

SUBJECT	Progress Report: Wales Audit Office Proposals for Improvement at October 2015
MEETING:	Audit Committee
DATE:	3rd December 2015

1. PURPOSE

To provide Audit Committee with an update on the authority's progress against the Wales Audit Office (WAO) proposals for improvement up to the end of October 2015.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That members consider the current position of proposals and future actions committed in response to the proposals and identify any areas where they feel further action needs to be taken or further information is required.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Proposals for improvement are made by the WAO as advice to support the authority's development. These are distinct from statutory recommendations that require the authority to set actions in response within 30 working days of their receipt.
- 3.2 The proposals included in the report are those issued to the Council as a result of regulatory work conducted by the WAO in the authority. The specific WAO reports which have instigated the proposals are referenced in the update.
- 3.3 In November 2015 the WAO Annual Improvement Report 2014-15, incorporating the Corporate Assessment Report 2015, was published. This included a further nine proposals for improvement. There were no statutory recommendations. This report will be presented to Cabinet and subsequently Audit Committee in January 2016. The action the Council will take in response to these proposals will be included when this is reported and these are therefore not included in this report at this stage.
- 3.4 The report members are considering today highlights:
 - The specific proposal, or more than one proposal if they are closely linked.
 - The progress made up to October 2015 to address the issues identified by the proposal.
 - Whether the status of the proposal is to remain "open" or be "closed" if the evidence of progress suggests it has been sufficiently addressed.
 - Any further actions that will be taken to address the proposal.
- 3.5 The proposals made by WAO focus on:

- a. Information management including the authority's dealings around governance and management arrangements with the Shared Resource Service (SRS).
 - b. Corporate performance and efficiency including improving efficiency and value for money, delivering and monitoring savings, financial monitoring arrangements, ensuring robust and comprehensive performance measures and targets and improving self-assessment.
 - c. Ensuring robust arrangements for the Annual Governance Statement.
 - d. Clarifying the council's approach to area regeneration
- 3.6 WAO also make recommendations that may be relevant to the council in local government national reports. Although these have not been issued directly to the council, like the other proposals, the relevant recommendations from the national reports issued in 2014-15 that were included in the WAO Annual Improvement Report 2014-15, incorporating the Corporate Assessment Report 2015, have been included in this update to ensure that members are aware of issues which are relevant to Monmouthshire and understand the progress against them and any further action that is planned to address them. These reports relate to children and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET's), Environmental Health, Scrutiny, Welfare Reform Changes and Financial Resilience.
- 3.7 The proposals which were suggested as being "closed" in the last report to Audit Committee in 2014, due to the fact they have been addressed, have been removed from the report. The report also highlights further proposals which are suggested to be closed as the progress and evidence in the update is suggesting sufficient action has been taken to address them. Proposals which require further work are marked as "open". In a small number of instances, where actions in response to proposals are not under the sole discretion of the authority, proposals have been excluded from this set, for instance proposals around the Gwent Frailty project which is a joint venture across a number of authorities.
- 3.8 Some of the forward looking actions committed by the authority are likely to be reflected within other council strategic documents such as the council's Improvement Plan, the Whole Authority Strategic Risk Assessment and the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 3.9 WAO as part of their ongoing annual audit work programme may follow up progress in any of the open or recently closed proposal areas.

4. REASONS

To ensure the authority responds to the WAO proposals to secure the improvements required.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Finances and any other resource implications of activity related to the proposals will need to be taken into account by the relevant responsibility holders.

6. AUTHORS

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Subject area and evidence source

Information Management, Information Management Themed Review April 2012, Technology Themed review reported Oct 2011

WAO Proposal for improvement	Update the Information Strategy to ensure future information management plans accurately reflect the national and local context.	Status of Proposal	Close
WAO Proposal for improvement	Develop and implement an action plan for information to drive information issues forward within the organisation		

Current Position in October 2015

The council has an Information Strategy, policy and staff guidance. The strategy was last updated in February 2015. Mandatory Data Protection and Information Governance training is provided to all employees, and is incorporated into the induction program. Ongoing refresher training is provided along with targeted updates to all employees concerning the risks of data breaches, incorporating any national incidents e.g. of cyber-attack.

The Digital and Technology team have a Service Improvement Plan in place that sets their action plan for information issues.

Information is considered an essential 'tool to do the job' and the SharePoint (Council Intranet) site is increasingly being used as an Electronic Document Record Management System (EDRMS) and intranet site to make it easy for people to access, share, display and keep our data safe, which is essential within an agile organisation. Team sites are being developed within Sharepoint in order to share and disseminate information as appropriate.

We are improving the data display functionality of the intranet and web sites in order to simplify information for users using data dashboards and graphical displays.

Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
	Existing	Keep the Information Strategy under review.	Sian Hayward, Digital and Technology manager	ongoing
Existing	Data presentation and the development of the Intranet as an Electronic Document Record Management System will continue to be rolled over the next 2 years	Sian Hayward	April 2017	

WAO Proposal for improvement	Develop the governance role with the SRS.			Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	<p>Officers have now completed the SRS review, and it has been scrutinised by MCC's Economy and Development Select and Audit Committees. Member organisations now agree an annual commissioning document with the SRS, detailing the individual services to be bought in from the SRS.</p> <p>A strategy day has been held in order to develop the overall SRS strategy, with representation from all stakeholder organisations. The strategy has been scrutinised by the Economy and Development Select Committee, and is due to be approved by the SRS board in November 2015. Following on from approval will be the development of a business plan, aligned to the strategy and MCC's own strategic direction. A project to manage the cultural identity and implement the core service offer has been established within the SRS.</p> <p>In the recent Corporate Assessment WAO reported "The Council has an appropriate structure to oversee ICT delivery. Day-to-day operational matters are overseen by the ICT Business Change Team. The team consists of managers from SRS, business partners and Council directorates. The strategic purpose of the ICT Business Change Team is to help the Council, SRS and partners communicate, deliver, develop and join up their ICT systems in a timely manner whilst avoiding duplication." The review date for the SRS business continuity plan is January 2016, the constituent authorities are working with the SRS to further strengthen the business continuity planning arrangements within the SRS.</p>				
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	
	Existing	Work with the SRS Board to implement the findings of the review specifically around finance and the core service, governance and cultural identity. This has informed the Phoenix project which has been established to manage the SRS strategic direction, with particular emphasis on cultural identity.	Peter Davies, Head of Commercial and People Development	Ongoing from April 2014	
	Existing	Influence and negotiate with partners on improvements to ensure the future viability and legitimacy of the SRS.	Peter Davies	Ongoing from April 2014	
	Existing	Develop a comprehensive Capital Replacement Programme (CRP), and associated funding mechanisms for the CRP. The CRP has been established and funding mechanisms and processes are being sought going forward.	Peter Davies	Ongoing from April 2014	
	Existing	Establish a Service Level Agreement (SLA) built on the core service, unit cost, ROI and VFM through the review of the SRS.	Peter Davies	Ongoing from April 2014	
	New	Propose and process changes in senior officer representation on SRS Business Solutions Board and SRS Public Board.	Kellie Beirne Chief Officer, Enterprise & Peter Davies	December 2015	
	New	Develop the SRS business plan	Peter Davies	Ongoing from November 2015	

	New	Work with the SRS to further strengthen business continuity arrangements within the SRS.	Peter Davies	January 2016	
WAO Proposal for improvement	Develop a Monmouthshire Council Transformation strategy that builds upon the vision outlined in the “Digital Deal” framework through engagement and consultation with key service stakeholders and which is aligned with the national ICT Strategy.			Status of Proposal	Close
Current position in October 2015	<p>iCounty has been approved by Cabinet as our new digital strategy and the Digital Roadmap has three main areas of focus:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) internal systems, processes, data and infrastructure 2) community, economic, business and education dimensions 3) Opportunities for commercialisation. <p>It identifies MCC is the strategic decision maker on IT priorities and investment and that SRS is one delivery agent among other contractors and providers. This provides a clear direction for ICT in the county.</p> <p>The recent WAO report concluded “The Council has a strategy for the use of technology but this does not show the extent of planned improvement needed to demonstrate success. The Digital Strategy (iCounty) sets out the Council’s overall planned direction of travel for IT and digital technology, together with measurable outcomes. In order to demonstrate that the aims of the strategy have been achieved and to monitor progress, the Council needs to set specific targets for the delivery of these outcomes.” A revised programme plan is being produced that will outline the outcomes and targets against which performance and delivery will be measured.</p>				
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	
	New	Produce a revised programme plan outlining the outcomes and targets against which performance and delivery will be measured.	Sian Hayward, Digital and Technology manager	April 2016	
WAO Proposal for improvement	The Council and the SRS needs to work together to plan programmes to refresh and renew the ICT infrastructure so that they can be incorporated into the MTFP.			Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	<p>The Capital Replacement Programme (CRP) has been approved by the Digital Programme Board and funding mechanisms have been identified for annual investment in order to ensure the ICT infrastructure is maintained.</p> <p>The review of SRS and the opportunity to establish a core service, unit cost, Return On Investment (ROI) and value for money statement should also contribute to realise efficiencies and effectiveness of ICT in the MTFP.</p>				

Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	
	Existing	Continue to monitor the CRP to ensure the funding is sufficient to maintain the ICT infrastructure	Sian Hayward Digital and Technology manager	Ongoing	
WAO Proposal for improvement	The Council needs to routinely collect information relating to the usage and cost of transactions across the different access channels to establish a baseline and then regularly monitor the usage and cost and use this to inform decision making and prioritisation. The Council needs to proactively market the different access channels at every opportunity to encourage take-up of lower cost channels			Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	<p>The Council is developing a customer services strategy and will develop an overarching business plan alongside a programme plan to include both service re-design and digitisation of customer contact transactional channels. The programme will prioritise projects which maximise the financial and efficiency savings to be made from channel shift using the web site and other digital customer interfaces, including social media.</p> <p>The council has a budget mandate for 2016/17 identifying savings to be made from channel shift.</p>				
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	
	New	Develop a Customer Services Strategy and identify a programme manager	Will McLean, Head of Policy and Engagement	By the end of 2015/16	
	New	Create a business plan and programme plan	Will McLean	By the end of 2015/16	
	New	Implement the customer services strategy	Will McLean	Ongoing through to 2017	

Corporate performance and financial management

Subject area and evidence source

Performance Assessment December 2012, Annual Improvement Report 2012 and 2013, Local Authority Review of Governance' Improvement Study April 2013, Service Based Budget Review June 2013, Improvement Assessment Letter September 2013, Data Quality Review – November 2013, Financial Position Assessment – December 2014

WAO Proposal for improvement	Status of Proposal	Open
WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>Improve efficiency and value for money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying statutory and non-statutory requirements. • Determining the 'acceptable standards of performance' for each service. • Identifying and regularly collecting financial, performance and demand/need data • Analysing collected data to inform and understand the relationship between 'cost: performance: impact'. • Identify options for improving efficiency and maintaining performance to the agreed level. <p>The Council should further develop the reporting of financial information in conjunction with performance information.</p>	
Current position in October 2015	<p>The Council's partnership administration continuance agreement reaffirmed the Council's priorities of; education, the protection of vulnerable people and promoting enterprise and introduced maintaining locally accessible services as a fourth priority. The agreement set performance expectation in line with these resource priorities.</p> <p>Our Improvement Plan for 2015/17 reflects the performance expectations of the priorities in the partnership continuance agreement, resource pressures and mandated budget savings.</p> <p>Service Improvement Plans reflect performance expectations (targets) of individual service areas in consideration of agreed priorities, demands, resources and finance.</p> <p>Progress against existing mandated budget savings is assessed and reported to members at 4 time intervals throughout the year using a traffic light system to indicate whether savings are likely to be achieved or reasons explaining why the mandate is delayed and next steps. This not only focusses on financial performance but also accounts for operational, people and customer impacts of delivery.</p> <p>Quarterly financial reporting was supplemented with finance, performance and cost benchmarking information at month 6 & 9 of 2014/15. The developments so far help give members useful performance context when discussing budgets. Further integration has proved difficult as to develop performance indicators to match all relevant budget codes and make these available at each reporting period as part of quarterly budget monitoring would be overly resource intensive without adding sufficient value to justify the time required.</p> <p>In October 2015 Cabinet agreed a report setting out the budget proposals that have been developed for the MTFP particularly focused on the next year (2016/17) for budget consultation with Members, the public and community groups. The mandates that set out the proposals enables managers to reflect the option and their expected impact on financial, performance and demand/need. Work is continuing on the need to</p>	

address the longer term issue of a reducing resource base as part of the MTFP. This work has enabled proposals to be worked up for next year, whilst taking into account the medium term financial position. This approach has also been key to enabling a focus on aligning proposals with vision of sustainable and resilient communities and maintain core priorities, as identified within the Administration's Continuation Agreement 2015-17.

Heads of Service are challenged annually in a process that involves the Leader, Executive Members and Chief Executive. This involves a performance report that uses cost, finance, performance benchmarking and needs data from a range of sources and develops this into deeper knowledge and understanding to inform the challenge session.

	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
Actions	Existing	Continue to monitor budget savings for financial performance and operational, people and customer impacts of delivery.	Joy Robson - Head of Finance and Will Mclean – Head of Policy and Engagement	Quarterly
	Existing	Continue to strengthen the collection, analysis and evaluation of finance, performance/demand data, in particular as part of the mandated budget saving process.	Joy Robson - Head of Finance and Will Mclean – Head of Policy and Engagement	Ongoing

WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>Ensure approved savings targets are delivered by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addressing weaknesses in current budget monitoring information; • effectively scrutinising savings plans on an on-going basis; and • Challenging and holding services to account 	Status of Proposal	Open
WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>Monthly or bi-monthly monitoring and reporting of the Council's savings plans should be introduced.</p>		

Current position in October 2015	<p>Following a review, budget monitoring arrangements for 2014/15 have been revised to improve the timeliness and access to budget monitoring information quarterly for Cabinet and Select Committees.</p> <p>In January 2015 council agreed the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to set the 2015/16 budget. This includes £4.8million of specific saving initiatives identified for 2015/16. An assessment on the preparedness of services to deliver the 2015/16 budget mandates was completed in March 2015 to mitigate risks and maximise the levels of income or reductions in costs required to deliver approved savings. Monthly financial Monitoring with service manager and Accountants is in place</p>
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Further progress against savings is assessed at 4 time intervals throughout the year using a traffic light system to indicate whether savings are likely to be achieved or reasons explaining why the mandate is delayed and next steps. This not only focusses on financial performance but also accounts for operational, people and customer impacts of delivery.

Revised budget monitoring arrangements introduced in 2014/15 have continued in 2015/16, reporting budget information, including progress against savings, quarterly for Cabinet and Select Committees. The percentage of mandated savings in 2015/16 forecast to be delivered at month 6 is 83% (£3,969,983 of the £4,779,983 identified savings). £498,000 savings have been deemed unachievable at the end of month 6, and a further £312,000 unlikely to be realised in 2015-16.

Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
	Existing	Continue to implement strengthened budget monitoring and challenge processes on financial performance.	Joy Robson, Head of Finance and Will McLean – Head of Policy and Engagement	March 2016 and Ongoing

WAO Proposal for improvement	The Council will need to consider whether it is being unnecessarily pessimistic or overly prudent in its budget monitoring projections or whether it is not correctly capturing complete information in order for it to make a robust estimate of the year-end position.	Status of Proposal	Close
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Officers are continuing to ensure that all relevant information is taken into account in monitoring the budget and forecasting the year end position. The budget monitoring report itself provides a catalyst for identifying if further action on the budget is needed. For example the month 6 report has led to the need for a recovery plan and so the forecast at month 9 will incorporate the effect of this. Forecasts during the year will therefore change in response to the position reported.

Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
	Existing	Continue quarterly budget monitoring and ensure that all relevant information is taken into account	Senior Leadership Team	On going

WAO Proposal for improvement	The 2014-15 savings plan should be revised to remove the double-counted savings and also reviewed to ensure that no similar errors exist.			Status of Proposal	Close
WAO Proposal for improvement	The budget-efficiency targets regarding the challenging income and expenditure inflation assumptions should be treated as a saving target and monitored accordingly.				
Current position in October 2015	<p>In the 2014/15 budget, once the budget was set, budget managers were required to manage within the budgets established. This means that if errors are highlighted afterwards, alternative savings had to be achieved to correct the budget. In 2014/15 the overall budget position for the council was an overall surplus of £31,000.</p> <p>In 2015/16 Budget holders continue to be expected to manage their budgets within the amounts that are provided, including the assumptions made around inflation etc. This is monitored through the normal budget monitoring process.</p>				
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	
	Existing	Continue quarterly budget monitoring and ensure that all relevant information is taken into account	Senior Leadership Team	On going	
WAO Proposal for improvement	The Council should introduce an Income Generation Strategy.			Status of Proposal	Close
Current position in October 2015	<p>An Income Generation Strategy has been developed and was approved by Cabinet in October 2015. This provides strategy to explore in a more comprehensive way the opportunities to secure new and additional resources and to sustain current income flows, over and above the level of financial allocation or 'settlement' received by the Council. Services are going to use the ideas listed in the appendix to the strategy to explore if there is any scope to increase income for the future years in the MTFP. For 2016/17 an above inflation increase is being proposed on discretionary fees and charges, based on previous feedback from public engagement that this is preferable to cutting services.</p>				
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	
	New	Use the ideas listed in the appendix to the income generation strategy to explore if there is any scope to increase income for the future years in the MTFP.	Relevant Service managers	2017/18 budget setting process	
WAO Proposal for improvement	Benchmarking should be undertaken with other local authorities in relation to fees and charges.			Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	<p>Welsh Treasurers have set up a group to look at this issue for all authorities in Wales.</p>				
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	

	Existing	Work with the Welsh Treasurers group looking at benchmarking.	Joy Robson, Head of Finance	On going
WAO Proposal for improvement	Establish clear comprehensive measures of success for all improvement objectives that enable effective monitoring of progress and performance through regular, clear reporting of outcomes.		Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	<p>The structure of the Council's Stage 1 Improvement Plan for 2015/17 has been revised providing clearer links between the activity in the plan and measures of success to monitor progress, performance and impact against the objective. The Improvement Plan 2015/17 reflects the performance expectations of the priorities in the partnership continuance agreement, resource pressures and mandated budget savings.</p> <p>Each action area has clearly defined timescales and milestone/measure attached. The measures included provided two years' worth of trend performance and set a target quantifying the expected impact of performance. This enables the Improvement Objectives to be scored based on the Council's Self-evaluation framework, which was further developed in the Improvement Plan 2015/17 to set defined criteria for each scoring level (Level 1 – Unsatisfactory to Level 6 – Excellent)</p> <p>The WAO Annual Improvement report identified the "Council responded positively to our feedback on its 2014-17 Improvement Plan and sought to address our comments when compiling the 2015- 17 Improvement Plan. A review of the draft Improvement Plan for 2015-17 identifies improvements in target setting and improved links between actions and measures." As part of the more detailed feedback of the audit there remain areas for improvement.</p>			
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
	Existing	Continue identify and adopt quality and robust metrics that measure what matters.	Will McLean - Head of Policy and Engagement	ongoing
WAO Proposal for improvement	Improve self-assessment arrangements, performance reporting and accessibility of performance information to citizens and stakeholders		Status of Proposal	Closed
WAO Proposal for improvement	Maximise accessibility to citizens and stakeholders on the Council's performance assessment			
Current position in October 2015	The Council's main assessment of performance is in its Stage 2 Improvement Plan. In the assessment of performance for 2014-15, published in October 2015, Improvement Objectives were evaluated and scored based on the Council's Self-evaluation framework, which was further developed in the Improvement Plan 2015/17 to set defined criteria for each scoring level (Level 1 – Unsatisfactory to Level 6 – Excellent). This provides a clear overview of the Council's performance.			

The Improvement Plan 2015 and public summaries of the plan were published on the Council’s website, all social media channels and printed summaries available in Community Hubs across the county. The Improvement Plan has been prepared with a focus to ensure jargon is removed and clear explanations of the structure of the report and why information is included and presented in such a way.

Further use of tools such as infographics is being made to share bite-sized performance data with citizens using social media. This includes:

- Use of infographics and performance videos that are available on screens in some of the Council’s public buildings.
- The production of infographic posters on performance and finance of the Council to inform public engagement events and roadshows held on the 2015/16 budget process.

The National Survey for Wales has revealed there has been a decrease in the percentage of people who agree the local authority is good at letting them know how we are performing to 39% which places Monmouthshire as 9th amongst local authorities. Despite this decrease a significant amount of work has been undertaken to improve accessibility of performance information to Citizens.

Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
	New	Increase the amount of data that can be easily accessed on the council’s website to ensure public accountability	Will Mclean Head of Policy and Engagement	June 2016

WAO Proposal for improvement	Improve the quality of performance data validation within service areas:	Status of Proposal	Open
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Current position in October 2015	<p>Data quality audits, undertaken by Internal Audit on nationally set and published Performance Indicators and locally set and published Indicators in 2014/15 have both been given a draft control rating of “Good”. Within this there remain recommendations from the internal audit reports that require further attention, while these are not materially significant to the output of the data published they need to be addressed to ensure ongoing robustness of process and supporting evidence to meet Internal and External audit requirements.</p> <p>In January 2015 Wales Audit Office undertook a data quality review of a small sample of published PIs for 2013/14 these identified issues with some indicators, particularly with data systems underpinning a couple of newly developed Local Performance indicators.</p> <p>The process for data quality continues to be strengthened. Two guidance notes on completing national and local performance indicators respectively, including internal audit briefs, are produced setting clear requirements for data compilers with continued support from the Policy and Performance team to strengthen arrangements. It is recognised that there is a particular risk to data quality when developing performance data measures for new policies or initiatives that may not have been subject to data quality processes previously. These areas will be particularly targeted for policy and performance team support</p>
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	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
Actions	Existing	Target Policy and Performance team support on new or developing performance indicators.	Will McLean - Head of Policy and Engagement	Ongoing
	Existing	Allocate Internal Audit time appropriately to focus on the data systems underpinning data as well as the accuracy of the outputs of the data.	Will McLean - Head of Policy and Engagement	June 2016
WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>Improve controls over changes to service target intervention levels:</p> <p>Strengthen arrangements to set, manage and report changes to the targets set for all measures used to evaluate performance.</p>		Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	<p>Service targets are set in service plans and subject to challenge by Department Management Teams and the Policy and Performance team.</p> <p>A consistent system to maintain an audit trail and rationale for performance targets has been established through the development of a performance management system for the Council, the “data hub” hosted on the Council’s intranet site.</p> <p>An audit of targets was undertaken in November 2014, Changes to targets were scrutinised by Select Committee and approved by Cabinet in November and December 2014. This provided Members with a clear rationale for any changes, the opportunity to challenge and ensure suitable approval for changes.</p> <p>All approved targets were subsequently used to evaluate the Council’s performance in the Stage 2 Improvement Plan 2015. There were identified errors in subsequent reporting of some targets in the Cabinet dashboard at quarter 3 2014/15, where some revised targets had not been amended in the report, which was also identified in the WAO Annual improvement report .This highlights the need to continue to ensure changes to targets are checked and processes to update data are robust before reporting on the council’s performance management system.</p>			
	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
Actions	Existing	Continuing to quality assure the Council’s performance management database to ensure target changes are captured and an audit trail of changes maintained.	Will McLean - Head of Policy and Engagement	Ongoing
	Existing	Continue to strengthen target setting procedures based on available information and data (this should reduce the need for changes)	Will McLean	Ongoing

WAO Proposal for improvement	Undertake greater challenge of the Annual Governance Statement content by SLT/Members to ensure that the statement is consistent with their knowledge of wider issues affecting the Council and to ensure the AGS is 'Council owned'			Status of Proposal	Close
Current position in October 2015	<p>A working group has been set up, including members of Senior Leadership Team, to review the effectiveness of the Code of Corporate Governance and the Annual Governance Statement. The revised Code of Corporate Governance, which supports the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) in setting out how Monmouthshire demonstrates it has appropriate governance arrangements in place and how they are continually reviewed to strengthen them moving forward, was approved by Cabinet in July 2011.</p> <p>The draft Annual Governance Statement is now routinely taken to the established working group, SLT and Audit Committee. This ensures wider input of information in its development and strengthened awareness of sound corporate governance across the Council. This includes an action plan to strengthen areas of governance identified as needing improvement.</p> <p>The Annual Governance Statement for the year ending 31st March 2015 was agreed by Council and the Audit Committee as part of the annual accounts in September 2015.</p> <p>The Statement demonstrates that Monmouthshire has governance arrangements in place to meet the challenges of the governance principles and that a review has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of those arrangements. We have demonstrated that in most areas we have effective governance arrangements in place which are continually improving, but also recognise that there is further work to do. The main areas of concern identified by the Council are identified and an action plan to address known gaps has been established</p>				
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales	
	Existing	To continue the working group on corporate governance in order to maintain a wider ownership of corporate governance and ensue implementation of actions as part of the annual update of the Statement	Andrew Wathan, Chief Internal Auditor	September 2016	

Subject area and evidence source		Collaborative working		
		Corporate Assessment August 2011, Annual Improvement Reports 2012 and 2013, Gwent Frailty Study 2012, WAO study on Collaboration January 2014, Gwent Frailty Study November 2012		
WAO Proposal for improvement	Gwent Frailty <i>Gwent Frailty is collaborative work is not under the single leadership and management of Monmouthshire, but is a collaborative arrangement hosted by Caerphilly CBC.</i>		Status of Proposal	n/a
Current position in October 2015	The most recent study of Gwent Frailty was conducted by consultants Cordis Bright rather than by Wales Audit Office. It is not covered in this overview			
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales

Subject area and evidence source		Area regeneration		
		Review of Whole Place Area Regeneration (May 2014)		
WAO Proposal for improvement	Clarify the council approach to area regeneration by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing and agreeing the aims of Whole Place, what the programme consists of and plans for the future. Establishing and agreeing the role and aims of area plans as part of the overall Whole Place approach. Simplifying and agreeing terminology used to describe Whole Place. Outlining roles and responsibility in some detail, to include lead officers, select committees, area managers, town teams and corporate performance and improvement teams. Reviewing governance arrangements and clarifying and agreeing the relationship between Programme Boards and Area Committees if they are to continue. Communicating the approach so that there is a common understanding amongst all Council staff, members and local people. 		Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	A Whole Place Strategy has been implemented that provides a simple framework to guide how the council will invest in communities in order to enable them to build their own resourcefulness. The strategy sets out the key purpose; core principles and potential benefits to the Council and local communities of whole place.			

A community governance review has been completed by an independent consultant and Cabinet have agreed the format. A members seminar is being held in November 2015 for members to better understand and agree some of the recommendations before the Community Governance review goes to Full Council to adopt and implement. The Community Governance review will help clarify structures and align process and delivery frameworks to support community governance.

Community groups are being given presentations as and when they are engaged with about what “Whole Place means”. The Whole Place Team is visiting officer department meetings and all political groups to tell the “Whole Place” story and are asking how they think they can be involved.

Programme board membership is being reviewed along with the whole place plans to ensure the membership has the right skills to oversee the plans.

	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
Actions	Existing	Complete the review of community governance	Debbie McCarty Whole Place Manager	Full Council – November 2016
	Existing	Complete the review of programme board memberships	Debbie McCarty Whole Place Manager	April 2016

WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>Build on the new momentum that exists by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing and evaluating progress to date on whole place, identifying and addressing barriers to progress. • Clarifying leadership and management arrangements for Whole Place, including detailed roles and responsibilities. • Developing clear and agreed arrangements for the future of the programme in the two pilot areas and the remainder of the Borough if the approach is to be rolled out. 	Status of Proposal	Open
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Current position in October 2015	<p>An evaluation of Whole Place has been completed in February 2015 appraising the progress to date, including progress against Wales Audit Office proposals. The evaluation identifies the areas where value has been added and also where lessons have been learnt. The next steps in rolling out the Whole Place approach will need to take account of the findings of the evaluation.</p> <p>Existing plans in Bryn Y Cwm and Severnside are being reviewed in Autumn/Winter 2015.</p> <p>A new Whole Place team was established in April 2015 which includes a manager and 3 whole place officers with clear roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>A Whole Place Strategy has been implemented that provides a simple framework to guide how the council will invest in communities in order to enable them to build their own resourcefulness. The strategy sets out the key purpose; core principles and potential benefits to the Council and local communities of whole place that will guide the approach when it is decided to develop plans for Lower Wye and Central Monmouthshire.</p>
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	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
Actions	Existing	Complete the evaluation of whole place plans in Bryn Y Cwm and Severnside	Debbie McCarty Whole Place Manager	April 2016
	Existing	Roll out plans for Lower Wye guided by the strategy and informed by the evaluation	Debbie McCarty Whole Place Manager	Lower Wye -September 2016
	Existing	Continue to evaluate the delivery programme	Debbie McCarty Whole Place Manager	Sept 2015 ongoing
WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>Put mechanisms in place to assess the added value that the Council is getting from Whole Place by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing measures of success for the Whole Place approach and two area plans that include broad outcomes, added value and community wellbeing. • Improving programme management arrangements, to include performance, project progress, finances and risk. • Developing an approach to systematic review and evaluation to inform the future of the programme. 		Status of Proposal	Open
Current position in October 2015	<p>Measuring the impact of an approach such as Whole Place which is about delivering long-term sustainable change across communities is difficult and we continue to look at good practice to shape how we do this.</p> <p>An evaluation of Whole Place has been completed in February 2015 appraising the progress to date, including progress against Wales Audit Office proposals. The evaluation identifies the areas where value has been added and also where lessons have been learnt. The next steps in rolling out the Whole Place approach will need to take account of the findings of the evaluation</p> <p>Existing Whole place plans in Bryn Y Cwm and Severnside are being reviewed in Autumn/Winter 2015. Part of the review process involves a questionnaire to understand whether the plan is still relevant and ensure the right performance indicators are being used to measure outcomes, rather than implementing broad performance indicators that aren't relevant.</p> <p>The newly established Whole Place team have set up a business plan setting their role in implementing, managing and evaluating the Whole Place approach. This recognises the added value is to the community and by assisting the community in becoming resilient and sustainable it will reduce the demands on the council.</p> <p>As part of the roll out in Lower Wye we are establishing a baseline set of performance indicators that can be realistically measured and are relevant to the people and the place. Alongside this we will be review existing dataset internally and externally that can help measure soft outcomes (broad outcomes, added value and community wellbeing) of whole place.</p>			

	Programme board membership is being reviewed along with the whole place plans to ensure the membership has the right skills to oversee the plans.			
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
	Existing	Complete the evaluation of whole place plans in Bryn Y Cwm and Severnside	Debbie McCarty Whole Place Manager	April 2016
	Existing	Complete the review of programme board memberships	Debbie McCarty Whole Place Manager	April 2016

WAO National Study	Good Scrutiny? Good Question! – May 2014
WAO Proposal for improvement	R1 Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R5 Ensure that external review bodies take account of scrutiny work programmes and the outputs of scrutiny activity, where appropriate, in planning and delivering their work.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R6 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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R7 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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R8 Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement
WAO Proposal for improvement	R9 Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders.
Current position in October 2015	The Scrutiny function in Monmouthshire strives to continuously improve its' service offer: Feedback from Members, officers, partners and inspectors informs how effective the service is and whether it is progressing in the right direction. The service self-evaluates annually using the 'Characteristics of Good Scrutiny' as a benchmark (R7) and the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Group is the forum where robust self-reflection takes place. The most recent self-evaluation preceded the Council's recent Corporate Assessment, through which, it was clear that the function had implemented the recommendations of the WAO Scrutiny Study (as above).

The Scrutiny Chairs undertake pre-meetings and sum-up actions, making recommendations to the Cabinet via Chairs Letters (R6). The scrutiny function has a 'Scrutiny and Executive Protocol' in place (R1) which ensures absolute clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities for Cabinet Members and Senior Officers in relation to scrutiny. The Scrutiny Manager delivers a comprehensive rolling Scrutiny Development Programme for Members, including Performance Management, Schools Financial Management, Financial Scrutiny, Scrutiny Challenge and Raising the Bar in Scrutiny (R2). The Council applies Participation Cymru's Principles for Public Engagement corporately and the Select Committees engage frequently with the public through their work, enabling public speaking at Select Committee meetings (R9). The Scrutiny Handbook is a guide for Members, officers and the public on the role and value of scrutiny and the website www.monmouthshire.gov/scrutiny displays the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme and invites public submissions.

Members lead and own the scrutiny process and the Cabinet and Council planner is emailed weekly to Members to ensure maximum opportunity for early engagement with scrutiny (R3). Select Committees liaise directly with regulators to programme inspection work into the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme (R4). Any relevant scrutiny reports are emailed to external bodies, who are requested to respond to Scrutiny's recommendations and attend Scrutiny Meetings if appropriate ~ effective working relationships with external bodies such as Aneurin Bevan Health Board have developed through direct engagement via the scrutiny process (R5).

The scrutiny function has a 'Scrutiny Service Improvement Plan' which is the 'Monmouthshire Scrutiny Action Plan' produced in response to the WAO Scrutiny Study's recommendations. The plan is built into the Council's improvement framework and is updated quarterly, being challenged by the Council's Policy and Performance team and the Head of Democratic Services. The plan is also scrutinised by the Council's Audit Committee annually to ensure they are satisfied that the Council has appropriate and effective scrutiny arrangements in place (R8).

	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
Mitigating Actions	Existing	Self-evaluation of Scrutiny applying the 'Characteristics of Good Scrutiny'.	Scrutiny Manager and the Scrutiny Chairs Liaison Group	April 2016
	Existing	Table the Quarter 2 Service Improvement Plan (WAO Action Plan) to the Council's Audit Committee	Scrutiny Manager	December 2015/January 2016

WAO National Study	Young people not in education, employment or training - Findings from a review of councils in Wales – July 2014
WAO Proposal for improvement	R1 Together with partners, map and review expenditure on NEETs services to better understand the resources required to deliver the Framework
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
Current position in October 2015	<p>Monmouthshire County Council Youth Service took the lead in the implementation of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework in January 2014, and with schools, careers wales and other providers completed the local plan for approval by Welsh Government for March 2014. A mapping exercise of current provision of NEETs was undertaken involving all post16 providers in Monmouthshire. This was also a requirement of Welsh Government under the framework. We have not mapped and reviewed expenditure, we have looked at what the gaps are in provision and how can these be met by existing or future services and provision.</p> <p>The NEETs strategy 2015-18 was developed and was approved by cabinet in October 2015. This sets the Council strategy and action plan to reduce NEETs for 11-25 year olds with the aspiration of creating a NEET free County. This predominately focusses on provision up to 18 year olds. The NEET strategy is reported quarterly to the local service board performance group. The strategy's action plan contributes towards Monmouthshire Single Integrated Plan Outcome 3 (Good Access and Mobility) and Outcome 8 (Access to practical and flexible learning). The strategy was developed by the 14 -19 Curriculum Group and Post 16 steering group, addressing local need and priorities. Working with post 16 providers in the statutory, voluntary and third sector, over the last 2 years has contributed towards the reduction in the number of young people 19 -24 years who are NEET. For example, employability programmes such as the Way into Work during 2012 -2014 through the DWP Flexible Support Fund. The NEET figure for 19 -24 years (JSA and ESA claimants) continues to be monitored through the Post 16 Steering group.</p> <p>The current provision for young people with significant or multiple barriers (young people in Tier 2 of the Welsh Government 5 Tier Mode) is limited in Monmouthshire. Local partnerships have identified the need for further provision and investment to enable a positive impact in engaging and sustaining tier 2 young people in education, employment and training.</p>

With the European Structural Fund programmes Inspire 2 Achieve (working with young people 11-24 years most at risk of becoming NEET) and Inspire 2 Work (working with young people 16 -24 years who are NEET) starting in January 2016. Inspire 2 Work will work with young people with multiple barriers offering a bespoke package of support and intervention to enable progression into education, employment or training. Offering qualifications, work taster sessions, confidence building, communication and ICT skills etc.

Whilst the good work achieved in Monmouthshire schools to date in identifying and preventing disengagement at all stages of their education is acknowledged, the NEET strategy builds on schools' contribution and works towards an early identification system, a suitable curriculum and learning pathway to support skills development and qualifications. The Local Authority Early Identification system identifies young people in Key Stage 3, 4 and 5 most at risk of becoming NEET, key indicators are attendance, attainment and behaviour. Meetings are held with schools to review interventions and support currently in place for those most at risk and identify further interventions if appropriate.

Schools, Education Welfare Service, Pupil Referral Service, Youth Service and Careers Wales with the LA will work together with a single goal: to support and improve outcomes for young people at risk of becoming NEET or who are NEET. This model has reduced Monmouthshire NEET figures from 3.8 % in 2012 (LA target 3.8%) to 1.7 % in 2014 (LA target 3.3%).

The draft NEET strategy was presented to the Children and Young People (CYP) Select Committee for scrutiny in September 2015. This was approved by CYP select and taken to cabinet and approved in October 2015. CYP select requested six monthly updates on progress on the strategy action plan. Both CYP select and cabinet demonstrated clear knowledge and commitment towards the role of the youth service in leading and co-ordinating services for young people 16 – 24 years at risk of becoming NEET or who are actually NEET.

The European Structural Fund (ESF) programmes Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work were also presented at CYP select in September 2015. Positive feedback from members was received, once the programmes have gone live members requested regular updates on progress and achievements.

The NEET strategy will be monitored by the Post 16 Steering Group and 14 -19 curriculum group on a quarterly basis ensuring resources are used effectively. This then will be reported to the Children and Young People Departmental Management Team and Local Service Board. The same reporting flow has been put in place for Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work programmes.

	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
Actions	Existing	Monitor effectiveness of Local Authority Early Identification System for KS3, 4 and 5	Youth Service	July 2016
	Existing	Review and evaluate NEET Strategy	Post 16 Steering group and 14 -19 Curriculum Group	October 2016
	New	Implementation of ESF programmes – Inspire 2 Achieve and Inspire 2 Work	Youth Service, PRS Mounton House, Careers Wales, Enterprise and Melin Homes	March 2016

	New	Monitor the Inspire 2 Work programme to evaluate if it is meeting the needs of young people with multiple barriers and has a positive impact	Inspire 2 Work provision group	January 2017
	New	Monitor the Inspire 2 Achieve programme to evaluate if it is reducing the risk of young people becoming NEET.	Inspire 2 Achieve provision group	January 2017

WAO National Study	Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens – October 2014			
WAO Proposal for improvement	R1 Revise the best practice standards to: <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. 			
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.			
WAO Proposal for improvement	R3 Improve engagement with local residents over planned budget cuts and changes in services by: <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. 			
WAO Proposal for improvement	R4 Improve efficiency and value for money by: <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. 			
WAO Proposal for improvement	R5 Improve strategic planning by: <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. 			

WAO Proposal for improvement	R6 Clearly set out the expectations of the council environmental health services under new housing and health legislation and agree on how these duties will be delivered.			
Current position in October 2015	<p>The Best Practice Standards were developed through the Wales Heads of Environmental Health Group, with representation from all local authorities. Through the Council's representation on the group we will contribute to any revision and realignment of the standards, this will incorporate work on Upper/lower standards. As described under the "Good Scrutiny? Good Question!" national report the Scrutiny Manager delivers a comprehensive rolling Scrutiny Development Programme for Members, including Performance Management, Schools Financial Management, Financial Scrutiny, Scrutiny Challenge and Raising the Bar in Scrutiny.</p> <p>Budget proposals that have been developed are being consulted on with members, the public and community groups as part of the Monmouthshire Engages Budget 2016/17 sessions to outline the severity of funding reductions and seek views on the ideas.</p> <p>Environmental Health are almost exclusively delivering statutory duties, while working to encourage others to deliver non-statutory service for example dog fouling support via Town & Community Councils. The service continues to look at discretionary fees and charges and options for income generation, for example charging for supplementary advisory food safety visits.</p> <p>Environmental Health collect and utilise a range of performance data, this includes; established Business plans as part of the Council's service improvement planning process, this reflects performance expectations of the service in consideration of agreed priorities, demands, resources and finance. Six monthly reporting to Strong Communities Select Committee on Public Protection services to review performance across this Division, noting budget reductions implemented since April 2014. This provides a range of comparative data over time. To supplement this future performance reports will include case studies to fully understand performance achieved. The latest report in November 2015 shows reactive work is generally maintaining performance but there has been some detriment to proactive work.</p> <p>New legislation expectations have been discussed in All Wales forums, including feedback to the Welsh Government on funding requirements.</p>			
Actions	New or Existing	Action	Action Holders	Timescales
	Existing	Contribute to revision and realignment of Best Practice Standards	Gill Dicken, Principal Environmental Health Officer.	Ongoing
	Existing	Capture Case studies to further evidence the service performance	David Jones, Head of Community Protection	Ongoing

WAO National Study	Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales – January 2015
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R2 Improve governance and accountability for welfare reform by: <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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R3 Ensure effective management of performance on welfare reform by: <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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R5 Improve engagement with tenants affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy through: <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.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R7 Improve management, access to and use of Discretionary Housing Payments by: <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 councils 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.
Current position in October 2015	Welfare reform changes is an important part of our shared benefits service, work is also undertaken with partners as part of our partnership forums. A fuller position update will be provided when the WAO Annual Improvement Report 2014-15 is presented to Cabinet and subsequently Audit Committee in January 2016.

WAO National Study	The financial resilience of councils in Wales – April 2015
WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>R1 Councils should ensure that their corporate plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is the core driver for the service plans and other supporting strategies including workforce, information technology and capital expenditure; • maintains at least a three to five-year forward view and is aligned with the medium term financial plan and other supporting strategies; and • should clearly articulate the desired role of the council in five years – the model for delivering priority services and the infrastructure and resources needed to deliver future priorities within available finances.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R2 Councils should ensure that their medium term financial plans identify the major financial risks and key assumptions, and senior officers and councillors should subject them to effective scrutiny and challenge before adopting the plan.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R3 Councils need to ensure that funding deficits are accurately projected and fully reconciled to detailed savings plans for each year over the life of the medium term financial plan.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R4 Councils should regularly review the adequacy of the financial assurance arrangements that underpin the delivery of annual savings plans, including the level of scrutiny and challenge provided by councillors.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R5 Councils should ensure that they have a comprehensive reserves strategy that outlines the specific purpose of accumulated useable reserves as part of their Medium Term Financial Plan.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R6 Councils should develop corporate wide policies on income generation.
WAO Proposal for improvement	<p>R7 Councils should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthen budget setting and monitoring arrangements to ensure financial resilience; and • review the coverage and effectiveness of their internal and external assurance financial systems and controls to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide early warning of weaknesses in key systems.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R8 Councils must review their finance teams and ensure that they have sufficient capacity and the right skills to meet future demands.
WAO Proposal for improvement	R9 Council officers need to equip councillors with the knowledge and skills they need to deliver effective governance and challenge by extending training opportunities and producing high quality management information.
Current position in October 2015	<p>The Council was subject to a specific “Financial Position Assessment” in 2014 which led to specific proposals that were issued to the Council, The current position of the Council in addressing these is included in the Finance and performance section of the proposals update. The proposals from the national report are provided here to provide members with an awareness of the wider proposals arising from the work across Wales.</p>