

Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report

March 2015

Executive Response

The Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report and Corporate Assessment is, overall, a fair and positive summary of the position of the Council. The report is a welcome endorsement of a full year of improved improvement reporting following the introduction of this year's Improvement Plan.

There are no new statutory recommendations. The proposals for improvement are already well advanced in our commitment and activity for response. Listed below are the seven proposals for improvement along with our response.

Proposal for Improvement (P1-7)	Response
<p>P1 The Council should develop and implement a (more) consistent approach to business planning that promotes the ownership by staff of key objectives and targets.</p>	<p>A review of strategic and operational business planning is underway. The review covers review and republication of the suite of key corporate documents – Improvement Plan, Governance Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and a new Corporate Resourcing plan; a review of the comprehensive of the set of portfolio strategic plans which drive policy and priorities (e.g. the Housing Business Plan; a review of the format, consistency and quality of operational business plan reports. This review will have staged outcomes with the first working deadline being June for the suite of revised key corporate documents.</p>
<p>P2 The Council should improve the quality of its reports to committees and Cabinet to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• where necessary, reports enable councillors to refer easily to relevant policies and previous decisions and discussions• key messages and recommendations are clear and succinct; and• reports to scrutiny committees include recommendations or options that committees might endorse.	<p>A review of report format, style and quality of presentation is under way. A pilot of an improved format will be recommended. The improved format will include use of executive summaries and fuller exploration of risk in assessing options for decisions. Fuller use of hyperlinks will be made to avoid publishing extensive appendices where this can be avoided</p> <p>Updated report writing guidelines are being produced. Refresher report writing training will be offered. Quality assurance systems for report approval are being improved.</p>
<p>P3 The Council should ensure that, in implementing its revised strategies for People, ICT and Asset Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• their financial implications feed into the medium-term financial plan;	<p>As P1 above noting:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a single corporate resourcing plan is being developed for June as part of the suite of key corporate documents. This plan will prioritise the allocation of corporate resources for change projects

<p>and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the links between the strategies are fully considered so that specialist staff are available when required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a comprehensive approach to programme management for officer portfolios where significant change needs to be led, co-ordinated and managed with a set of 8 programme management boards a comprehensive and more usable Medium, Term Financial Plan in a new graphic format for June
<p>P4 Group Leaders should strongly encourage members to take advantage of the Member Development Scheme.</p>	<p>A review of the member development programme is underway with the aim of having a broader offer for members in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association. Group Leaders are being requested to promote take-up of training opportunities amongst their respective groups.</p>
<p>P5 The Council should take the opportunity of its review of scrutiny structures to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny committees can add real value to Council decision-making by aligning agendas more explicitly to Council priorities and risks.</p>	<p>A Task and Finish Group has been set up by the Constitution Committee to review the number and terms of reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Group will report to the Annual General Meeting of the Council.</p> <p>Forward work programmes are to include major and higher risk annual budget proposals which require monitoring and assessment of impact, major service reviews included in the budget, and periodic review of the achievement of improvement priorities. Report formats are being reviewed as P2 above to make reports more purposeful.</p>
<p>P6 The Council should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adopt a consistent approach to managing risk, ensuring that all staff involved use a similar approach to record impact, likelihood and mitigating actions; and apply this approach to its future savings plans 	<p>Following an earlier internal review of risk management led by Internal Audit a number of actions are in train for the organisation to be more consistent and effective in the identification and reporting of risk at strategic, operational, project and partnership levels. P1 and P3 above will contribute.</p>
<p>P7 The Council should ensure a consistent approach to workforce planning and use the results to inform future reductions in staff</p>	<p>The new appraisal model as presented to the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee is being implemented to support talent recognition, retention and progression. Intelligence from this renewed appraisal programme will inform the training and development programme.</p> <p>Workforce planning risks are being assessed in each Chief Officer portfolio area as part of the revised People Strategy.</p>