

<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>Progress Report: Audit Wales Proposals for Improvement</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>Governance and Audit Committee</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>29<sup>th</sup> July 2021</b>
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>All</b>

## **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an update on the authority's progress against Audit Wales proposals for improvement up to July 2021 so that the committee can assure itself of the effectiveness of the authority's response to proposals.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That members consider the current position of proposals and future actions being taken to address them, seeking assurance that adequate progress is being made.
- 2.2 That members refer on any issues contained within Audit Wales national studies to other committees for consideration where they identify there are findings of particular relevance to the council.

## **3. KEY ISSUES**

- 3.1 Previously, Audit Wales has undertaken a Performance Audit work programme with the council, which identified areas that were deemed as requiring improvement, and issued proposals for improvement, which the Council were expected to act upon. Since the implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Audit Wales is responsible for:
- Auditing of accounts
  - Examining how public bodies manage and spend public money, including but not limited to their arrangements for securing value for money in the use of resources and making recommendations to improve the value for money of local government
  - Assessing the extent to which councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
  - Carrying out 'Special Inspections' as provided for in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021
  - Making appropriate recommendations to councils and to the Welsh Ministers.
- 3.2 The Coronavirus pandemic has had a considerable impact on services as many were reduced or stopped completely to comply with Government guidelines, or to allow resource deployment to front line services. As such, some proposals contained within appendix 1 will have seen a delay and progress will not be at the expected stage. In April 2020, the Auditor General for Wales wrote to Monmouthshire County Council to outline changes to the way auditors would be conducting their duties over the following months. Auditors have been working closely with audited bodies to support them to improve their evolving responses to COVID-19 and to undertake work providing real-time capture and sharing of learning and experience across all audited bodies. This has resulted in a change to the usual reporting format, moving away from formal proposals for improvement, and developing narrative reports, that identify novel and other practice as it emerges, with rapid analysis to draw out relevant points of learning.
- 3.3 This report builds on the most recent update provided in September 2019, a longer gap that usual as a result of the pandemic. Proposals that require further attention are marked as 'open', and some proposals have been combined where the issues covered and/or the

action the council is taking to respond to them are strongly linked. These can be found in appendix 1. Where progress and evidence for a proposal suggests it has been adequately addressed, the proposal has been 'closed' and removed from the report. An overview of these is provided in appendix 2. Some of the forward looking actions committed to by the authority are likely to be reflected within other council strategic documents such as the Council's Corporate Plan, enabling strategies, the Whole Authority Strategic Risk Assessment and the Medium Term Financial Plan.

- 3.4 Existing proposals are captured in the following format:
- The report within which the proposal was made
  - The specific proposal, or more than one proposal if they are closely linked.
  - The progress made up to July 2021 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 if it remains open.

More recent reviews identify an outline of the review, a summary of findings from Audit Wales, and any further actions identified in response to the review.

- 3.5 The specific Audit Wales reports, and accompanying management responses, are also presented to Governance and Audit Committee as they are produced. More recent reports produced will have limited progress to report at this stage. All of the recent reports issued by Audit Wales, as part of their performance audit work programme, including the council's initial management response, are available on the Performance Management section of the Hub (the council's intranet site) for members to view.

- 3.6 Audit Wales also produce an Annual Improvement Report (AIR) summarising the work undertaken in the council during that year and concluding on the council's prospects for improvement. This report was superseded by the Annual Audit Summary 2020, which shows the work completed since the last Annual Improvement Report issued in June 2019. The audit summary, published in December 2020, concluded:

*"The Auditor General certified that the Council has met its legal duties for improvement planning and reporting, and believes that it is likely to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 during 2020-21."*

- 3.7 In addition to the work programme, Audit Wales also make recommendations in local government national reports. Although these have not been issued directly to the council, like the other proposals, the recommendations from the national reports could be relevant to the council's services. The reports are published on [www.audit.wales/publications](http://www.audit.wales/publications); a list of the recently published reports and a brief overview is provided in appendix 3. These were circulated to the responsible officer(s) when they were published. Governance and Audit Committee has a role in ensuring the council considers the findings of the reports and can refer them to another scrutiny committee if they feel the reports require further consideration. The committee may also refer issues to Democratic Services Committee who are able to perform a coordinating function.

- 3.8 Audit Wales, 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 appropriately to Audit Wales proposals and recommendations to secure the improvements required.

#### **5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

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

**6. AUTHORS**

Emma Davies, Performance Officer

E-mail: [emmadavies@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:emmadavies@monmouthshire.gov.uk)

Telephone: 07989 692782

Richard Jones, Performance Manager

E-mail: [richardjones@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:richardjones@monmouthshire.gov.uk)

Telephone: 01633 740733

## Appendix 1

### Open Wales Audit Office Proposals for Improvement

#### Finance Proposals

Report	Financial Sustainability Assessment – June 2021		
Audit Wales Proposal	To ensure its Medium Term Financial Plan predicts future funding requirements as accurately as possible, the Council should regularly review its future cost pressure estimates to ensure they are reasonable and reflect recent levels of cost pressures.	Status	Open
	To bridge its estimated future funding gap and contribute to strengthening its financial sustainability, the Council should develop and deliver a programme of sustainable planned savings over the medium-term.		
What progress have we made	<p>The medium term prognosis is still of concern, there are no indicative settlement figures published and which significantly impedes and impacts on forward planning of budgets over the medium term. At this stage and with uncertainties remaining as to future levels of local government funding the MTFP for 2022/23 onwards factors in no cash increase in funding (0.0%), so that planning can be undertaken on a prudent basis.</p> <p>The consequence of this is that it applies a greater focus on the Council’s core service delivery and where cost pressures can be mitigated and sustainable planned savings can be made to aid the projected medium term budget deficit. The Council successfully identified and accommodated into the 2021/22 budget the ongoing and significant financial, demographic and demand-led pressures. This alongside its commitments to deliver the goals and objectives set out in its Corporate Plan. The work carried out to identify these realistic cost pressure will, alongside in year monitoring of budgets, inform the medium term financial plan. It is however noticeable that there are commonly a limited number of pressures identified for years 2 to 4 of the MTFP against service directorates, noting that it is common for them to be recognised closer to the year in question and through the budget process. This needs to be borne in mind when considering the remaining gap in the MTFP. Provision of £5m is however made in the MTFP, for modelling purposes, for “unidentified pressures” in each of the remaining years of the MTFP based on the level of pressures that have historically presented themselves and been accommodated as part of the budget process. However, most recent years have seen a level of net pressures needing to be accommodated in excess of £5m and this will need to be reflected upon moving forward.</p> <p>After several years of taking significant resource out of the budget the means of achieving further savings becomes increasingly more challenging. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic and where officer time has had to be diverted to the emergency response and ensuring vital services are delivered. Despite this, the budget proposals for 2021/22 included savings of £4.734m. All proposals were considered and tested through an initial process of independent challenge by officers and Cabinet Members.</p> <p>We have had to fundamentally review our income budgets as a consequence of the pandemic. It is never popular to charge for services but the reality is that we need to do so. However, we have limited any increases in charges as much as possible. Likewise increasing Council Tax is never</p>		

	popular but with national funding not keeping pace with demands on local authorities, local taxation is by default having to shoulder a greater proportion of our overall funding.			
	<b>Desired Result</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Further action planned	A Medium term financial plan which reflects realistic and accurate funding requirements as to allow a structured and planned approach to service delivery in the medium term in line with Corporate priorities.	Ensure the Medium Term Financial Plan reflects realistic future cost pressures as accurately as possible based on known information and informed by up to date and accurate service based data.	Chief Officer Resources	March 2022
	In parallel with the above, to develop and deliver a programme of sustainable planned savings over the medium-term to allow a balanced budget to be set that delivers on agreed Corporate priorities.	A robust and detailed review of planned savings brought forward that ensure that the impact on service delivery is mitigated where possible and that contributes to an overall sustainable budget position in the medium term.	Chief Officer Resources	March 2022

#### Asset Management proposals

<b>Report</b>	Audit Wales review of Asset Management – November 2017			
Audit Wales Proposal	<p>The Council's asset management arrangements could be strengthened by:          Developing and delivering a long-term sustainable strategy for its assets based on a thorough assessment of needs, costs and benefits supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ short, medium and long-term performance indicators;</li> <li>○ embedded governance arrangements to support the strategic management of assets;</li> <li>○ IT asset management systems which integrate more effectively with other systems to facilitate better information capture and use; and</li> <li>○ Utilising information arising from stakeholder consultation and engagement including what the Council has learnt about its experience of its community asset transfers to better inform its decision-making.</li> </ul>	Status	Open	
What progress have we made	<p>A review is ongoing for new replacement IT asset management software, with specific functionality to improve the effectiveness of communication between the Council's property and asset management teams. This will enable more effective short, medium and long term strategic assessment of the Council's assets, and contribute towards its rationalisation or redevelopment aspirations. Landlord Services' new Business Manager will work in collaboration with the Asset Management and Development Manager's to implement the new IT system.</p> <p>Following recommendations of Audit Wales, an updated Asset Management Strategy will be drafted, with associated business plan, to realign its delivery for 2022-26. The new Asset Management Strategy will include the Council's investment policy, with specific reference to the criteria for acquiring investment opportunities. The Asset Management Strategy will equally include details of the governance structure and delegated</p>			

	authority. The Asset Management Strategy will be supported by a Commercial Strategy which will be focused on the enhancement of income generation, an approach to the commercialisation of assets, and consideration of the Council's climate emergency declaration and carbon agenda.			
	<b>Desired Result</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
Further action planned	Clarity over the Council's approach to the use of its assets to support robust decision making.	Replace the IT system with a system that incorporates the Financial Asset Register as well as providing a comprehensive solution for the effective management of property data	Head of Commercial and Integrated Landlord Services	March 2023

**Well-being of Future Generations examination of reducing child poverty and social isolation and improving economic inclusion**

Report	Wellbeing of Future Generations: An examination of Reducing child poverty and social isolation and improve economic inclusion – November 2019			
Outline of the review	Examination of the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in reducing child poverty and social isolation and improving economic inclusion. This work looked at the well-being of future generations act through the lens of our approach to this topic and was not a full scale review of the council's approach to dealing with child poverty and social isolation.		Status	N/A
Audit Wales Summary	<p>The Council is starting to apply the sustainable development principle in relation to its social justice agenda, but does not yet have a long-term plan</p> <p>The Council has a good understanding of the issues and challenges but does not yet have a long-term plan to deliver this step</p> <p>The Council has designed this step with a clear focus on prevention but does not have a means of measuring preventative outcomes over the long term</p> <p>The Council has designed this step to contribute to the seven national well-being goals and delivery is well-integrated in some partner plans</p> <p>Collaboration is a key means of delivering the Council's social justice agenda and there are well established collaborative arrangements which the Council facilitates</p> <p>The Council has identified some groups and individuals it needs to reach to deliver this step and has involved key stakeholders, but is aware that more needs to be done</p>			
Further Action	<b>Desired Result</b>			
	Audit Wales did not make proposals for improvement in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFG Act) examinations report but did highlight some areas of development, which the Council is acting on as set out in the action plan included in the report.			

## Environmental Health

Report	Environmental Health follow-up review – December 2019			
Audit Wales Proposals	The Council should undertake a fresh analysis of statutory and non-statutory service obligations to support and inform any future service changes.		Status	Open
	<p>In order to develop a prosperous and future-proof environmental health service the Council should consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing statutory duties with non-statutory services and discretionary income generation.</li> <li>• Aligning its income generation activities with the Council’s overall Commercial Strategy and considering how the service might benefit.</li> <li>• Working in more formal partnerships with other authorities to deliver services.</li> <li>• Exploring how transformation and technology could improve efficiency and effectiveness.</li> </ul>			
What progress have we made	We strive to balance our statutory duties with important non-statutory work streams that we consider provide valuable services to our residents. We will continue to analyse our statutory and non-statutory obligations as part of our service planning, and provide clarity on statutory/non-statutory services in our Annual report to members.			
	Environmental health continues to be innovative in income generation and has a commercial culture that aligns to the focus of the commercial strategy. The Environmental Health focus, since March 2020, has been on responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, and EHO’s have provided the Track & Trace service in Monmouthshire. As such, most income generation has paused over last 18 months, but pursuing discretionary income sources will return as soon as possible, noting sensitivities around business closures.			
	The Environmental Health team are already involved in numerous working groups with other organisations and work in partnership, where required. The pandemic has demonstrated the EH team’s strength in working with a range of partners on a daily basis, including Public Health Wales, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, schools, care homes and various others. The feedback from partners and the general public, regarding our Covid response, has been exceptionally positive.			
Further action	Desired Result		Action	Responsible Officer
	No further actions are proposed above the activity already identified above			

### Leisure Services

Report	Leisure Services follow-up review – December 2019		
Outline of the review	<p>Follow up of the 2015 national review <i>Delivering with Less – Leisure Services</i> recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve strategic planning in leisure services;</li> <li>• Undertake an options appraisal to identify the most appropriate delivery model based on the council’s agreed vision and priorities for leisure services;</li> <li>• Ensure effective management of the performance of leisure services by establishing a suite of measures to allow officers, members and citizens to judge inputs, outputs and impact;</li> <li>• Improve governance, accountability and corporate leadership on leisure services</li> </ul>	Status	N/A
Audit Wales Summary	<p>This review sought to answer the question: Can the council assure itself that the delivery of its leisure services offers value for money? Overall, Audit Wales found that the council is making progress in addressing the 2015 national recommendations and has considered whether the delivery of its leisure service offers value for money. The review confirmed that the council has a long-standing vision for its leisure services, but is still developing a strategic plan to deliver its vision. The review also identified that the council considered alternative delivery models for its leisure service, however, this process did not always provide members with sufficient and timely financial information to aid decision-making. Finally, the review confirmed that the council proactively involved members in appraising different delivery options of its leisure service, and is further strengthening its performance framework.</p>		
Further Action	Desired Result		
Further Action	<p>There were no proposals for improvement identified following the review. However, considerable work has been undertaken to improve the performance monitoring framework, in particular, the strategic plan. A thorough Performance and Evaluation Framework is being developed, with an impact driven, outcome-based Service Business Plan and service specific delivery plans. To support this, a comprehensive and relevant KPI set has been established and work is underway to develop a suite of success stories and achievements to celebrate the outcomes and impact of work on the citizens of Monmouthshire. An external company has been appointed to develop a strategy, and stakeholder engagement will be completed shortly to inform the requirements and direction that the strategy will take.</p>		

Report	COVID-19 Learning Project - ongoing		
Outline of the review	<p>During any emergency or crisis people will develop solutions and work in ways that are novel. The prolonged duration of COVID-19 provides the opportunity to capture and consider this novel practice from three perspectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The identification of opportunities to improve the current response to the situation, in as close to real time as possible;</li> <li>2. The identification of emerging risks that can then be mitigated before they develop to a large scale;</li> </ol>	Status	N/A



	<p>3. The recording and consolidation of novel practice, that could be shared more widely in real time and also incorporated as good practice into 'business as usual' once COVID-19 has subsided.</p> <p>The Auditor General's statutory remit places Audit Wales in a unique position to observe activity wherever public resources are being used. Audit Wales staff have strong networks across the Welsh public services and they have been deployed in the three areas identified above, in support of the 'team Wales' efforts to respond to COVID-19.</p>		
Audit Wales Summary	This is an ongoing process of 'collect, analyse, share and repeat'. Greater value will potentially be generated over time as more information is gathered and shared with the people who can use it to support their response to COVID-19.		
Further Action	<b>Desired Result</b>		
	There are no proposals for improvement, but a series of blogs have been published throughout the year sharing insight and information on a range of subjects. These have been shared with the relevant service areas, where applicable.		

Report	<b>Recovery planning – Assurance and Risk Assessment – ongoing</b>		
Outline of the review	<p>Councils will be at different stages of recovery and whilst most will face common challenges, local circumstances will affect the way they plan and respond. Audit Wales will take an audit approach that supports the recovery planning process by applying timely independent challenge to assure both Audit Wales, councils and citizens that recovery processes are planned and delivered with proper regard for economy, efficiency and effectiveness and that it is done in accordance with the sustainable development principle. The project's aim is to enable us to answer the question "Are recovery processes planned and delivered with proper regard for economy, efficiency and effectiveness and are they being done in accordance with the sustainable development principle".</p>	Status	N/A
Audit Wales Summary	Audit Wales have committed to providing timely, real-time feedback, via conversations/emails with senior officers. Key messages have also been formally set out periodically through letters that set out the headline messages and a summary of work completed. The findings from the project will also be summarised in an annual audit report, together with a summary of all audit work undertaken during 2020-21.		
Further Action	<b>Desired Result</b>		
	There are no proposals for improvement, but a letter was issued in December sharing strengths and areas for consideration on a range of subjects. In Monmouthshire we have been cautious about the term recovery, since we remain in the grip of the pandemic and do not yet fully understand the long term costs in both human and financial terms. We have used a series of interim coronavirus strategies through the pandemic, the latest of which is titled 'Re-emergence' and is centred on bringing people safely back together by supporting friendship circles, neighbourhoods and communities to feel safe, confident and happy together.		

## Appendix 2

### Closed Wales Audit Office Proposal for Improvement

#### Finance Proposals

Report	Corporate Assessment – November 2015, Financial Resilience Assessment – February 2016 and Savings Planning – February 2017		
Audit Wales Proposal	The Council should ensure that all budget mandates are costed and are sufficiently detailed. <i>All budget mandates should be fully costed and supported by information showing how each saving area will be achieved with an evaluation of its impact. This information should be produced on a timely basis to inform the agreement of the mandates by Members.</i>	Status	Closed – Superseded by 2021 Audit Report
	Ensure central specialist functions, such as finance and procurement, work more closely with individual service areas in identifying potential savings, the scope of savings achievable and the potential to use pooled budgets with partners.		
	Strengthen financial planning arrangements by developing a robust Medium Term Financial Plan that incorporates its Reserves Policy, Income Generation Strategy and Future Monmouthshire project		
What progress have we made	<p>Following the approval of the Corporate Plan, an annual budget strategy was developed and is reported to Cabinet annually prior to commencing the budget process. This applies a strategic lens to the council's finances in the medium to long term, and aligns the delivery of the Corporate Plan to ensure its aspirations are sustainable.</p> <p>Alongside this, all service areas are asked to bring forward budget proposals annually, whilst simultaneously looking ahead and ensuring wherever possible, proposals support the medium term direction of travel. A consistent template is used to capture information on budget proposals with input and support from supporting service areas. A Future Generations Evaluation and equality impact assessment is completed on each proposal.</p> <p>A balanced revenue budget proposal has been put forward annually and is approved by Cabinet and Council.</p> <p>The medium term prognosis is still of concern and financial planning as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan is a continuing process. The Medium Term Financial planning model is updated regularly and is presented to Cabinet along with the proposed budget setting process for following year and over the medium term. Closer alignment between service's business planning arrangements and financial planning arrangements continues to be developed to improve the quality of service planning and financial planning, which also aligns to the delivery of the Corporate Plan to ensure its aspirations are sustainable.</p> <p>As part of the delivery of the Corporate Plan, a Commercial Strategy has been developed. The strategy seeks to enhance income generation, develop an approach to commercialising assets and create a commercial culture and ethos. The strategy has a short-, medium- and long-term</p>		

view and aims to provide a framework, with defined objectives, for new commercial projects and for the delivery of future commercial activity. The Council acquired two commercial investments and any further investments are considered by the Investment Committee.

At the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic Cabinet introduced a revised purpose and new strategic aims for the Council to provide clarity and ensure accountability through this period. The latest iteration was agreed in June 2021 in the Summer Strategy. Delivery of the strategic aims will continue to have significant resource implications, including increased costs to maintain current service delivery and demands in setting up new or amended services. Close financial and budget monitoring continues. A Financial Sustainability Assessment was also carried out in 2020, however this was not published, as originally planned, due to the complete change in context as a result of Covid-19.

### Human Resources proposals

Report	Corporate Assessment – November 2015 Human Resources: Corporate Assessment Follow-on Review – December 2016		
Audit Wales Proposal	Ensure that the planned revisions and changes made to ‘Check In Check Out’ deliver a clear process of assessing and improving the performance of all staff and that department, team and individual objective setting is in line with the Council’s corporate objectives.	Status	Close
	Improve oversight and ongoing implementation of the staff appraisal process. In particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure staff appraisal completion is uploaded onto the Council’s Hub to accurately reflect the numbers of staff in receipt of an annual appraisal;</li> <li>• increase the appraisal completion rate.</li> </ul>		
What progress have we made	<p>The Check In-Check Out process has been in place for a number of years and it is clear that the process does not work for all colleagues, nor is the quantitative approach the right one for the culture of MCC.</p> <p>Lessons have been learned from CV regarding the ‘Cwtch’ broadcast, Leaders Q&amp;A and surveys that have all improved communication and contact between leaders and colleagues and so this qualitative approach will be embedded and broadened to reach all colleagues. Colleagues and line managers will be given the ‘right’ to seek meaningful 1-1s on a regularised basis and so we will measure these happening against the stated desire using the survey.</p> <p>This can then compare with the feedback on SBPs about 1-1s being completed, and discrepancies reported back specifically to Directorates. Training delivery, especially in leadership, will then bear a focus for improving the skills of line managers to enable a variety of different approaches to the 1-1 process (and team meetings) so that performance development is realistically achieved.</p>		

Report	Corporate Assessment – November 2015 Human Resources: Corporate Assessment Follow-on Review – December 2016		
Audit Wales Proposal	Develop the Council’s workforce planning arrangements by including accurate data and key management information around workforce issues and statistics, reporting regularly to Strategic Leadership and Management Teams to enable effective monitoring of progress and management of these issues on an ongoing basis.	Status	Close
	Develop further workforce data to include staff establishment, contract status, vacancies, agency use, age, gender, and grade/pay distribution, to better inform future workforce planning activity.		
What progress have we made	The People strategy continues to be implemented and activity has been embedded in the relevant service business plans. The Strategy will be reconsidered, informed by the learning from leadership development sessions, wider organisational learning from the council’s Coronavirus response.		
	A Recruitment and Selection policy has been developed, which prompts managers to think about apprenticeships, forward thinking and future planning, three to five years ahead. The People Service HUB holds workforce planning guidance, and workforce planning support and challenge is provided at Directorate Management Teams (DMT). The Leaders Induction includes information for managers on knowing their people, understanding performance and identifying future plans, and an online weekly Leaders Q&A session offers the opportunity for managers to ask questions around recruitment and HR issues.		
	The Zellis HR and Payroll system has been transferred onto the Cloud, and far more of the system’s features are being developed for managers to use. Work is underway to produce a live, real-time HR dashboard, which provides information on team demographics, staff grades, turnover rates, personal information, etc. A coherent, single point of truth training management system will be fundamental to ensuring that all staff are suitably qualified and experienced, and that individuals are developed and future roles are prepared for, to assist with succession planning.		
	Recruitment and selection processes are being developed via a web recruitment system. This will automatically generate data on job vacancies and adverts, such as the number of applicants, the number shortlisted, posts unfulfilled, etc. This is anticipated to be live within 12 months.		
Report	Review of Whistleblowing and Fairness at Work (Grievance) arrangements – September 2019		
Audit Wales Proposal	Strengthen the arrangements to monitor and review the effectiveness of the Council’s arrangements for dealing with whistleblowing concerns and employee grievances by actively seeking feedback from all those involved	Status	Close
	Clarify the implementation and monitoring arrangements for the following action within the People Strategy: ‘monitor the implementation of recommendations from grievances to ensure organisational learning and development’		
	Clarify with the Standards Committee, how it will assess the effectiveness of the Whistleblowing Policy.		
	Identify methods of checking staff awareness and include the Whistleblowing Policy in the employee survey planned for summer 2014 and subsequent surveys (remaining proposal from 2014 review)		

What progress have we made	<p>A robust policy is in place to ensure the highest standards of conduct, and to enable and encourage serious concerns to be raised at an early stage and in the correct way. The policy will be reviewed in line with the standard HR Policy Review schedule.</p> <p>In each case of whistle blowing, individuals are asked to feedback on their experience to determine if they are content with the actions taken.</p> <p>Each grievance case is different so the feedback approach is treated on a case-by-case basis. For every case however, our policy and practice focuses on resolution. Where there are investigation reports required, recommendations are taken on board by the service area, who consider the outcomes so that improvements and organisational learning can take place. HR is involved in all grievance cases and any learning is included within the HR business partnering approach with service managers also.</p> <p>Whistleblowing will not be reported to the Standards Committee, whose remit is Member Code of Conduct. It is reported to the Audit and Governance Committee and the Monitoring Officer/Director HR is in attendance.</p>
----------------------------	---

### Partnership and collaborative working proposals

Report	Performance Management: Corporate Assessment Follow-on Review – July 2016		
Audit Wales Proposal	Ensure new Public Service Board (PSB) delivery plans clearly set out relevant actions and resources needed to deliver shared priorities so that each partner, including the Council, is clear what is expected of them.	Status	Close
What progress have we made	<p>The Public Service Board has completed its third annual report for 2020/21, which identifies the progress made to deliver the objectives and each of the steps (actions) set out in the well-being plan. With a substantial focus of partners on the pandemic there has been a lessened focus in progressing some areas of the PSB’s well-being objectives. The report sets out how partners have evolved and adjusted delivery under the objectives, including responding to the pandemic.</p> <p>The Council’s Community and Partnership Development Team continue to support partners to deliver the steps in the well-being plan. To ensure a continued focus on the issues that matter most to well-being in Monmouthshire, the PSB has agreed priority areas for partner collaboration over the remaining two years of the existing well-being plan. These are: Climate and decarbonisation, mental health, the economy and in particular, the extent to which the pandemic may have exacerbated inequality. These will be developed into a focused programme of activity over the next two years, with partnership structures to support delivery.</p> <p>A change in title and terms of reference has been agreed for the Public Service Board Select Committee. The newly entitled Public Services Select Committee allows for wider scrutiny of public service provision and, where powers allow, will provide greater accountability of services delivered in collaboration or by external partners, including arrangements delivered through Corporate Joint Committees.</p> <p>Proposals have been developed to move to a Gwent-wide PSB from September 2021, subject to further scrutiny and decision, which will offer opportunities to improve the well-being of people across Gwent by further developing collaborative working. Integral to this approach being</p>		

developed is maintaining local delivery and accountability, and a continued focus on working in partnership on projects that are specific to well-being in Monmouthshire. Further development of local partnership arrangements is being undertaken and aligned accordingly to any regional arrangements put in place, ensuring the ethos of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act remains at the heart of this structure.

### Governance Proposals

Report	Governance – Corporate Assessment Follow-on Review – June 2016		
Audit Wales Proposal	Strengthen scrutiny’s impact, status and effectiveness including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>formally recording Cabinet responses to scrutiny recommendations and observations; and</li> <li>better co-ordination of Cabinet and select committee forward work programmes.</li> </ul>	Status	Close
What progress have we made	<p>In order to ensure the Executive and the public are fully appraised of select committee outcomes, the political report template has been revised to include a ‘consultees’ section, in which the outcomes can be listed. Select committee chairs are able to attend Cabinet to report on conclusions of their committee when they are considering key decisions and this is recorded in the minutes.</p> <p>The Scrutiny Manager attends meetings of departmental management teams as necessary to discuss the cabinet and select committee forward work planner. The Head of Policy, Performance and Scrutiny is a member of Strategic Leadership Team and is well positioned to ensure that the Scrutiny Manager is sighted on key areas of activity.</p> <p>The forward work plans and Corporate Plan provide an opportunity for select committee chairs to identify areas of work that will benefit from scrutiny and where challenge can add value to policy development prior to decisions being made by Cabinet or Council. Further work will be needed to update work programmes in response to the next iteration of the Corporate Plan.</p>		

Report	Governance: Corporate Assessment Follow-on Review – June 2016. Good Governance when Determining Significant Service Changes – March 2017		
Audit Wales Proposal	Ensuring that budget savings mandates and service change reports systematically reflect stakeholder views and that these are taken into account during the decision making process.	Status	Close
What progress have we made	A new Public Open Forum process has been established, to enable more effective public engagement in the scrutiny of decisions and the formulation of policy, via video, audio or written submissions in advance of meetings. It is intended to embed this process within new scrutiny working arrangements to improve accessibility for the public. Improvements to the robustness of forward planners will help councillors prioritise the issues, where public involvement can add the greatest value. The authority will continue to build on previous budget engagement exercises to ensure that stakeholder views are reflected in proposals.		

Report	'Scrutiny: Fit for the Future?' Review – August 2018		
Audit Wales Proposal	Providing further training on the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act for scrutiny members to improve their understanding and consideration of the Act when undertaking scrutiny activity.	Status	Close
What progress have we made	A new training module on the Future Generations Act has been developed through the corporate training service, and this is being made available to members to inform their role. Officer training sessions have been held. Further training on scrutinising the implications of well-being of future generations, equalities and socio-economic duty is scheduled for autumn 2021.		

### Children's safeguarding proposals

Report	Follow-up review of Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding of Children – February 2020; Audit Wales Whole Authority review of children's safeguarding– August 2018		
Audit Wales Proposal	<p>Embed all aspects of safe recruitment, induction and training consistently.</p> <p>In particular:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve training records on safeguarding to show why the person received that particular level of training, when the training was received, and when it needs to be reviewed;</li> <li>ensure all people who have a specific role in safeguarding undertake appropriate training; and</li> <li>clarify when enhanced DBS checks are required and ensure these are obtained in line with guidance.</li> </ol>	Status	Close
What progress have we made	<p>Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff are able to access the right training for their needs, as set out in the Corporate Safeguarding Policy. Directorate Safeguarding Leads are responsible for ensuring that the workforce within their Directorate attend training at levels appropriate to their roles and functions and that safeguarding responsibilities are highlighted through staff induction processes, team meetings, supervision and staff briefings. Biennial completion of the SAFE process provides assurance over safeguarding training. The council is also recruiting its volunteers through the Volunteer Kinetic digital management system, which records safeguarding training.</p> <p>The council's Disclosure and Barring Service Policy sets out what constitutes regulated activity and refers managers to the Home Office eligibility guidance tool to determine what level of DBS check an activity or role requires. All ID checkers are required to attend mandatory one hour DBS training, which covers eligibility and signposts delegates to the Home Office tool and the DBS page on the council's intranet. The electronic processing platform is provided by Powys County Council which runs a DBS unit and provides DBS eligibility advice to MCC if needed.</p> <p>The HR system has been developed to include a module that records staff training activity, and is currently being piloted in Social Care and Health through the Workforce Development Team. It will eventually be rolled out to all other directorates, and will incorporate safeguarding training, along with broader mandatory training requirements such as safer recruitment and attendance management.</p>		
Report	Follow-up review of Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding of Children – February 2020; Audit Wales Whole Authority review of children's safeguarding– August 2018		

Audit Wales Proposal	Ensure control arrangements are consistently applied and improve performance monitoring arrangements around safeguarding to include all areas of service operation to address all gaps in accountability. This should include issuing clear guidance to managers on information on safeguarding that should be included in reports to members.	Status	Close
What progress have we made	<p>The self-evaluation process for safeguarding (SAFEs) is well embedded and takes place on a biennial basis within each directorate within the council. This is supported by the Safeguarding unit and there is a quality assurance mechanism through the Whole Authority Safeguarding Group.</p> <p>A recruitment agency has been appointed to provide corporate agency staff, where required, and ensure all individuals go through a safer recruitment process. This is in collaboration with four other local authorities, and utilises an online system to ensure a robust service. We have a Contracts Manager within Monmouthshire County Council who liaises with the recruitment company on a quarterly basis to oversee the process and ensure adherence to the safer recruitment process. Controls have also been implemented for agency staff recruited into schools, and all appointments must go through a legal process monitored by our own Legal team.</p> <p>A Safeguarding Evaluation Report is generated through the Whole Authority Safeguarding Group and presented to Council on an annual basis. Further questions or lines of inquiry from members are responded to and helps refine the content of the annual report. The latest Annual Safeguarding Evaluation Report was presented to Council in January 2021 and is based on activity and information from April 2019 to March 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. Where relevant, the report adopts an ‘as is’ position and provides information regarding the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has affected safeguarding activity. This evaluation report forms an integral part of the improvement of safeguarding practice across the Council, and drives the work of the Whole Authority Safeguarding Group.</p> <p>A new Safeguarding Business Manager has been appointed in the Safeguarding Unit to help collate performance information for safeguarding, including supporting the SAFE audits, core data and facilitating the production of annual evaluation reports.</p>		
Report	Follow-up review of Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding of Children – February 2020; Audit Wales Whole Authority review of children’s safeguarding– August 2018		
Audit Wales Proposal	Improve the Council’s commissioning and contracting arrangements in relation to safeguarding children by finalising guidance on commissioning, contracting and volunteering from a safeguarding perspective.	Status	Close
What progress	The council has developed guidance in minimum standards for safeguarding across commissioned services, and a self-assessment framework as a tool to support safe commissioning within directorates/services areas. Safe commissioning is embedded within the SAFE process.		



have we made	A volunteering toolkit and network are in place and Leading Volunteering training is delivered to staff that support volunteers. A Volunteer Kinetic digital management system is in place, containing live volunteer safe recruitment information and activity, which is reported on a quarterly basis. Service area champions have also been introduced to ensure that all current and new volunteers are recruited through the appropriate channels.
--------------	---

### Well-being of Future Generations examination of developing a range of options to improve rural transport

Report	Well-being of Future Generations: An examination of developing a range of options to improve rural transport – May 2019		
Outline	Examination of the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when taking the step to develop a range of options to improve rural transport to meet the following wellbeing objective: The Council delivers better infrastructure connectivity and opportunity	Status	N/A
Outcome	<p>The Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle in setting the step 'to develop a range of options to improve rural transport' but there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working</p> <p>The Council is at an early stage of understanding long-term needs and solutions.</p> <p>The Council has identified some of the problems caused by the lack of rural transport but has not yet identified potential solutions.</p> <p>The Council is committed to integrated solutions but rural transport is not well recognised within Council and partner plans.</p> <p>The Council has started to collaborate in the planning and scoping of some solutions and would benefit from engaging with more partners to identify root causes and additional sustainable solutions.</p> <p>Whilst there are positive examples of stakeholder involvement, the Council could benefit from involving the public at an earlier stage and producing comprehensive equality impact assessments for all policy decisions on major service change.</p>		
Proposals	<p style="text-align: center;">Desired Result</p> <p>Audit Wales did not make proposals for improvement in the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFG Act) examinations report but did highlight some areas of development which the Council plans to act on as set out in the action plan included in the report published by Audit Wales.</p>		

### Service User Perspective

Report	Service User Perspective Review, Customer Contact – May 2019		
Audit Wales Proposal	Improve customer contact arrangements taking into account user feedback	Status	Close
	Improve customer care in the customer contact arrangements to ensure citizens views are genuinely acknowledged and addressed		
	Routinely seek feedback from people who use the Community Hubs, My Monmouthshire App and the Compliments, Comments and Complaints arrangements to identify improvements to customer contact arrangements;		

	Seek feedback from people who do not currently use the Community Hubs, My Monmouthshire App or Compliments, Comments and Complaints arrangements to understand why;		
	Share learning about improvements made to individual Community Hubs with other Community Hub staff		
	Ensure that the Council meets the standards it sets such as in complaints		
What progress have we made	<p>We continue to promote and develop the My Monmouthshire app and listen to feedback from users across all channels to improve how this operates, and to improve the ways in which people can contact the council. Monty the Chatbot has been developed to assist in a broader range of enquiries, such as waste management and leisure services. Additional staff have been trained during the pandemic to provide longer hours of service to ensure as many customers receive the information they require. Every user is asked to complete feedback and this is monitored.</p> <p>Customer-facing teams use feedback and continually strive to improve customer care using both informal and formal mechanisms. We ensure that customers who provide feedback and wish to receive a response get one. We continue to use community events, when these are possible, to seek feedback on our arrangements and to test and launch new initiatives, as well as using feedback from the app user group and feedback received at the hubs. We continue to use feedback from complaints and compliments to improve our customer contact arrangements.</p> <p>Joint training has taken place across Hubs and the Contact Centre to ensure consistent messaging and information sharing. Furthermore, the Hubs and Contact Centre continue to liaise where there are service updates to ensure consistency in service delivery to customers. We continue to remind staff of good complaints handling and monitor our responsiveness against these standards.</p> <p>We have regulatory measures to monitor the handling of complaints in Social Services and follow the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales complaints model for all other complaints handling in the Council. We produce a whole authority complaints report, which is presented to the Strategic Leadership Team, Cabinet and select committees, and contains information on complaints activity. We capture both positive feedback (compliments) and negative comments from service areas and also directly from our customers, and this feedback is logged on our database and also reported to the above in the annual report. Furthermore, each business plan owner receives information on the complaints received so that they can consider improving their services, where necessary.</p> <p>Recommendations in formal complaint investigations are followed through where improvements to services are suggested. This will always be an ongoing piece of work to learn from customer feedback.</p>		

### Appendix 3

#### Audit Wales national studies published since last update

National Study	<b>The 'front door' to adult social care</b> <a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/front-door-adult-social-care">https://www.audit.wales/publication/front-door-adult-social-care</a>
Summary	<p>This report, published in September 2019, focuses on the effectiveness of the new 'front door' to social care, looking specifically at services for adults.</p> <p>The report found that Councils are preventing social-care demand, but information, advice and assistance are not consistently effective.</p>
Recommendations in the report	The report makes four recommendations for particular consideration by local authorities.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Adult Social Care team has received the report. The team are considering the findings that are relevant to the Council's arrangements as part of their service planning.

National Study	<b>Review of Public Services Boards</b> <a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/review-public-services-boards">https://www.audit.wales/publication/review-public-services-boards</a>
Summary	<p>This report, published in October 2019, concludes that Public Service Boards are unlikely to realise their potential unless they are given freedom to work more flexibly and think and act differently.</p> <p>Audit Wales have examined how Public Service Boards are operating; looking at their membership, terms of reference, frequency and focus of meetings, alignment with other partnerships, resources and scrutiny arrangements</p>
Recommendations in the report	The report makes three recommendations for particular consideration by Public Service Boards.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Performance and Partnerships teams have received the report and are considering the findings.

National Study	<p align="center"><b>Progress in implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act</b></p> <p align="center"><a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/progress-implementing-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-act">https://www.audit.wales/publication/progress-implementing-violence-against-women-domestic-abuse-and-sexual-violence-act</a></p>
Summary	<p>This report, published in November 2019, examines how the new duties and responsibilities of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act are being rolled out and delivered.</p> <p>The report identifies that victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence are often let down by an inconsistent, complex and fragmented system.</p>
Recommendations in the report	The reports make three recommendations for particular consideration by public bodies.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Social Care, Housing and Partnerships teams have received the report. They are considering the findings that are relevant to the Council's arrangements as part of their service planning.

National Study	<p align="center"><b>Findings from the Auditor General's Sustainable Development Principle Examinations</b></p> <p align="center"><a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/findings-auditor-generals-sustainable-development-principle-examinations">https://www.audit.wales/publication/findings-auditor-generals-sustainable-development-principle-examinations</a></p>
Summary	<p>This report, published in May 2020, summarises the findings from Audit Wales's examinations of 44 public bodies under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 in the first reporting period, from 2015-2020.</p> <p>Overall, Audit Wales found that public bodies can demonstrate that they are applying the sustainable development principle. But it is also clear that they must improve how they apply each of the five ways of working if they are going to affect genuine cultural change – the very essence of the Act. In the next five year reporting period, public bodies across Wales will need to work together in taking a more system-wide approach to improving well-being if they are to take their work to the next level.</p>
Recommendations in the report	This report provides an overview of what Audit Wales looked for, what they found and what they will expect to see in future.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Performance team has received the report and are considering the findings that are relevant to the Council's arrangements as part of their service planning.

National Study	<p align="center"><b>Rough Sleeping in Wales – Everyone's Problem; No One's Responsibility</b></p> <p align="center"><a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/rough-sleeping-wales-everyones-problem-no-ones-responsibility">https://www.audit.wales/publication/rough-sleeping-wales-everyones-problem-no-ones-responsibility</a></p>
Summary	<p>This report, published in July 2020, looks at how public bodies can help to end people sleeping rough in Wales. This is phase two of the review of partnership working and follows on from the <a href="#">report looking at Public Service Boards</a> published in October 2019.</p> <p>In the first three months of the pandemic, the Welsh Government supported councils to rehouse over 800 people sleeping rough or at risk of homelessness. One of the unexpected outcomes of the lockdown is that rough sleeping has been significantly</p>

	<p>reduced. Audit Wales found that in recent years, whilst many public bodies work with people sleeping rough, services were not always joined up and helping people when they needed it.</p> <p>Responding to COVID-19 is an opportunity for public bodies to start addressing long standing weaknesses in partnership working which has stopped them from tackling rough sleeping in the past.</p>
Recommendations in the report	The reports make two recommendations for particular consideration by public bodies.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Housing team has received the report. The team are considering the findings of the report that are relevant to the Council's arrangements as part of their service planning.

National Study	<p><b>'Raising Our Game' - Tackling Fraud in Wales</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/raising-our-game-tackling-fraud-wales">https://www.audit.wales/publication/raising-our-game-tackling-fraud-wales</a></p>
Summary	<p>This report, published in July 2020, states that the Crime Survey for England and Wales recognises fraud as being one of the most prevalent crimes in society today. However, some senior public sector leaders are sceptical about the levels of fraud within their organisations. As a result, they are reluctant to invest in counter-fraud arrangements and assign a low priority to investigating cases of potential fraud identified to them by the National Fraud Initiative.</p> <p>Audit Wales believe that the pandemic provides an important opportunity for the Welsh counter-fraud community to come together (by appropriate means) and reflect on the speed and effectiveness of its response to the fraudsters. Public sector bodies can mitigate these risks by having the right organisational culture supported by strong counter-fraud arrangements.</p>
Recommendations in the report	The reports make 15 recommendations for particular consideration by all public bodies.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Finance team has received the report and are considering the findings.

National Study	<p><b>Financial Sustainability of Local Government as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/financial-sustainability-local-government-result-covid-19-pandemic">https://www.audit.wales/publication/financial-sustainability-local-government-result-covid-19-pandemic</a></p>
Summary	<p>This report, published in October 2020, is the beginning of Audit Wales's work looking at the financial sustainability of local councils during 2020-21. The report sets a high-level baseline position, including the reserves position, of local councils before the pandemic. It also sets out the initial financial implications of the pandemic for local councils and the scale of the anticipated challenge going forward, as well as some reflections on the preparedness of local government in Wales for such an unprecedented event. Finally, the report sets out how Audit Wales intends to provide support and constructive challenge to</p>

	councils and the local government sector, as a whole, over the remainder of 2020-21, in their efforts to maintain financial sustainability against such significant funding pressures.
Recommendations in the report	This report is the beginning of a series of reviews and sets the high-level, baseline position for ongoing support.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Finance team has received the report. The team are considering the findings of the report that are relevant to the Council's arrangements as part of their service planning.

National Study	<b>Commercialisation in Local Government</b> <a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/commercialisation-local-government">https://www.audit.wales/publication/commercialisation-local-government</a>
Summary	<p>This report, published in October 2020, shows that local government has handled the impact of austerity well so far. However, with rising expectations from the general public and increasing demand for services, councils face a challenging future. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are also working in ways and delivering services to communities that may have fundamentally changed.</p> <p>Councils have conducted commercial activity for a long time, and many councils are exploring additional commercial opportunities to mitigate against the financial pressures they face. There is a need to look at different ways to make savings, safeguard services and generate income with increasingly ambitious financial targets. Consequently, commercialisation is becoming more important for councils.</p> <p>This report is specifically targeted at helping elected members and senior officers to examine and judge the potential impact on their organisations when considering whether to undertake commercialisation. It will also help councils to demonstrate how well they are discharging their value for money responsibilities.</p>
Recommendations in the report	The reports make seven recommendations for particular consideration by local authorities.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Finance team has received the report. The team are considering the findings of the report that are relevant to the Council's arrangements as part of their service planning.

National Study	<b>Welsh Community Care Information System</b> <a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/welsh-community-care-information-system">https://www.audit.wales/publication/welsh-community-care-information-system</a>
Summary	<p>This report, published in October 2020, shows that despite efforts to accelerate implementation of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) across health boards and local authorities, the prospects for full take-up remain uncertain. There are also some important issues that still need to be resolved, including around how the system functions.</p> <p>The Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) is intended to enable health and social care staff to deliver more efficient and effective services. WCCIS has been developed as a single system and a shared electronic record for use across a wide range of adult and children’s services. The idea is that all 22 local authorities and seven health boards should implement it.</p>
Recommendations in the report	<p>The reports make two recommendations for particular consideration by Welsh Government, the WCCIS National Programme Team, health boards, and local authorities.</p>
Monmouthshire County Council lead	<p>The Council’s Social Care and Health team has received the report. The team are considering the findings of the report that are relevant to the Council’s arrangements as part of their service planning.</p>

National Study	<b>The National Fraud Initiative in Wales 2018-20</b> <a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/national-fraud-initiative-wales-2018-20">https://www.audit.wales/publication/national-fraud-initiative-wales-2018-20</a>
Summary	<p>This report, published in October 2020, shows that whilst the majority of Welsh NFI participants display a strong commitment to counter fraud and the NFI, as reported in my recent report on counter-fraud arrangements across Wales, some bodies do not demonstrate a commitment to address fraud and do not ensure that sufficient, skilled staff resource is in place to investigate matches, prevent frauds and correct errors.</p> <p>The report also highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the risk of fraud as public bodies have needed to urgently process COVID-19 support payments in very difficult circumstances</p>
Recommendations in the report	<p>The reports make four recommendations for particular consideration by all participants in the National Fraud Initiative.</p>
Monmouthshire County Council lead	<p>The Council’s Finance team has received the report and are considering the findings.</p>

National Study	<b>Providing Free School Meals During Lockdown</b> <a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/providing-free-school-meals-during-lockdown">https://www.audit.wales/publication/providing-free-school-meals-during-lockdown</a>
Summary	<p>This report, published in November 2020, looks at how councils approached the challenge of continuing to provide free school meals during the national lockdown in spring and summer 2020.</p> <p>Audit Wales undertook this work as part of the COVID-19 learning project. The aim was to identify how councils adapted their free school meals service during the lockdown, and particularly if there are any learning points as a result of this experience both for councils and the wider public sector.</p>
Recommendations in the report	The reports identifies a number of outcomes and learning points for consideration by local authorities and the wider public sector.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Education team has received the report. The team are considering the findings of the report that are relevant to the Council's arrangements as part of their service planning.

National Study	<b>Test, Trace, Protect in Wales: An Overview of Progress to Date</b> <a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/test-trace-protect-wales-overview-progress-date">https://www.audit.wales/publication/test-trace-protect-wales-overview-progress-date</a>
Summary	<p>This report, published in March 2021, sets out the main findings of how public services are responding to the delivery of TTP services in Wales.</p> <p>The Test, Trace, Protect (TTP) programme has successfully brought together different parts of the Welsh public sector to quickly build a system of testing and contact tracing mostly from scratch and at a fast pace.</p> <p>Although the programme struggled to cope with earlier peaks of the spread of the virus, it rapidly learnt and evolved to the challenges it faced.</p>
Recommendations in the report	The reports identifies a number of key messages and findings consideration by the wider public sector.
Monmouthshire County Council lead	The Council's Test Trace and Protect team has received the report and are considering the findings of the report.



National Study	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>At your Discretion - Local Government Discretionary Services</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="https://www.audit.wales/publication/your-discretion-local-government-discretionary-services">https://www.audit.wales/publication/your-discretion-local-government-discretionary-services</a></p>
Summary	<p>This report, published in April 2021, looks at how councils define their services and look to protect essential services when dealing with funding cuts. Financial pressures have led to councils reducing spend and cutting services, but the pandemic has shown local government services are essential to keeping people safe and healthy.</p> <p>This review focussed on how councils define services, the systems and processes they have used to review services and how robust these are.</p> <p>Looking to the future, Councils need to take the opportunity to refresh, reevaluate and reset what they do and to learn from the pandemic to build a better future. There are opportunities for councils to involve citizens in shaping and running services themselves. The challenge for local councils will be to apply the lessons learnt from the pandemic and use it to refine, adapt and deliver further improvements in order to create positive change and remain relevant to all of their citizens.</p>
Recommendations in the report	<p>The reports identifies a number of outcomes and learning points for consideration by local authorities and the wider public sector.</p>
Monmouthshire County Council lead	<p>The Council’s Strategic Leadership Team has received the report and are considering the findings.</p>