

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 ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT (AIR) 2018-19

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to introduce the Annual Improvement Report (AIR) 2018-19 from the Auditor General which is attached at **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:-

1. **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.

2. **Helping people to be more self-reliant** – taking early steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services.

3. **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.

- 2.2 The Wales Audit Office (WAO) report assesses whether or not the Council meets its continuous improvement duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, taking account of a range of audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2018-19.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 requires the Auditor General to undertake a forward-looking annual improvement assessment and to publish an annual improvement report for each improvement authority in Wales.

- 3.2 For 2018-19, the Auditor General undertook improvement assessment work, an assurance and risk assessment project as well as work in relation to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 at all Councils. At some councils, they also supplemented this work with local risk-based audits, identified in the Audit Plan for 2018-19.
- 3.3 A summary of the work carried out, including that of the relevant regulators, along with conclusions and proposals for improvement arising from the work is set out in Exhibit 1 (pp. 6-21 of the attached report). The section is broken down into local risk based performance audits, improvement planning and reporting and reviews by inspection and regulation bodies.
- 3.4 The report also includes a summary of the national studies the WAO undertook during the year (Appendix 3, pp. 26-42), with recommendations that all local authorities are required to address.

4. Current Situation / Proposal

- 4.1 The overall conclusion of the AIR is positive, as follows:

“Based on, and limited to, the work carried out by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators, the Auditor General believes that the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Measure (2009) during 2019-20”.

- 4.2 Those areas in Exhibit 1 where proposals for improvement have been identified are summarised below:

Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFG Act) examinations

Findings – “We can see some positive aspects in how the Council has taken account of the sustainable development principle in its approach to delivering the Porthcawl Resort Investment Focus (PRIF) programme, but further work is required to consistently embed the five ways of working”.

The Auditor General did not make any proposals for improvement but did highlight some areas of development which the council plans to act on.

Service User Perspective of Disabled Facilities Grants

Finding – “Most service users we spoke to were happy with the housing adaptations service, but the Council is not maximising opportunities to improve the service and deliver value for money”.

The Auditor General made a number of proposals for improvement as set out on pages 8-10 of Appendix 1.

Environmental Health

Finding – “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.”

However, the Auditor General concluded 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, and included a number of proposals for improvement on pages 11-14.

Corporate Arrangements for the Safeguarding of Children

Finding – “The Council has met, or partially met, our previous recommendations and proposals for improvement, but we have identified some further proposals for improvement to strengthen aspects of the Council’s corporate safeguarding arrangements”.

The Auditor General made a number of proposals for improvement as set out on pages 15-18.

- 4.3 Exhibit 1 also includes the findings of work undertaken by Estyn on the inspection of education services in Bridgend County Borough Council and by HM Inspectorate of Probation on the inspection of Youth Offending services in Western Bay. It also includes the Annual Performance Review Letter 2018/19 from the Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).
- 4.4 The report includes the Auditor General’s Annual Audit Letter 2017-18 at Appendix 2 which summarises the key messages arising from his statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. He concluded that:

“the quality of the draft accounts and associated records presented for audit had been prepared to a generally high standard, reflecting the Council’s continued improvement over recent years”.

The Auditor General did not make any formal recommendations nor proposals for improvement.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

- 5.1 There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and the Procedure Rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 No equality impact assessment has been undertaken as the Auditor General's Annual Improvement Report is essentially a retrospective assessment of the Council's performance.

7. Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Implications

- 7.1 As the report is for information it is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of wellbeing goals/objectives as a result of this report.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Audit Committee:
- Note the Annual Improvement Report 2018-19 produced by Wales Audit Office (**Appendix A**)

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November 2019

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Background Documents: None