

JANUARY 2025

Improvement Proposals in External Audit Reports

Key to the conclusions –

1. **On-going** - agreement or action plan in place in order to respond to the recommendations and work has commenced.
2. **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.
3. **Completed - recommendations have been realised.**

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

1. 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 challenge and support regime has been implemented since the first round of performance challenge meetings in 2022/23. In addition, guidance on the new regime was prepared for Departments, Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Members at the beginning of 2022/23 and updated for 2023/24. In addition, a series of sessions were held to raise awareness of the new arrangements for Department representatives and Cabinet Members, which also provided an opportunity to ask questions and present observations.

These arrangements have been reviewed in recent months, taking into account a report by Audit Wales in September 2023 which refers to the need to consider giving higher visibility to performance information within the public scrutiny committees in order to challenge the progress being made and that the information being presented to elected members as a whole about performance needs to be strengthened. As a result, a new performance reporting regime will be introduced in May 2025 whereby performance reports will be submitted directly to Scrutiny Committees rather than Cabinet. There is also an intention to publish or share performance information more widely, including publishing all performance measures.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

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

Local report for Gwynedd from Audit Wales published in November 2022

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report that continue to require attention:

- i) Update on recruiting all the necessary lay members
- ii) Arrangements for the provision of training for Committee members
- iii) On a regional North Wales level, confirm the scrutiny arrangements, borrowing powers and the VAT status of the Corporate Joint Committee

Progress against improvement proposals:

- i) The challenge of identifying individuals to take on the role lay members on the Committee requires us to look again at the methods used and to include a combination of the traditional advert, canvassing members and organisations, together with the website to ensure success. This work is underway.
- ii) A workshop for committee members was held on the 3rd of April, 2024.

- iii) We can confirm that the loan powers and VAT status of the Joint Scrutiny Committee have been resolved through regulations which became effective on the 1st of April 2023. A plan based on a standard report and draft standing orders to establish a Joint Scrutiny Committee is in the process of being submitted to the region's councils. The exact timeframe is dependent on the councils' decision-making cycle. It must also be recognised that this is subject to the approval of a Full Council meeting of each Local Authority. The intention was backed by Wrexham County Borough Council in December and decisions by the councils are expected by the end of the municipal year.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

The scrutiny aspect inevitably involves building a consensus between the 6 Councils in north Wales on direction and moving the matter through their individual decision-making arrangements. As a result the schedule is challenging and has slipped but recent progress gives confidence that the situation will be resolved early in 25/26.

3. Review of the effectiveness of scrutiny – Cyngor Gwynedd

Local report for Gwynedd from Audit Wales published in October 2023 (Sept. noted on the Welsh version)

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report -

R1 – Formulating a scrutiny programme

The Cabinet forward programme and the Council Plan should have further influence on the forward programme of the public scrutiny committees so that the output of scrutiny feeds into decisions planned by Cabinet.

R2 – Highlighting performance information

Performance information should be given higher visibility within the public scrutiny committees to challenge progress made.

R3 – Training

Appropriate providers, whether internal or external, should be used to deliver training in specialist areas such as questioning skills, financial affairs and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, to effectively increase members' confidence to challenge.

R4 – Strengthening legislative consideration

Scrutiny processes should be reviewed to ensure there is a proper emphasis on legislation including the Equality Act 2010 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, to ensure compliance with them.

R5 - Scrutiny investigations

Consideration should be given to conducting a higher number of investigations inviting a limited number of members to join the task group and finish from all scrutiny committees or all members, so that those interested in the field have the opportunity to participate and maintain enthusiasm. This will be a medium for public engagement as well.

R6 - Tracking the impact of scrutiny

The reporting of scrutiny committee decisions and the adoption of a formal tracking regime should be strengthened, to get the best value for money and publicly highlight the contribution of the scrutiny regime to council governance.

Progress against improvement proposals

A1

We have:

- Highlighted the Council Plan in prioritising issues for scrutiny at the annual workshops again this year, drawing particular attention to it.
- Highlighted Council Plan issues/ which are further pre-scrutinised by making them more visual – in the annual report, at the forward scrutiny programme, when considering the questioning strategy at the informal meetings, and highlighted by the Chair at the start of each scrutiny item. This has been welcomed by the Councillors.
- Taken steps to strengthen the Cabinet's forward programme by identifying items beyond six months.
- Modified the Cabinet reporting template to highlight matters that have been brought under scrutiny noting the need for the Cabinet Member to report on the comments of the relevant scrutiny committee since September 2023.
- Shared the annual milestones of delivering the Council's Plan with relevant scrutiny Members

A2

We have:

- Identified a role for the corporate directors to support the scrutineers to identify issues for scrutiny since September 2023
- Begun to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our current arrangements - comments have been made at the scrutiny workshops and an internal review has been undertaken.
- Developed arrangements for reporting performance to the Scrutiny Committees, and starting to report to the committees in 2025/26 after carrying out training for the Scrutiny and Cabinet members.

A3

We have:

- Conducted training for all Councillors on good practice in scrutiny in March 2024. It must be noted that discovering external Welsh-speaking providers is a challenge.
- Adapted our internal operating arrangements as a result of the training and comments raised at the scrutiny workshops to sharpen our questioning strategy, improve the recommendations of the scrutineers and identify and assess the impact of the scrutiny.
- Conducted training for Chairs and aspiring Chairs in May 2024 and conduct training for Scrutiny Forum Members (chairs and vice-chairs of scrutiny committees) when there is any change to membership.
- Reminded Councillors again this year about matters relating to the Well-being of Future Generations Act at the annual scrutiny workshops.

A4

We have:

- Reminded Councillors again this year about matters relating to the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Equality Act 2010 at the annual scrutiny workshops.
- Reminded all scrutiny Councillors of the importance of attending the annual scrutiny workshops and participating in the training available.
- Identified a specific role for the scrutiny Chairs and vice-chairs to promote the scrutiny workshops and encourage their members to attend all workshops and meetings.
- Reminded all Councillors of their duty to undertake the core training, one of the core areas is 'Equality', which clearly refers to the act. This is receiving ongoing attention from the Democracy Services Committee.
- Developed arrangements for holding informal meetings other than the committee itself to focus on the questioning strategy, taking into account issues in relevant Acts.

A5

We have:

1. Re-established an investigations programme (which was discontinued during covid for obvious reasons), within the resources available. One investigation has already reported as well as one task and finish group, and one more investigation is underway.
2. It is fair to note that the investigations and task and finish groups take up a significant amount of Councillors' time, and it can be a challenge to ensure that a sufficient number of members are available, as well as officers to support the process.
3. Adhered to our current arrangements of proposing to members of the scrutiny committees in the first instance before extending to all members.

A6

We have:

- Conducted 'good practice in scrutiny' training which referred to the need for a questioning strategy and created clear recommendations for all members.

- Adapted our internal operating arrangements as a result of the training and comments raised from the scrutiny workshops to sharpen our questioning strategy, improve the recommendations of the scrutineers and identify and assess the impact of the scrutiny by holding informal meetings on a different day for the committee and putting a serious focus on the work. Members of the Scrutiny Forum have a key role to ensure that the focus remains during committee meetings and to guide members towards strong, clear and sound recommendations.
- In the Autumn of 2024 arrangements were been developed to enable Scrutiny Chairs to bring forward-scrutiny matters to Cabinet meetings, ensuring a clear role for all.
- Established a formal tracking regime that provides an update on decisions/recommendations for each Scrutiny Committee. Information for the period May 2022 to the end of November 2024 has been shared with all scrutiny members, and will be sent to them every 6 months from now on. The information is intended to be used to highlight the impact of public scrutiny in the Annual Scrutiny Report.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

4. **Cyngor Gwynedd – Digital Strategy Review**

Local report for Gwynedd from Audit Wales published in December 2023.

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report -

R1 - Strengthening the evidence base

To help ensure that its next digital strategy is well informed and that its resources are effectively targeted, in developing its strategy the Council should draw on evidence from a wide range of sources, including;

- involving stakeholders with an interest in the digital strategy as well as drawing on the views of stakeholders from existing sources
- the objectives and strategies of other public bodies, and identifying opportunities to collaborate
- analysis of current and future trends (see our audit criteria for Q.1.1 and Q1.2 in Appendix 1 for some examples of what this might include)

R2 - Identifying resource implications

To help ensure that its next digital strategy is deliverable the Council should identify the short- and long- term resources implications of delivering it together with any intended efficiency savings.

R3 - Arrangements for monitoring value for money

To be able to monitor the value for money of its next digital strategy, the Council should strengthen its arrangements for monitoring both its progress and impact over the short, medium and longer term.

The trail of the discussion on the recommendations

R1

The Digital Plan has been extensively shared for comments as well as proposals to collaborate, including with Wales' local governments, the digital office of the WLGA, CDPS, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, and Bangor University.

Extensive engagement has taken place internally within the Council, including holding a prioritisation workshop and new content suggestions with the Corporate Management Team, Assistant Heads and the Managers' Network.

The Digital Plan was presented to the Education and Economy Committee on 14/09/23 to seek opinion before being finally presented to the Cabinet. The Plan was warmly welcomed, and valid and useful comments were fed back into the Plan before it continued its journey to the Cabinet.

Numerous sources were used in the preparation of the Digital Plan, approved by the Council's Cabinet on November 7th, 2023, including developments in the digital field, service trends, environmental implications, prospective investments on infrastructure by the North Wales Ambition Board, and digital strategies of other organisations, including the Welsh Government.

Having been presented to the Cabinet on November 7th, 2023, there will be an ongoing review of the Plan with technology changes, financial climate and the needs of our services being considered, which may lead to the introduction of changes, as confirmed in the comments of the Chief Finance Officer:

'The Digital Plan will be under ongoing review, and I am satisfied that the adoption of the Plan would not prejudice the bidding arrangements. Should a shortage of funding mean that some of the bids are unsuccessful we will re-prioritise the content of the Plan as necessary.'

R2

A full analysis has been carried out regarding the resources needed to realise the vision of the Digital Plan, along with identifying opportunities for efficiency savings. The projects and the request for additional resource support were submitted to the corporate bid procedure, in accordance with the plans identified in the report which supported the Digital Plan on its presentation to the Council's Cabinet for approval on November 7th, 2023:

'Detailed work has been made in relation to the initial costs of putting the Plan into action. The identified costs are a combination of capital and one-off revenue costs, and permanent revenue. A specific fund has been earmarked for some time for one-off costs, and it will be possible to realise many elements of the projects in question by using this financial resource. However, there will be a need to consider the permanent revenue implications within the corporate bidding system annually.'

Furthermore, the Chief Finance Officer's comment states:

'Every single project in the Digital Plan has been costed, and as noted those costs are a combination of permanent revenue, one-time revenue and capital. One-time resources have been earmarked for the Digital Plan in the form of a fund, and I can confirm that bids for permanent revenue have been submitted in accordance with the Council's normal arrangements.'

R3

Arrangements for monitoring progress are set out in the report presented to the Council's Cabinet on November 7th, 2023, stating:

'The governance arrangements for realising and monitoring the work programme is as follows. The Finance and Information Technology Department are responsible for realising the Digital Plan in the Council's Plan, and the Assistant Head of that department is the Project Manager. The Digital Transformation Board has been established to keep an overview on the work programme's progress and to offer challenge and support, in addition to the usual performance challenge and support arrangements – this to acknowledge how important the development of the digital field is to our ability as a Council to provide services towards the future.'

Further reference to the monitoring arrangements can be found in the body of the Digital Plan, with the Corporate Director stating:

'A comprehensive annual review together with regular progress reports will allow us to monitor the contribution of the individual projects to the broader vision, accepting that, given the constant advancements in digital technology, the priorities will require some adjusting, even within the lifetime of the Plan.'

A full record of the governance arrangements appears in the last chapter of the Plan, entitled "Governance Arrangements."

Progress against improvement proposals

R1

Completed for the presentation of the Digital Plan (07/11/23).
An ongoing task to keep the Plan up to date.

R2

Already completed (07/11/23).

R3

Already completed (07/11/23).

Conclusion

Completed - recommendations have been realised.

Additional reports since February 2024

5. Cyngor Gwynedd – Use of performance information: service user perspective and Outcomes

Wales Audit Report, January 2024

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report requiring updates

Information about the server user's perspective

R1 The Council should strengthen its arrangements to enable Senior Learners to understand the perspective of the service user through:

- sharing its performance information on service's user perspective with a wider variety of Senior Leaders to ensure that it is worth as much as possible considering cross cutting themes of its well-being objectives;
- ensure itself that the information on service user perspective derives from the variety of service users including groups that share protected characteristics.

Information about results

R2 The Council should strengthen the information provided to Senior Leaders to help them to evaluate that the Council fulfils its aims and the intended results.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Report and recommendations have been discussed as part of reviewing our performance reporting arrangements over the past few months.

R1

A new performance reporting regime will be introduced in May 2025 where performance reports will be submitted to Scrutiny Committees rather than Cabinet meetings. This will see performance information shared with a wider range of senior leaders.

We are already looking to improve the information we have by increasing the variety of individuals with protected characteristics or groups who represent them within our Citizens Panel.

An engagement group (which includes representatives from each Department) has been established, and work has taken place through the group to raise awareness among managers of the need to collect the views of individuals with protected characteristics. We also intend to take part in the National Residents Survey (coordinated by Data Cymru) to improve the information we have on residents' views of all our services and performance.

R2

Milestones have been confirmed for Council Plan projects and shared with relevant Members and Officers to enable them to evaluate whether we are achieving our intended objectives and outcomes. Progress is constantly monitored at the performance challenge and support meetings, and through overview reports.

Work is ongoing to compare measures and management data with our peers. This would allow us to identify areas where there are performance discrepancies.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

6. A report on education services in Cyngor Gwynedd

Estyn, June 2023

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report

R1

Ensure that leaders act strategically on all aspects of their work and that they have suitable supervision and full consideration of risk regarding important aspects that have arisen during the inspection.

R2

Improving arrangements for monitoring, evaluating, and promoting pupils' attendance.

R3

Strengthen the provision to respond to the needs of pupils with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties and ensure monitoring arrangements and improve the quality of that provision.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

R1

The Education Department is in the process of drawing up a 10 year Education Strategy for Gwynedd. The Education Strategy has now been identified as a priority in the Council's Plan from April 2024 onwards, with a clear work program and milestones in terms of refining the content of the Draft Education Strategy, engaging on the priorities with key stakeholders, identifying a timetable for carrying out a public consultation, together with the timetable for going before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet.

Work is already underway following the appointment of the Head of Education to set clear direction and priorities for the Education Department, ensuring appropriate arrangements

around identifying responsible officers, drawing up milestones, a timetable and identifying risks associated with those priorities, as part of the Department's improvement plan and the self evaluation cycle.

R2

Work has already begun to respond to attendance challenges by improving reporting systems and improving the quality of the data, together with sharing messages with schools, and that work has begun to bear fruit at the end of the Autumn Term with attendance rates having improved, although there is some way to go for the rates to increase to what they were before Covid-19. The process of drawing up an action plan in response to the recommendation has begun, which includes the following elements:

- Improve attendance reporting systems.
- Early identification of persistent absences. 31 January 2024 31 March 2024 Inclusion Manager / Data Unit Manager Assistant Head of Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion
- Discussion and action with specific schools where attendance challenges are more evident.
- Add capacity to the Wellbeing Team.
- Design and run a campaign about the importance of attendance.

R3

An external evaluation of the Authority's inclusion provisions jointly with stakeholders has been commissioned, and a draft report together with recommendations has been submitted to the Department. Discuss the findings and recommendations of the commissioned report with stakeholders and draw up an action plan in response to the recommendations. Implement the action plan and monitor the results.

Progress against improvement proposals

R1

Over the past year, the Department has been working on formulating a 10-year Education Strategy for Gwynedd. An initial draft of it was before the Education and Economy Scrutiny Committee on 14 September 2023, along with discussions in the Headteachers' Strategic Groups, and more recent discussions with headteachers in informal sessions. We will continue with informal engagement and discussions on the content of the Strategy in the Spring 2025 term, before publicly consulting on it and presenting it before Cabinet.

R2

The plans for Attendance remain in place, and continue to develop. As noted in the last report, the data availability has improved in terms of the data range available to analyze attendance trends. This improves the Authority's ability to target interventions. That work has had an impact with attendance rates improving at the end of the Autumn Term, although there is some way to go for rates to increase to what they were before Covid-19. The process of formulating an action plan is in response to the recommendation. The attendance campaign has started, with more visual materials available for schools to use in the pipeline

soon. Each Secondary School has received a visit from the Welfare Team to map out their attendance targeting processes and methods. A questionnaire has also been sent out to each school to identify where further targeting and development is needed.

Funding is coming from the Welsh Government to increasing attendance through a grant to the Welfare team together and a Community Schools grant. This is being used to increase capacity within the Welfare team, and to employ family workers to provide intervention for parents.

R3

After receiving the recommendations of an External Appraisal of inclusion provisions, an Inclusion Project Board was established comprising Education/ALN and I Officers, Children's Service and Youth service, Headteachers. Board members had the opportunity to visit other LA's to identify good practice, hold a workshop of services that support families, look at possible options and so on. The Board has now reached the point of finalizing options that will be presented to the Leadership Team (on January 14, 2025). Options are working towards September 2025 for any change to the provision.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

7 An inspection of youth offending services in Gwynedd and Ynys Môn

HM Inspectorate of Probation, March 2024

[Link to the report](#)

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

There are 7 recommendations contained in the report:

The Gwynedd & Ynys Môn Youth Justice Service should:

1. improve the quality of assessment and planning work to keep children safe and manage the risk of harm they present to others
2. ensure that management oversight is consistently effective in reviewing Asset Plus activity and contingency planning, so that practitioners are clear about what they need to improve
3. provide practitioners with comprehensive guidance that supports the completion of effective out-of-court assessment and planning work
4. improve the knowledge and understanding of practitioners to identify when children are being exploited so that timely action is taken to keep children safe.

The Gwynedd & Ynys Môn Youth Justice Strategic Management Board should:

5. ensure consistent attendance at the management board from senior education and health leaders, to achieve positive education and health outcomes for all children
6. address the disconnect between the strategic management board and frontline practitioners
7. address the gap in speech, language, and communication provision for children and ensure that services are provided which assess and respond to children's communication needs.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

A detailed Improvement Plan has been prepared to address the recommendations, and this was shared with the Governance and Audit Committee on the 5th of September, 2024. The Improvement Plan was produced in collaboration with members of the Management Board, Executive Management Group and Service staff following a meeting held to review the draft report and initiate the process of formulating a response, so that the ownership to implement the Improvement Plan is received through the Service and with our partners.

Progress against improvement proposals

An action plan to respond to the recommendations is being implemented.

- The existing Improvement Plan will be part of the service's Annual Youth Justice Plan from 2025-26.
- Some of the improvements outlined in the plan require progress at a national/partnership level and require policy change.

The Youth Justice Management Board reviewed the Gwynedd Mon HMIP Improvement Plan on **11th Dec 2024**, the Board noted significant progress had been made in;

- Staff **training/development**
- Policy and practice changes to **Prevention and Diversion**
- Completion on **Resettlement** requirements
- **Governance and Oversight** improvement

In addition to Local Management Board oversight of the Improvement Plan, the **Youth Justice Board** (YJB/MOJ) for England and Wales have an oversight and supportive role in the Inspection Improvement Plan, and they were in attendance on the 11th Dec and were satisfied good progress was being made with the Plan.

Conclusion

Completed - ongoing work.

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

Cyngor Gwynedd have created a new Regeneration Plan for the county. The county is split into 13 areas and a local area plan has been prepared for each of the 13 areas. Intense consultation has taken place with operational community groups and town and community councils to seek views on the important themes for communities and how a model of collaboration can be built upon to act on these priorities. This also includes a combination of a number of cross-departmental consultations.

We now have an area plan for each of the 13 areas, with an action plan outlining plans that are taking place locally through community activity. We have set up a cross-departmental group to share the plans with other Council departments to ensure that the action plans include all Council projects in the areas. During March-April 2024 we presented the plans to the public in a series of local workshops in order to identify partners and to see whether local partnerships needed to be established to implement plans. Work to establish arrangements to ensure an ongoing dialogue with the communities to keep the area plans active has been ongoing during October-December 2024. During 2025 we will build on these arrangements and liaise to arrange ways to collaborate and develop the projects in the action plans. It will also be an opportunity to discuss new projects.

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

Completed – continuous work.

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 issue, there are no recommendations specific to Gwynedd. Nevertheless, the recommendations have been considered by the Care Business and Commissioning Service on behalf of the Department for Adults and the Department for Children, and are being implemented. The use of direct payments in Gwynedd has been among the lowest in Wales and the service has not been of the standard we would like, but this has been addressed as described below, and the use of direct payments is on the rise. There is still some work to be done, but this will be part of the ongoing work of the Care Business and Commissioning Service.

Progress against improvement proposals

Part 1 and Part 2:

The direct payments regime in Gwynedd is now clearer, with the service internalised in its entirety. Direct payment users get to choose their own payroll provider where they will hire employees themselves. This gives users of direct payments more say and control in accordance with the Act, but also gives the Department more control and oversight.

A project group has reviewed the public information available about direct payments, reviewed the promotional leaflets etc, and made this simple and accessible information available to employees at the front line as well as the public. The direct payments team has a closer relationship with the personal assistants, with further work to be done on this element.

Training for social workers and occupational therapists should continue to ensure that they are confident with the new arrangements and confident of promoting it, and this work is part of the day-to-day development of the service.

Part 3:

The service consistently reports through the Council's challenge and performance support regime on direct payment use, but there is much more to do. Discussions are ongoing on establishing a more comprehensive performance reporting system including their impact on individuals and their carers after putting them in place. A comprehensive evaluation system is yet to be developed, now part of the team's day-to-day work. Work goes on to discuss how other counties evaluate, and how we can learn from good practice.

Development of the direct payments service in Gwynedd will continue, and it is hoped to appoint a leader soon who will drive the service forward, amongst other preventative services such as technology etc.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

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 requiring updates –

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 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 Wellbeing Plan 2023-28 prioritises working together to mitigate the impact of poverty on the wellbeing of our communities. We have commissioned the Bevan Foundation to facilitate three workshops in Gwynedd and Anglesey to ensure that organisations in the area have a shared understanding of poverty and to help organisations think more strategically about their role in delivering a solution. There has been some slippage with the timetable, but the programme of work will be presented to the Scrutiny Committees in January (Gwynedd) and March (Anglesey).

Recommendation 5

We have completed work to understand the people of Gwynedd's experiences of living in poverty. 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.

We supported vulnerable individuals following Storm Darragh, and we have supported older people with the pension credit. In addition, a new coordinator has recently been appointed, who will further develop this work.

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 NWPSSEN Members use a version of this. We now use our version of it, on an electronic app, and it includes questions on engagement, cumulative impact, mitigation, impact monitoring and a further action plan.

Progress against improvement proposals

A number of this report's recommendations have already been delivered, and an update on those that remain is provided above.

Conclusion

R2 - Ongoing.

R5 – Ongoing.

R8 - Completed – continuous work.

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 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 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 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've adapted it slightly for local purposes and are using it in the form of an electronic app.

Recommendation 4 - We believe the use of the new electronic impact assessment app has improved our delivery, as it encourages those who use it to consider the issue more

seriously. That said, we continue to look out for good practice and further guidance and are very willing to adapt.

Progress against improvement proposals

The new version of the impact assessment is now operational, and we will modify it as necessary.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

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 requiring updates:

- 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;
 - integrated into business plans.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Recommendation 1

Cyngor Gwynedd's [Climate and Nature Emergency Plan](#) (CNEP) is monitored by the Climate and Nature Board, which consists of the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members, Chief Officers and a representative of scrutiny committees. The Board monitors development and expenditure on projects within the CNEP, and provides guidance on new priorities or projects.

During 2024 we have been reviewing the CNEP to ensure our priorities remain current, and to remove or add new projects. Further discussions on the review will take place in the Climate and Nature Executive Group (Council officers) and the Climate and Nature Board over the coming months, prioritising based on the impact in terms of carbon and financial savings and what can be achieved within the available budget.

At a meeting of the Council's Cabinet on 12 March 2024 it was agreed to delegate expenditure from the remaining amount in the Council's climate fund to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and members of the Climate and Nature Board.

Progress against the recommendations

Recommendation 1

All projects are included in the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan because it will reduce carbon emissions or increase carbon absorption levels. We have not delayed to financially price every single project before commencing implementation, but rather prioritised the projects that will reduce our carbon emissions in the categories where we have reliable high emissions data – eg. Install solar PV panels and implement our Green Fleet Plan.

Before deciding to invest in a new project a business plan that includes carbon savings analysis and financial investment will be discussed by the Climate and Nature Board, and where necessary they will then be presented to Cabinet. All of this, therefore, takes place in the context of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the Capital Programme.

The process of reviewing the Council's strategies and business plans is ongoing work, but during 2024/25 the WLGA published guidance on how local authorities can seek to reduce carbon emissions through their procurement processes, through lands management and through business travel and commuting. Work is currently underway to apply the new guidance to integrate carbon savings into our business plan development and evaluation processes.

Conclusion:

Completed – continuous work.

6. **'A missed opportunity' – Social Enterprises**

Report of the Auditor General for Wales, December 2022

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

Recommendations arising from the report:

- R1 To get the best from their work with and funding of Social Enterprises, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authority officers use the checklist in Appendix 2 to:
- self-evaluate current Social Enterprise engagement, management, performance and practice;
 - identify opportunities to improve joint working; and
 - jointly draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified through the self-evaluation.
- R2 To drive improvement we recommend that the local authority:
- formally approve the completed Action Plan;
 - regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and

- revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance.

R3 To ensure the local authority delivers its S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises we recommend that it reports on current activity and future priorities following the evaluation of its Action Plan including the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

The appendix is a checklist in three parts, namely Strategy, Commissioning and Procurement and Performance Management.

The work on developing a strategy and vision has started by holding a joint face-to-face meeting with representatives of Gwynedd's social enterprises in July. A workshop was held and the attendees (Third Sector, Council Officers and Councillors) were given the opportunity to contribute to the development and coproduction of action priorities for us as a Council.

In terms of the Commissioning, Procurement and Performance Management elements, several points in the Checklist are already in place and active and it is planned to build on that over the coming months. The Market Stability Report was recently published for Gwynedd and was developed through discussions with the 3rd sector and other providers.

Progress against the recommendations

R1

The self-assessment checklist was completed and the report was brought to the attention of local social enterprises. There was also discussion at a Third Sector Group meeting with representatives from the 3rd sector, Councillors and Officers in Gwynedd to self-evaluate our engagement, performance management and monitoring. This work goes on.

R2

A cross-departmental group is regularly held to redesign and direct the Compact (an agreement between the Council and the 3rd Sector) with Mantell Gwynedd involved in this work. We also consult with the 3rd Sector Group regarding this work, and intend to take it to Cabinet shortly.

Mantell Gwynedd is working with commissioning officers within the Council to consider how to monitor performance and deliver social value for money while doing so. This work is ongoing.

R3

We have an understanding of our development and promotion of social enterprises in accordance with the requirement of Section 16. A report on this work is included in the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services.

Conclusion:

Completed – continuous work.

Additional reports since February 2024

7. Sustainable development? – making best use of brownfield land and empty buildings

Audit Wales

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

Recommendations arising from the report:

R1

To enable stakeholders to assess potential sites councils should create a systematic process to find and publicise suitable sites for regeneration: • this should draw on data already held by councils, as well as external data sources to develop a composite and more complete picture of sites; and • where known, key barriers should be named to help efforts to overcome them

R2

To help ensure that regeneration activity and the shaping of the environment is informed by the needs of communities Councils should increase opportunities for community-based involvement in regeneration, both in plan-making and actual development.

R3

To provide focus and impetus to developing brownfield sites Councils should review their current regeneration approaches and where appropriate set clearer, more ambitious regeneration policies and targets. Together these should:

- set out the approach and expectations of the council;
- set out how their approach will be resourced; and
- set out how the approach aligns with national policy goals and regional planning priorities

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

R1

As part of the process of creating a new Local Development Plan for the Gwynedd Local Planning Authority Area, one evidence base that the Planning Policy Service will undertake is an Urban Capacity Study. The purpose of this work is to identify sites (lands and buildings)

that could be available to meet development needs during the Plan's lifespan, for example, for housing and employment uses. This work will be undertaken for the main settlements with specific consideration given to brownfield land.

Having identified potential sites, discussions will be held with other Services to assess the suitability of any sites to be designated within the Plan. This will consider any key obstacles to develop.

However, due to the rural nature of the area, it must be recognised that opportunities to designate brownfield land have previously been limited.

R2

As part of the new Local Development Plan process, the Delivery Agreement includes a Communities Inclusion Plan. This provides participation opportunities to stakeholders, including the public, in the key steps of preparing the Plan.

In addition, one step within the process of preparing the Plan is the demand for sites where there is an opportunity to offer lands for inclusion in the Plan.

Cyngor Gwynedd has developed a new Regeneration Framework for the county; including 13 regeneration plans for local catchment areas. As part of the process, a local engagement campaign was organised to identify main matters and local priorities. The draft local regeneration Plans have been prepared which reflect the priorities of local communities.

R3

Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (Edition 12/ February 2024) states support for the development of brownfield land where able when sites are suitable.

There is a Policy in the current Plan to prioritise the development of brownfield land and there will be a similar Policy in the new Plan.

To set targets in the Plan, paragraph 4.2.19 states that "...providing housing-based regeneration sites can sometimes be difficult, making it difficult to note development timetables. When the ability to deliver is a problem, planning authorities should omit such sites from their housing supply to ensure that they do not rely on them to satisfy the housing requirement of their development plan..."

This intertwines with the need to ensure the deliverability of sites before they are included in the Plan. This may mean that it is difficult to set a specific target within the Development Plan for regeneration sites.

As part of the process of preparing the new Plan, the Planning Policy Service will discuss specific plans with other Services that should be included in the Plan. This may include regeneration sites if they meet deliverability requirements.

Progress against the recommendations

R1

Preparation of the new Local Development Plan is underway and the Welsh Government has approved the Delivery Agreement for the Plan since April 2024, which sets out the resources the Council will provide for the preparation of the Plan, as well as setting a timeframe of 3 and a half years for completion. The steps for preparing the new Plan include a systematic process (see reference to "site demand" in A2 below as an example of this) of identifying sites suitable for meeting and developing needs of the area over the next 15 years.

Meanwhile, planning applications for new developments will continue to be decided in accordance with the Joint Local Development Plan, which has also been prepared using a systematic process to locate the sites designated as suitable for development.

R2

The Community Involvement Plan which is a part of the Delivery Agreement, approved by Welsh Government, is already being implemented as part of the preparation of the new Plan.

The call for sites, where developers and the public can propose sites / lands for development or protection, has commenced and been extended to the end of January 2025, with this process involving extensive consultation with communities.

R3

Stimulating brownfield site development is supported in the policies of the Joint Local Development Plan, and this will also be addressed in the preparation of the new Plan.

Consideration is being given to the Regeneration Framework for the County and the Area Regeneration Plans as we prepare the new Plan, and the Plan is also expected to align with national policies.

Conclusion:

Completed – continuous work.

8. Setting of Well-being Objectives – Cyngor Gwynedd

Audit Wales

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

Recommendations arising from the report:

R1

Delivery of well-being objectives

The Council should ensure that budget-setting or producing of a medium-term financial plan are clearly aligned with the Council's new well-being objectives, so that there is clarity about how savings targets or known future financial uncertainty might affect the delivery of its current well-being objectives.

R2

Appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements

The Council should ensure that it develops appropriate outcome measures and provides effective monitoring, reporting and scrutiny of the progress being made on delivering its current well-being objectives.

R3

Improving well-being and having a broad impact

The Council should map how the Council's work could support partners' objectives, and vice versa when setting future well-being objectives so that it can identify opportunities to collaborate with others.

R4

Involvement and consultation

The Council should extend its stakeholder networks when setting future well-being objectives and seek to involve people who reflect the full diversity of the county.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Recommendations received and plans put in place to respond. The organisational response form was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at the meeting on 23rd May 2023.

Progress against the recommendations

R1

The Medium Term Financial Plan was approved by Cabinet at their meeting on the 14 May 2024, therefore this work has been completed.

R2

The work to identify suitable measures to measure progress against our wellbeing objectives is still ongoing but has slipped somewhat from the original timetable set out due to staffing changes within the Business Support Service. This will be addressed over the coming months.

R3

As part of the work of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Service Board the Council (along with the other partner organisations) are committed to mapping the threats and challenges they currently face. The next step is to try to identify opportunities to collaborate with other organisations or with all organisations such as a Board (there are already some examples where opportunities have been identified to collaborate with individual organisations).

R4

Work continues to increase diversity on the Equality Core Group with representatives for young people and queer young people added over the past year. Services within the Council have benefited from consultation with the group on work in the areas of transport, youth service, housing. Further work will take place in the areas of engagement, museums, elections, and parking over the coming months.

Over the next few weeks we will be taking part in the National Resident Survey to give County residents the opportunity to provide feedback on how the Council is performing. As part of this work we will implement a communication plan that will ensure we raise awareness of the survey amongst equality characteristic groups.

Conclusion:

Ongoing.

9. Urgent and Emergency Care: Flow out of Hospital – North Wales Region

A report by Audit Wales

[Link to the report](#)

Recommendations arising from the report:

There are 16 recommendations in the report – details can be found here: [Link to the report](#)

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

As this is a regional report for North Wales, a response has been prepared at a regional level. This was discussed at the Governance and Audit Committee meeting on 10th October, 2024. It was agreed at that time that an update on the recommendations would be provided to the Committee in 12 months' time.

Progress against the recommendations

Actions are underway, and a report on progress will be submitted to the Regional Partnership Board in February, 2025.

Conclusion:

On-going.

Timetable:

To be confirmed.