



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report: 2016-17 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Issued: June 2017

Document reference: 344A2017



This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Colin Davies and Justine Morgan under the direction of Jane Holownia.

**Huw Vaughan Thomas**  
**Auditor General for Wales**  
**Wales Audit Office**  
**24 Cathedral Road**  
**Cardiff**  
**CF11 9LJ**

The Auditor General is independent of government, and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General. The Wales Audit Office is held to account by the National Assembly.

Together with appointed auditors, 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.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Assembly Commission and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

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.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

# Contents

## Summary report

2016-17 performance audit work	4
The Council continues to meet its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement	4
Recommendations and proposals for improvement	4
Audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2016-17	5

## Appendices

Appendix 1 – Status of this report	9
Appendix 2 – Annual Audit Letter	10
Appendix 3 – National report recommendations 2016-17	13

# Summary report

## 2016-17 performance audit work

- 1 In determining the breadth of work undertaken during the year, we considered the extent of accumulated audit and inspection knowledge as well as other available sources of information including Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's (the Council) own mechanisms for review and evaluation. For 2016-17, we undertook improvement assessment work at all councils under three themes: governance, use of resources, and improvement planning and reporting. At some councils, we supplemented this work with local risk-based audits, identified in the Audit Plan for 2016-17.
- 2 The work carried out since the last Annual Improvement Report (AIR), including that of the relevant regulators, is set out in [Exhibit 1](#).

## The Council continues to meet its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement

- 3 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 2017-18.

## Recommendations and proposals for improvement

- 4 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 proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Council, we would expect it to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
  - b make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made, the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
  - 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.

- 5 During the course of the year, the Auditor General did not make any formal recommendations. However, a number of proposals for improvement have been made and these are repeated in this report. We will monitor progress against them and relevant recommendations made in our national reports (Appendix 3) as part of our improvement assessment work.

## Audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2016-17

### Exhibit 1: Audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2016-17

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
<b>Governance</b>			
February 2017	<p><b>Good governance when determining service changes</b></p> <p>Review of the Council's governance arrangements for determining service changes.</p>	<p>The Council has effective governance arrangements for determining significant service changes and has demonstrated a commitment to further improving them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Council has a clear vision and strategy for determining service changes linked to its strategic priorities;</li> <li>governance and accountability arrangements for service change decision making are clear and well understood;</li> <li>options appraisals are well developed and transparent;</li> <li>the Council has effective consultation arrangements for key service changes and is committed to improving its engagement with stakeholders;</li> <li>the Council is improving its corporate arrangements for monitoring the impact of service changes; and</li> <li>the Council has made improvements to its decision making processes to reflect learning from earlier service changes.</li> </ul>	<p>P1 That the Council set out at the point of decision on service change proposals how the impact of proposed changes is going to be measured and monitored.</p> <p>P2 That the Council clarify and promote the arrangements for public participation in its overview and scrutiny process in order to encourage and promote public involvement.</p> <p>P3 That the Council publish its overview and scrutiny committees' forward work programme(s) as stand-alone document(s) on the Council website to increase openness and transparency.</p>

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
<b>Use of resources</b>			
November 2016	<p><b>Annual audit letter 2015-16</b></p> <p>Letter summarising the key messages arising from the Auditor General's statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. The Annual Audit Letter is in <a href="#">Appendix 2</a> of this report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources.</li> <li>I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.</li> <li>I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 29 September 2016.</li> </ul>	None.
December 2016	<p><b>Savings planning</b></p> <p>Review of the Council's financial savings arrangements, including how well it is delivering the required savings and whether it has robust approaches to plan, manage and deliver budget savings, at a pace that supports financial resilience.</p>	<p>The Council has a largely effective and improving savings planning approach, which supports future financial resilience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Council has reported achievement of all of its 2015-16 savings plans in year, and can demonstrate that individual savings have been delivered;</li> <li>the Council has an effective corporate framework for financial planning but lacks indicative savings plans for future years; and</li> <li>the Council has a well-considered and detailed plan for 2016-17 and is forecasting that all planned savings will be achieved.</li> </ul>	P1 Strengthen financial planning by finalising the development of an income generation approach; and developing savings plans to cover the funding gap identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
<b>Local performance audit: Risk-based assessment of corporate arrangements</b>			
August 2016	<b>Information and Communications Technology and Information Governance</b>	The Council has a clear vision for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) which is integrated with the Council's overarching aims and goals.	None.
February 2017	<b>Human Resources</b>	The Council has effective arrangements in place to manage and utilise its workforce.	P1 The Council should record explicitly the potential risk of insufficient capacity within the HR Division to support the Council implement its change agenda on the corporate risk register and the HR Delivery Plan 2017/18.
March 2017	<b>Collaboration and partnerships</b>	<p>The Council is collaborating effectively with a range of partners in order to achieve efficiencies and improve services to its citizens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Council is collaborating well with neighbouring councils;</li> <li>the Council is a valued member of the Cwm Taf Public Service Board;</li> <li>the Council is seeking to modernise health and social care for the benefit of its citizens in conjunction with Cwm Taf University Health Board; and</li> <li>the Council is leading on the City Deal initiative to primarily improve the economic performance and the transportation infrastructure of the region.</li> </ul>	None
March 2017	<b>Improvement and performance</b>	The Council's Corporate Self-Assessment arrangements are becoming embedded and increasingly focussed, providing a balanced evaluation of performance and supporting improvement actions.	None.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
May 2017	<b>Financial and service planning</b>	The Council has improved its financial and performance management arrangements, strengthening the linkage between the Council's Corporate Plan Priority areas and resources allocated to them.	None.

#### Improvement planning and reporting

July 2016	<b>Annual improvement plan audit</b> Review of the Council's published plans for delivering on improvement objectives.	The Council has complied with its statutory improvement planning duties.	None.
July 2016	<b>Annual assessment of performance audit</b> Review of the Council's published performance assessment.	The Council has complied with its statutory improvement reporting duties.	None.

#### Reviews by inspection and regulation bodies

No reviews by inspection and regulation bodies have taken place during the period covered in this report.



# Appendix 1 – Status of this report

## Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) 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. Improvement authorities (defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities) have a general duty to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions'.

The annual improvement assessment considers the likelihood that an authority will comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. The assessment is also the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. Staff of the Wales Audit Office, on behalf of the Auditor General, produce the annual improvement report. The report discharges the Auditor General's duties under section 24 of the Measure, by summarising his audit and assessment work in a published annual improvement report for each authority. 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.

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 – Annual Audit Letter

Councillor Andrew Morgan  
The Leader  
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council  
The Pavilions  
Cambrian Park  
Clydach Vale  
Mid Glamorgan  
CF40 2XX

Reference: 630A2016

Date issued: November 2016

Dear Councillor Morgan

## Annual Audit Letter – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Pension Fund 2015-16

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 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 29 September 2016 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and 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 at the Council Meeting on 28 September 2016, in my Audit of Financial Statements report.

Overall the statement of accounts and associated working papers provided for audit were of a good standard. Officers were very helpful and supplied us with all the information we requested. I reported to you the more significant issues arising from our audit, which are summarised below:

- **RCTCBC Accounts** – our testing identified £1.9 million of Receipts in Advance that should have been recognised as income in 2015-16. Management agreed and amendments were made to the Financial Statements. We will work with Finance Officers to agree the accounting treatment of this type of transaction for future years.
- **RCT Pension Fund Accounts** – material misstatements were identified in the draft accounts relating to Transfers from (and to) other Pension Funds. Contrary to its accounting policy the Pension Fund had not accrued for this type of transaction on an accruals basis. Management agreed to the misstatements and adjusted the Financial Statements. The net impact was to reduce the value of Transfers In and Transfers Out in 2015-16 by £41.9 million and £1.8 million respectively and increase the corresponding values for 2014-15 by the same amounts.

Since completion of the audit we have held a joint Post Project Learning exercise with Council finance officers. We have identified areas where we can both learn from this year, and make improvements for the future. We have set up regular meetings to take these issues forward and to start preparations for the challenges that will be brought about by future requirements to bring forward the accounts preparation and audit.

### **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 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. We will also shortly be issuing a report on the Council's financial resilience which will consider whether the Council's financial savings planning arrangements support financial resilience.

### **I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 29 September 2016**

My work to date on certification of grant claims and returns has not identified significant issues that would impact on the 2016-17 accounts or key financial systems.

A more detailed report on my grant certification work will follow in 2017 once this year's programme of certification work is complete.

The financial audit fee for 2015-16 is currently expected to be in line with the fee set out in the Annual Audit Plan.

Yours sincerely

**Anthony Veale**  
**For and on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales**

cc: Chris Bradshaw, Chief Executive

# Appendix 3 – national report recommendations 2016-17

## Exhibit 2: national report recommendations 2016-17

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
August 2016	<a href="#"><u>Financial Resilience of Local Authorities in Wales 2015-16</u></a>	<p>In our report of 2014-15 (<b>The Financial Resilience of Councils in Wales</b>, April 2015) we made a number of recommendations for local authorities. Many of these recommendations remained relevant and required further work from authorities to address them during 2016-17. In addition, we also made the following recommendations based on our more recent review:</p> <p>R1 Local authorities should strengthen their financial-planning arrangements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing more explicit links between the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and their corporate priorities and service plans;</li> <li>• aligning other key strategies such as workforce and asset management plans with the MTFP;</li> <li>• developing comprehensive multi-year fully costed savings plans which underpin and cover the period of the MTFP, not just the forthcoming annual budget;</li> <li>• categorising savings proposals so that the shift from traditional-type savings to transformational savings can be monitored over the period of the MTFP; and</li> <li>• ensuring timescales for the delivery of specific savings proposals are realistic and accountability for delivery is properly assigned.</li> </ul> <p>R2 Local authorities should develop corporate income generation and charging policies.</p> <p>R3 Local authorities should ensure that they have a comprehensive reserves strategy, which outlines the specific purpose of accumulated useable reserves and the impact and use of these in the MTFP.</p> <p>R4 Local authorities should develop key performance indicators to monitor the MTFP.</p> <p>R5 Local authorities should ensure that savings plans are sufficiently detailed to ensure that members are clear as to what the plans are intended to deliver and that the delivery of those plans can be scrutinised appropriately throughout the year.</p> <p>R6 Local authorities should ensure that corporate capacity and capability are at a level that can effectively support the delivery of savings plans in the MTFP at the pace required.</p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
October 2016	<a href="#"><u>Community Safety in Wales</u></a>	<p>The seven recommendations within this report required individual and collective action from a range of stakeholders – the Welsh Government, Home Office Wales Team, police and crime commissioners, public service board members and local authorities:</p> <p>R1 Improve strategic planning to better co-ordinate activity for community safety by replacing the existing planning framework with a national strategy supported by regional and local plans that are focused on delivering the agreed national community-safety priorities.</p> <p>R2 Improve strategic partnership working by formally creating effective community-safety boards that replace existing community-safety structures that formalise and draw together the work of the Welsh Government, police forces, local authorities, health boards, fire and rescue authorities, the Wales Association for Community Safety Officers, and other key stakeholders.</p> <p>R3 Improve planning through the creation of comprehensive action plans that cover the work of all partners and clearly identify the regional and local contribution in meeting the national priorities for community safety.</p> <p>R4 Review current grant-funding arrangements and move to pooled budgets with longer-term funding commitments to support delivery bodies to improve project and workforce planning that focuses on delivering the priorities of the national community-safety strategy.</p> <p>R5 Ensure effective management of performance of community safety by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• setting appropriate measures at each level to enable members, officers and the public to judge progress in delivering actions for community-safety services;</li> <li>• ensuring performance information covers the work of all relevant agencies; and</li> <li>• establishing measures to judge inputs, outputs and impact to be able to understand the effect of investment decisions and support oversight and scrutiny.</li> </ul> <p>R6 Revise the systems for managing community-safety risks and introduce monitoring and review arrangements that focus on assuring the public that money spent on community safety is resulting in better outcomes for people in Wales.</p> <p>R7 Improve engagement and communication with citizens through public service boards in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing plans and priorities for community safety;</li> <li>• agreeing priorities for action; and</li> <li>• reporting performance and evaluating impact.</li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
November 2016	<a href="#">Charging for Services and Generating Income by Local Authorities</a>	<p>This report made eight recommendations, of which six required action from local authorities. <b>Recommendations R4</b> and <b>R6</b> required action from the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association:</p> <p>R1 Develop strategic frameworks for introducing and reviewing charges, linking them firmly with the MTFP and the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>R2 Review the unit and total costs of providing discretionary services to clearly identify any deficits and, where needed, set targets to improve the current operating position.</p> <p>R3 Use the impact assessment checklist whenever changes to charges are considered.</p> <p>R5 Identify opportunities to procure private sector companies to collect charges to improve efficiency and economy in collecting income.</p> <p>R7 Improve management of performance, governance and accountability by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regularly reporting any changes to charges to scrutiny committee(s);</li> <li>• improving monitoring to better understand the impact of changes to fees and charges on demand, and the achievement of objectives;</li> <li>• benchmarking and comparing performance with others more rigorously; and</li> <li>• providing elected members with more comprehensive information to facilitate robust decision making.</li> </ul> <p>R8 Improve the forecasting of income from charges through the use of scenario planning and sensitivity analysis.</p>



Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2017	<a href="#"><u>Local Authority Funding of Third Sector Services</u></a>	<p>This report made three recommendations, of which two required action from local authorities. <b>Recommendation R3</b> required action from the Welsh Government:</p> <p>R1 To get the best from funding decisions, local authorities and third-sector bodies need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place to support their work with the third sector. To assist local authorities and third-sector bodies in developing their working practices, we recommend that local authority and third-sector officers use the Checklist for local authorities effectively engaging and working with the third sector to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-evaluate current third-sector engagement, management, performance and practice;</li> <li>• identify where improvements in joint working are required; and</li> <li>• jointly draft and implement an action plan to address the gaps and weaknesses identified through the self-evaluation.</li> </ul> <p>R2 Poor performance management arrangements are weakening accountability and limiting effective scrutiny of third-sector activity and performance. To strengthen oversight of the third sector, we recommend that elected members scrutinise the review checklist completed by officers, and regularly challenge performance by officers and the local authority in addressing gaps and weaknesses.</p>

Wales Audit Office

24 Cathedral Road

Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales)

Website: [www.audit.wales](http://www.audit.wales)

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru

24 Heol y Gadeirlan

Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn Testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: [post@archwilio.cymru](mailto:post@archwilio.cymru)

Gwefan: [www.archwilio.cymru](http://www.archwilio.cymru)