



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report 2014-15

## Gwynedd Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Huw Lloyd Jones and Nigel Griffiths under the direction of Jane Holownia.

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The Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies and assesses compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

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The Auditor General and staff of the Wales Audit Office aim to provide public-focused and proportionate reporting on the stewardship of public resources and in the process provide insight and promote improvement.

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# Summary report

## Purpose of this report

- 1 Each year the Auditor General is required to audit the improvement planning and reporting arrangements of Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national park authorities, and to assess whether each authority will meet statutory continuous improvement duties<sup>1</sup>. This work has been undertaken on behalf of the Auditor General by staff of the Wales Audit Office. [Appendix 1](#) provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties in local government.
- 2 In addition, the Auditor General undertakes an in-depth corporate assessment at each authority on a cyclical basis (currently at least once every four years). In the intervening years, in addition to audits of improvement planning and reporting, the Wales Audit Office, on behalf of the Auditor General, will keep track of developments and focus further improvement assessment work on a number of key themes, developed in discussion with each authority.
- 3 This Annual Improvement Report (AIR) summarises the audit work undertaken at Gwynedd Council (the Council) since the last such report was published in April 2014. The AIR also includes a summary of the key findings from reports and letters issued by 'relevant regulators', namely; the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW); Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn); and the Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC). Nonetheless, this report does not represent a comprehensive review of all the Council's arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on the work carried out at the Council by the relevant regulators and, unless stated otherwise, reflect the situation at the point in time that such work was concluded.
- 4 Taking into consideration the work carried out during 2014-15, the Auditor General has provided an 'Overall Conclusion' in this report ([see page 6](#)) as to whether he believes that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2015-16.
- 5 This conclusion should not be seen as a definitive statement of organisational health or as a prediction of future success. Rather, it should be viewed as providing an opinion on the extent to which the arrangements currently in place are reasonably sound insofar as can be ascertained from the work carried out.
- 6 We want to find out if this report gives you the information you need and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by e-mailing us at [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales) or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

<sup>1</sup> Duties and requirements contained within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure).

## The Council's commitment to become a more citizen-centred organisation and its track record in delivering its service and financial objectives mean it is well placed to secure continuous improvement in 2015-16

- 7 The Auditor General has based this conclusion on the performance audit work carried out during the year by the Wales Audit Office and the inspection work of the other regulators. The projects undertaken, together with the resultant findings, recommendations and/or proposals for improvement, are summarised below.

### 2014-15 performance audit work

- 8 In determining the breadth of work to be undertaken we considered the extent of accumulated audit and inspection knowledge as well as other available sources of information including the Council's own mechanisms for review and evaluation. For 2014-15, the Wales Audit Office undertook improvement assessment work under three themes: Performance, Use of Resources, and Governance. Individual projects undertaken by the Wales Audit Office and the other regulators during the year included:

Project name	Brief description	Dates when the work was undertaken
<b>Wales Audit Office – Financial planning review</b>	Assessment of the Council's financial position and how it is budgeting and delivering on required savings.	July to December 2014
<b>Wales Audit Office – Audit of the Council's Improvement Plan</b>	Assessment of the Council's adherence to Welsh Government guidelines for the publication of its Improvement Plan.	April to June 2014
<b>Wales Audit Office – Audit of the Council's Performance Report</b>	Assessment of the Council's adherence to Welsh Government requirements for the publication of its Performance Report.	October to November 2014
<b>Wales Audit Office – Review of performance management arrangements in the Waste Management Service</b>	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Service's performance management arrangements in delivering/meeting national and local objectives and targets.	October to December 2014

Project name	Brief description	Dates when the work was undertaken
<b>Wales Audit Office – Review of the Council’s Ffordd Gwynedd project and the work of the Governance Arrangements Assessment Group</b>	Assessment of progress made in delivering improvements to the Council’s governance arrangements and its objective of ‘putting the people of Gwynedd at the heart of everything the Council does’.	April 2014 to March 2015
<b>Wales Audit Office – Review of the Gwynedd and Ynys Môn Joint Local Service Board</b>	Assessment of the progress made by the Joint Local Service Board in establishing effective governance arrangements to deliver improved outcomes for the people of Gwynedd.	November 2014 to March 2015
<b>Wales Audit Office – Review of the Council’s arrangements to support the safeguarding of children</b>	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council’s governance arrangements for the safeguarding of children.	January to April 2014
<b>Wales Audit Office – Review of the Council’s arrangements for distributing Discretionary Housing Payments</b>	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council’s services for the allocation, distribution, administration and use of Discretionary Housing Payments.	January to March 2015
<b>Estyn – Review of the Council’s post-inspection improvement plan</b>	Assessment of the Council’s progress in implementing the recommendations made by Estyn following their 2013 inspection of the Council’s Education Services for Children and Young People.	March 2014 to February 2015
<b>CSSIW – Inspection of the Council’s Domiciliary Care Agency</b>	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Agency in the provision of services to various adult client groups.	February 2014
<b>CSSIW – Inspection of safeguarding and care planning of looked-after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour</b>	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council’s services for looked-after children over 11 years of age and care leavers who were identified as being vulnerable and/or involved in risky behaviours.	April to May 2014

Project name	Brief description	Dates when the work was undertaken
<b>CSSIW – Review of the Social Services Department’s performance in 2013-14</b>	Assessment of the performance of the Council’s Social Services Department.	April to October 2014
<b>CSSIW – Inspection of the Council’s Fostering Service</b>	Assessment of the Service provided by the Council and the quality of life experienced by those in foster care.	October to November 2014
<b>Welsh Language Commissioner – Review of the Council’s Welsh Language Scheme</b>	Assessment of the effectiveness of the Scheme in providing Council services to the public in Welsh.	July to August 2014

## Headlines – a summary of key findings

- 9 The table below summarises the key findings of work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office, and the other regulators, in 2014-15.

<b>Performance</b>	<p><b>Wales Audit Office</b> – Performance across a range of the Council’s services compared well with other local authorities in Wales (<a href="#">paragraphs 13 to 15</a>).</p> <p><b>CSSIW</b> – Support for vulnerable residents improved but the number of older people in care homes remains too high (<a href="#">paragraphs 16 to 32</a>).</p> <p><b>Estyn</b> – Good progress has been made in addressing some underperforming areas of education provision but further improvement is required in others including Key Stage 4 performance in a number of schools (<a href="#">paragraphs 33 to 46</a>).</p> <p><b>Wales Audit Office</b> – Waste recycling rates improved supporting the achievement of Welsh Government statutory targets but there is a lack of independent assurance of the effectiveness of some waste management initiatives (<a href="#">paragraphs 47 to 50</a>).</p> <p><b>Wales Audit Office</b> – Most of the Council’s available Discretionary Housing Payments have been allocated and there is an effective process for ensuring people in the greatest need of assistance are receiving help (<a href="#">paragraphs 51 to 54</a>).</p> <p><b>Welsh Language Commissioner</b> – Further progress was made to improve the Welsh-language capability of Council staff (<a href="#">paragraphs 55 to 58</a>).</p>
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<b>Use of Resources</b>	<b>Wales Audit Office</b> – Financial management arrangements were effective ( <a href="#">paragraphs 59 to 66</a> ).
<b>Governance</b>	<p><b>Wales Audit Office</b> – Changes to the Council's culture and the way it manages and delivers services continued to develop but it is too early to fully assess their effectiveness in improving services (<a href="#">paragraphs 67 to 71</a>).</p> <p><b>Wales Audit Office</b> – After a slow start the joint Local Service Board clarified its focus and improved its governance but the pace of progress needs to be maintained (<a href="#">paragraphs 72 to 78</a>).</p>
<b>Improvement planning and reporting audits</b>	<b>Wales Audit Office</b> – The Auditor General issued audit certificates stating that the Council had discharged its duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 ( <a href="#">Appendices 2 and 3</a> ).
<b>Audit of accounts</b>	<b>Wales Audit Office</b> – On 28 November 2014, the Appointed Auditor issued an Annual Audit Letter to the Council. The Letter summarises the key messages arising from his statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. It confirmed that, on 30 September 2014, he issued an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements, including the Gwynedd Pension Fund, confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Gwynedd Pension Fund's financial position and transactions ( <a href="#">Appendix 4</a> ).



## Recommendations and proposals for improvement

- 10 Given the wide range of services provided by the Council and the challenges it is facing, it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
- a make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
  - b make proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Council, we would expect them to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
  - c conduct a special inspection and publish a report and make recommendations; and
  - d recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 11 The Auditor General makes no formal recommendations to the Council in this AIR. He does, however, make recommendations that may be relevant to the Council in his Local Government National Reports. A list of recommendations contained in reports issued in 2014-15 can be found in [Appendix 5](#). There are also a number of proposals for improvement for the Council arising from the work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office during the year.

Proposals for improvement	
The Council should:	
P1	Review its working practices against the recommendations in the Auditor General's 2014-15 Local Government National Reports and implement improvements.
P2	Participate more fully in the Welsh Government's Waste and Resource Action Plan to validate and/or improve waste recycling and cost reduction plans.
P3	Identify and/or develop performance indicators that enable progress against the objectives in the Ffordd Gwynedd Strategy to be measured.
P4	Ensure – in conjunction with its partners – that the Joint Local Service Board has sufficient resources to enable it to discharge its responsibilities effectively, including the update of the Single Integrated Plan.

- 12 In addition, CSSIW, Estyn and the WLC included areas for improvement in their inspection reports and letters issued to the Council during 2014-15. These are available at [www.cssiw.org.uk](http://www.cssiw.org.uk), [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk) and [www.comisiynyddygybraeg.org](http://www.comisiynyddygybraeg.org).

# Detailed report



# Performance

## Performance across a range of the Council's services compared well with other local authorities in Wales

- 13 The 2014 AIR concluded that many areas of the Council's services – as measured by its key indicators and the Welsh Government's National Strategic Indicators – were performing well. This remains the case. The Council's performance in 2013-14 improved or remained the same in 68.8 per cent of the indicators. Although this was slightly less than the previous year, when 71.9 per cent of the indicators improved or remained the same, it demonstrates that, in 2013-14, the Council continued to achieve improvements across many of its service areas.
- 14 Each year the Welsh Government undertakes a national survey to obtain the views of people living in Wales on a range of issues including, health, education and local services. The 2013-14 survey showed that 63.6 per cent of Gwynedd's residents believed that the Council provided high quality services. This is higher than the previous year's figure of 57 per cent, is the fourth best result amongst all the local authorities in Wales and better than the Welsh average of 57.1 per cent.
- 15 The views of Gwynedd's Citizens Panel supported the results of the national survey with 63 per cent satisfied with the way the Council delivered its services in 2013-14 compared with 58 per cent in the previous year. In addition, 54 per cent of the Panel believed the Council offered value-for-money services compared with 50 per cent in the previous year.

## Support for vulnerable residents improved but the number of older people in care homes remains too high

- 16 The CSSIW's 2013-14 Performance Evaluation of the Council's Social Services report concluded that there had been incremental improvement in the provision of social care in the County during 2013-14 with new initiatives promoting independence in adult services, continued progress in the delivery of children's services and strong outcomes for looked-after children.
- 17 The Council does, however, face significant challenges in the medium term in the delivery of its social care services. The adult services budget is forecast to reduce by over £6 million from £40.6 million in 2014-15 to £34.4 million in 2017-18. Such a large reduction in resources will require changes in the way care and support for vulnerable adults are commissioned and provided. This will include further development of preventative services that promote independence and are planned, developed and evaluated jointly by the Council, service users, families, carers and communities.

- 18 Despite the challenges presented by the financial situation, the Council continued to invest in the development of new services for older people and adults with learning disabilities. This included the:
- a construction of seven units for people with learning disabilities at Pant yr Eithin, Harlech;
  - b opening, in November 2014, of the 40-bed extra-care facility for older people in Bangor; and
  - c progression of the extra-care housing development in Porthmadog.
- 19 Further progress was also made in the development of joint working arrangements with partners in the provision of adult services. The Integrated Transformation Team, which comprises senior officers from the Council, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and the third sector, continued to introduce new services and initiatives including the:
- a implementation of new working practices in the Social Work (Discharge) and Physiotherapist Services, which involved staff working weekends, thereby providing seven-day-a-week coverage in these areas;
  - b review by the Pharmacy Service of high-risk medication in the community;
  - c secondment of a senior member of staff from the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to support further integration of services; and
  - d establishment of plans to further improve joint working by co-locating health and social services staff and improving compatibility and communication between ICT systems.
- 20 Access to social-care services continued to be good and well supported by an effective Advice and Assessment Team. In December 2013, the Council commissioned an external consultant to examine its Adult Assessment and Care Management Service. The review concluded that, overall, the Service was responsive and solid. However, it also identified some weaknesses including the variable use of outcomes to measure performance, under-development of multi-disciplinary working and delays in the provision of equipment and maintenance services to people's homes.
- 21 The Council's performance in reviewing adult care plans during the year continued to improve and, at 85.3 per cent, it is now above the Welsh average of 81.1 per cent. The Council also performed well in avoiding delays in the discharge of patients from hospital. The rate of delayed transfer of care for social-care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 or over was 1.5, significantly better than the Welsh average of 4.6.

- 22 The Council remained committed to promoting independence for older people with 462 reablement packages provided during the year. An internal review of the Reablement Service identified that less than half of the recipients of the packages needed ongoing support and only six per cent required further assistance within two years.
- 23 The Council operated an effective Adult Placement Service with the manager of the Service gaining the Care Forum Wales gold award in the Leading Practice in the Management of Social Care category. Other staff received gold and bronze awards in the Promoting Fulfilled Lives category.
- 24 The CSSIW inspection of the Council's Domiciliary Care Service was largely positive with users commenting favourably on the quality of service provided. The Council does, however, continue to run a large number of residential services for older people which, in the long term, will prove increasingly difficult to sustain. The rate of older people (aged 65 or over) whom the Council supported in care per 1,000 population aged 65 or over at 31 March 2014 was 25.6. This was significantly above the Welsh average of 19.8 and was the second highest amongst all the local authorities in Wales. The rate of older people the Council supported in the community per 1,000 population aged 65 or over on 31 March 2014 was 46.2. This was substantially below the Welsh average of 74.4 and was the lowest amongst all the local authorities in Wales.
- 25 The Council continued to improve its services for young people, children and families including the:
- a Implementation of the 'When I'm Ready' Programme for looked-after children. The Programme extends the duration of placements and helps young people take advantage of opportunities to train or gain qualifications.
  - b 'Gyda'n Gilydd' scheme which supported 509 families before they reached the need for support from social services.
  - c Development of the Integrated Family Support Service to focus on safeguarding children in families where the parents have alcohol and/or drug problems.
- 26 Performance in the provision of a number of children's services was good. Over 99 per cent of children's referrals to the Council received a decision within a day. Over 47 per cent of the referrals were allocated to a social worker for an initial assessment. This was above the Welsh average of 42.9 per cent. The Council completed 67 per cent of initial assessments of children within seven working days, and there was a reduction in the proportion of children being re-referred from 30 per cent in 2012-13 to 26.6 per cent in 2013-14.

- 27 The CSSIW inspection of the Council's arrangements for the safeguarding and care planning of looked-after children concluded that social workers and their managers had a good understanding of the young people they were working with, including knowledge of their vulnerabilities and risky behaviours. Referral and information sharing between staff was good. Operational relationships between teams and partner agencies supported effective and timely communications.
- 28 The number of children the Council looked after fell from 200 in 2012-13 to 185 in 2013-14. The outcomes for looked-after children remained consistently strong. The Council continued to achieve stability of placements and qualifications for the children they looked after that were amongst the best in Wales. All young people in the care of the Council had a pathway plan and personal advisor. The Council improved its performance for the timeliness of reviews of care plans for looked-after children with 94.3 per cent carried out within statutory timescales in 2013-14 compared to 75.4 per cent in 2012-13. Young people contacted during the inspection reported that they were encouraged to attend their reviews and that advocacy was available if required. However, the inspection found that reviews were overly focussed on short-term events and not on the long-term outcomes, and quality of care plans was variable. Young people also reported frustrations in the lack of clarity in delegated authority when seeking permission for school trips and overnight stays.
- 29 The CSSIW inspection identified a need for the Council to further develop looked-after children's access to primary health services and move-on accommodation. The Council's corporate parenting responsibilities require that children they look after are able to use primary healthcare. The proportion of children registered with a GP within 10 days of becoming the Council's responsibility declined from 92.5 per cent in 2012-13 to 78.3 per cent in 2013-14. Although the proportion of health assessments for looked-after children increased to 46 per cent in 2013-14 from 31 per cent in 2012-13, this was significantly below the Welsh average of 81 per cent.
- 30 Estyn's 2013 inspection of the Council's Education Services for Children and Young People concluded that, at a corporate level, there was no clear understanding of procedures to ensure that all Council staff clearly understood their roles and responsibilities in relation to protecting and safeguarding children. As a result, the Council's safeguarding arrangements did not meet statutory requirements and were a cause for concern. However, a follow-up visit by Estyn in 2014-15 found that progress had been made to address these concerns. A corporate Safeguarding Policy had been adopted and restructuring at head-of-service level, including the creation of a Head of Children and Family Support Services post, had strengthened the Council's capacity to establish, develop and manage its policies and procedures for safeguarding children and young people.

- 31 Work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office during 2014 confirmed the findings of the CSSIW inspection and the Estyn follow-up visit, concluding that the Council's governance arrangements for meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children were mostly fit for purpose and effectively managed.
- 32 The CSSIW inspection of the Council's Fostering Service concluded that children and young people had secure placements where their needs were effectively met. The CSSIW inspection of Drws y Nant, the Council-commissioned children's home, identified a very strong person-centred environment where young people reported they were listened to and valued.

**Good progress has been made in addressing some underperforming areas of education provision but further improvement is required in others including Key Stage 4 performance in a number of schools**

- 33 Estyn's 2013 inspection of the Council's Education Service for Children and Young People concluded that Estyn needed to monitor the Council's progress in addressing the recommendations made following their inspection. Three follow-up visits were undertaken by Estyn during 2014-15. Estyn's letter to the Council, issued after their final visit, concluded that the Council had made sufficient progress in addressing weaknesses in its children's safeguarding arrangements (see [paragraph 30](#)), and in relation to their other recommendations to enable it to be removed from the 'Estyn monitoring' category.
- 34 [Paragraphs 35 to 46](#) summarise Estyn's evaluation of the Council's progress in relation to each of the recommendations in the 2013 inspection report. The recommendations are set out below.

**Raise standards in Key Stage 4 by targeting underperforming departments in low-performing secondary schools more robustly**

- 35 Estyn found that the Council has partly addressed this recommendation. Estyn's inspection report identified that, over the four years preceding the inspection, GCSE performance in too many secondary schools was in the bottom quarter in most of the main performance indicators when compared with schools elsewhere in Wales with similar levels of deprivation. Following the inspection, the Council identified six secondary schools where performance in Key Stage 4 was an issue. An action plan was agreed for each school following meetings with the head teacher and chair of the governing body.

- 36 Estyn's follow-up visits found that the Council had introduced a number of initiatives to support performance in Key Stage 4. A network had been established for the schools' management teams that was supported and facilitated by the regional School Improvement Service. In order to meet the specific needs of underperforming departments in the target schools, the Council commissioned external support. A former deputy head teacher worked with one school on literacy and a former mathematics advisor supported another school. The Council had developed promising arrangements to make better use of school-to-school support and to pair schools and departments to identify and promote good practice. These arrangements are, however, at an early stage and it is too early to assess their effectiveness.
- 37 In response to the September 2013 report of the Services Scrutiny Committee on the Quality of Education in the County, the Council established the Quality Promotion Project in the secondary sector. The Project touches on a wide range of areas that have been identified as in need of improvement. In January 2014, a deputy head teacher was seconded on a part-time basis to lead the Project. Early indications are that her work has contributed effectively in improving leadership and standards in secondary schools.
- 38 In 2013 the Council met or exceeded all of the Welsh Government's modelled expectations for Key Stage 4 on the basis of the number of pupils entitled to free school meals. This included meeting the expected performance for five or more good GCSE grades that included mathematics and Welsh or English for the first time in five years. From 2012 to 2014, the improvement in the percentage of pupils attaining this indicator was better than the average for Wales in each of the six schools targeted by the Council following the 2013 inspection. However, Estyn judged that too many schools remained in the bottom quarter for most of the main Key Stage 4 indicators.

**Monitor and challenge all schools and use the full powers available to improve leadership and management in underperforming schools**

- 39 Estyn found that the Council has partly addressed this recommendation. The system of monitoring and challenging school performance has been strengthened since the inspection. Council officers and the responsible Cabinet member meet every two weeks to discuss education issues including underperforming schools. Head teachers of underperforming schools attend meetings with the Head of Education Services and the Cabinet member to discuss school improvement plans. During the last 18 months, Council officers have visited two underperforming schools. One of the visits followed an Estyn inspection of the school. Both schools have made appropriate improvement progress to date.



**Continue to develop and implement the Council's present strategies to improve attendance in secondary schools**

- 40 Estyn found that the Council has largely addressed this recommendation. In 2011-12, attendance in half of the secondary schools in Gwynedd was in the bottom quarter of similar schools in Wales. Four schools had been in the bottom quarter for four consecutive years and one school for three years. The inspection concluded that the Council had been slow to address consistently low attendance in some of its secondary schools.
- 41 Since the inspection, the Council has improved its co-operation with secondary schools' management teams to promote attendances and deal more effectively with absences. A temporary appointment had been made to address poor attendance and work was progressing effectively. The Council had also held meetings with secondary head teachers to review attendance rates in schools. As a result, the Council produced clear and practical guidelines for improvement actions in schools. Education Welfare Officers are now located in schools rather than a central office and review and respond to absences on a weekly basis.
- 42 The attendance rate for every secondary school in the County has increased over the past two years. Some 25 per cent of secondary schools are now in the bottom quarter of similar schools in Wales compared with 50 per cent in 2011-12.

**Improve the quality of self-evaluation and the implementation of improvement plans and performance management within the Education Department**

- 43 Estyn found that the Council has partly addressed this recommendation. Overall, the Education Service's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement planning procedures have been strengthened since the inspection. Lines of accountability from the Service to the Council were clearer and there was a more direct link between corporate and service priorities.
- 44 Despite these improvements, information provided to senior officers and members did not always accurately identify management and performance weaknesses. For example, reports did not identify the Service's failure to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place for leadership and management in a pupil referral unit that was judged by Estyn to require special measures.

### **Continue to implement plans to reduce surplus places**

- 45 Estyn found that the Council has largely addressed this recommendation. Since the inspection the Council has worked effectively to implement a number of priorities in its Excellent Primary Education for Children in Gwynedd Strategy. The implementation of a plan to reorganise schools in the Bala area and the closure of a primary school in the Botwnnog catchment area removed 376 surplus places within the County. A plan to merge three primary schools in Arfon in September 2015 has been agreed and adopted, and will remove 97 surplus places. A proposal to re-model Ysgol Glancegin in Bangor will remove approximately 100 surplus places.
- 46 The Council is also consulting on a plan to reorganise educational provision in the Dolgellau catchment area and is in the second stage of the reorganisation of schools in the Bala area. If the plans are realised, approximately 650 surplus places across primary and secondary schools will be removed by September 2017.

### **Waste recycling rates improved supporting the achievement of Welsh Government statutory targets but there is a lack of independent assurance of the effectiveness of some waste management initiatives**

- 47 Historically, the Council's recycling rate has lagged behind that of many other councils in Wales but performance has improved in recent years. In 2013-14, 54 per cent of waste was re-used, recycled or composted compared with 51.5 per cent in 2012-13.
- 48 The Council has implemented a number of schemes to increase its recycling rate, achieve national recycling targets, meet its landfill allowance, and avoid possible financial penalties from the Welsh Government. The introduction of a three-weekly collection of residual waste in Dwyfor in October 2014 has increased the recycling rate to about 57 per cent and, when fully implemented across the County, is likely to take the rate to over 60 per cent. This means that the Council should achieve the statutory target of recycling 58 per cent of municipal waste by 2015-16 and be well placed to meet the target of 64 per cent by 2019-20.
- 49 The 2024-25 statutory target, to recycle 70 per cent of municipal waste, does, however, remain challenging. Further planned initiatives, including one with other councils in North Wales to treat residual waste at an energy-from-waste plant from 2019, should, if successfully delivered, assist in making the 2024-25 target more achievable. The Council has also identified that a higher rate of food waste capture in the County is essential to further improve its recycling performance and reduce the amount of waste it sends to landfill. About half of the County's residents do not recycle their food waste or could recycle more. The Council already uses 99.4 per cent of its landfill allowance and is, therefore, at risk of exceeding the allowance and incurring financial penalties in the future. If the Council does not obtain a higher diversion from landfill than that achieved in 2013-14, it could incur a financial penalty of £158,000 in 2014-15, and a further penalty of £314,600 in 2015-16.

50 Performance management arrangements within the Waste Management Service were robust and effective. Managers closely monitored the cost and performance of waste recycling schemes and provided regular reports to the Portfolio Lead, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees. The Council does not, however, routinely engage in independent assessments of the performance of its various waste management activities. It has only limited participation in the Collaborative Change Programme delivered by the Waste and Resource Action Programme on behalf of the Welsh Government. The Programme provides free advice and technical support to participating councils to increase waste recycling and reduce costs. Fuller involvement in the Programme by the Council could provide a useful independent 'health-check' to ensure that the different parts of the Service align effectively and that performance is maximised.

**Most of the Council's available Discretionary Housing Payments have been allocated and there is an effective process for ensuring people in the greatest need of assistance are receiving help**

51 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 heralded a significant change to the administration and distribution of benefits and will have a major impact on many citizens. In April 2011, the UK Government embarked on a programme of reform which will culminate with the phased introduction of Universal Credit between October 2013 and 2017. A major focus of the UK Government's plans are changes to housing benefit, which are aimed at reducing annual expenditure by around £2.3 billion. These changes will mean that millions of households in Great Britain will receive less in benefits.

52 In January 2015, the Auditor General published a report on how well councils were managing the impact of welfare reform changes on social housing tenants in Wales. The report reviewed the management and use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) by councils in Wales and concluded that the allocation, distribution, administration and use of these payments have significant inconsistencies and weaknesses. We followed up this work at individual councils.

53 Our review found that Gwynedd Council made it easy for vulnerable clients to apply for DHP. Applicants were required to complete two documents: a clear and simple two-page application form and a two-page income and expenditure profile. Both forms were straightforward and easy to understand. In addition, the Council had developed a referral process with other organisations including Shelter Cymru, Citizens Advice and a local credit union, and this client-focussed approach encouraged take-up by vulnerable people.

54 By the end of November 2014, the Council had paid out £710,055 of the £733,297 DHP monies allocated to it by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Council had a system in place which effectively monitored its DHP spend. The Council also monitored the number of people it had assisted, including landlords, and the amount of budget available to assist applicants. In February 2015, a policy for prioritising the allocation of DHP was produced which should assist the Council in measuring the impact of its work and assess whether it is effectively helping those most in need of financial assistance.

### Further progress was made to improve the Welsh-language capability of Council staff

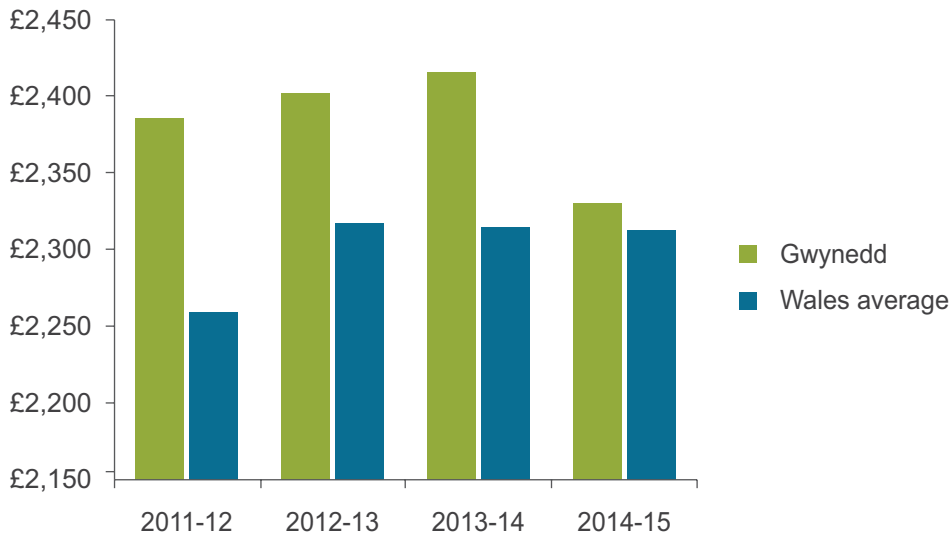
- 55 The role of the Welsh Language Commissioner was created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. New powers to impose standards on organisations came into force through subordinate legislation at the end of 2014. The Commissioner will continue to review Welsh-language schemes by virtue of powers inherited under the Welsh Language Act 1993, and will enforce standards by investigating statutory complaints, making decisions on statutory investigations, maintaining a register of enforcement action, and imposing civil penalties when appropriate.
- 56 The Commissioner works with all councils in Wales to inspect and advise on the implementation of language schemes. It is the responsibility of councils to provide services to the public in Welsh in accordance with the commitments in their language schemes. Every council is required to provide an annual monitoring report to the Commissioner outlining its performance in implementing the language scheme. The Commissioner analyses every monitoring report, provides a formal response and collects further information as required.
- 57 The Commissioner reported that, following progress in the Leisure Centres Language Champions Scheme, the Council intended to establish a similar scheme in its residential homes. The clauses referring to the use of the Welsh language in social-care agreements for older people had been strengthened. The Council's Contracts Unit Brokerage Team won the Welsh Government's Words into Action award for assisting in the provision of Welsh-medium services by home care workers.
- 58 The Council also co-operated with the Welsh Language Commissioner's office in the review of the Welsh-language guidelines of the Derwen partnership which, in conjunction with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, provides specialist services for children.

# Use of Resources

## Financial management arrangements were effective

- 59 The Council regularly reviewed its Financial Strategy and made reasonable assumptions around a range of variable factors including the likely level of Revenue Support Grant. As part of this process, the Council considered the appropriateness of its reserves and balances.
- 60 The Council had effective financial forecasting, budget setting and control systems in place. Between 2011-12 and 2013-14, the Council accurately forecast its annual budget shortfall and successfully identified a range of savings to bridge the gap between income and expenditure. Budgetary control arrangements were underpinned by detailed guidance and monitoring at officer, member and executive levels.
- 61 Plans to deliver the Council's 2014-15 savings were fit for purpose, effectively managed and are likely to be achieved. Efficiency savings plans had been developed for 2014-15 across all Council departments. The plans contained clear descriptions of where savings would be made. Robust procedures for measuring and tracking savings had been established and regular reports were made to the Council's Savings Panel.
- 62 In the medium term, the Council forecasts that additional savings of at least £34 million will be required between 2014 and 2018. When setting its 2015-16 budget, the Council identified savings of £8.6 million, increased Council Tax by 4.5 per cent and funded the remaining shortfall of £2.018 million from general balances. The Council is also identifying further efficiency savings and prioritising possible cuts to services to reflect the views of the people of Gwynedd (see [paragraph 69](#)).
- 63 [Exhibit 1](#) below compares the Council's planned gross revenue expenditure (net of income) per head of population over the last four years with the average for councils across Wales.
- 64 The graph shows that expenditure per head in Gwynedd was well above the Wales average in each of the three years prior to 2014-15. This reflects, at least in part, the fact that services are more costly to deliver in rural areas such as Gwynedd than in more densely populated areas. However, planned spending for 2014-15, at £2,330 per head, was only slightly higher than the Wales average of £2,312 per head. Since 2011-12, we calculate that spend per head has fallen by eight per cent in real terms in Gwynedd compared with an average three per cent reduction across Wales.

## Exhibit 1



Source: Stats Wales

- 65 We include in [Appendix 6](#) some information about the distribution of the Council's financial resources in 2013-14 and about trends in the Council's gross revenue expenditure and income since 2008-09. The data are drawn from the Council's Statements of Accounts. We also include information about trends in the number of staff employed by the Council, drawing on data the Council submitted to Benchmarking Wales.
- 66 As in all councils, the cost of education and social care forms a high proportion of the Council's expenditure. Almost half its gross income for 2013-14, derived from Revenue Support Grant (38.7 per cent) and Non-Domestic Rates (10.2 per cent). These are income sources over which the Council has no control, and Revenue Support Grant is falling. In Gwynedd, fees and charges represented 33.3 per cent of the Council's income for 2013-14, well below the Wales average of 37 per cent, while income from Council Tax, at 17.7 per cent, formed an above-average proportion of total income.

# Governance

Changes to the Council's culture and the way it manages and delivers services continued to develop but it is too early to fully assess their effectiveness in improving performance

- 67 The Council's main corporate governance transformational programme, Ffordd Gwynedd, is intended to improve its culture and governance and 'put the people of Gwynedd at the heart of everything the Council does'. Ffordd Gwynedd – which is led by the Chief Executive and monitored by the Customer Care and Transformation Delivery Panel – comprises nine improvement projects including leadership development, engagement with the public and performance management.
- 68 Implementation of the various elements of the Ffordd Gwynedd programme quickened during 2014. Information and training sessions were held for managers and front-line staff during the summer and a meeting of the Management College – led by the Chief Executive – was held towards the end of the year. The draft Ffordd Gwynedd Strategy was prepared and three priority reviews – termed 'interventions' – commenced in Adult Social Services, HR and Building Maintenance. Benefits, including improved service outcomes and efficiency savings, are expected to be identified and implemented by March 2016.
- 69 The leadership development project progressed as planned with the first workshops held during October 2014. Targets and milestones for the engagement project were missed but this was primarily due to resources being diverted to support the Gwynedd Challenge (The Big Conversation) initiative which was undertaken to consult with the public on the financial situation facing the Council. Gwynedd Challenge (The Big Conversation) provides a good example of how engagement and dialogue with the public in determining Council policies and priorities – one of the primary goals of Ffordd Gwynedd – are developing.
- 70 Although it is too early to fully assess the effectiveness of Ffordd Gwynedd, progress to date is promising. It is, however, important that the Council identifies a small number of high-level performance measures that can be used to demonstrate the attainment of the planned improvements. The requirement for performance measures is included in the draft Ffordd Gwynedd Strategy but these are yet to be fully developed.

71 The work of the Council's Governance Arrangements Assessment Group also progressed well during the year. The Group was set up in 2012-13 to assist in establishing a more formal and rigorous evaluation of the various elements of the Council's governance framework. During the year, the Group assessed the importance and effectiveness of each of the 31 elements of the framework in supporting the delivery of the Council's objectives. Elements identified by the Group as being most in need of improvement included collaboration with partners in the delivery of services, engagement with the public and management of performance. All these high-priority improvement areas are included within one or more of the projects in the Ffordd Gwynedd programme.

**After a slow start the joint Local Service Board clarified its focus and improved its governance but the pace of progress needs to be maintained**

72 The joint Local Service Board (LSB) was established in April 2013, following the merger of the two former LSBs in Gwynedd and Anglesey. A new Partnership Unit, hosted by Gwynedd Council, was set up to co-ordinate the LSB's activity across both Counties. Difficulties were, however, encountered during the first months of operation of the newly formed LSB. Weaknesses in its co-ordination and management resulted in some partners believing its focus was too narrowly based on low-level operational concerns, at the expense of addressing more important community issues. This resulted in a number of the LSB partners feeling detached from its aims and objectives, which subsequently led to variable attendances at meetings, thereby lessening the effectiveness of decision making.

73 The Council and its partners recognised the situation was not sustainable and a significant change was required for the LSB to make progress and promote better collaboration and outcomes. A pause-and-review stage was instigated during the year, which included the appointment of a new Partnership Manager to better co-ordinate LSB activities, assist in the production of a joint Single Integrated Plan for both Gwynedd and Anglesey, and agree new priorities. In early 2014, and during the pause-and-review stage, the LSB made a number of important decisions including:

- a development of a new ambition with greater focus on bridging the funding gap in public services;
- b identification of an appropriate balance between effective service demand management and spend in the short term and effective multi-agency interventions and impact on service demands in the medium to long term;
- c development of a small number of key priorities for delivery over the next two years; and
- d a review of the current partnership structures and governance arrangements of the LSB.



- 74 To assist in improving communications, the Partnership Manager set up regular meetings with individual LSB members to provide support in the development of the vision and priorities, whilst encouraging buy-in from all partners. This initiative also promoted greater trust, commitment and co-operation amongst all the LSB partners. Attendances at LSB meetings significantly improved during 2014.
- 75 The LSB adopted a systems-thinking approach to the development of the new priorities, which involved the use of an external consultancy to facilitate a conference and subsequent workshops for partners. This resulted in a greater understanding of the cultures, aims and objectives of the partner organisations and the development of three clear strategic priorities. A new LSB Chairperson was elected in November 2014. The Chairperson has knowledge and experience in a number of areas linked to the LSB's new priorities including housing, social and economic issues.
- 76 Despite this recent progress in governance and performance management, systems are still developing. The LSB has agreed a single governance and scrutiny model, which is representative of, and brings external expertise and knowledge from, a range of partners. The model has attracted interest from the Welsh Government and neighbouring LSBs. Work streams for delivery of the three priorities have been agreed and individual LSB members have taken responsibility for their oversight and progress. The Centre for Public Scrutiny is supporting and mentoring the LSB's governance arrangements.
- 77 As a result of the various initiatives undertaken during the year, the LSB is better placed to achieve more effective partnership working than before and better outcomes for the citizens of both Counties. Early implications of the Future Generations (Wales) Bill have been considered, such as focusing on breaking the cycle and patterns of behaviours of some communities and individuals which result in greater demand and fragility across partners' services. Partners such as Snowdonia National Park, Medrwn Môn and Bangor University are involved in projects to support and alleviate pressure on mainstream public services.
- 78 Despite the progress achieved during the year, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed if the momentum is to be maintained. The Single Integrated Plan – Strengthening our communities in Anglesey and Gwynedd (2013-2017) – was published in August 2014, prior to the LSB developing its new priorities. The Plan needs to be updated to take account of the new priorities and identify individual partners' work streams. Also, the recently announced retirements and departures of a number of executive members, and the Partnership Manager, have raised concerns regarding resilience and capacity, and present a significant challenge to the Council and its LSB partners.

# Appendix 1 – Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake an annual improvement assessment, and to publish an annual improvement report, for each improvement authority in Wales. This requirement covers local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

This report has been produced by staff of the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges his duties under section 19 to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an improvement assessment under section 18 and stating whether, as a result of his improvement plan audit under section 17, he believes that the authority has discharged its improvement planning duties under section 15.

Improvement authorities are under a general duty to ‘make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions’. Improvement authorities are defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

The annual improvement assessment is the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. The improvement assessment is a forward-looking assessment of an authority’s likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It also includes a retrospective assessment of whether an authority has achieved its planned improvements in order to inform a view as to the authority’s track record of improvement. The Auditor General will summarise his audit and assessment work in a published annual improvement report for each authority (under section 24).

The Auditor General may also, in some circumstances, carry out special inspections (under section 21), which will be reported to the authority and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). An important ancillary activity for the Auditor General is the co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work (required by section 23), which takes into consideration the overall programme of work of all relevant regulators at an improvement authority. The Auditor General may also take account of information shared by relevant regulators (under section 33) in his assessments.

# Appendix 2 – Audit of Gwynedd Council’s 2014-15 Improvement Plan

## Certificate

I certify that I have audited Gwynedd Council’s (the Council) Improvement Plan in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) and my Code of Audit Practice.

As a result of my audit, I believe that the Council has discharged its duties under section 15(6) to (9) of the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

## Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Auditor General

Under the Measure, the Council is required to prepare and publish an Improvement Plan describing its plans to discharge its duties to:

- make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions;
- make arrangements to secure achievement of its improvement objectives; and
- make arrangements to exercise its functions so that any performance standard specified by Welsh Ministers is met.

The Measure requires the Council to publish its Improvement Plan as soon as is reasonably practicable after the start of the financial year to which it relates, or after such other date as Welsh Ministers may specify by order.

The Council is responsible for preparing the Improvement Plan and for the information set out within it. The Measure requires that the Council has regard to guidance issued by Welsh Ministers in preparing and publishing its plan.

As the Council’s auditor, I am required under sections 17 and 19 of the Measure to carry out an audit of the Improvement Plan, to certify that I have done so, and to report whether I believe that the Council has discharged its duties to prepare and publish an Improvement Plan in accordance with statutory requirements set out in section 15 and statutory guidance.

## Scope of the Improvement Plan audit

For the purposes of my audit work I will accept that, provided an authority meets its statutory requirements, it will also have complied with Welsh Government statutory guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

For this audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information, or whether the Improvement Plan published by the Council can be achieved. Other assessment work that I will undertake under section 18 of the Measure will examine these issues. My audit of the Council's Improvement Plan, therefore, comprised a review of the plan to ascertain whether it included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the plan complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing its plan.

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with sections 17 and 19 of the Measure cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

Huw Vaughan Thomas  
**Auditor General for Wales**

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business  
Huw Lloyd Jones, Manager, Wales Audit Office  
Nigel Griffiths, Performance Audit Lead, Wales Audit Office

# Appendix 3 – Audit of Gwynedd Council’s Assessment of 2013-14 Performance

## Certificate

I certify that I have audited Gwynedd Council’s (the Council) assessment of its performance in 2013-14 in accordance with section 17 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) and my Code of Audit Practice.

As a result of my audit, I believe that the Council has discharged its duties under sections 15(2), (3), (8) and (9) of the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

## Respective responsibilities of the Council and the Auditor General

Under the Measure, the Council is required to annually publish an assessment which describes its performance:

- in discharging its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions;
- in meeting the improvement objectives it has set itself;
- by reference to performance indicators specified by Welsh Ministers, and self-imposed performance indicators; and
- in meeting any performance standards specified by Welsh Ministers, and self-imposed performance standards.

The Measure requires the Council to publish its assessment before 31 October in the financial year following that to which the information relates, or by any other such date as Welsh Ministers may specify by order.

The Measure requires that the Council has regard to guidance issued by Welsh Ministers in publishing its assessment.

As the Council’s auditor, I am required under sections 17 and 19 of the Measure to carry out an audit to determine whether the Council has discharged its duty to publish an assessment of performance, to certify that I have done so, and to report whether I believe that the Council has discharged its duties in accordance with statutory requirements set out in section 15 and statutory guidance.

## Scope of the audit

For the purposes of my audit work I will accept that, provided an authority meets its statutory requirements, it will also have complied with Welsh Government statutory guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.

For this audit I am not required to form a view on the completeness or accuracy of information. Other assessment work that I will undertake under section 18 of the Measure may examine these issues. My audit of the Council's assessment of performance, therefore, comprised a review of the Council's publication to ascertain whether it included elements prescribed in legislation. I also assessed whether the arrangements for publishing the assessment complied with the requirements of the legislation, and that the Council had regard to statutory guidance in preparing and publishing it.

The work I have carried out in order to report and make recommendations in accordance with sections 17 and 19 of the Measure cannot solely be relied upon to identify all weaknesses or opportunities for improvement.

Huw Vaughan Thomas  
**Auditor General For Wales**

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business  
Huw Lloyd Jones, Manager, Wales Audit Office  
Nigel Griffiths, Performance Audit Lead, Wales Audit Office

# Appendix 4 – Annual Audit Letter

Councillor Dyfed Edwards  
Dilwyn Williams  
Gwynedd Council  
Council Offices  
Caernarfon  
Gwynedd  
LL55 1SH

Dear Dyfed and Dilwyn

## **Annual Audit Letter – Gwynedd Council 2013-14**

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

### **The Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources**

It is the Council's responsibility to:

- put systems of internal control in place to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions and to ensure that its assets are secure;
- maintain proper accounting records;
- prepare a Statement of Accounts in accordance with relevant requirements; and
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 requires me to:

- provide an audit opinion on the accounting statements;
- review the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; and
- issue a certificate confirming that I have completed the audit of the accounts.

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards. **On 30 September 2014, I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Pension Fund's financial position and transactions.** My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members of the Audit Committee in my Audit of Financial Statements reports on 25 September 2014.

My reports concluded that the Statement of Accounts were generally prepared to a good standard. I did identify that the Council could do further work to improve its accounting practices in relation to the maintenance of its non-current asset register. In addition, there was one material weakness in your internal controls which was relevant to the Council both directly and in its role as the administering authority for the Gwynedd Pension Fund. Membership data provided by some employers, for use in the pension fund systems, was not up to date and this could have a significant effect on both the triennial valuation and the annual IAS19 valuations provided by the actuary.

Since I referred to this in my 2012-13 annual audit letter, the Council had not progressed this issue as well as they had hoped and the quality of the membership data for some Employer Bodies remained an issue for 2013-14, albeit it did not impact on my opinion on the financial statements. Since then the Council has employed temporary resources to address the issue and is making good progress in reconciling membership data.

The Council is required to provide Whole of Government Accounts (WGA) under HM Treasury's **Whole of Government Accounts (Designation of Bodies) Order**. The Council submitted its WGA return by the due date. We reviewed the return and identified no issues that we wish to draw to your attention.

It is also worth noting the Council lead on the preparation of the accounts for three Joint Committees (GwE, Special Educational Needs and the Joint Planning Policy Joint Committee). On 30 September I issued unqualified opinions on the accounts confirming that they present a true and fair view of the respective Joint Committees' financial position and transactions. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to the members of the respective Committees in my Audit of Financial Statements reports. I do not need to bring anything to your attention in this letter.

**I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources**

My consideration of the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness has been based on the audit work undertaken on the accounts as well as placing reliance on the work completed as part of the Improvement Assessment under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The Auditor General will highlight areas where the effectiveness of these arrangements has yet to be demonstrated or where improvements could be made when he publishes his Annual Improvement Report.

**I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts (for Gwynedd Council and Gwynedd Pension Fund) has been completed on 30 September 2013.** I also issued a completion certificate for the Joint Committees on the same date.



**My work to date on certification of grant claims and returns has not identified significant issues that would impact on the 2014-15 accounts or key financial systems**

A more detailed report on my grant certification work will follow in Spring 2015 once this year's programme of certification work is complete.

The financial audit fee for 2013-14 is currently expected to be in line with the agreed fee set out in the Annual Audit Outline.

Yours sincerely

Derwyn Owen

**For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor**

# Appendix 5 – National report recommendations 2014-15

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
May 2014	Good Scrutiny? Good Question!	R1 Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny.
		R2 Ensure that scrutiny members, and specifically scrutiny chairs, receive training and support to fully equip them with the skills required to undertake effective scrutiny.
		R3 Further develop scrutiny forward work programming to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide a clear rationale for topic selection;</li> <li>• be more outcome focused;</li> <li>• ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; and</li> <li>• align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements.</li> </ul>
		R4 Ensure that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation and that its activities are complementary with the work of external review bodies.
		R5 Ensure that the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and acted upon to improve the function's effectiveness; including following up on proposed actions and examining outcomes.
		R6 Undertake regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network.
		R7 Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study.
		R8 Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
July 2014	Young people not in education, employment or training - Findings from a review of councils in Wales	<p>R1 Together with partners, map and review expenditure on NEETs services to better understand the resources required to deliver the Framework.</p> <p>R2 Clarify their strategic approach to reducing the proportion of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET as well as their approach for 16 to 18 year olds.</p> <p>R3 Focus on young people with significant or multiple barriers to engaging with education, employment or training rather than those who are more likely to re-engage without significant additional support.</p> <p>R4 Develop their objectives and targets for reducing the number of young people NEET so that they can be held to account and their work aligns with the Welsh Government's targets and objectives.</p> <p>R5 Ensure that elected members and partners fully understand that councils have a clear responsibility for leading and co-ordinating youth services for 16 to 24 year olds.</p> <p>R6 Improve the evaluation of the effectiveness and relative value for money of the services and interventions in their area that are intended to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET.</p>

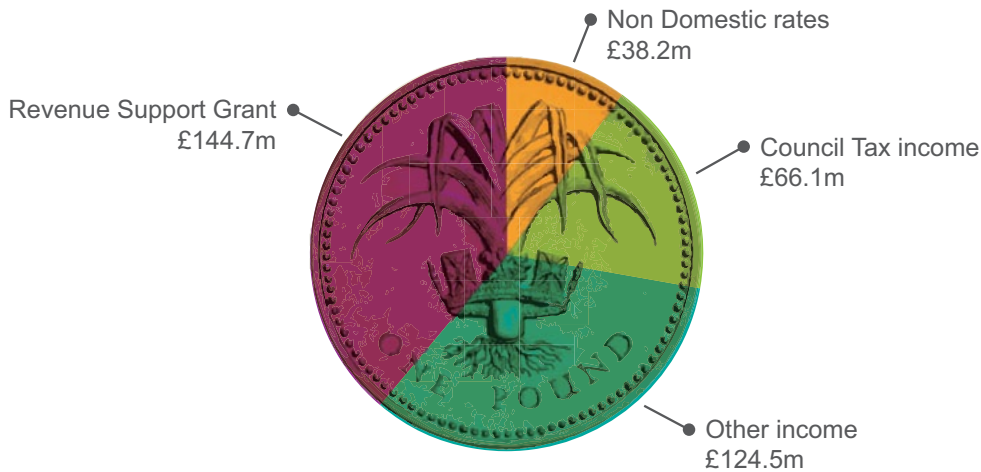
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2014	<p><b>Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens</b></p>	<p>R1 Revise the best practice standards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• align the work of environmental health with national strategic priorities;</li> <li>• identify the wider contribution of environmental health in delivering strategic priorities of the Welsh Government; and</li> <li>• identify the benefit and impact of environmental health services on protecting citizens.</li> </ul> <p>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.</p> <p>R3 Improve engagement with local residents over planned budget cuts and changes in services by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consulting with residents on planned changes in services and using the findings to shape decisions;</li> <li>• outlining which services are to be cut and how these cuts will impact on residents; and</li> <li>• setting out plans for increasing charges or changing standards of service.</li> </ul> <p>R4 Improve efficiency and value for money by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying the statutory and non-statutory duties of council environmental health services.</li> <li>• Agreeing environmental health priorities for the future and the role of councils in delivering these.</li> <li>• Determining an ‘acceptable standard of performance’ for environmental health services (upper and lower) and publicise these to citizens.</li> <li>• Improving efficiency and maintaining performance to the agreed level through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– collaborating and/or integrating with others to reduce cost and/or improve quality;</li> <li>– outsourcing where services can be delivered more cost effectively to agreed standards;</li> <li>– introducing and/or increasing charges and focusing on income-generation activity;</li> <li>– using grants strategically to maximise impact and return; and</li> <li>– reducing activities to focus on core statutory and strategic priorities.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>R5 Improve strategic planning by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identifying, collecting and analysing financial, performance and demand/need data on environmental health services;</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• agree how digital information can be used to plan and develop environmental health services in the future.</li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2015	<b>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</b>	R1 Improve strategic planning and better co-ordinate activity to tackle the impact of welfare reform on social-housing tenants by ensuring comprehensive action plans are in place that cover the work of all relevant council departments, housing associations and the work of external stakeholders.
		R2 Improve governance and accountability for welfare reform by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appointing member and officer leads to take responsibility for strategic leadership on welfare reform and be accountable for performance; and</li> <li>• ensuring members receive adequate training and regular briefings on welfare reform to be able to challenge and scrutinise performance and decisions.</li> </ul>
		R3 Ensure effective management of performance on welfare reform by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting appropriate measures to enable members, officers and the public to judge progress in delivering actions;</li> <li>• ensuring performance information covers the work of all relevant agencies and especially housing associations; and</li> <li>• establishing measures to judge the wider impact of welfare reform.</li> </ul>
		R4 Strengthen how welfare-reform risks are managed by creating a single corporate-level approach that co ordinates activity across the Council and the work of others to provide adequate assurance that all the necessary and appropriate actions to mitigate risk are taking place.
		R5 Improve engagement with tenants affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the provision of regular advice and information on the options open to them to address the financial impact of the change in their circumstances;</li> <li>• the promotion of the ‘Your benefits are changing’ helpline; and</li> <li>• the provision of support to tenants specifically affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy to participate in regional/national employment schemes.</li> </ul>

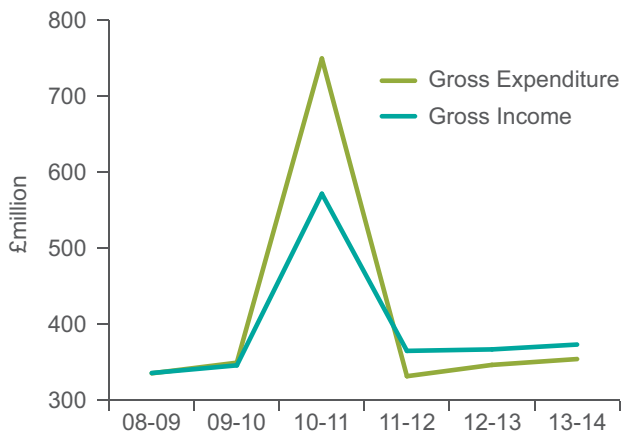
Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2015	<p><b>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</b></p>	<p>R7 Improve management, access to and use of Discretionary Housing Payments by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishing a clear policy or guide that is available in hard copy and online to the public that sets out the Council's policy and arrangements for administering Discretionary Housing Payments;</li> <li>• clearly defining eligible and non-eligible housing costs covered by Discretionary Housing Payments in application forms, policy documentation and applicant guidance leaflets;</li> <li>• clearly setting out the maximum/minimum length of time that such payments will be provided;</li> <li>• setting and publishing the timescale for the Council making a decision on Discretionary Housing Payments applications;</li> <li>• including information within public literature on the Council's policy for right to review or appeal of a decision and the timescales and process to be followed in deciding on these; and</li> <li>• clearly define the priority groups for Discretionary Housing Payments in public literature to ensure that those seeking assistance, and those agencies supporting them, can assess whether such payments are a viable option to address their housing and financial needs.</li> </ul>

# Appendix 6 – Useful information about the Council’s resources

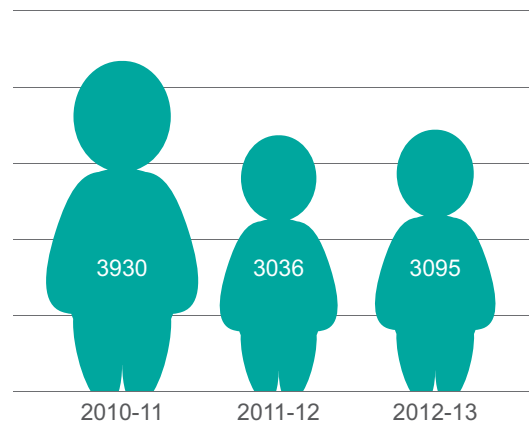
Total Gross Income 2013-14



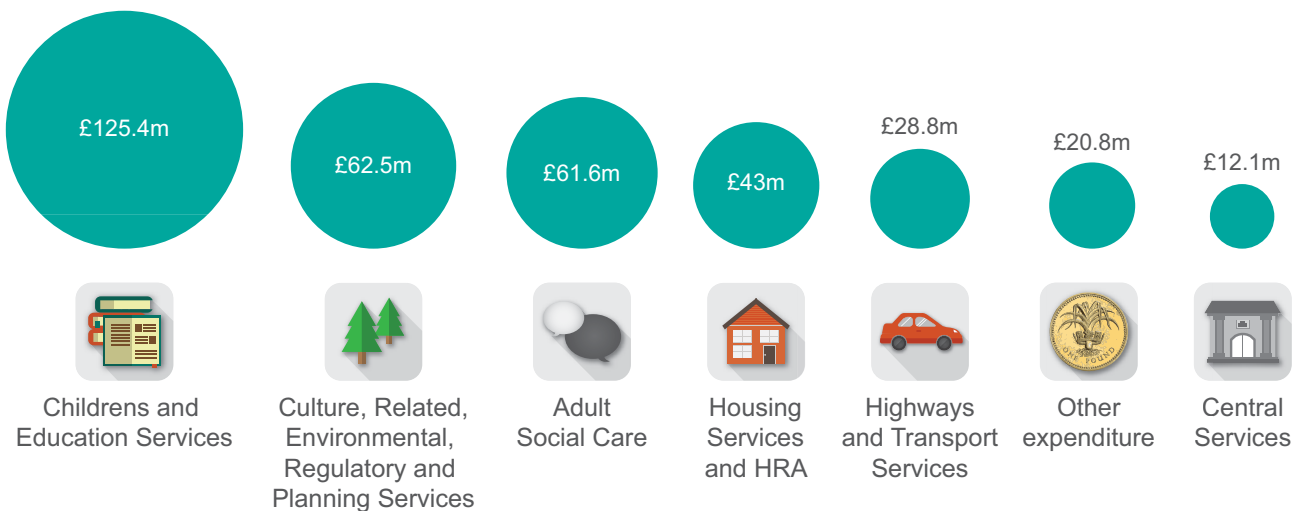
Total Income and Expenditure



Number of whole time equivalent staff 2010-11 to 2012-13



Total Gross Expenditure by service area



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