



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2019/20

Audit Committee

3 February 2020

Item No. 6
Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report 2018/19 – Council Progress Update

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR FOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

Author: Christian Hanagan

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To consider the Wales Audit Office 'Annual Improvement Report 2018/19' presented to Council on [18 September 2019](#) and the progress made to date by the Council in implementing the proposals for improvement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Consider whether there are any matters of a governance, internal control or risk management nature that require further action or attention by Audit Committee.
- 2.2 Consider whether there are any matters of a performance nature that require review by the Council's scrutiny committees.

3. ARRANGEMENTS FOR MONITORING WALES AUDIT OFFICE PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT / RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council recognises the important role the Wales Audit Office plays in supporting on-going improvement to governance and service delivery, and uses the oversight of Audit Committee and Scrutiny Committees to oversee the arrangements and the monitoring of progress.

Audit Committee

- 3.2 The Terms of Reference of the Council's Audit Committee include the following responsibilities in relation to reports from the Council's External Auditor (for the

purposes of this report the External Auditor being the Wales Audit Office): *Point O - 'To receive and consider reports of the External Auditor in relation to matters of financial probity and corporate governance and providing the opportunity for direct discussion with the auditor(s) on these'* and *Point P - 'Consider national reports, for example, from the Wales Audit Office, of relevance to the work of the Authority'*.

- 3.3 To discharge the above requirements, the Council's Audit Committee has responsibility for:
- Providing independent assurance that there are adequate controls in place to mitigate key risks; and
 - Determining whether there are any matters of a governance, internal control or risk management nature that require further action or attention.
- 3.4 As part of discharging its Terms of Reference, Audit Committee should also take account of the conclusions and findings from each Wales Audit Office report when forming an opinion on the adequacy of internal control / governance arrangements in place.
- 3.5 In addition to the above, where Audit Committee considers there are performance related matters that require further review, it is able to refer these to the designated Scrutiny Committee for review

Scrutiny Committees

- 3.6 Members will note the Council's Scrutiny function has a different, albeit, complementary role, in respect of overseeing the reports issued by the Wales Audit Office i.e. to review and challenge the progress the Council is making toward implementing agreed actions.
- 3.7 Where a Scrutiny Committee determines there are matters of a governance, internal control or risk management nature that require further review, it is able to refer these to Audit Committee for consideration.

4. WALES AUDIT OFFICE – ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT 2018/19

- 4.1 At the meeting of Council held on the [18th September 2019](#) Members received the Wales Audit Office [Annual Improvement Report 2018/19](#) (AIR). The AIR contained proposals for improvement/recommendations from published reports that were specific to Rhondda Cynon Taf and also national reports that relate to local authorities more generally and also Welsh Government. Table 1 provides a list of the published reports covered by the AIR together with electronic links to each of these reports.

Table 1 – Published reports covered by the AIR

Type of Report	Report Title	Proposals For Improvement Reported
WAO - RCT Specific Reports <i>(audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2018-19)</i>	Annual Audit Letter 2017-18 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 Compliance confirmed as part of AIR	No
	Assurance and Risk Assessment Project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council.	No
	Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFG Act) examinations Examination of the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the Sustainable Development principle when developing new community based models of service with a focus on early intervention and prevention, choice, control and independence to meet the following wellbeing objective: People – promoting independence and positive lives for everyone	No
	Review of the Council’s published plans for delivering on improvement objectives.	No Compliance confirmed
	Review of the Council’s published performance assessment.	No Compliance confirmed
	Leisure Services Review of the arrangements the Council has put in place to deliver leisure services building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General as part of the ‘Delivering with Less’ themed studies.	No
	Environmental Health – follow up Review of the arrangements the Council has put in place to deliver environmental health services	3 Proposals for Improvement

Type of Report	Report Title	Proposals For Improvement Reported
	building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General as part of the 'Delivering with Less' themed studies.	<i>included in Appendix 1</i>
	Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements Review of the effectiveness of Corporate Safeguarding arrangements building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General in this area.	6 Proposals for Improvement <i>included in Appendix 1</i>
Reviews by other inspection and regulation bodies		
Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW):	Inspection of Older Adults Services	4 Proposals for Improvement <i>included in Appendix 1</i>
Care Inspectorate Wales:	Local authority annual performance review letter	No

4.2 An update on the progress made by Council services, to date, to implement the proposals for improvement/recommendations made by the Wales Audit Office, where applicable to Rhondda Cynon Taf, is set out in Appendix 1. For Members information, this up date was also reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on [20 January 2020](#).

4.3 In line with the Audit Committee's Terms of Reference, the Committee is requested to (in addition to Members own lines of enquiry):

- Consider whether there are any matters of a governance, internal control or risk management nature that require further action or attention; and
- Consider whether there are any matters of a performance nature that require review by the Council's scrutiny committees

5. **CONCLUSIONS**

5.1 Wales Audit Office reports play an important role in supporting on-going improvement to the Council's governance and service delivery arrangements. As part of this process the Council utilises its Audit Committee, in line with its Terms of Reference, and Scrutiny Committees to oversee the arrangements and the monitoring of progress.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972

as amended by

THE ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT, 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

AUDIT COMMITTEE

3 February 2020

REPORT OF: THE SERVICE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND COMMUNICATION

Author: Christian Hanagan

Item 6 Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report [2018/19 – Council Progress Update](#)

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Wales Audit Office - Annual Improvement Report [2018/19](#)

Local and National Reports – Progress to date

Compliance	
Annual Audit Letter 2017-18 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 Compliance confirmed as part of AIR	No proposals for improvement
Annual Improvement Plan Audit (of 19/20 Plans contained in the Council’s annual Corporate Performance Report) Compliance confirmed	No proposals for improvement
Annual Assessment of Performance (evaluation of 18/19 Plans contained in the Council’s Corporate Performance Report) Compliance confirmed	No proposals for improvement
Care Inspectorate Wales Local Authority Performance Review Annual Letter 2018-19	No proposals for improvement

[Well-being of Future Generations Act \(Wales\) 2015 \(WFG Act\) examination](#)

“Examination of the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when developing new community based models of service with a focus on early intervention and prevention, choice, control and independence to meet the following Well- being objective: People – promoting independence and positive lives for everyone.”

Proposals for Improvement	Next Steps
Whilst our examination did not make any proposals for improvement, we identified issues for the Council to consider in developing its future plans for the new community based models of service. These are detailed in our full report .	The WFG examination findings will be used to ensure the Council and its services are acting in accordance with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act including the Sustainable Development principles when developing and implementing its Service Delivery and Priority Plans and plans for key projects.

Local risk-based performance audit

Leisure services

“Building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General as part of the ‘delivering with less’ themed studies. **Leisure Services** - Review of the arrangements the council has put in place to deliver.” – A [feedback presentation](#) was presented to Council officers in September 2019. A formal published report is not expected from WAO.

No proposals/recommendations for Improvement

Overall finding:

“The Council, in responding to the challenges of austerity, has invested appropriately in a model of delivering leisure services based upon its strategic vision and priorities. The Council’s investment has realised increased membership and income but it is too early to evaluate any impact on long term well-being.”

Environmental Health

“Review of the arrangements the council has put in place to deliver environmental health services building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General as part of the ‘delivering with less’ themed studies.”

Proposals for Improvement	Next Steps
P1 The Council should refresh its analysis of statutory/discretionary environmental health functions to ensure it remains a relevant and robust information base for any future decisions around budgets and service changes.	A detailed plan setting out progress and next steps to address the proposals is being considered by Health and Well-being Scrutiny Committee on 28 January 2020.
P2 As part of a fresh analysis of statutory/discretionary services in environmental health, the Council should formally agree what constitutes ‘required’ and ‘better’ levels of environmental service provision for each service area. This will enable the Council to reinforce the focus on key statutory priorities and make better-informed decisions around future service provision, whilst increasing transparency for residents.	
P3 The Council should undertake an annual self-assessment of the effectiveness of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee in line with an appropriate framework, for example the FRC Corporate Governance Code, to provide additional assurance to members.	

Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding Children

“Review of the effectiveness of corporate safeguarding arrangements building on the study previously undertaken by the Auditor General in this area.”

The Council agrees with all the Proposals for Improvement identified within the WAO report. A detailed plan setting out progress and next steps to address these proposals is scheduled for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2020. In the meantime, a brief update is set out below for information

Proposal for Improvement	Next Steps
<p>P1 Strengthen the Corporate Safeguarding Policy in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information on topics that have safeguarding implications such as modern day slavery, trafficking, child sexual exploitation, counter terrorism and the risk of radicalisation, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 and self-harm; • Cross-refer to the Council’s Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Policy; and • Clarify the role and status of the Corporate Safeguarding Working Group. 	<p>Agreed</p> <p>This proposal widens the scope of the current Corporate Safeguarding Policy to include VAWDASV. To address this more fully, a revised Safeguarding Policy is being developed that updates the current Policy in the light of current best practice and also addresses the Proposals for Improvement.</p>
<p>P2 Strengthen the Recruitment and Selection Procedures in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to safeguarding as a key commitment in the opening section of the procedures; • The job descriptions section could refer to safeguarding for relevant posts; • Specify that job adverts for posts that require a DBS check will contain an explicit statement on safeguarding; • The induction section could refer to safeguarding; and • The Corporate Safeguarding Policy and the DBS Policy should be referenced in the ‘Related Policies’ section. 	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Safeguarding implications are being considered as part of the Council’s review of its current recruitment and selection processes.</p>
<p>P3 The Council should gather contractual monitoring information from across all Council Directorates</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>The response to this proposal will include a review of current contracts to establish where monitoring is already in place and where monitoring needs to be strengthened.</p>
<p>P4 The Council should improve its approach to safeguarding training in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerate the rate of compliance with the completion of its mandatory safeguarding training and the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 training; • Clarify when mandatory safeguarding training needs to be refreshed; • Consider ways in which it could extend its safeguarding training offer, for example to taxi drivers and to those working in the night time economy; • Improve its monitoring of safeguarding training compliance; and • Clarify how soon new starters must complete the mandatory safeguarding training 	<p>Agreed</p> <p>A wide ranging review of Safeguarding training and the potential to widen its scope is being undertaken.</p> <p>A Cross Council working group is in place to identify/take steps to strengthen the training compliance for both Safeguarding and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence.</p>

Proposal for Improvement	Next Steps
<p>P5 The Council should consider producing performance measures (for example in respect of DBS check compliance) to enhance the performance information that goes to scrutiny and aid transparency.</p>	<p>Agreed Performance measures will be developed in line with agreed actions within the plan.</p>
<p>P6 The Corporate Safeguarding Working Group should have oversight of corporate safeguarding risks from across the Council.</p>	<p>Agreed The Corporate Safeguarding risks arising from the 19/20 Service Delivery Plans have been made available to the Corporate Safeguarding Strategic Group. This process will be strengthened as part of the 2020/21 Performance arrangements.</p>

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW): Inspection of Older Adults Services

Findings	Next Steps
<p>Well-being CIW found that there was a need to consistently recognise carers' roles and to ensure the voice of the carer is heard; with improved support for carers tailored to enable them to achieve their own wellbeing outcomes.</p>	<p>A detailed plan setting out progress and next steps to address the proposals is scheduled for consideration by Health and Well-being Scrutiny Committee on 24 February 2020 – (not 28 Jan as previously indicated)</p>
<p>People voice and choice CIW identified a need to ensure a consistent approach to involving people's networks of significant family and friends as appropriate so they actively participate and contribute to the assessment, planning and safeguarding process.</p>	
<p>Partnerships, integration and co-production CIW recommend that more developed links and effective links with GPs could improve utilisation of community services to reduce the potential deterioration of older people living independently in the community.</p>	
<p>Prevention and early intervention CIW identified a need to ensure there is clarity in health and social care collaborative planning of preventative services (for example in the development of primary care hubs and community hubs).</p>	

National report recommendations 2018-19

[Procuring Residual and Food Waste Treatment Capacity](#) The national report contained two recommendations. Both of the recommendations were for the Welsh Government

Recommendations for Improvement		RCT comment
WAO FWTC 01	<p>We recommend that the Welsh Government (WG):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in reviewing the Towards Zero Waste strategy, considers how its ambition of there being no residual waste by 2050 aligns with current projections for residual waste treatment; and • works with councils to consider the impact of changes in projections on the likely cost of residual waste projects and any mitigating action needed to manage these costs. 	<p>Agree that WG should align residual tonnage projections to their ambition of no residual waste by 2050. If the projections are accurate, consider changing zero waste to something more achievable. The long-term nature of these projections should also be considered as it's highly likely that there will be new ways to deal with the remaining residual waste in this timeframe which will have a significant impact. Due to the uncertain nature of long-term projections, local authorities should be aware of any financial pressures as a result of this but also be mindful that developments within timeframe would reduce these figures. In parallel, further discussions required between WG and local authorities in respect of financial implications and funding requirements.</p>
WAO FWTC 02	<p>We recommend that the Welsh Government continue its oversight of projects during the operational phase by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building on its existing model of providing experienced individuals to assist with project development and procurement and making sure input is available to assist with contract management if required; • setting out its expectations of councils regarding contract management; • ensuring partnerships revisit their waste projections and associated risks periodically, for example to reflect updated population projections or economic forecasts; and • obtaining from partnerships basic management information on gate fees paid, amount of waste sent to facilities and quality of contractor service. 	<p>The words "if required" are key. Contract management teams have been set up as part of these projects and should be allowed to manage them accordingly. It is helpful to know that if there is a lack of knowledge in a particular area then assistance is available from Welsh Government.</p> <p>Current tonnage projections are provided regularly and any actions resulting from these followed up.</p>

Waste Management in Wales: Municipal Recycling- The national report contained four recommendations. All recommendations were for the Welsh Government.

Recommendations for Improvement		RCT comment
WAO MR01	The Welsh Government should work with councils to understand better the basis of the variation in spending on waste management services that are fundamentally the same and ensure that waste management costs are accounted for in a consistent way.	The WLGA has a comprehensive Local Authority waste benchmarking group that breaks down expenditure with this aim in mind. The challenge is that all Local Authorities treat support service costs differently and also have different overhead allocation methods. With this in mind, it would currently be resource intensive to achieve a level of comparison in this area.
WAO MR02	When undertaking its further analysis to understand better the reasons for differences in councils' reported costs, and the impact on costs where councils have adopted the Collections Blueprint, we recommend that the Welsh Government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> explores how the cost of collecting dry recyclables may affect the overall cost of providing kerbside waste management services to households; and compares the actual costs with the costs modelled previously as part of the Welsh Government-commissioned review of the Collections Blueprint for councils that now operate the Collections Blueprint. 	RCT does not fully comply with the Collections Blueprint, consequently it is difficult to comment. However, we would welcome an up to date analysis of costs of providing source segregated recycling collection to ensure that it is the most cost-effective way of providing this service.
WAO MR03	We recommend that the Welsh Government replace or complement the current target to recycle, compost and reuse wastes with performance measures to refocus recycling on the waste resources that have the largest impact on carbon reduction, and/or are scarce. We recognise that the Welsh Government may need to consider the affordability of data collection for any alternative means of measurement.	Agree that any additional cost/burden to assess impact of these additional measures would need to be assessed. Consideration should also be given to simplifying the current process as there are a number of waste streams that are split in a number of different ways. For example, residual waste is split into metals, incinerator bottom ash (IBA), energy, air pollution control residues (APCr) and landfill, and the proportions change on a monthly basis. We would welcome a way where standard percentages are used for all authorities, for example, 1 tonne of residual waste constitutes 30% IBA, 60% Energy, 5% APCr, 5% Landfill.
WAO MR04	The Welsh Government should demonstrate in the revised waste strategy that not only is it possible to recycle a greater proportion of municipal waste, but how doing so maximises its contribution to achieving its sustainable development objectives.	It is useful to include this element as it's a good tool that local authorities can use in their own business planning processes.

[Waste Management in Wales – Preventing Waste](#) The national report contained three recommendations. All recommendations were for the Welsh Government.

Recommendations for Improvement		RCT comment
WAO PW01	<p>We recommend that the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • revisits the relative priority it gives to recycling and waste prevention as part of its review of Towards Zero Waste; • sets out clearly the expectations on different organisations and sectors for waste prevention; and • revisits its overall waste prevention targets and the approach it has taken to monitor them in light of progress to date, examples from other countries and in the context of current projections about waste arising through to 2050. 	Agree with proposals.
WAO PW02	<p>We recommend that the Welsh Government works with Natural Resources Wales to explore the costs and benefits of other options to improve non-municipal waste data in Wales, including additional powers to require waste data from businesses.</p>	This is a step in the right direction. Currently, it is not a level playing field due to the amount of data and work that goes into producing this information. It is a burden that only Local Authorities have to meet and if there are Welsh targets then the whole of Wales should be contributing to them.
WAO PW03	<p>We recommend that the Welsh Government consider whether provisions to extend producer responsibility and the use of financial powers such as grant conditions, fiscal measures and customer charges and incentives, are needed to promote and to prioritise waste prevention.</p>	As waste reduction is primary in the Waste Hierarchy this can only be a good thing. However, the impact on Local Authority recycling percentages should also be considered.

Local Government Services to Rural Communities Note - RCT is defined as Semi rural. Three areas i.e. Maerdy, Rhigos and Ynysybwl, feature in the list of Eligible Wards to which the Rural Community Development fund applies

The national report contained four recommendations

Recommendations for Improvement		RCT comment
WAO SRC 01	<p>Socio economic change, poor infrastructure and shifts in provision of key services and facilities has resulted in the residualisation of communities in rural Wales. (See paragraphs 1.2 – 1.16) We recommend that Welsh Government support public bodies to deliver a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by: refreshing rural grant programmes to create sustainable financial structures, with multi-year allocations; and helping people and businesses make the most of digital connectivity through targeted and more effective business and adult education support programmes</p>	<p>The Council delivers a wide range of adult community learning opportunities to communities across RCT. The majority of courses and programmes are delivered at libraries, community centres and other venues. In 2017/18 learning was delivered at 96 venues across the County Borough including our rural communities.</p> <p>Provision is targeted at those who are most disadvantaged and would benefit from gaining skills and qualifications although there is also a programme of activities designed to enhance the well-being of participants and to support the social integration and independence of older residents or those who have a life-limiting health condition. The service provides a range of digital skills courses, from basic Introduction to Computing to ECDL courses.</p>
WAO SRC 02	<p>The role of Public Service Boards is evolving but there are opportunities to articulate a clearer and more ambitious shared vision for rural Wales (see paragraphs 2.2 to 2.9 and 2.28 to 2.31). We recommend that PSB public services partners respond more effectively to the challenges faced by rural communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their different rural communities using the Welsh Government’s Rural Proofing Tool and identify and agree the local and strategic actions needed to support community sustainability; and • ensuring the Local Well-Being Plan sets out a more optimistic and ambitious vision for ‘place’ with joint priorities co-produced by partners and with citizens to address agreed challenges. 	<p>The Cwm Taf Well-being Plan responds to the challenge around ‘Place’ through its ‘Thriving Communities’ objective under which the PSB is taking forward a programme of developing community hubs, each supporting a neighbourhood network within up to ten Community Zones across RCT. This aims to deliver a better public service offer in co-production between the public sector, third sector and the communities themselves.</p>
WAO SRC 03	<p>To help sustain rural communities, public services need to think differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). We recommend councils provide a more effective response to the challenges faced by rural communities by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring service commissioners have cost data and qualitative information on the full range of service options available 	<p>The Council commissions a wide range of evidence based services and interventions across the County Borough, including our rural communities. These include services to support vulnerable people, tackling poverty, support children and communities, housing related support, and social care. Wherever possible services are developed and</p>

Recommendations for Improvement		RCT comment
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> using citizens' views on the availability, affordability, accessibility, adequacy and acceptability of council services to shape the delivery and integration of services. 	commissioned in consultation with service users and communities. The performance of commissioned services is proactively monitored to ensure outcomes are delivered and qualitative data is included in this process. The Council also consults widely each year on setting its budget and service priorities.
WAO SRC 04	<p>To help sustain rural communities, public services need to act differently in the future (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.12). We recommend councils do more to develop community resilience and self-help by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> working with relevant bodies such as the Wales Co-operative Centre to support social enterprise and more collaborative business models providing tailored community outreach for those who face multiple barriers to accessing public services and work enhancing and recognising the role of town and community councils by capitalising on their local knowledge and supporting them to do more encouraging a more integrated approach to service delivery in rural areas by establishing pan-public service community hubs, networks of expertise, and clusters of advice and prevention services enabling local action by supporting community asset transfer identifying which assets are suitable to transfer, and having the right systems in place to make things happen improving community-based leadership by developing networks of interest, training and coaching, and encouraging volunteering 	<p>The Council has developed a range of services to improve community resilience, self-help, volunteering and employment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing a programme across up to ten community zones, each with its own community hub and neighbourhood network. An effective community asset transfer process that facilitates the development of the neighbourhood networks. Transformed its approach to 'Team Around the Family' to create a Resilient Families Service providing support to vulnerable families who need it. Comprehensive employment support through Communities for Work, Communities for Work+, Inspire to Work and a range of provision including digital skills, independent living skills, and essential skills.

[Provision of Local Government Services to Rural Communities: Community Asset Transfer](#)

Recommendations for Improvement	RCT comment
<p>R1 Local authorities need to do more to make CATs (Community Asset Transfers) simpler and more appealing, help build the capacity of community and town councils, give them more guidance in raising finance, and look to support other community development models such as social enterprises that support social value and citizen involvement. In addition, we recommend that local authorities monitor and publish CAT numbers and measure the social impact of CATs.</p>	<p>RCT has a positive track record in relation to its Community Asset Transfers (CATs), the procedures for which are continually reviewed to ensure that they are relevant and fit for purpose. A revised CAT process is aligned to its Community Hub and Neighbourhood Network Model. We also have a well developed system for recording CATs including delivery activity, funding levered in, community partner involvement etc.</p>

Recommendations for Improvement	RCT comment
	<p>There is a CAT web page i.e. RCT Together, in place which is currently being reviewed. CAT numbers and the social impact of CATs have not previously been published but will be considered as part of the development of the communication arrangements for the Neighbourhood Networks including a revised web presence.</p> <p>We are currently testing out the functionality and usefulness of the OCSI 'Value Insight' system to provide Social Value Reports for community groups including those going through Community Asset Transfers.</p>
<p>R2 Local authorities have significant scope to provide better and more visible help and support before, during, and after the community asset transfer process. We conclude that there is considerable scope to improve the business planning, preparation, and aftercare for community asset transfer. We recommend that local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify community assets transfer's role in establishing community hubs, networks of expertise and clusters of advice and prevention services; • work with town and community councils to develop their ability to take on more CATs; • identify which assets are suitable to transfer, and clarify what the authority needs to do to enable their transfer; • ensure their CAT policy adequately covers aftercare, long term support, post transfer support, signposting access to finance, and sharing the learning about works well; and • support community-based leadership by developing networks of interest, training and coaching, and encouraging volunteering. 	<p>As well as the work set out above, the Council provides support through 'RCT Together' CAT Factsheet and support process templates. A revised CAT process aligned to its Community Hub and Neighbourhood Network Model.</p> <p>There is close working between Council services i.e. Community Development, Corporate Estates and Prosperity and Development. The Council also facilitates multi-agency partner support for both pre- CAT discussions and post CAT transfer. Two funds are in place to support this process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Community Asset Transfer Fund of up to £10,000 per organisation and 2) Community Activity Fund of up to £500 per organisation <p>The Rhondda Fach Neighbourhood Network area is part of the Council's network and includes the Thriving Communities Objective of the wider Cwm Taf Public Services Board. Within this area, two CATs have been progressed with the Fern Partnership;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former Maerdy Library, now Maerdy Hub. • Former Ferndale Infants School is now the primary Community Hub 'Ferndale Yr Hwb'. Ferndale Hwb originated as one of two Welsh Government's Children First pilot areas to tackle Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) through a place based approach. This partnership approach sees the co-location of Little Ferns childcare, library services and Communities for Work+ and a range of sessional services being delivered by a range of partners. A Community Co-

Recommendations for Improvement	RCT comment
	ordinator has been employed and the Neighbourhood Network has been established.

[The maturity of local government in use of data](#)

R1 Part 1 of the report highlights the importance of creating a strong data culture and clear leadership to make better use of data.	
<p>We recommend that local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have a clear vision that treats data as a key resource • establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data • undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests • create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services. 	<p>The Authority recognises the strategic importance of data which is a key area of focus within its Digital Strategy 2017/20. This strategy sets a goal of using consistent data and information to improve the way services are managed and to inform future service provision. To inform the direction of the Council, a Corporate Business Intelligence Review (CBIR) was undertaken that formed part of the wider Digital Programme in 2019 and its findings and recommendations have been used to shape a more strategic approach for the use of data designed to maximise the opportunities for improvement.</p> <p>Plans are in place to develop a customer account for the access of services. To enable the account development, a new Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) has been procured, which will be implemented in 2020/21. The CRM is seen as a key building block for the creation of the single customer record. Services and functionality will be incrementally added to the account and customers will be offered / prompted to sign up for a secure account, allowing them to have a 'single view' of their activity with the council.</p>
R2 Part 2 of the report notes that whilst it is important that authorities comply with relevant data protection legislation, they also need to share data with partners to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services. Whilst these two things are not mutually exclusive, uncertainty on data protection responsibilities is resulting in some officers not sharing data, even where there is agreement to provide partners with information.	
<p>We recommend that authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share • review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities. 	<p>The Council's arrangements are well embedded for the protection of personal information from data misuse, with several information protocols in place to enable the benefits of data sharing. As part of the Council's work in relation to GDPR and also the Corporate Business Intelligence Review (CBIR) an Information Asset Register (IAR) has been established to define where data is held and accountable Information Asset Owners (IAO) defined.</p> <p>Mandatory Data Protection E-learning is provided to all staff, which practically discusses the need for appropriate sharing protocols/agreements and also the need to assess the necessity and proportionality of the sharing of the personal information. The Council also publishes information management bulletins and has during 2019, presented at organisational wide managers briefings, to advise and discuss how staff, including senior management, can comply in their day-to-day roles and provide assurance as to an appropriate management of data.</p>

	<p>Following the new legislation, guidance is currently being developed on Schedule 2/3 (exemption) requests which will give service managers and other staff further information on when they are permitted to share information that is not covered as part of a formal agreement and what organisations we are likely to share with under this condition.</p> <p>During 2019 the Council undertook a review of all Council contracts (over £15k) to ensure those that process personal information have the appropriate data sharing provision and protocols, with work on reviewing all Council contracts also being progressed.</p>
<p>R3 In Part 3 of our report, we conclude that adequate resources and sufficient capacity are ongoing challenges. However, without upskilling staff to make better use of data, authorities are missing opportunities to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.</p>	
<p>We recommend that authorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify staff who have a role in analysing and managing data to remove duplication and free up resources to build and develop capacity in data usage • invest and support the development of staff data analytical, mining and segmentation skills. 	<p>The identification of staff skills and expertise and roles that will support development of the Council’s Digital and Data strategies will be integral to the identified work programmes.</p>
<p>R4 Part 4 of our report highlights that authorities have more to do to create a data-driven decision-making culture and to unlock the potential of the data they hold.</p>	
<p>We recommend that local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set data reporting standards to ensure minimum data standards underpin decision making • make more open data available. 	<p>There are currently no clear corporate Data Standards in place. However, the need for these standards have been reinforced as part of the outcomes of a data pilot in Adult Services project. The new Digital Strategy 2020-2024 being developed reflects the need for a single Data Strategy across the Council and the need to ensure on-going improvement in data quality, master data management developed and to allow for data insights to be more easily created.</p>

[The effectiveness of local planning authorities in Wales](#) The national report contained four recommendations. The majority of recommendations were for local authorities to address.

Recommendations for Improvement	Progress/next step (or may include action plan)
<p>R1 Part 1</p>	
<p>To improve involvement with stakeholders and ownership of decisions we recommend that local planning authorities:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • test current engagement and involvement practices and consider the full range of other options available to ensure involvement activities are fit for purpose • use ‘Place Plans’ as a vehicle to engage and involve communities and citizens in planning choices and decision making • improve transparency and accountability by holding planning meetings at appropriate times, rotating meetings to take place in areas which are subject to proposed development, webcasting meetings and providing opportunities for stakeholders to address committee meetings. 	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>We continue to review and develop communication and engagement, for example neighbour notification ‘letters’ advising of planning applications have been re-designed in postcard format making them more visible and user friendly. We also provide a QR code taking the recipient directly to the application on the Council’s Planning website.</p> <p>Significant progress has been made in bringing forward specific Place focussed plans for town centres across RCT which has involved significant levels of community consultation and engagement.</p> <p>The current status of progress of the Place based Town Centre Regeneration strategies is summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mountain Ash – Regeneration Framework adopted by Cabinet decision with report of 18/12/18 • Porth – Town Centre Regeneration Strategy adopted by Cabinet decision with report of 24/1/19 • Pontypridd – Town Centre Placemaking Plan/Masterplan currently in development and due to be reported to Cabinet in Spring 2020 • Tonypany – Town Centre Regeneration Strategy currently in development and due to be reported to Cabinet in Summer 2020 • Treorchy – Town Centre Regeneration Strategy currently in development and due to be reported to Cabinet in Autumn 2020 <p>Meetings of the Council’s Planning & Development Committee commence at 5pm to allow people to attend at the end of the working day. Various approaches have been trialled in the past to encourage greater participation, including a WG funded pilot of live streaming Development Control meetings and holding meetings at different Council venues. However, neither of these approaches were as successful as anticipated. The Council is currently considering its approach to encourage wider involvement across all Council Committees including its response to the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Bill in relation to Webcasting which are being considered by the Democratic Services Committee.</p>

	<p>Anyone with an interest in an application can register to speak when the matter is considered by Committee and there is no limit on the number of speakers. This is a positive arrangement that facilitates greater opportunities for public speaking at Planning Committee meetings. Anecdotal feedback from participants involved suggests that RCT's arrangements lead to a greater participation within the process by interested third parties and other stakeholders.</p> <p>With changes in technological advancements and as part of the work to prepare for the proposals in the Local Government and Elections Bill, the use of webcasting for Council meetings has been revisited and a report was presented to the Democratic Services Committee in January 2020.</p>
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To improve involvement with stakeholders and ownership of decisions, **we recommend that Welsh Government:** review the Development Management Procedure Order 2012 and update the engagement and involvement standards for local planning authorities.

R2 Part 2
 To improve resilience, **we recommend that local planning authorities:**

- review their building control fee regimes to ensure the levels set, better reflect the actual cost of providing these services and make the service self-funding; and
 - improve capacity by working regionally to:
 - integrate services to address specialism gaps;
 - develop joint supplementary planning guidance; and
 - develop future local development plans regionally and in partnership with other local planning authorities.
- We recommend that the Welsh Government:**
- reviews development control fees to ensure the levels set, better reflect the actual cost of providing these services; and
 - consider how to use the powers in the Planning (Wales) Act to support and improve local planning authority capacity and resilience.

Agreed
 The Council has started a review of the current fee structure. It is anticipated that a revised fee structure will be in place by mid-2020.

In a meeting of [Council in July 2019](#) it was agreed that RCT would contribute to the preparation and cost of a Strategic Development Plan (SDP) for the Cardiff Capital Region. It is the intention that the SDP would be a 20 year plan, 2020 and 2040, with an earliest start date of 2025. Considerable joint working between all the 10 South East Wales/Cardiff Capital Region authorities took place to arrange these preparatory proposals.

To meet decision making requirements in respect of RCT, in the interim period, the Council determined on [27 November 2019](#) to begin the preparation of the revision of our Local Development Plan.

In preparing LDPs, all opportunities for joint working and preparation, or procurement of, evidence base are sought, and implemented where possible.

Strong working relationships are in place across Planning Authorities. Numerous Wales and region wide Development Management and Planning Policy groups meet regularly at various levels. Many regular sub group meetings have taken place to look at setting out standard approaches to LDP preparation, in particular in relation to the collation of evidence base for

	<p>various topics. Identification of expertise within individual authorities has also taken place, which can aid authorities that may have gaps in their planning teams.</p> <p>With regards to Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) best practice is sought from other Authorities where appropriate. However, as SPG is associated with each Local Authority LDP and its policies, which differ from one another, this prevents wholesale joint SPG preparation.</p> <p>In November 2019 the Welsh Government has introduced the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill which includes a general power of competence, a power for local authorities to make an application to merge voluntarily, and powers to facilitate regional working through corporate joint committees (CJs). It is likely that the SDP will come forward through this format in the future.</p> <p>Members will be kept informed of LDP progress through specific statutory stages of the plan and through various committees and LDP preparatory engagement.</p>
<p>R3 Part 2 the cost of development control services is not reflected in the charges set for these services and progress in developing regional responses to strengthen resilience has been slow. We recommend that the Welsh Government:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviews development control fees to ensure the levels set, better reflect the actual cost of providing these services; and • consider how to use the powers in the Planning (Wales) Act to support and improve local planning authority capacity and resilience. 	<p>Agree.</p> <p>The Council will consider and respond to Welsh Government’s current consultation document ‘Changes to Planning and Related Application Fees’ by 13 March 2020. Prior to submission the response will be subject to approval by the Cabinet Member.</p>
<p>R4 Part 3 summarises the effectiveness and impact of local planning authorities decision making and how well they are performing against national measures. We recommend that local planning authorities improve the effectiveness of planning committees by:</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing their scheme of delegation to ensure planning committees are focussed on the most important strategic issues relevant to their authority • revising reporting templates to ensure they are clear and unambiguous to help guide decision making and reduce the level of officer recommendations overturned • enforcing the local planning authorities’ standards of conduct for meetings 	<p>The reporting template is kept under regular review and improvements to its format are made when necessary to ensure that the report is clear, unambiguous and ensures members are aware of the material planning considerations that they should take into account when reaching a decision.</p> <p>A legal advisor is present at each meeting of the Council’s Planning & Development Committee ensuring that the meeting is in accordance with the legislative requirements and the standards of conduct for meetings.</p>

R5 Part 4

identifies the central role of planning to delivering the ambitions of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. **We recommend that local planning authorities:**

- set a clear ambitious vision that shows how planning contributes to improving wellbeing.
- provide planning committee members with regular and appropriate wellbeing training and support to help deliver their wider responsibilities
- set appropriate measures for their administration of the planning system and the impact of their planning decisions on wellbeing
- annually publish these performance measures to judge planning authorities impact on wellbeing

Agreed.

Planning decisions are taken having regard to national and local planning policy and guidance. [Planning Policy edition 10](#), embeds the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act into Planning Policy.

Although the RCT LDP predates the Well-being of Future Generations Act the principles of sustainability are embedded through the document. The planned review of the LDP will further embed the principles of sustainability and wellbeing, as a full Sustainability Appraisal report/document is a critical part of the evidence base that will need to be prepared and submitted as part of the LDP preparation and assessment process.

Members of the Council's Planning & Development Committee receive training on various topics which are considered relevant to their membership of the Committee. A new programme of training for 2020 is being developed with the Chair of the Planning Committee and the relevant Cabinet Member.

The LPA is required to provide quarterly monitoring figures to Welsh Government in respect of its performance in making planning decisions and are published [here](#).

Currently, measured data does not specifically measure the impact of planning decisions on wellbeing, which is not a straightforward impact to measure. However, it is anticipated in a timescale to run parallel with the LDP Review, the LPA will develop a suite of criteria by which an understanding of the impact of planning decisions on wellbeing can be better measured and therefore understood.

The Council monitors its impact on regenerating the local economy (and a strong local economy is an important contributor to 'wellbeing') through its 'Economy' corporate priority which is reported quarterly to Cabinet. Through the development of the [Council's new Corporate Plan 2020-2024](#), the Council will further develop measures of the impact of our work on the prosperity, people and place of RCT. However, it is challenging to measure the impact of planning in isolation from other factors.