

Summary of External Regulations and Inspections – 2021/22

Audit Wales

Date	Title	Recommendations / observations	Reporting Information	Response status RAG and note
April 2021	At Your Discretion Local Government Discretionary Services	<p>Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/At-your-discretion-English.pdf</p> <p>Recommendation/Proposals for improvement: None</p>	<p>O&SC: N/A</p> <p>Cabinet: N/A</p> <p>G&AC: N/A</p>	N/A
May 2021	Flintshire County Council – Rental Income	<p>Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/flintshire_council_rental_income_english.pdf</p> <p>Proposals for improvement:</p> <p>P1 - To better understand the overall income and rent arrears performance, the Council needs to collect and report additional performance indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • total rent collected during the year from former and current tenants; and • the amount written off during the financial year. <p>P2 - To inform the delivery of the service, through a better understanding of the needs and experiences of tenants, the Council should collect a more comprehensive range of data including information on equalities</p>	<p>CRO&SC: 11/11/21</p> <p>Cabinet: 19/10/21</p> <p>G&AC: 17/11/21</p>	<p>P1 – Two additional indicators adopted by Cabinet were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total rent collected during the year from both former and current tenants • the amount written off during the financial year in unpaid rents <p>P2 - The collection of more comprehensive datasets including strengthening integrated tenant engagement arrangements to better understand the needs and experiences of tenants and to inform future housing service delivery</p>

Appendix 1

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Aug 2021	Flintshire County Council – Financial Sustainability Assessment	<p>Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/ffsa.pdf</p> <p>Recommendation/Proposals for improvement: None</p>	<p>CRO&SC: 16/09/21</p> <p>Cabinet: 21/09/21</p> <p>G&AC: 27/09/21</p>	N/A
Sept 2021	Regenerating Town Centres in Wales	<p>Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/town-centre-regeneration-eng.pdf</p> <p>Recommendation/Proposals for improvement:</p> <p>R1 - Non-domestic rates have not been reviewed in recent years, and the levels charged do not reflect the current rents being achieved in many town centres. We recommend that the Welsh Government review Nondomestic Rates to ensure the system better reflects towncentre conditions when the payments holiday ends in March 2022.</p> <p>R2 - Many town-centre businesses are impacted adversely by charging for car parking, access to public transport and poor transport infrastructure. We recommend that the Welsh Government work with local authorities to review transport challenges facing town centres and agree how best to address these.</p>	<p>EE O&SC: 09/11/21</p> <p>Cabinet: 16/11/21</p> <p>G&AC: 17/11/21</p>	<p>R1 – Although the Council has not been asked to respond on this recommendation business rates are a frequent area for concern raised by businesses in town centres and the review process has been highlighted as needing action by Welsh Government.</p> <p>R2 – Parking has been free in Flintshire County Council operated car parks since March 2020 to support the local economy during the response to the pandemic. The normal charges remained suspended to help local businesses as they came out of lockdown last summer until recently. Now that the country is at Alert Level 0, and following the reopening of all town centre businesses and hospitality venues, parking charges were reintroduced from 1st October. As both Governments promote economic recovery and are bringing to a close national emergency funds on which</p>

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				<p>public bodies have relied, councils can no longer continue to offset a resumption to some “normality”.</p> <p>Charging for designated public car parks is adopted Council policy. The rationale for the original policy covers easing potential congestion and ensuring fair access to parking spaces in the short-stay car parks through a local traffic control system that includes charging. Our charges remain very competitive and we will consider options of special seasonal arrangements e.g. pre-Christmas. We are also open to working in partnership with Town Councils on local options where they are workable.</p> <p>In Flintshire, we have been instrumental over the last four years in leading on North Wales Metro projects and promoting Active Travel across the County with successful bids made to the Welsh Government each year to deliver transport schemes across the county. We have our own countywide Integrated Transport Strategy for Flintshire, which forms a key element of the North East Wales Metro proposals which are supported and promoted by Welsh Government (WG). We recognise that, in order to provide a long term sustainable transport solution, it is essential that all modes of transport are successfully integrated, whilst maintaining and promoting at its heart, a sustainable, affordable and environmentally friendly public transport service, with links to all of Flintshire and the wider region.</p> <p>Active travel and sustainable travel options is a priority for us in the Council Plan and we will be looking to provide opportunities for increasing levels of walking and cycling, and enable access to other alternative and sustainable methods of travel. Additionally, ensuring effective transport connectivity and that the network facilitates and supports recovery and growth is a priority in the Council Plan.</p>

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		<p>R3 - The Welsh Government has directly provided and levered in just under £900 million through 13 funding schemes to help regenerate town centres. However, some aspects of the Welsh Government’s management of the funding are considered problematic. To ensure local authorities are able to maximise the impact of funding and tackle the more difficult and longstanding problems that would help transform their town centres, we recommend that the Welsh Government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consolidate funding to reduce bureaucracy by streamlining processes and grant conditions and keeping requests for information and supporting materials to a minimum; • move away from annual bidding cycles to multi-year allocations; and • rebalance investment from capital to revenue to help local authorities address staff capacity and skills shortages. <p>R4 - The Welsh Government has provided all 22 local authorities with training on how best to use existing enforcement, financial assistance and debt recovery powers, but they are not being consistently nor effectively utilised to support regeneration. We recommend that local authorities take appropriate action, using these existing powers and resources available to achieve</p>		<p>R3 – Although the Council has not been asked to respond on this recommendation the current system of funding for regeneration is in need of review. Annual bidding cycles considerably reduce the ability of the Council to plan long term regeneration work programmes and the delivery of capital projects within the structure of inflexible financial years hampers delivery and increases costs. In the absence of longer term revenue funding from Welsh Government local government capacity to develop and deliver regeneration projects is limited and forms a significant constraint to progress.</p> <p>R4 – The Council already uses a range of regulatory powers to tackle empty and problem properties. However, use of these powers can be extremely time consuming and can ultimately place considerable financial burdens on the Council which cannot always be recouped. The Welsh Government support is therefore welcomed. This approach is featured within the Council’s agreed strategic approach to town centre regeneration adopted in March 2020 and included in the current Council Plan.</p>

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		<p>the best possible outcome for town centres by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using alternative methods of enforcement before using Compulsory Purchase Orders as a last resort; • integrating enforcement strategies with wider departmental strategies across housing, environmental health, planning and regeneration teams to make more effective use of existing skills and resources; and • ensuring there is capacity and the right expertise to use the full range of powers, working in collaboration with other councils to achieve good outcomes <p>R5 - The Welsh Government’s ‘Town Centres First’ approach looks to put the health of town centres at the heart of the decisions taken by the Welsh Government, local authorities, the wider public sector, businesses and communities. This requires a high degree of integration between crosscutting policy frameworks and decision making to promote town centres above much else. We recommend that the Welsh Government sets out how it plans to deliver this in practice, its expectations of partners and the practical steps it will take to make this ambition a reality.</p>		<p>Following the training provided by Welsh Government earlier in the year, the Council has developed a panel of officers from the different regulatory and regeneration services to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a shared list of vacant or problem properties is maintained and reviewed regularly; • action by the Council is co-ordinated effectively across the different teams; • owners of properties are offered effective support and encouragement before enforcement action is commenced; and • limited resources are managed through the careful prioritization of enforcement action based on the length of time properties have been vacant and the scale of problems they are causing to neighbours and communities. <p>R5 – Although the Council has not been asked to respond on this recommendation the further clarity recommended by Audit Wales would be welcomed. The principle of “Town Centres First” is fully supported by the Council but a clear delivery plan and resources are needed to underpin the policy.</p>

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		<p>R6 - Town centres are changing, and local authorities need to be receptive to these changes and plan to manage these shifts. We recommend that local authorities use our regeneration tool to self-assess their current</p>		<p>R6 - The Council has undertaken the self-assessment recommended by Audit Wales and has identified a number of areas for further development. Some of these are already in hand but not yet fully realised. Extra staff capacity to deliver these has been agreed by Cabinet and recruitment is underway. Particular areas for further development include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further work is required to engage stakeholders in the individual towns and translate the County level strategic approach into local delivery plans. • Continue work on data gathering for town centres to improve Council, partner and business decision-making.
<p>Sept 2021</p>	<p>Financial Sustainability of Local Government</p>	<p>Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/Financial%20Sustainability%20of%20Local%20Government%20-%20English_1.pdf</p> <p>Four steps to help improve councils' financial sustainability:</p> <p>S1 – Financial Strategies - Understand short, medium and long-term challenges and clearly set out the overall priorities for the council's finances</p> <p>S2 – Reserves - Plan your approach to, and use of, reserves to ensure that it supports longer-term financial sustainability</p> <p>S3 – Performance against budget - Know what's realistic for services to achieve and then understand and act on areas of consistent overspends</p>	<p>O&SC: N/A</p> <p>Cabinet: N/A</p> <p>G&AC: N/A</p>	<p>Work is currently being undertaken in conjunction with the introduction of the CIPFA financial management code which will assist in identifying any improvements required to current financial management practices</p>

Appendix 1

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		<p>S4 – Savings delivery - Understand what is realistic for services to deliver on savings or cost reductions and act on areas that do not consistently deliver planned savings</p>		
Nov 2021	The Welsh Government's Warm Homes Programme	<p>Report Link: https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/The%20Welsh%20Governments%20Warm%20Homes%20Programme%20-%20English.pdf</p> <p>Recommendation/Proposals for improvement: None</p>	<p>O&SC: N/A Cabinet: N/A G&AC: N/A</p>	N/A

Care in Wales (CIW)

Date	Title	Recommendation	Reporting Information	Response
Apr 2021	Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) Local Authority Assurance Check April 2021: Social Services	Actions arising from Assurance Check – Adult Services: None	O&SC: N/A Cabinet: N/A G&AC: N/A	N/A
		Actions arising from Assurance Check – Children’s Services: The following actions were identified as a result of the Assurance Check April 2021:	S&HC O&SC: 09/09/21 Cabinet: 13/07/21 G&AC: July 2022	
		C1. Promote and encourage the rights of children to be offered formal advocacy		C1 – Actions on track: Improve staff awareness of the independent advocacy provision and referral pathways; Systems in place to monitor and understand take up/decline
		C2. Strengthen the recording of the evidence of front door decision making and analysis on PARIS		C2 – Actions on track: Map front door recording processes to ensure that we are demonstrating the child’s journey and the associated decision making. Finalise and implement ‘Family Support Framework’ to ensure consistency of threshold decision making and the associated recording requirements
C3. Review of how we conduct our safeguarding enquiries, ensuring children are seen and seen alone within the enquiry period and that core groups for children on the child protection register are consistently conducted in line with statutory requirements.		C3 – Actions on track: Facilitated event with Team Managers and Senior Practitioners to review existing practice and approaches, any barriers to compliance and to re-process our approach as part of the wider Vanguard review, ensuring compliance with statutory requirements. A Practice Directive issued to staff to ensure that core groups are held within statutory timeframes Redistribute capacity to our front door to ensure timely processing of reports (referrals) on our IT system		

Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO)

Date	Title	Recommendations / observations	Reporting Information	Response Link
July 2021	Information Commissioner’s Annual Report 2020-21	<p>Report Link: https://ico.org.uk/media/about-the-ico/documents/2620166/hc-354-information-commissioners-ara-2020-21.pdf</p> <p>Recommendation/Proposals for improvement: None</p>	<p>O&SC: N/A Cabinet: N/A G&AC: N/A</p>	N/A