also provides detailed data for individual town centres.

Outcome

Completed.

6. Review of the work of local authorities to support their learning communities in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs)

Report for Gwynedd from Estyn dated 18 January 2021 - This letter is a follow-up to a national thematic report published on 15 January 2021 - [Support for local authorities and regional consortia for schools and PRUs to respond to COVID-19](#)

A letter was received from the Chief Inspector of Estyn describing the work undertaken by Gwynedd Council between March and October 2020 to respond to learning challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are descriptions of the work undertaken and a few observations on the success of the work; there are no firm recommendations for future implementation. To summarise; the letter does not highlight matters of concern that require action.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

The letter was shared with the Chief Executive, the Cabinet Member for Education, the Head of Education Department and members of the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee.

The annual report of the Education Department was submitted to the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 4 February 2021, and sections of the contents of the letter are quoted in this report.

Progress against improvement proposals

The observations made in the letter as well as the national recommendations have received consideration from the Department and the Cabinet Member, and we have used the recommendations in planning how to support schools and learners through the pandemic.

Estyn offered positive observations on our progress against the national recommendations back in July 2021 (see the link below).



Gwynedd.pdf

Conclusion

Completed.

7. Direct Payments for Adult Social Care

National report published in April 2022 by Audit Wales

[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 in discussion with service users and carers to ensure it is clear, concise and fully explains what they need to know about Direct Payments.
- Undertake additional promotional work to encourage take up of Direct Payments.
- Ensure advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice on Direct Payments to service users and carers.

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

-Provide training to social workers on Direct Payments to ensure they fully understand their potential and feel confident promoting it to service users and carers.

In part 2:

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

-Clarify policy expectations in plain accessible language and set out: what Direct Payments can pay for; how application and assessment processes, timescales and review processes work; how monitoring individual payments and the paperwork required to verify payments will work; how unused monies are to be treated and whether they can be banked; and how to administer and manage pooled budgets.

In part 3:

-Work together to establish a system to fully evaluate Direct Payments that captures all elements of the process – information, promotion, assessing, managing and evaluating impact on wellbeing and independence.

-Annually publish performance information for all elements of Direct Payments to enable a whole system view of delivery and impact to support improvement.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

This report responds to National matters, therefore there are no specific recommendations to be implemented in Gwynedd. Despite this, the recommendations have been discussed internally within the Department. We as a Department are well aware that the use of Direct Payments in Gwynedd is the lowest in Wales, and that this matter needs attention.

As part of the process to transform the service, we have been out to tender for Direct Payment Support during 2021/22. Diverse Cymru's tender was successful, and they have started supporting us with this work. We experienced some obstacles during the early days of the contract, but our hope is that we will be able to tackle some of these issues moving forward by working closely with Diverse Cymru over the coming months. This issue is not currently on the Department's risk register, but it is possible that it might need to be added soon.

Progress against improvement proposals

Part 1:

-In terms of the public information and materials available to explain the Direct Payments system, this is something that requires our attention. These changes will be implemented with the support of the Business Project Officer and the Information Officer, and we aim to implement these changes by the end of 2022/23.

-Training for Social Workers is another work stream that requires further attention, and our hope is that further training will also promote the use of Direct Payments, and also enable workers to discuss this during initial conversations with individuals who receive services.

Part 2:

-To address these recommendations we will be continuing our working relationship with Diverse Cymru, and ensuring that clear information and materials are made public, readily available, and written in understandable language for individuals and their families.

-To support with the recruitment and retention of personal assistants, we expect Diverse Cymru to develop a register where other providers across the county can access or input information.

Part 3:

-Currently, there is no system in place to evaluate all elements of the Direct Payments process. This is something that needs to be looked at as soon as possible. The Business Project Officer will be reviewing the service with the support of the Senior Business Manager, and it is foreseen that they will present a report of their findings to the Cabinet in due course. Despite this, other projects are seen as higher priority at this moment in time, therefore although the performance measures will be developed soon the evaluation of all elements of the Direct Payments process will be completed by the end of 2023/24.

Conclusion:

In the planning stages