

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO AUDIT COMMITTEE

14 NOVEMBER 2019

REPORT OF THE INTERIM HEAD OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER

WALES AUDIT OFFICE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES – FOLLOW UP REVIEW

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to submit the Follow Up report on Environmental Health Services, produced by Wales Audit Office (WAO), attached as **Appendix A**, for noting.

2. Connections to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priorities:

Supporting a successful economy – taking steps to make the county a good place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions of all people in the county.

Smarter use of resources – ensuring that all its resources (financial, physical, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the development of resources throughout the community that can help deliver the Council's priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 Wales Audit Office undertook this piece of work as a follow up to a national report that was published in October 2014 entitled 'Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens'. The local review in 2019 assessed whether there have been any budget and staff changes within the Council's environmental health services and the extent to which it has addressed the recommendations included in their 2014 national report. In respect of this recent review, WAO focused on the Council's progress in addressing recommendations 2, 3, 4, and 5, namely:

R2 Provide scrutiny chairs and members with the necessary skills and support to effectively scrutinise and challenge service performance, savings plans and the impact of budget reductions.

R3 Improve engagement with local residents over planned budget cuts and changes in services by:

- consulting with residents on planned changes in services and using the findings to shape decisions;

- outlining which services are to be cut and how these cuts will impact on residents; and
- setting out plans for increasing charges or changing standards of service.

R4 Improve efficiency and value for money by:

- identifying the statutory and non-statutory duties of council environmental health services;
- agreeing environmental health priorities for the future and the role of councils in delivering these;
- determining an 'acceptable standard of performance' for environmental health services (upper and lower) and publicise these to citizens;
- improving efficiency and maintaining performance to the agreed level through:
 - collaborating and/or integrating with others to reduce cost and/or improve quality;
 - outsourcing where services can be delivered more cost effectively to agreed standards;
 - introducing and/or increasing charges and focusing on income-generation activity;
 - using grants strategically to maximise impact and return; and
 - reducing activities to focus on core statutory and strategic priorities.

R5 Improve strategic planning by:

- identifying, collecting and analysing financial, performance and demand/need data on environmental health services;
- analysing collected data to inform and understand the relationship between 'cost: benefit: impact' and use this intelligence to underpin decisions on the future of council environmental health services; and
- agree how digital information can be used to plan and develop environmental health services in the future.

3.2 The review was undertaken between April and July 2019, and involved interviews with a selection of officers and members and review of documentation.

3.3 Since the national review was undertaken in 2014, from 1 May 2015 Cardiff Council, Bridgend County Borough Council and the Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council have been operating under a joint working agreement known as the shared regulatory service (SRS). The SRS provides environmental health, licensing and trading standards services.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

4.1 The follow up review in 2019 sought to answer the question: Is the Council's environmental health service continuing to deliver its statutory obligations given the financial challenges?

4.2 Overall, WAO found that the shared regulatory services (SRS) model is enabling the Council to sustain its delivery of environmental health services in a context of

reducing resources and additional responsibilities placed on it by ongoing changes in legislation. They felt that there is scope for the Council to strengthen its scrutiny and oversight arrangements of environmental health services and work with SRS and other providers to explore the opportunities for future improvement

4.3 WAO reached this conclusion because:

- resources available to environmental health services have reduced since 2014-15 but the Council's performance has been maintained by collaborating with two other councils through the SRS.
- whilst the Council and SRS are confident that environmental health obligations are being met, neither have explicitly assessed if this is the case. They felt that the Council and SRS should work together to distinguish between statutory and non-statutory services to help inform decision making around any future budget reductions.
- governance and performance management frameworks are robust but arrangements for review and challenge of performance information could be formalised.
- the Council should improve independent challenge, member oversight and scrutiny in relation to environmental health services provided by the Council, the SRS and other providers.
- the Council has consulted key external stakeholders on significant changes to environmental health services, but should more carefully consider the impact of future changes on residents and businesses and undertake direct consultation where appropriate
- the Council and the SRS must continue to innovate and transform services in order to help mitigate any future funding reductions.

4.4 WAO has identified ten proposals for improvement following the review. These apply to both services provided by the SRS and by the Council. These are set out on page 7 of the report.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedural rules

5.1 The Report does not have any impacts on policy framework and procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report

8. Financial implications

8.1 There are no financial implications relating to the report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that Audit Committee:

- Note the WAO Environmental Health Services Follow Up Report (Appendix A)

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Background documents: None