



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report 2014-15

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Colin Davies and Tim Buckle 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.

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.

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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 duties¹. 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 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 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (the Council) since the last such report was published in July 2014. This report also includes a summary of the key findings from reports 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 (the Commission). 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 relevant external review bodies 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 and states whether he believes that the Council is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2015-16 (**see page 7**).
- 5 This statement should not be seen as a definitive diagnosis 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@wao.gov.uk or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

¹ Duties and requirements contained within the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure).

2014-15 performance audit work

- 7 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 the Council's own mechanisms for review and evaluation. For 2014-15, we 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 |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| Wales Audit Office – Annual Audit of the Council's Improvement Plan (Corporate Plan 2014-15) | Assessment of adherence to Welsh Government guidelines for the publication of its Improvement Plan. | April to June 2014 |
| Wales Audit Office – Financial planning review | Assessment of the Council's financial position and how it is budgeting and delivering on required savings. | June to October 2014 |
| Wales Audit Office – Scrutiny and Member Engagement Follow Up | Follow up on progress since the 2013-14 Wales Audit Office review of Scrutiny and Member Engagement. | September 2014 to January 2015 |
| Wales Audit Office – Data Quality Follow-up | Follow-up on progress against proposals for improvement. | September 2014 to January 2015 |
| Wales Audit Office – Audit of the Council's Annual Delivery Report 2013-14 | Assessment of the Council's adherence to Welsh Government guidelines for the publication of its Performance Report. | November 2014 |
| Wales Audit Office – Review of the Council's Annual Delivery Report 2013-14: Improvement Objective Tracer | Review of the Council's arrangements for assessing and reporting performance in relation to Outcomes 1 and 2 of the Council's Social Regeneration Improvement Objective for 2013-14. | December 2014 to April 2015 |
| Wales Audit Office – Review of the Council's arrangements to support the safeguarding of children | Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements for the safeguarding of children. | March 2014 to May 2014 |

| Project name | Brief description | Dates when the work was undertaken |
|---|--|------------------------------------|
| Wales Audit Office – Delivering with less | Review of the impact of cuts in resources on the ability of council environmental health services to deliver their statutory obligations. | October 2013 to October 2014 |
| Wales Audit Office – Review of the Council’s arrangements for distributing Discretionary Housing Payments | Assessment of the effectiveness of the Council’s services for the allocation, distribution, administration and use of Discretionary Housing Payments. | November 2014 to April 2015 |
| CSSIW – Review of the Social Services Department’s performance in 2013-14 | Assessment of the performance of the Council’s Social Services Department. | 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 |
| CSSIW – Inspection of safeguarding and care planning of looked-after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviour | 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 |
| Estyn | Monitoring visit | 30 June to 3 July 2014 |
| Welsh Language Commissioner – Review of the Council’s Welsh Language Scheme | Assessment of the effectiveness of the Scheme in providing Council services to the public in Welsh. | July 2014 |

The Council has generally robust financial management arrangements and is strengthening its data quality arrangements but there is scope to further develop performance reporting and scrutiny arrangements, and strengthen links between service and financial planning

- 8 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 Measure during 2015-16.
- 9 The Auditor General has reached this conclusion because:
- the Council has generally robust financial management arrangements;
 - elected members and senior officers have demonstrated a clear commitment to taking difficult decisions to improve education provision;
 - the Council has put in place financial planning to meet current and future budgetary pressures in social services and advances have been made in reshaping service provision in adult services; and
 - in 2014-15, the Council discharged its improvement planning and reporting duties under the Measure.
- 10 A key challenge for the Council will be to continue to ensure that its financial management, performance management and governance arrangements remain fit for purpose in the context of reducing resources. During 2015-16 our work will include a financial management review that will look forward to 2016-17 budget setting and savings proposals, as well as reviews of the Council's decision making arrangements relating to its service change proposals, and arrangements for strategic asset management. The Council intends to revise its improvement planning and reporting arrangements for 2015-16 and we will examine the Council's revised approach as part of our review of the Council's arrangements for managing improvement.

Headlines – a summary of key findings

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

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Performance | <p>Estyn – Elected members and senior officers have demonstrated a clear commitment to taking difficult decisions to improve education provision and using resources effectively. (Paragraphs 16 to 18)</p> <p>CSSIW – The Council balanced its budget for social services in 2013-14, has put in place financial planning to meet current and future budgetary pressures, and advances have been made in reshaping service provision in adult services; however, there are a number of areas for improvement in both adult and children’s services. (Paragraphs 19 to 23)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council discharged its statutory improvement planning duties through a more reader-friendly Corporate Plan with improved clarity around the scope of the Council’s improvement ambitions. (Paragraph 24)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council is taking steps to strengthen its arrangements for ensuring the quality and accuracy of its performance measures; however these steps were not taken in time to inform the Council’s Corporate Plan 2014-15. (Paragraph 25)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council’s Annual Delivery Report 2013-14 provides a fair and balanced picture of its performance; however, there remains scope to improve the evidence base and the evaluation of progress towards meeting improvement priorities. (Paragraphs 26 to 29)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council’s reporting of progress against its Social Regeneration Improvement Priority was fair and balanced however it did not sufficiently explain the extent to which the Council has achieved its objectives. (Paragraph 30)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council has continued to develop its arrangements for scrutinising its Annual Delivery Report, however, arrangements would be strengthened through addressing some weaknesses in process and ensuring scrutiny members have a consistent understanding of their role. (Paragraphs 31 to 32)</p> |
|--------------------|--|

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>Performance</p> | <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council is generally delivering environmental health services at the highest levels. Despite budget cuts, staff numbers have been maintained and stakeholders are mostly positive about management of services, although meeting new statutory duties to protect the public and the environment will present a significant challenge. (Paragraph 33)</p> <p>Welsh Language Commissioner – The Council mainstreams the Welsh language into key policies by providing guidance directly to business plan managers, thus ensuring that the Welsh language is a consideration when planning services. (Paragraphs 34 to 36)</p> |
| <p>Use of resources</p> | <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council has generally robust financial management arrangements which have served it well, although there is scope to further develop the links between service and financial planning and performance and, given the increasingly challenging financial climate, to review its arrangements to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. (Paragraph 37)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council has established good systems to administer Discretionary Housing Payments but because of weaknesses in some of its management and performance arrangements, it is unclear if those in the greatest need are receiving help. (Paragraphs 38 to 43)</p> |
| <p>Governance</p> | <p>Wales Audit Office – Progress in further embedding and developing scrutiny has been mixed. (Paragraphs 44 to 47)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – The Council's arrangements for ensuring that it meets its safeguarding responsibilities have some weaknesses which the Council is addressing. (Paragraphs 48 to 51)</p> <p>Wales Audit Office – Overall whistleblowing arrangements are generally sound, but a number of weaknesses in policy, process and training need to be addressed. (Paragraph 52)</p> |
| <p>Improvement planning and reporting audits</p> | <p>Wales Audit Office – The Auditor General issued audit certificates stating that the Council had discharged its duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. (Appendices 2 and 3)</p> |
| <p>Audit of accounts</p> | <p>Wales Audit Office – On 11 December 2014 the Appointed Auditor issued an Annual Audit Letter to Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough 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 accounting statements stating that they present a true and fair view of the Council's and the Pension Fund's financial position and transactions. The Annual Audit Letter can be found in Appendix 4 of this report.</p> |

Recommendations

- 12 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:
- 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;
 - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made, the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
 - conduct a special inspection and publish a report and make recommendations; and
 - recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 13 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](#).
- 14 There is one proposal 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 where appropriate.

- 15 In addition, CSSIW, Estyn and the Welsh Language Commissioner 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, www.estyn.gov.uk and www.comisiynyddygybraeg.org.

Detailed report



Performance

Elected members and senior officers have demonstrated a clear commitment to taking difficult decisions to improve education provision and using resources effectively

- 16 Following Estyn's inspection of education services for children and young people in March 2012, the authority was identified as requiring follow-up through Estyn monitoring. A final monitoring visit was undertaken by Estyn from 30 June to 3 July 2014. Following the visit Estyn judged the Council to have made sufficient progress in relation to the recommendations following the inspection of March 2012. As a result, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales considers that the authority is no longer in need of Estyn monitoring and is removing it from further follow-up activity.
- 17 Estyn found that following their inspection in March 2012, the authority produced an appropriately detailed post-inspection action plan with clear incremental steps to achieve improvement in its education services for children and young people. Elected members and senior officers have demonstrated a clear commitment to taking difficult decisions to improve provision and using resources effectively. The Director of Education and Lifelong Learning's strong and effective leadership has been a key factor in this drive for improvement.
- 18 Estyn also reported that the authority should continue to work to raise standards across all key stages, and to improve attendance. It should also continue its work to improve how it undertakes its scrutiny functions, and develop Fframwaith² further so that it undertakes its role effectively.

The Council balanced its budget for social services in 2013-14, has put in place financial planning to meet current and future budgetary pressures and advances have been made in reshaping service provision in adult services; however, there are a number of areas for improvement in both adult and children's services

- 19 The CSSIW published its Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013/2014 in October 2014 and this is available on its website: www.cssiw.org.uk. The CSSIW reported that the Council effectively balanced its overall budget for social services in 2013-14. The Council spends more on social care per head than many other Welsh authorities although this is in the context of relatively high levels of deprivation. The Council has outlined realistic savings and has demonstrated strategic financial planning to meet current and future budgetary pressures. In adult services, advances have been made in reshaping service provision. Further change in adult service provision plus an anticipated remodelling of children's services are planned for 2015-16. This is planned to align services to the requirements of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (the Act) and as a response to the current economic challenges.

² Fframwaith is the Rhondda Cynon Taf Children and Young People's Partnership, which was established to promote local co-operation amongst agencies to improve the well-being of children, young people and their families.

- 20 The Council has mature relationships with the local health board and the neighbouring council of Merthyr Tydfil. This has allowed for an increase in collaborative working and commissioning in several areas of adult and children's services and will be expanded further in 2014-15 and beyond. This is not without its challenges and the director acknowledges that the pace of change must increase in some areas.
- 21 The Council has a wide ranging strategy to promote the Welsh language and was the locality used for the launch of **More than just Words**³.
- 22 Workforce capacity issues remain in children's services, and CSSIW's report highlights the continued use of unqualified workers to case manage and complete initial assessments. Children's services have seen an increase in referrals, a relatively high looked after population and the highest recorded number of young people on the child protection register from any council in Wales. The timely completion of assessments in both adult and children's services is poor and will affect the effectiveness of support and preventative work with vulnerable people and families. The Council has identified that greater quality assurance of assessment and care management would improve service provision across social services. The assessment and support of carers (young carers and adult carers) deteriorated this year. The Council states it will consider these areas for improvement as part of its overall review of services to ensure all change promotes the priorities dictated in the Act. The Council has strong corporate parenting arrangements and improvements have been noted in the educational achievement of looked after children leaving school.
- 23 The **Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013/2014** also includes a number of areas of progress and areas for improvement.

The Council discharged its statutory improvement planning duties through a more reader-friendly Corporate Plan with improved clarity around the scope of the Council's improvement ambitions

- 24 In our 2014 Annual Improvement Report we reported that improved communication and engagement with citizens were needed around the scale of the Council's improvement ambitions and the impact of service changes in its priority areas, and that the Council's summary version of its 2013-14 Corporate Plan did not contain sufficient information to provide a general readership with a fair and balanced overview of the Council's improvement priorities or how these are intended to improve outcomes for citizens. The Council has begun to address these issues and the Council's Corporate Plan 2014-15 sets out a clear explanation for the selection of the Council's seven improvement priorities. The Plan sets out intended measures with clear targets for most priorities with a brief rationale to explain the level of target set where this is the same or lower than the previous

³ Welsh Government: Strategic Framework for Welsh Language Services in Health, Social Services and Social Care.

years' performance that provides additional context. The format of the Council's Corporate Plan has also been revised into a more reader-friendly document, without the need for a summary version. The Council's improvement priorities are also clearly linked to outcomes identified in the Single Integrated Plan **Delivering Change** published by the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Service Board. The detailed action plans that support the Corporate Plan are also clear and comprehensive and include a significant number of measures along with the critical actions, milestones and target delivery dates for each outcome under each improvement priority. However, targets have not been assigned to some of the measures in the detailed action plans, for example, because they are new measures, and therefore for some measures the extent of the Council's ambition is unclear.

The Council is taking steps to strengthen its arrangements for ensuring the quality and accuracy of its performance measures; however these steps were not taken in time to inform the Council's Corporate Plan 2014-15

- 25 During 2013-14 we found that the Council could not rely on the quality and accuracy of some of its performance measures, and during 2014-15 we followed up the Council's progress in this area. We found that the Council has recognised the need to improve its arrangements for ensuring data quality and the action taken by the authority in response to previous audits demonstrates a willingness to address identified weaknesses. Steps have been taken to strengthen the approach to target-setting for performance measures, and the importance of data quality has also been emphasised to managers within the Council. A risk based process for the Corporate Performance team to review samples of performance measures has been put in place resulting in a significant number of performance measures being subsequently reviewed. However, progress in addressing identified weaknesses was not timely enough to enable the Council to place reliance on the accuracy of data used to inform the Corporate Plan 2014-15, or elements of the Annual Delivery Report 2013-14. To address this, the Corporate Performance team is reviewing performance measures on an ongoing basis.

The Council's Annual Delivery Report 2013-14 provides a fair and balanced picture of its performance; however, there remains scope to improve the evidence base and the evaluation of progress towards meeting improvement priorities

- 26 The Council's Annual Delivery Report (the Report) provides a fair and balanced picture of the Council's performance in relation to its Improvement Priorities over 2013-14 making reference to the Council's own targets as well as some references to comparative performance in the previous year and comparisons with the rest of Wales over time to illustrate its relative performance. However, the Summary version of the Report would be strengthened through the inclusion of some additional data and narrative that would provide a more balanced picture of performance.

- 27 The Council has revised the format of its Report for 2013-14 and has also addressed some of the issues that we raised in relation to its previous Report, such as the inclusion of clear information to enable citizens to provide feedback to the Council and re-formatting the Report and Summary to make for a more reader-friendly document. The Report is informed by detailed performance evaluations for each Improvement Priority including additional performance data and comparisons across Wales and over time where relevant; the detailed performance evaluations do not form part of the formal Report but are linked in the Report and are available on the Council's website. The Report also contains examples of how the performance data/analysis has informed the selection of priorities for 2014-15, and there are examples within the Report where the analysis of comparative performance is described in the text together with the consequences and the Authority's planned response. The Report also describes the contribution made to the Council's Improvement Priorities through partnership working and includes examples of initiatives that have been progressed through partnership working.
- 28 The evidence provided in the Report enables an assessment of whether the Council has met its Improvement Priorities including the views of regulators, service users, citizens and the inclusion of case studies that illustrate the impact of the Council's actions. However, there are some weaknesses in the evidence base including the absence of targets for some measures, and some evidence provided that relates to 2014-15 rather than 2013-14 for one Improvement Priority, which does not assist in providing a picture of performance for 2013-14. Performance over time and across Wales where available could also be more clearly illustrated in the Report for some measures as the tables containing key performance measures only include comparison against the Council's own targets for 2013-14.
- 29 Both the Report and its Summary would benefit from a consistent approach to summarising performance against each Improvement Priority, this summary is provided in relation to one Improvement Priority in the Report but is absent for others. The extent to which the narrative provides an evaluation in the Report is mixed with the focus of some being around action taken rather than an assessment of the extent to which the Council has made progress towards its Improvement Priorities. We consider this as a priority that the Council needs to address.

The Council's reporting of progress against its Social Regeneration Improvement Priority was fair and balanced, however, it did not sufficiently explain the extent to which the Council has achieved its objectives

- 30 During 2014-15, we looked in detail at the Council's Social Regeneration Improvement Priority as part of our audit of the Report. We found that the Council has arrangements in place to ensure that reporting is fair and balanced including challenge from the Corporate Performance team. However, weaknesses in the Council's evidence base limited the extent to which progress against the Improvement Priority could be measured. For example, the absence of targets and comparisons for some measures does not provide an illustration of performance over time, and weaknesses in the Council's data quality arrangements also limit the reliance that could be placed on some of the performance measures contained in the 2013-14 Report. The Council has taken steps to improve the quality and reliability of its performance data; although as noted above these steps were only taken in time to inform some of the data presented in the Report for 2013-14. Targets for a greater number of measures relating to Social Regeneration have also been included in the Council's Corporate Plan 2014-15, which, along with the inclusion of a number of consistent performance measures over two or more years, should help to strengthen future performance evaluations, including comparisons of performance over time, in this area of activity.

The Council has continued to develop its arrangements for scrutinising its Annual Delivery Report, however, arrangements would be strengthened through addressing some weaknesses in process and ensuring scrutiny members have a consistent understanding of their role

- 31 The Council continued to evolve the process for involving scrutiny members in the development of the Report through the establishment of working groups to scrutinise the detailed draft performance evaluations prepared by officers to inform the Report. This resulted in a number of proposed revisions to the performance evaluations that were subsequently reported to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Arrangements for supporting members to undertake their role were strengthened including assisting working groups with suggested lines of enquiry and with the facilitation of meetings. As the process develops there is an opportunity for Members to take greater ownership with appropriate support from officers in determining lines of enquiry and formulating conclusions. One of the working groups engaged with representatives of a voluntary organisation to help inform its scrutiny of the performance evaluation, and training was provided for members on public engagement in scrutiny. There are opportunities to build on this experience to broaden engagement with external stakeholders to inform future scrutiny of the Annual Delivery Report.

- 32 Despite the improvements noted above, the effectiveness of scrutiny's contribution was potentially reduced by weaknesses in process including the lack of a clear and consistent approach to agreeing conclusions in relation to the identified lines of enquiry and the timeliness of information provided to the working groups and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. For example, the working groups and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees were not able to scrutinise the Council's draft Annual Delivery Report or Summary prior to it being reported to Council. We are aware that the Council has continued to provide training to members and has arrangements in place to understand the learning needs of members. However, we also observed that discussion and questioning in some scrutiny working groups were at times unfocused and not all members demonstrated a strong grasp of the role that the working groups were being asked to perform. The Council held an evaluation session at the conclusion of the process as part of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and this, along with the observations in this report, provides an opportunity to reflect on the approach adopted this year and strengthen arrangements in future.

The Council is generally delivering environmental health services at the highest levels. Despite budget cuts, staff numbers have been maintained and stakeholders are mostly positive about management of services, although meeting new statutory duties to protect the public and the environment will present a significant challenge

- 33 Councils have many statutory environmental health duties but spending is not being protected during the current period of financial austerity, which is making it more difficult to deliver national strategic priorities. The Council is delivering most of its environmental health services at the highest levels as judged against the Best Practice Standards. Between 2011-12 and 2013-14 the Council significantly cut environmental health budgets and there was a marginal decrease in staff numbers. Staff survey respondents are mostly positive about the current standard of environmental health service but there is a low awareness of current performance or future plans amongst citizens. New environmental health statutory duties are being introduced which councils across Wales will find challenging to deliver.

The Council mainstreams the Welsh language into key policies by providing guidance directly to business plan managers, thus ensuring that the Welsh language is a consideration when planning services

- 34 The role of the Welsh Language Commissioner (the Commissioner) was created by the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. New powers to impose standards on organisations came into force through subordinate legislation on 31 March 2015. The Commissioner will continue to review Welsh-language schemes by virtue of powers inherited under the Welsh Language Act 1993.

- 35 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 committed to providing 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.
- 36 The Commissioner reported that the Council mainstreams the Welsh language into key policies by providing guidance directly to business plan managers, thus ensuring that the Welsh language is a consideration when planning services. The Council appointed an additional translator during the year in response to increased demand for translation of documents following a campaign by the Council to increase compliance with the Welsh language scheme. Arrangements have been established which ensures that new content produced for the website is automatically sent to the Council's translators. However, there has been a slight decrease from last year in the percentage of Welsh pages. The work of recording staff language skills is ongoing. The Council has recorded a decline in the percentage of Welsh speakers employed, however, it is recognised that there are gaps in the information as arrangements take time to be fully implemented. Eighty staff attended language training courses, and two language awareness sessions were provided for social care workers.

Use of resources

The Council has generally robust financial management arrangements which have served it well although there is scope to further develop the links between service and financial planning and performance and, given the increasingly challenging financial climate, to review its arrangements to ensure that they remain fit for purpose

37 We came to this conclusion because we found that:

- Over the period 2011-12 to 2013-14 the Council had a good track record of delivering identified savings within year against the planned actions it approved, and has utilised earmarked reserves appropriately as budgetary pressure has increased over the years.
- The Council's corporate framework for strategic financial planning has served it well, although there is scope to integrate the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the Corporate Plan more closely in order to strengthen the linkage between the Council's Improvement Objectives and the resources employed in their achievement.
- The Council's financial management and control arrangements are fit for purpose and are being effectively managed.
- The Council's financial governance arrangements to review and challenge are well established and have proved effective. However, given that the Council has identified the need to deliver significant cost reductions through efficiency savings and service transformation, and within a relatively short timeframe, it should review its budget/savings plan monitoring and reporting arrangements to ensure that they remain fit for purpose, and support robust officer and member scrutiny.
- The Council's current savings plans for 2014-15 are adequate, and the Council reports that it is on target to meet the savings level as set out in its budget strategy. The Council has taken steps to widen opportunities for local residents to engage and to understand the Council's financial position and have their say on service change proposals. However, given the very challenging financial position, the Council needs to reflect upon its current arrangements and consider how its consultation and engagement with citizens over future service change proposals may be further improved.

The Council has established good systems to administer Discretionary Housing Payments but because of weaknesses in some of its management and performance arrangements, it is unclear if those in the greatest need are receiving help

- 38 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 heralds 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, creating hard choices for them about how they use their money and manage financially on a day-to-day basis.
- 39 In January 2015, the Auditor General for Wales published his report on how well councils are managing the impact of welfare reform changes on social housing tenants in Wales. His 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.
- 40 Our review found that the Council does have processes in place to support vulnerable customers to apply for DHP. The Council's website provides a good level of information regarding DHP including the Council's five-page application form. Whilst the application form can be directly downloaded, the applicant cannot complete and submit the form online. There is a DHP policy in place, which is also made available to the public. The Council does not have a clear policy statement explaining how DHP contributes towards a Council-wide welfare policy and it is not clear how the Council uses DHP to assist people to reduce the impact of welfare reform changes such as the Spare Room Subsidy, the benefit cap or the financial hardships faced by other families in housing need.
- 41 The Council has systems in place to monitor the level of expenditure against the money provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, the number of customers it has helped and how long it takes to decide on applications. However, it does not monitor the number of landlords assisted to ensure there is good coverage across all sectors and areas, and neither does it monitor the impact of DHP payments on those in housing need.

- 42 The Council had paid out £318,556 of its Department for Work and Pensions allocation of £541,416 at the end of November 2014 and assisted 1,200 people. This represents 58 per cent of its allocation. Although there is a clear and comprehensive policy in place, because of weaknesses in the monitoring arrangements it has introduced to evaluate its performance on delivering DHP, the Council cannot know whether its payment of DHP is having the right level of impact.
- 43 The Council recognises these challenges and is working collaboratively with other Councils, the Welfare Reform Club and the Welsh Local Government Association to tackle them.

Governance

Progress in further embedding and developing scrutiny has been mixed

- 44 In last year's Annual Improvement Report we highlighted that there were a number of opportunities to further develop and embed scrutiny activity following the work we undertook during 2013-14 on constitutional issues and member engagement. During 2014-15 we reviewed the Council's progress in this area. There has been some progress in developing and embedding scrutiny including steps to engage the public in the work of overview and scrutiny as part of the development of the Council's Annual Delivery Report; however, the Council also recognises the need to further develop opportunities to engage the public in the work of overview and scrutiny. The Council has formed a working group to consider the findings of the Wales Audit Office's National Scrutiny Improvement Study. The majority of scrutiny committees have introduced the use of pre-meetings to guide lines of enquiry and assist the Committees in achieving outcomes.
- 45 We note the positive comments contained within Estyn's latest monitoring visit letter dated July 2014 regarding the development of scrutiny arrangements in relation to Education and related partnership services. However, CSSIW in its **Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2013/2014** published in October 2014, highlighted a lack of challenge from scrutiny in relation to its Looked After Children Inspection.
- 46 A number of the areas we highlighted as opportunities to further embed scrutiny have not been taken forward. For example, the Council's 2013-14 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report largely describes topics that the committees have considered rather than providing a summary of the outcomes generated and/or an evaluation of the effectiveness of scrutiny arrangements. In addition we found that Cabinet members have not regularly attended scrutiny committees as a matter of course to answer questions, and our observations of the scrutiny working groups that informed the development of the Report indicated to us that their role was unclear. The timeliness of reporting to scrutiny remains an area that could be improved, for example, the Quarter 1 Council Performance Report for 2014-15 was not reported to scrutiny committees until October 2014, and as noted above the timeliness of information provision to scrutiny in relation to the Report could also be improved.

- 47 Scrutiny committees have not adopted criteria to consider when prioritising items for scrutiny, and an analysis of a sample of scrutiny committee work programme reports suggested that the purpose/anticipated outcomes of scrutiny of some items is not clear in the reports. Whilst there are some examples of outputs/ recommendations arising from scrutiny a review of a sample of committee minutes and reports highlighted a number of examples of scrutiny committees 'noting' reports, with no obvious output arising from consideration of the item. Therefore there remain opportunities for the Council to further develop and embed scrutiny practice including developing a clearer focus on the outcomes of scrutiny activity. We understand that the Council intends to put in place measures to address the issues identified above, and we will continue to monitor progress in this area. As part of our work over 2015-16 we will review the Council's response to the recommendations arising from **Good Scrutiny? Good Question!** the Auditor General's improvement study on scrutiny in local government (May 2014).

The Council's arrangements for ensuring that it meets its safeguarding responsibilities have some weaknesses which the Council is addressing

- 48 During the period March 2014 to May 2014, we completed a review of the Council's assurance and accountability arrangements for ensuring that safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and are being adhered to. The findings of the study were reported to the Council in October 2014. The study examined what the Council itself has done to seek assurance that its arrangements to support safeguarding are effective by reviewing how the Council is discharging its safeguarding responsibilities at all levels: cabinet, senior management team, scrutiny and individual officers.
- 49 We found that the governance, accountability and management arrangements for overseeing whether the Council is meeting its safeguarding responsibilities to children have some weaknesses, including not having a specific risk register for safeguarding. The lack of a formal and active risk management approach for safeguarding is acknowledged by key officers and a proposal to develop such a system was considered by Cabinet with work due to start in the near future.
- 50 We also found that the Council's arrangements for monitoring and evaluating its safeguarding responsibilities to children have some weaknesses which the Council is addressing including in relation to the provision of training for staff on safeguarding, for which three-year plans have been set out with thousands of staff being targeted to receive one or more of four levels of safeguarding training.
- 51 Finally we found that the Council's approach to identifying and acting on improvements in its safeguarding arrangements has some weaknesses which the Council is addressing, including the introduction of an electronic Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to reduce the time required to complete DBS checks on employees.

Overall whistleblowing arrangements are generally sound, but a number of weaknesses in policy, process and training need to be addressed

- 52 The Council's Whistleblowing Policy is clearly written and provides reassurance to potential whistleblowers; however, at the time of our review it was out of date and required updating to reflect the changes in legislation from June 2013. The Whistleblowing Policy exists as a standalone document and is easily accessible on the Council's intranet. The Council is aware that it faces a significant challenge in reaching those staff without computer access and has prepared a number of documents over and above the policy itself to raise awareness. The current whistleblowing arrangements, themes, trends and outcomes are not subject to member challenge and scrutiny and caseload information is not recorded in a formal, central way. The Council has not done anything to check the level of awareness of the whistleblowing policy amongst its staff and there are no publicity arrangements in place at present. The Council has completed Disciplinary and Grievance training which covers whistleblowing but opportunities exist to strengthen and expand training.

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 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's 2014-15 Improvement Plan

Certificate

I certify that I have audited Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough 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.

I make no recommendations under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009

Huw Vaughan Thomas
Auditor General for Wales

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business
Colin Davies, Manager
Justine Morgan, Performance Audit Lead

Appendix 3 – Audit of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's assessment of 2013-14 performance

Certificate

I certify that I have audited Rhondda Cynon Taf County 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: Leighton Andrews, Minister for Public Services
Colin Davies, Manager
Justine Morgan, Performance Audit Lead

Appendix 4 – Annual Audit Letter

Mr S Merritt Chief Executive
Mr Andrew Morgan Leader
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
The Pavilions
Clydach Vale
Tonypandy
CF40 2XX

Dear Steve and Andrew

Annual Audit Letter – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough 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 stating 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 Council in my Audit of Financial Statements report on 24 September 2014. I also issued unqualified opinions on the Council's Whole of Government Accounts return, the accounts of the joint committees for which the Council has administrative responsibility and the Welsh Church Act Fund.

I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources although further improvements can be made

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.

One issue which has relevance to my duties is financial standing and is repeated here. The Council has generally robust financial management arrangements which have served it well, although there is scope to further develop the links between service and financial planning and performance and, given the increasingly challenging financial climate, to review its arrangements to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 30 September 2014.

My work to date on certification of grant claims and returns has not identified significant issues.

I issued a report on my grant certification work for 2012-13 in April. There were no major issues arising from this work. A report on my grant certification work for 2013-14 will follow in March 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

John Herniman
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"> • provide a clear rationale for topic selection; • be more outcome focused; • ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; and • align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements. |
| | | 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 | R1 Together with partners, map and review expenditure on NEETs services to better understand the resources required to deliver the Framework. |
| | | 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. |
| | | 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. |
| | | 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. |
| | | 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. |
| | | 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. |

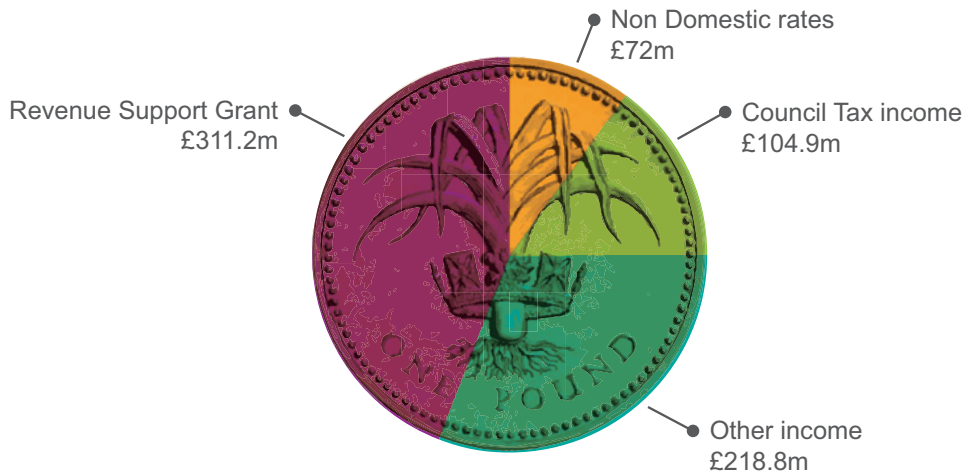
| Date of report | Title of review | Recommendation |
|----------------|---|--|
| October 2014 | <p>Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens</p> | <p>R1 Revise the best practice standards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • align the work of environmental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

| Date of report | Title of review | Recommendation |
|----------------|--|---|
| January 2015 | <p>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</p> | <p>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.</p> |
| | | <p>R2 Improve governance and accountability for welfare reform by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appointing member and officer leads to take responsibility for strategic leadership on welfare reform and be accountable for performance; and • ensuring members receive adequate training and regular briefings on welfare reform to be able to challenge and scrutinise performance and decisions. |
| | | <p>R3 Ensure effective management of performance on welfare reform by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting appropriate measures to enable members, officers and the public to judge progress in delivering actions; • ensuring performance information covers the work of all relevant agencies and especially housing associations; and • establishing measures to judge the wider impact of welfare reform. |
| | | <p>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.</p> |
| | | <p>R5 Improve engagement with tenants affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the provision of regular advice and information on the options open to them to address the financial impact of the change in their circumstances; • the promotion of the ‘Your benefits are changing’ helpline; and • the provision of support to tenants specifically affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy to participate in regional/national employment schemes. |

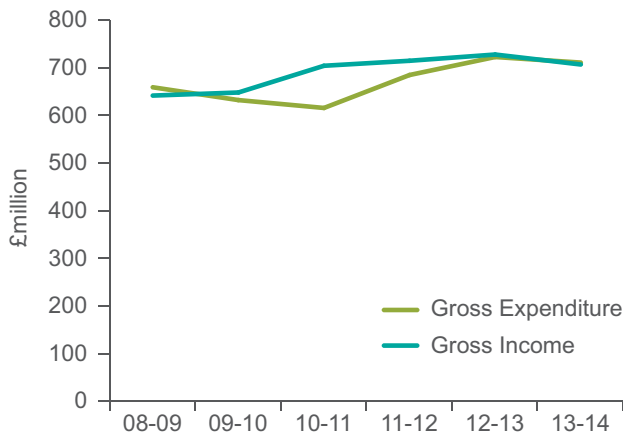
| Date of report | Title of review | Recommendation |
|----------------|--|---|
| January 2015 | <p>Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales</p> | <p>R7 Improve management, access to and use of Discretionary Housing Payments by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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; • clearly defining eligible and non-eligible housing costs covered by Discretionary Housing Payments in application forms, policy documentation and applicant guidance leaflets; • clearly setting out the maximum/minimum length of time that such payments will be provided; • setting and publishing the timescale for the Council making a decision on Discretionary Housing Payments applications; • 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 • 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. |

Appendix 6 – Useful information about Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's resources

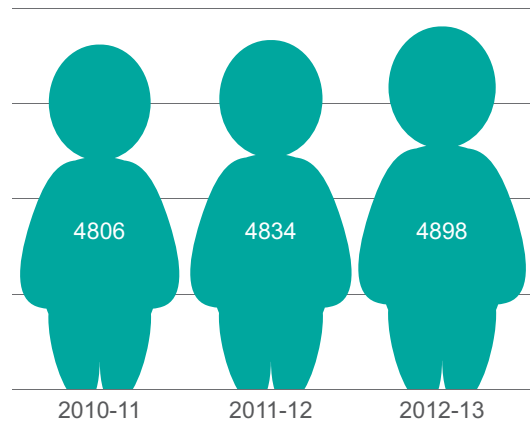
Total Gross Income 2013-14



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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