

Improvement Proposals in External Audit Reports

Key to the conclusions –

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

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

1. Gwynedd Council - Human Resources Information System

Local report to Gwynedd published November 2018

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

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

1. Review technology options within the project:

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

Progress against improvement proposals

The residual work programme has been incorporated into the action plan of the Council's Digital Plan. Good progress has recently been made to complete key modules and it is anticipated that all priority modules will be operational in 2024. The development of workforce digital skills will be an ongoing issue that will form part of the Council's Workforce Learning and Development Strategy.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

2. Local government use of data: Cyngor Gwynedd

Local report for Gwynedd from Audit Wales published in January 2019

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

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

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

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

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

The report and improvement recommendations were discussed at the Information Governance Operational Panel, and the matter is included in the Council's Risk Register (Governance level): "Fails to maximise the potential of information when supporting Council business and fails to meet statutory standards". Furthermore, and as part of the Council's new Digital Plan, which was approved by Cabinet in October 2023, a Data Sub-group has been established to get to grips with this field with a representative from every department contributing to deliver an ambitious work programme to improve the use of data.

Progress against improvement proposals

The Council has now approved a new Digital Plan for 2023-2028 and matters relating to data and its use are being addressed as part of its action plan.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

Timetable

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

3. 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. A series of sessions were held to raise awareness of the new arrangements for Department representatives and Cabinet Members during May/June 2022, which also provided an opportunity to ask questions and present observations. With the new arrangements now having taken root, work is underway to review performance arrangements with a view to making any further adjustments (if necessary) over the coming months. There is also an intention to publish or share information on performance more widely, including publishing all performance measures.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that the actions to meet the recommendations will be completed by the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

4. Springing Forward - Cyngor Gwynedd

Audit Wales report. June 2022

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

Vision, strategies, delivery plans and the sustainable development principle

Recommendation 1

The Council needs to put the sustainable development principle at the heart of its considerations, building on the experience of the pandemic, as it:

- develops the Council's vision for the shape and size of its land and building assets and workforce in the short, medium, and long term;
- develops asset and workforce strategies; and
- develops costed delivery plans

Data and benchmarking

Recommendation 2

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

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

A report containing the 'Management Response' was presented to the Governance and Scrutiny Committee in November 2022 which outlines how it is intended to respond to the recommendations.

Vision, strategies, delivery plans and the sustainable development principle

The principle of sustainable development will be central to all considerations in the context of updating and reviewing the following plans and strategies:

1. Latest review of the Asset Strategy. The Corporate Asset Strategy, which is led corporately, sets the direction for the Property Asset Management Plan. Our ability to draw up a Property Asset Management Plan will be dependent on ensuring that the Corporate Asset Strategy is in place.
2. Land and Property Asset Plan to be included as a proposed corporate improvement priority in the next Five-Year Council Plan. The Property Asset Plan is included as an improvement priority in the Council's Plan 2023-28.
3. The Ffordd Gwynedd Plan 2022-2027 (the corporate Organisational Development Plan) has been adopted by Cabinet.
4. The Council's Working for the Future Plan was approved by the Cabinet in September.

Data and benchmarking

The Digital Transformation Board has been established to lead on drawing up the Council's Digital Strategy for the next five years. Four work sub-streams have been established to date, namely:

- Data
- Administration
- Customer Contact
- Technical

Progress against improvement proposals

Vision, strategies, delivery plans and the sustainable development principle

As a part of the Council Plan for 2023-28, we will adopt a new Property Asset Management Plan. The 'Adoption of a new Property Asset Management Plan' is included as a priority in the Council's Plan 2023-28. Our ability to proceed with drawing up a Property Asset Management Plan will be dependent on ensuring that a Corporate Asset Strategy and Strategic Asset Management Plan are in place.

In September, we confirmed our flexible working and hybrid working arrangements and shared it with the workforce.

Data and benchmarking

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

- Identify our data - We will create a register and data maps for each system and will note how they compare.
- Data Charter - Along with data maps, this will guide our work in establishing a "Data Charter" to ensure that the arrangements we have for data retention are appropriate.
- Creating a Data Warehouse - We want to create a data warehouse (wGwynedd) that will bring data together from many different systems. These integrations will facilitate collaborative thinking between the services and support us to predict and measure service usage several steps into the future. The warehouse will be based on the "Data Register" and the "Data Charter", and there will be processes for rationalising and cleaning our data to improve accuracy and enable us to report confidently based on truth.
- Data Reporting Platform – We will undertake an exercise to identify the best platform for the Council's needs.
- Developing the Digital Literacy of the Council Workforce - We will deliver data literacy training to everyone in the Council.
- Publishing Performance Data – We will develop an appropriate platform to report on the Council's performance data.

Conclusion

Completed – continuous work.

5. Inspection Report: Performance Evaluation Inspection of Cyngor Gwynedd

Local report for Gwynedd from Care Inspectorate Wales conducted in September 2022.

Dolen i'r adroddiad ar wefan Arolygiaeth Gofal Cymru

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

There are a number of proposals for improvement within the report under the following headings:

People - voices and choices

Prevention

Well-being

Partnerships

The trail of the discussion on the recommendations

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

Progress against improvement proposals

Overall, we are making positive progress on the Home Care Program with our performance data over the last few months showing a reduction in the number of home care hours that we cannot meet. There are several developments by the care providers which are to be commended and which have contributed to the progress but having said that, it must be recognized that problems continue to arise in some areas which have affected the number of hours which we cannot meet, and these specific areas are receiving attention. We are about to go out to tender on two sub areas again where the providers were unable to meet the demand. The corporate director has met with all occupational therapist and social worker teams to emphasise the need to work in different ways – promoting direct payments, technology etc. This culture change will continue over the coming months and the direct payments services and technology are being developed so that the employees are confident in promoting and offering the alternative provision.

We have developed a new workload management system to try to tackle our lack of ability to review care packages within statutory timescales and we also extended the work contracts of some individuals to assist with the review work. However, a budget to continue with this is challenging. Likewise, the department's ability to strengthen our care quality assurance systems is extremely challenging given the financial climate. We are continuing to review the situation, but it will continue to be challenging to meet the statutory timeframe

without additional resource. A task and finish Group is looking at improving review arrangements, simplifying the review form, aligning how we review and ensuring we are able to report accurately.

We continue to see progress in relation to collaboration with the Health Board in terms of developing home care and hospital discharge arrangements and this remains a priority. The Council has re-engaged in discussions with the Health Board under the guidance of the corporate director, to re-look at the placement of integrated teams in areas of the County. Group meetings have been established under the guidance of the corporate director, and they meet regularly and agree priorities.

In relation to Unpaid Carers, we continue to review the relevant policies, identifying the type of support carers receive and how that is recorded, and engaging with a number of stakeholders although to draw up a comprehensive Unpaid Carers Scheme. Work also continues to review our direct payment arrangements, with a specific project board looking at transforming the service. The direct payments support has been internalised, and the direct payments service will continue to be developed as a matter of urgency so that employees have confidence in providing the offer.

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

Following CIW's recommendations in relation to our supervision and safeguarding arrangements, a results workshop has been held with the support of Social Care Wales to support staff to change culture and act based on strengths. Mentoring training has been provided to our leaders since we last reported, which weaves into the training mentioned above, and sessions have been held with the Corporate Director to share the vision with the service.

The department has put a departmental Public Relations and Communications Manager in place to lead on the development of a communication and engagement strategy and this is a priority improvement project in the Council's Plan. We have already been working on improving our services website pages. Work is ongoing to map out all communication and engagement activity, identifying gaps and also looking at our internal communications. We are also engaging with the workforce and the public on our communications. This mapping and gap identification for implementation will be done by March 2024.

Conclusion:

Completed – continuous work.

Timetable:

There is a different timeframe for different elements of the work, and the timescales are set out above where applicable. Work to initiate a response to the recommendations and put

arrangements in place has been undertaken, and there will be ongoing work to improve our services in line with the AGC recommendations.

6. 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) Confirm and implement the plans for completing the external panel's performance assessment
- ii) Update on recruiting all the necessary lay members
- iii) Arrangements for the provision of training for Committee members
- iv) On a regional North Wales level, confirm the scrutiny arrangements, borrowing powers and the VAT status of the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC)

Progress against improvement proposals:

- i) Completed. Changes to the Constitution were made by the Full Council on the 28th of September 2023. The function of organising and appointing a panel was allocated to the Cabinet, with the response to the report and recommendations retained by the Full Council.

Following this, a decision was made at Cabinet on the 7th of November to conduct the Panel assessment during October 2024 and the results/recommendations will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet, and the Full Council in due course.

- ii) There is further recognition that the traditional route of advertising has not provided enough suitable candidates to fill the requirement. We will continue to engage with professional bodies etc to identify suitable individuals.
- iii) A Workshop will be held in the early months of 2024 to assess the effectiveness of the Committee. The workshop should identify specific areas where members feel the need for training and a programme will be drawn up based on that.
- iv) Councils' feedback is expected on potential scrutiny options that will run concurrently with the Ambition Board transfer project. The project of transferring the work of the Ambition Board continues to progress at a regional level. Gwynedd is involved in this work and provides support to the CJC and the Ambition Board to achieve this. It is noted however that the Ambition Board transfer project is not a core part of establishing the CJC as a corporation

The VAT and borrowing arrangements have now been ironed out. This meant that the CJC has the same VAT status that belongs to councils and can access public body loan arrangements."

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

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

Additional reports since September 2023

7. 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.

The trail of the discussion on the recommendations

A1 – The Scrutiny committees' annual workshops give detailed attention to the Council Plan, prioritising items of the Plan when they are timely to be scrutinised.

We have already moved forward with arrangements to strengthen the Cabinet's forward programme in order to improve the correlation between the Cabinet and Scrutiny forward programme.

A new template for Cabinet reports includes specific reference to matters raised by the scrutiny committees and has been operational since September 2023.

Annual milestones that need to be achieved for the Council Plan have been shared with the relevant Members and Scrutiny Officers.

A2 – Work is already moving forward as the corporate directors are attending performance challenging meetings jointly with the Scrutiny Members, with the directors supporting the Scrutineers to identify matters to be scrutinised further.

Further consideration is given to reporting publicly as the performance challenging arrangements are developed and adapted.

A3 – A comprehensive training programme is provided for Councillors, and the first two years following an election are always intensive. Professional providers are used to provide training, whether they be internal or external officers.

Training has already been provided to the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees on "Chairing Skills", which included a section on ensuring clear recommendations from the committee. This was carried out in September 2023 by in-house professional officers. A further session is planned in May 2024 for Chairs, Vice-Chairs and aspiring Chairs.

Sessions on 'scrutiny questioning skills' are scheduled for March 2024 for all scrutiny members. The annual training on the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act takes place at the annual workshops.

A4 – We will continue to remind Councillors of the requirements in the annual training at the annual scrutiny workshops when formulating the programme of work.

We are including a leaflet to remind the Councillors of the relevant considerations when sharing each meeting agenda with them.

A5 – There has been a reduction in the scrutiny investigations held following covid-19 restrictions. Recommencing the formal scrutiny work in the committees was prioritised. It was decided to recommence the scrutiny investigations at the start of the new Council term.

The current arrangements for investigations mean that we try and identify members from amongst the committees for investigations, extending the invitation to all members if there isn't sufficient interest. Our investigations are already a medium to strengthen the engagement with the public.

The "Gwynedd Category 3 Secondary Schools" investigation has already been completed and reported to committee in September 2023. An 'autism plan' task and finish group is being formed. Having an interest in a field brings certain challenges, as there's a need to be independent and non-biased in an investigation or task group.

A6 – A number of different factors come together in order to improve our arrangements for tracing the impact of scrutiny.

- Training for the scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs on how to draw up clear recommendations and/or how to refer a matter to the Cabinet has been provided as part of the "Chairing Skills" training.
- There are specific references in Cabinet reports to the considerations raised by scrutiny committees.
- Members of the Scrutiny Forum self-evaluate their performance, including assessing the impact of scrutiny.
- We will consider the role of Scrutiny Chairs to present the findings or recommendations on matters that were scrutinised prior to Cabinet consideration

Progress against improvement proposals

Work is already underway to address many of the recommendations and others are ongoing. The work coincides with the review into scrutiny arrangements, progress was reported to the Governance and Audit Committee meeting on 18/01/2024.

Conclusion

On-going.

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

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

National Report from Audit Wales, published in December 2018

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

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

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

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Gwynedd Council is currently working on creating a new Regeneration Plan for the county. The county is split into 13 areas and a local area plan will be prepared for each of the 13 areas. As the initial part of the plan we have consulted with operational community groups and town and community councils to seek the views on the important themes for communities and how a model of collaboration can be built upon to act on these priorities. This is a combination of a number of cross-departmental consultation that are happening. Also in 2022 we have opened the consultation to the broader public, with the consultation open between March and the end of June 2022, and over 3,600 questionnaires that have been recorded and analysed were received. Reports for each of the 13 local regeneration areas have been prepared in order to summarise the observations received. During

September and October 2022, workshops were established with local organisations in each of the 13 local regeneration areas. The purpose of the workshops was to report back on the outcomes of the engagement work, addressing local priorities. The workshops were also an opportunity to consider and discuss local projects and commence the work of drawing up action plans. Local regeneration plans (draft) were completed during February/March for every individual area. During May and June 2023, a series of further workshops were organized in the local areas to consider and discuss the draft action plans giving the communities an opportunity to add and confirm local plans.

We now have a draft 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 will present the plans to the public in a series of local workshops to identify partners and to see whether local partnerships need to be established to implement plans.

Progress against improvement proposals

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

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

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

2. Direct Payments for Social Care Provision for Adults

National Report by Audit Wales published in April 2022

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report

In part 1, the report recommends that local authorities:

- Review public information and discuss with service users and carers to ensure that they are clear, concise, and fully explain what they need to know about Direct Payments.
- Undertakes additional promotion work to encourage people to use Direct Payments.

- Ensure that advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice about Direct Payments to service users and carers.
- Ensure that information about Direct Payments are available at the front door to social care and that they are included in the initial discussion on the options in terms of the care available to service users and carers.
- Provide training for social workers on Direct Payments to ensure that they fully understand their potential and feel confident and promote them to service users and carers.

In part 2:

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

In part 3:

- Collaborate to establish a system to evaluate Direct Payments in full, and this being a system that records every element of the process - information, promotion, assessment, management and evaluating impact on well-being and independence.
- Publish information about performance annually for every element of Direct Payments in order to make it possible to have a whole system overview of how they are provided and of their impact to support improvement.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

This is a report in response to a national matter, therefore there are no specific recommendations for Gwynedd. Nevertheless, the recommendations have been considered by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department, and are being implemented. As a Department, we are fully aware that Gwynedd's use of direct payments is the lowest in Wales and that the service has not been of the standard that we expect, and this is being addressed as described below.

Progress against improvement proposals

Part 1 and Part 2:

Before reviewing the public information and material available for direct payments, developing training for social workers etc, we needed to be clear what is being offered in terms of direct payments/payroll service support in Gwynedd. The direct payments regime is now clearer.

We noted last fall that there were frustrating issues when working with an external company providing the direct payment support service on our behalf at the time. This led to a number of complaints and frustration from individuals receiving direct payments. The future of this service was under review. The agreement with the external company has now been terminated, and staff have transferred to the Council under TUPE regulations. The support service will be internal to the Council from now

on, and direct payment users will be allowed to choose their own payroll provider where they will employ workers themselves. The new regime will give users of direct payments more say and control in accordance with the Act, but also give the Department more control and oversight.

A full programme of work and a project manager are in place to act on the programme of work. Most of the work programme is expected to be completed by 31/3/24.

As well as looking at the whole system, the information available, how direct payments are promoted etc, the direct payments project group has been looking at our options in terms of maintaining the direct payments support service. As noted above, one of the group's recommendations has been implemented (to internalise the direct payments support service). The next step, which we're currently developing, is to simplify and promote the service, and we expect this to be implemented by 31/3/24.

Part 3:

A comprehensive evaluation system and direct payment performance information will be part of the work programme, but will likely follow the work described above as the last step. These recommendations are therefore expected to be fully implemented during March and April 2024.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that the remaining actions to answer Part 1 and 2 recommendations will be completed by the end of March 2024, and Part 3 by May 2024.

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 and work has begun on formulating work programmes to work together on this. At a time of dwindling public sector resources and significant funding cuts, working together to tackle poverty is more important than ever so that we can deliver the best outcomes for the residents of

Gwynedd and Anglesey. The programme of work will be presented to the Scrutiny Committees in the spring.

Recommendation 5

Over the past 18 months we have engaged with a large number of people who are in poverty and who contact the Council's services when they are in crisis. At present, we prioritise dealing with the emergency (whether that might be vouchers for food, fuel, or essentials) and when time or circumstances allow, we follow up with a number of those individuals to gather feedback. We have also undertaken work to understand the people of Gwynedd's experiences of living in poverty – people who do not necessarily engage with services at present, to understand the barriers that they face. We have used those messages to produce our communication plan, review some of our arrangements and shape our short-term work programme to respond to the cost-of-living crisis. Residents have told us that accessing the latest information on all the support that is available in one place is useful, therefore our Help with Living Costs website is maintained and updated regularly with our own information and that of our partners; residents have also told us that they are required to contact more than one service through usual methods such as on the phone, visiting offices is difficult, therefore we have organised a series of events jointly with our partners taking services to village halls, etc. throughout the county.

Since our previous progress report, we have now collaborated with WCPP on a poverty stigma project to draw on people's experiences of cost-of-living support and poverty. We have also modified and relaunched our Cost-of-Living website to respond to people's experiences in terms of language and labels on the support and service offered. We have also prioritized work on stigma and people's experiences of food poverty, and we will work with Menter Môn and Public Health Wales on a Behavioral Change project towards providing food poverty support.

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 have adapted it slightly and are in the process of adopting this as our new template in electronic form. We are currently piloting the new template. It is expected that IT will have completed the work so that it becomes operational by the new financial year. To accompany this, we are preparing a resource that will include the most relevant, comprehensive and current data. Ensuring engagement is an important part of the questions in the tool and a list of organisations is available. There is a need to monitor the assessment often and the tool includes a question in order to create an action plan.

Progress against improvement proposals

This report was published in November 2022, and some recommendations have already been delivered (reported to committee in February and September 2023) and updates on the remaining ones are provided above.

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

Details for the various recommendations are outlined above.

4. Equality Impact Assessment: more than a tick box exercise?

National Report from the Auditor General for Wales September 2022

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

Improvement Proposals arising from the report –

Recommendation 1

Clarifying the scope of the duty to impact assess policies and practices

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

Recommendation 2

Building a picture of what good integrated impact assessment looks like

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

Recommendation 3

Applying the equality duties to collaborative public bodies and Partnerships

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

Recommendation 4

Reviewing public bodies' current approach for conducting EIAs

While there are examples of good practice related to distinct stages of the EIA process, all public bodies have lessons to learn about their overall approach. Public bodies should review their overall approach to EIAs considering the findings of this report and the detailed

guidance available from the EHRC and the Practice Hub. We recognise that developments in response to our other recommendations and the Welsh Government's review of the PSED Wales specific regulations may have implications for current guidance in due course.

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

These recommendations are general and nation-wide and therefore they are not all relevant to us in Cyngor Gwynedd.

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

Recommendation 4 - we have already acknowledged that we have work to do to improve the procedure and this is why we have adopted the new template that is based on the experience of all organisations. The equality officers attended an Audit Wales Good Practice Event to obtain guidance and discussion regarding the field. Following this meeting we are of the view that we are on the right track with the new template, although we are ready to make changes if guidance to that effect is received from the Government.

Progress against improvement proposals

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

Conclusion

On-going.

Timetable

We anticipate that actions to respond to the recommendations will be completed by the end of April 2024, although, indeed, there will be a need for subsequent careful monitoring. We will also need to see what will emerge from the Government under Recommendations 1, 2 and 3.

5. Gwynedd Council – Decarbonisation Progress

Letter from Audit Wales, December 2022

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

Recommendations arising from the report:

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

The direction of the discussion on the recommendations

Recommendation 1

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

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

Recommendation 2

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

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

Progress against the recommendations

Recommendation 1

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.

All projects are developed and challenged by the Climate and Nature Board, and decisions on their funding are made in accordance with established internal processes. 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 business strategies and plans is ongoing, and work has begun to see how we can incorporate carbon impact measurement into business plans. We are also developing guidance to support our staff to reduce carbon emissions through the procurement chain.

Recommendation 2

The Council collects data on its carbon emissions and carbon absorption levels and submits them to Welsh Government annually following a reporting template used by most public institutions in Wales. We used the data collected for year 2022/23 to produce the first [Annual Report on our Climate Emergency Plan and Nature](#) published in December 2023. We will continue to collect data and publish an Annual Report every year into the future.

Conclusion:

Recommendation 1 - On-going.

Recommendation 1 - Completed – continuous work

Timetable:

The procurement guidance is expected to be completed by the end of March 2024. The nature of reviewing business plans means that the timeframe of doing so is on-going.

Additional reports since September 2023

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.
- A3 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

R1 – 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 Councilors) 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.

R2 – Recommendation A1 will need to be completed before we can take further action on A2.

R3 - Recommendation A1 will need to be completed before we can take further action on A3.

Progress against the recommendations

A1 - A Cross-Departmental Group of officers has completed a self-assessment using the checklist submitted by Audit Wales as part of the "Missed Opportunity" report. We have also drawn the attention of local social enterprises to the report and plan to discuss the conclusions of the self-assessment with them in the coming months.

A2 We have drafted an action plan but it will require consultation with internal departments and with our enterprise partners before it is adopted. We will aim to have a final action plan in place by the end of March 2024.

A3 - The Self-Assessment has identified that we have an understanding of what we are currently doing to develop and promote social enterprises in accordance with the requirement of Section 16. We have a record of the services commissioned and grants given to enterprises by different departments. Specifically in Health and Social Care we commission and provide grants to enterprises to respond to the Population Needs Assessment and to the Market Stability Report. We are also involved in promoting the social value of enterprise work through our contribution to the Regional and National Social Value Forum.

The draft action plan outlines what else we can do as a Council to promote and develop social enterprises. The Cabinet recently adopted a Social Value Framework as part of our procurement arrangements, and we will see that framework used in relevant contracts during the year.

Conclusion:

On-going.

Timetable:

As noted above.