

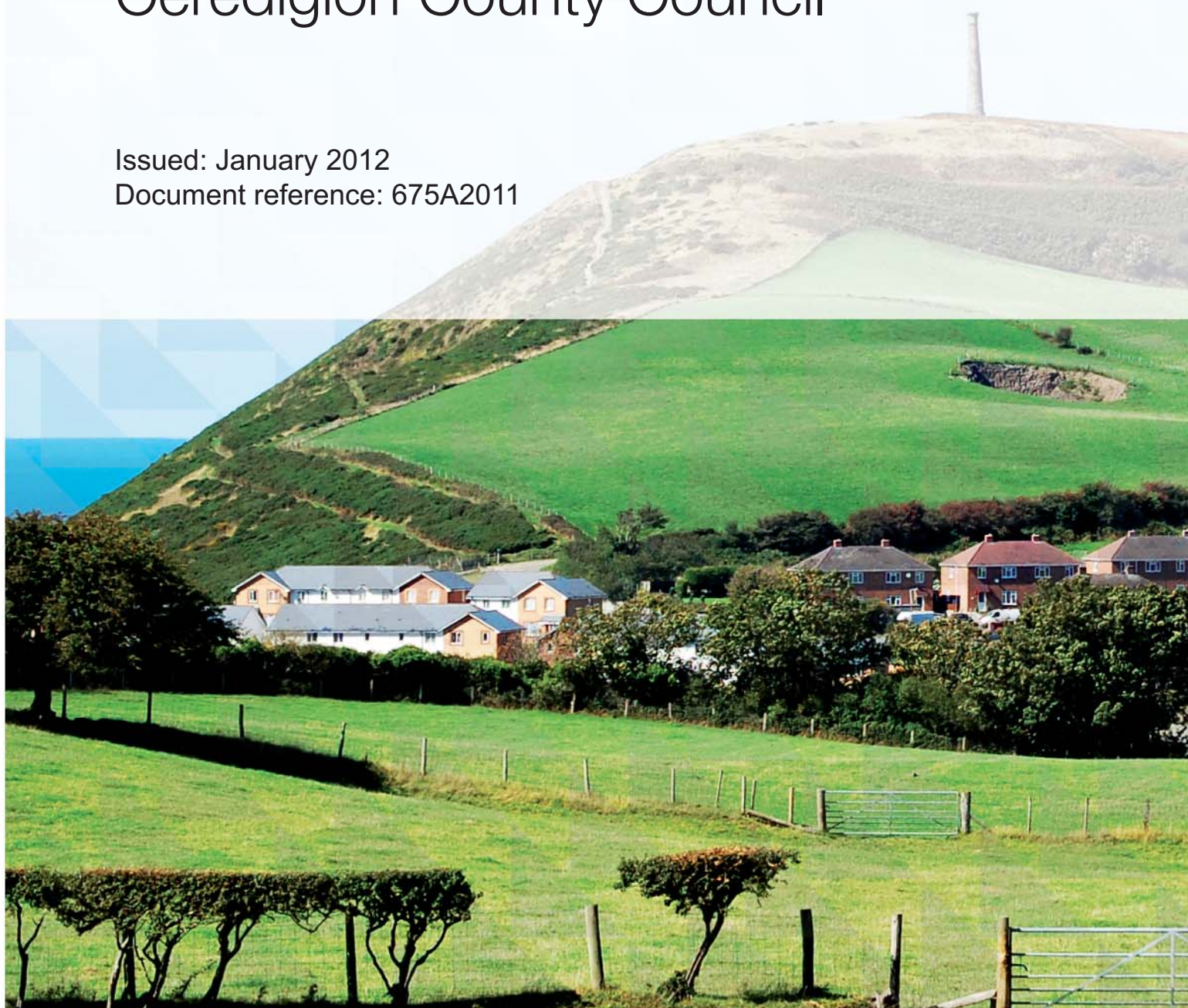


WALES **AUDIT** OFFICE
SWYDDFA **ARCHWILIO** CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report

Ceredigion County Council

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About the Auditor General for Wales

The Auditor General is independent of government and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. He leads the Wales Audit Office and is held accountable by the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly for the Wales Audit Office's work.

The Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Assembly Commission and National Health Service bodies in Wales. He also appoints the external auditors of Welsh local government bodies, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. The Auditor General's appointed auditors are responsible for the annual audit of the majority of public money spent in Wales, including the £15 billion of funds that are voted to Wales annually by the Westminster Parliament. Nearly £5.5 billion of this funding is passed by the Welsh Government to local government in the form of general and specific grants. Local government, in turn, raises a further £2.1 billion through council tax and business rates.

As well as carrying out financial audit, the Auditor General's role is to examine how public bodies manage and spend public money, including achieving value in the delivery of public services. The Wales Audit Office aims to make public money count, by promoting improvement, so that people in Wales benefit from accountable, well-managed public services that offer the best possible value for money. It is also committed to identifying and spreading good practice across the Welsh public sector.

Huw Vaughan Thomas, Auditor General for Wales, was supported by Non Jenkins and Jeremy Evans and colleagues under the direction of Alan Morris in conducting the Improvement Assessment and producing this report.

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Summary report

- 1 Each year, the Auditor General must report on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement and delivering their services. Drawing on the work of the Wales Audit Office and that of relevant Welsh inspectorates, this report presents a picture of improvement over the last year. The report is in three main sections which cover the planning, delivery and evaluation of improvement by Ceredigion County Council (the Council).
 - the Council has started to put new human resources arrangements in place, but because of difficulties with recruitment and sickness absence in social services this has impacted on the service's capacity to support and deliver some intended improvements;
 - the Council recognises the importance of the effective use of technology and significant improvements have been made;
 - the Council is committed to and is progressing its collaboration and partnership working;
 - the Council's commitment to public engagement is growing; and
 - the Council is on target to meet its Equalities duties and is active in promoting the Welsh language but its progress in delivering against its Welsh Language Scheme duties is variable.
- 2 Overall the Auditor General has concluded that the Council is moving forward with its ambitious transformation programme, but its planning, delivery, monitoring and reporting still need strengthening in some key areas, and performance and outcomes continue to be variable.
- 3 We found that the Council's plans and arrangements are moving its transformation programme forward but progress in some areas has been slower than expected. We said this because:
 - the Council has responded well to our Preliminary Corporate Assessment proposals for improvement and has made progress through its transformation programme;
 - the Council is reviewing its governance arrangements;
 - the Council has good arrangements in place for managing its finances although it has only recently brought together a comprehensive Medium Term Financial Plan;
- 4 We also found that the Council's delivery of improvement in priority areas is variable. We based this conclusion on the following:
 - action is being taken to address weaknesses in social services to support people in need but, due to capacity issues, intended improvements have not been achieved in some areas;
 - overall, performance in education is improving as the strong service management team is focussing on the right things to help people develop; and
 - many environment priorities are being achieved, and progress has been made in regenerating Aberystwyth albeit more slowly than the Council intended.

- 5 Finally, the report sets out our views on the Council's own assessment of its performance and arrangements. We concluded that the Council recognises that more consistent and robust corporate evaluation and reporting of performance and outcomes are required to focus better on areas needing the most improvement to achieve all of its priorities.

Recommendations and proposals for improvement

Recommendation

- R1** The Council should publish a comparison of its performance with other Welsh improvement authorities and other public bodies as required under section 15 (2)b(ii) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

Proposals for improvement

- P1** The Council needs to ensure that in focussing on the arrangements for future collaboration, it does not lose sight of the need to maintain and improve service standards in Ceredigion particularly in key areas like social services.
- P2** The Council needs to ensure that it is realistic in planning for improvement, focussing on where and what it can influence and the areas that need the most attention, so that it is able to achieve all of its priorities.
- P3** The Council will need to work quickly to complete the work of its workstreams in clarifying, shaping, and prioritising its strategic objectives if its transformation programme and plans for the future are to have an impact.
- P4** The Council needs to strengthen its corporate self-assurance and evaluation arrangements.
- P5** The Council should continue to address the proposals and actions for improvement we have set out in our thematic study feedback reports.
- P6** The Council should also ensure that it acts more in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 guidance in terms of publishing its assessment of performance.

Detailed report



Introduction

- 6 This report was prepared by the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales. On [page 2](#) you can find a brief explanation of what the Auditor General does.
- 7 Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure), the Auditor General must report each year on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement and delivering their services. [Appendix 1](#) provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties under the Measure. With help from Welsh inspectorates, Estyn (for education) and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW), and the Welsh Language Board, we have brought together a picture of what each council or authority in Wales is trying to achieve and how it is going about it. This report also sets out the progress the Council has made since the Auditor General published his last Annual Improvement Report, drawing on the Council's own self-assessment.
- 8 Throughout the report, we set out what the Council needs to do to improve its services. Given the wide range of services provided and the challenges facing the Council it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
 - recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way;
 - conduct a special inspection and publish the report with detailed recommendations;
 - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Council must respond to that recommendation publicly within 30 days; and
 - make proposals for improvement – if we make proposals to the Council, we would expect it to do something about them and we will follow up what happens.
- 9 We want to find out if this report gives you the information you need and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by e-mailing us at info@wao.gov.uk or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

The Council is moving forward with its ambitious transformation programme, but its planning, delivery, monitoring and reporting still need strengthening in some key areas and performance and outcomes continue to be variable

- 10 We do not undertake a comprehensive annual review of all council arrangements or services. Our work has been focused on the main objectives the Council has set itself. The report builds upon earlier feedback and reports issued to the Council and the conclusions are based on our cumulative and shared knowledge and findings from work undertaken this year.
- 11 Our overall conclusion reflects the good progress the Council is making with its transformation programme to modernise the Council's arrangements to support improvement to enable it to function more corporately, effectively and efficiently across all of its services and departments.
- 12 The challenge for the Council is to make sure that in focussing on arrangements for future collaboration it does not lose sight of the need to also continue to improve service standards in Ceredigion at the same time, particularly in some critical areas. In particular, the indications of decline in some areas within social services serve as a reminder to the Council of the need to balance its efforts between meeting today's needs and preparing for a better future.

The Council's plans and arrangements are moving its transformation programme forward but progress in some areas has been slower than expected

The Council has responded well to our Preliminary Corporate Assessment proposals for improvement and has made progress through its transformation programme

- 13 In August 2010 the Auditor General's Preliminary Corporate Assessment concluded that the Council was at a critical point and recognised that it needed to change the way it managed and delivered improvement within the next six months if it was to improve within more limited resources.
- 14 In January 2011 the Auditor General published his first Annual Improvement Report, which showed that the Council had responded very positively to the messages and areas for improvement set out in his Preliminary Corporate Assessment. It noted that the Council had already made some changes to the way it had worked over recent years and that, following the Preliminary Corporate Assessment report, it had significantly increased the scale and pace of change. For instance, the Council had started to put more solid arrangements in place to manage the transformation towards functioning as a more joined-up, modern and corporate Council.
- 15 In July 2011, the Auditor General issued a letter to the Council providing an update on his Corporate Assessment, commenting on progress and developments since his previous reports. The Auditor General confirmed that he was satisfied that the Council was discharging its duties under the Measure and that it was likely to comply with its requirements during this financial year. This conclusion was reached on the basis that the Council had published its new Improvement Plan Objectives for 2011-12 which clearly set out: the improvements that citizens can expect for each objective; how the Council defines success; what its current service performance is; how it intends to make changes; and how it will monitor progress.
- 16 The Auditor General concluded that this year's Improvement Plan is an improvement on last year's equivalent; it is better laid out and easier to read. He suggested some further areas for improvement for next year including better signposting to different plans, more comprehensive measures for each improvement objective and better target setting.
- 17 In his Corporate Assessment Update letter, the Auditor General recognised that the Council had embarked upon a transformation and efficiency programme intended to change the way in which it organises its functions and delivers its services. The Council had established a framework for change to support delivery of the programme by April 2014. The Corporate Assessment Update letter noted that the Council had continued to make progress in all areas identified as in need of improvement in the 2010 Preliminary Corporate Assessment. These areas included progress in relation to strengthening the Council's corporate planning, transformation programme framework, human resources, ICT, medium-term financial planning, and establishing arrangements for evaluating performance.
- 18 The Corporate Assessment Update also concluded that the Council is clear about the financial challenges it faces in the future and has developed a savings strategy to meet the

anticipated reduction in funding. The Corporate Assessment Update identified three further areas for improvement, two of which were in relation to clarifying the role of members and officers in the new arrangements, and one in relation to validating data and information accuracy.

- 19 A summary of the Council's progress in responding to our proposals for improvement is set out in [Appendix 5](#) of this report.
- 20 To help show how the Council is planning for and making arrangements for improvement, we reviewed the Council's assessment of whether it achieved the Improvement Objective it set itself in 2010-11 'to transform its services to be more efficient and effective for the citizens'. Our assessment found that the Council has started to progress most of the things it set out to do through its three-year transformation programme, and is committed to working with its partners to do this. Nonetheless, progress has been slower than the Council had anticipated in some areas, including many of its work streams and a thematic group, in particular in relation to improving internal communication due to capacity issues.
- 21 As part of its transformation programme the Council has adopted a new vision statement: 'Ceredigion County Council delivers value for money public services that support a strong economy while promoting wellbeing in our people and our communities.' This statement, informed by the views of citizens, reflects a more strategic and corporate approach by the Council to improving services. The Council is using this approach to drive its plans and priorities, its management and governance arrangements, its plans to achieve

efficiencies, and collaboration with its partners within local government and more widely across the public sector. The Council also expects these plans to put it in a stronger position to respond to the difficult financial situation and to changing legislative requirements. However, to achieve this position, it will need to work quickly to complete the work underway to clarify, shape, and prioritise its strategic objectives.

- 22 As part of its transformation programme, the Council plans some changes to its management structure. The preferred new arrangement being promoted by the Transformation Strategy Group and the Chief Executive is a management structure aligned to the Vision.
- 23 A particularly successful area of Council activity has been the rationalisation of its buildings where there are a number of examples of schemes that should contribute to achieving savings and more efficient services. An example is the decision of the Identity and Passport Service to co-locate in Canolfan Rheidol, the Council's new office in Aberystwyth.
- 24 We will continue to monitor the progress of the transformation programme and focus our future assessments on the impact and outcomes of the programme and how the Council is measuring, monitoring and evaluating whether the desired outcomes are being achieved.
- 25 The CSSIW also reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's performance in social services during 2010-11 some areas of strength and improvement relating to how well the Council is undertaking its transformation, as follows:

'What the Authority does well:

- Transformation and efficiency programme to drive improved function and delivery of services is now in place.

What the Local Authority needs to develop/improve:

- Delivery of the framework for change which supports the transformation programme.
- Continue to develop skills and capacity for managing and delivering change.¹

- 26 Further detail on these strengths and areas for development can be found in CSSIW's Annual Review and Evaluation which is available on CSSIW's website:
<http://wales.gov.uk/cssiwsuite/newcssiw/publications/lareviews/2011/5530105/?lang=eng>

The Council is reviewing its governance arrangements

- 27 Our 2010 Preliminary Corporate Assessment made proposals for the Council to strengthen its corporate leadership, direction, governance and scrutiny arrangements to ensure that it can make the decisions necessary.
- 28 The 2011 Corporate Assessment Update letter made the following two proposals for improving governance arrangements:
- to support the drive for cultural change, roles within Cabinet should be reviewed in the context of assessing whether portfolio arrangements that are aligned with directorates support or present a potential barrier to change; and

- the organisation of the Scrutiny function should be reviewed with the aim of: reducing the overall number of committees; monitoring and scrutinising the direction, progress and impact of the transformation programme; and establishing the means of taking a cross-cutting view of service delivery.

- 29 Since then, the Council has been undertaking a review of its constitution and its scrutiny arrangements to meet the requirements of the new Local Government Measure 2011, improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its scrutiny arrangements and support its transformation programme. The Council is hoping to pilot new scrutiny arrangements before this year's local government elections but due to timescales this may not be possible. Joint scrutiny arrangements to support and challenge collaboration projects and ensure clear accountability arrangements are yet to be considered.
- 30 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's performance in social services during 2010-11 that the Council needs to develop or improve some key issues relating to its governance arrangements. These include developing the performance management role of the scrutiny committee and the scrutiny and observation of front line work by members.
- 31 The CSSIW's Annual Evaluation also notes that: 'Last year CSSIW identified the need to ensure that future work plans for the scrutiny committee have a greater focus on performance data. The Council acknowledges that this remains an area for improvement.'

¹ *Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2010/2011 Ceredigion County Council – Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, 31 October 2011.*

The Council has good arrangements in place for managing its finances although it has only recently brought together a comprehensive Medium Term Financial Plan

- 32 Our 2011 Corporate Assessment Update letter noted that the Council is clear about the financial challenges it faces in the future and has developed a savings strategy to meet the anticipated reduction in funding. The Council manages its finances well and demonstrates strong, accountable financial leadership. It identified that savings totalling £3 million were required in 2011-12, and that over the period 2011-12 to 2014-15 a shortfall in the region of £10.4 million will need to be covered.
- 33 The Council had already introduced changes to the budget setting process as a means of tackling the departmental arrangements that were previously used. These changes, together with the arrangements it is developing within its transformation and efficiency programme, should enable it to make better informed strategic decisions about the use of the funding it has available.
- 34 In September 2011, the Council was reporting that it would achieve its savings target for 2011-12, but was still likely to end the financial year with a very small overspend, estimated at £60,000. The Council anticipates that in education, leisure and cultural services, all areas will remain within budget, with the exception of the area of continuing education which is predicting a £250,000 overspend as a result of a reduction in the contract value approved by the Welsh Government for Ceredigion Training.
- However, in social services, the Council predicts overspends in learning disabilities services, families and children services, and older people services. These overspends are offset by predicted underspends, largely in local authority homes and mental health services.
- 35 A three-year Medium Term Financial strategy is produced annually. On 15 December 2011, the Council approved a single document bringing together its financial assumptions, standards of service delivery, demographic needs and workforce plans. This document will enable it to consider overall management of its resources to meet its objectives. Financial information underpins decision making, and financial decision making is based on comprehensive financial information. Members review the Council's financial performance on a regular basis.
- 36 The average band D council tax paid in Ceredigion has for several years been below the Welsh average, by around £30 per household. In 2011-12 it was £1,132.55 compared with the Welsh average of £1,161.96 making Ceredigion the eighth lowest of the 22 authorities in Wales. In Ceredigion the band D council tax increased by 21.5 per cent over the five years, compared with an average increase of 20.8 per cent across Wales.
- 37 While council tax levels are typically low in Ceredigion, collection rates are slightly higher than the average in Wales. For 2010-11, the Council collected 96.8 per cent of council tax, compared with the Welsh average recovery rate of 96.6 per cent.

- 38 The auditor appointed by the Auditor General issued his Annual Audit Letter to the Council in November 2011 confirming that the Council complied with reporting requirements relating to its financial performance and use of resources, although some matters arising from the audit were identified. [Appendix 3](#) gives more detail.
- 39 Our audit work on the Council's management of housing benefit and council tax benefit concluded that there is low risk of service failure in the Council's arrangements to administer, secure, and provide customer access to these benefits. We also reported that the Council is contributing about £0.5 million towards the cost of providing the service. We propose to undertake in 2012 a further review of the Council's housing benefit service and also follow up the progress it has made in relation to our work on housing and council tax overpayments.
- 40 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's performance during 2010-11 that the Council needs to: 'Implement its medium term financial plan in order to be able to deliver efficiency savings in a planned and systematic way.' The CSSIW also noted that: 'The director of social services reports that the current difficult financial climate within the public sector will continue to be a challenge, particularly with the demographic increases identified within Ceredigion of people aged 65 years and over. There is a strong commitment corporately to make efficiencies, increase productivity, improve culture and release cashable savings, as there is a recognition that existing services are too costly and the current level of spend is not sustainable.
- The corporate management team are working towards achieving a balanced budget by 2013, which will require the delivery of its plans to deal with the current £1.1 million overspend' (in social services).
- 41 The Council has started to put new human resources arrangements in place, but because of difficulties with recruitment and sickness absence in social services this has impacted on the service's capacity to support and deliver some intended improvements. We reported in our 2011 Corporate Assessment Update Letter that the Council has undertaken work to consolidate corporate Human Resources (HR) arrangements and recently made an internal appointment to the post of Head of Corporate Human Resources. The Council had provided a note of the considerable work that has been undertaken over the past six to 12 months and we undertook a baseline assessment of current HR arrangements in collaboration with the new head of service as a means of assessing the development of the arrangements in the future.
- 42 From this baseline assessment we have concluded that the Council has started the process of creating a more corporate HR service which is geared towards ensuring greater consistency in HR practice than was the case in previous years. There is now far greater control over decisions to recruit and also an effective authority-wide Voluntary Early Retirement (VER) scheme. The scheme is being used to help the Council to restructure and make savings, but the onus remains on managers to ensure that the right skill mix and resources to deliver services are maintained.

43 More needs to be done strategically, for example, introducing more effective workforce planning, and operationally, including improving the monitoring of sickness levels and attendance management practices. The two most significant and outstanding challenges for the Council's HR service in the next year are likely to be:

- Finalising the job evaluation process and accommodating the likely financial implications of this. The Council has still to conclude its negotiations to achieve a single status agreement for equal pay. By November 2011, around nine in every 10 of the Council's jobs had been evaluated. The expectation is that the remaining 10 per cent will be completed by April 2012. The resolution of both job evaluation and single status should provide the Council with more certainty over its future pay costs.
- Operating at the centre of the various transformation initiatives that may involve considerable restructuring within the Council as well as forging closer links with other councils and the NHS.

44 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's performance in social services during 2010-11 that the Council needs to develop or improve a number of issues relating to its Human Resources and workforce. These include:

- 'Corporate human resources support for social services to deliver plans to improve management of sickness.
- Workforce planning to minimise the effects of staff absence. This is a significant concern in a number of areas.'

45 The CSSIW's Annual Evaluation notes that 'other workforce issues, particularly the management of sickness also need to be addressed to achieve benefits through both improved efficiency in front line services as well as financial savings'. It clarifies that in children's services 'although additional staffing was agreed, difficulties with recruiting and sickness absence have impacted on the service to deliver the necessary improvements'.

46 For adults' services, the Annual Evaluation notes that: 'The impact of both absence due to both sickness and staff vacancies was seen in adult services during the recent protection of vulnerable adults' inspection.' The Evaluation concludes that: 'The Council needs to ensure that the planned improvements to corporate human resources are able to more effectively assist social services in delivering improved management of this process. This remains an area of priority for the Council.'

The Council recognises the importance of effective use of technology and significant improvements have been made

47 Our 2011 Corporate Assessment Update letter reports that the Council recognises the importance of the effective use of technology and significant progress has been made in recent years. Significant improvements have been made to the technology infrastructure and technology foundations, and governance arrangements are in place to support the delivery of efficiencies and service transformation. The Council's recent links with Powys County Council's ICT systems is an example of this. The Council has not yet defined how it wants to deliver its services in

the future, for example, its approach to home working, or 'centralisation' of back-office functions. Such decisions are required to set a context for the future development of the technology infrastructure.

- 48 We are currently undertaking a review of the Council's approach to Information Management. Due to the increasing financial pressure on the public sector there is a need to maximise and exploit the information held to deliver and plan for quality services effectively. We will summarise our findings in our next report.

The Council is committed to and is progressing its collaboration and partnership working

- 49 Our 2010 Preliminary Corporate Assessment proposed that the Council:
- clarify its corporate strategy for the development of shared services and alternative models of service delivery that link clearly to its Medium Term Financial Strategy; and
 - build on its recent reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of its partnership framework.
- 50 The Council is involved in a number of current collaborations and has been undertaking a significant amount of work as part of its transformation programme to map current and assess future partnerships and collaborations with other bodies. With the growing demands for efficiencies, due to financial pressures on the public sector, the Council's Transformation and Efficiencies Group noted in July 2011 that, whilst the Council should address and consider all

opportunities for collaboration, a clear feasibility study/business case should be developed in respect of each case and considered on its merits and any recommendations for collaboration based on clear, identified service improvements or cost efficiencies.

- 51 Drawing on the views of the Council's Transformation and Efficiencies Group, we have commenced a review of the Council's approach to the development of shared services. The objective of our review is to assess the Council's approach to developing feasibility studies and business cases for shared services, to ensure that they are robust and comprehensive. The remit of the review is currently being agreed with officers, but will include an assessment of the processes supporting the Council's decision making in relation to the potential collaboration with Powys County Council for a shared social services function.
- 52 The CSSIW also reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's social services performance during 2010-11 what the Council does well and needs to develop or improve in relation to partnership working as follows:
- 'What the Authority does well:
- Secondment of key staff to lead on social care and health developments (adults services).
 - Focus on developing improved needs analysis – work on older people commended in the recent Social Services Improvement Agency report.
 - Progress in taking forward the modernisation and integration agenda.

What the Local Authority needs to develop/improve:

- Take forward the plans to develop integrated and improved point of access for adult services.
- Revision of the management arrangements for the West Wales adoption consortium.
- Multi-agency engagement in (child protection) core group working.
- Promotion of life chances for looked after children through increase in support for education and health services.
- Delivery of revised commissioning strategies in order to support future financial decisions.
- Delivery of further outcomes from the plans for integration of services.'

53 The CSSIW's Annual Evaluation specifically comments on the current feasibility study being undertaken between Ceredigion and Powys councils in relation to joining up social services in both Councils. It notes that: 'There is currently a feasibility study taking place, supported by Pricewaterhouse Coopers, into a possible central Wales social care service being developed between Ceredigion and Powys county councils' social services departments. The proposal would involve the director of Ceredigion taking on this role across the two councils. This will have significant impact and CSSIW will continue to monitor this development. As identified earlier the capacity of the workforce to be able to meet the challenges of leading and managing change is not adequately developed. The Council has also identified this and needs to ensure that the necessary skills and capacity

can be identified to support future integration plans both with health partners and to support the possible integration with Powys County Council.'

The Council's commitment to public engagement is growing

54 Our public engagement study concluded that the Council's commitment to public engagement is growing but it does not have sound arrangements to ensure engagement is effective and to evaluate the effectiveness of its engagement activity. To improve, we proposed that the Council should develop clear internal arrangements to ensure that, when services and corporate departments engage with citizens, there is sufficient guidance and support on the most appropriate methods to use to set up, collect and analyse data and information. These arrangements should ensure greater consistency and robustness throughout the Council's public engagement activities and in feeding back the outcomes of engagement.

55 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's social services performance during 2010-11 that the Council engages well with service users in reviewing and shaping services but needs to develop and improve its awareness of complaints procedures across all services.

56 The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales's Annual Summary provides a breakdown of all complaints received and investigated by his office in relation to all local authorities in Wales during 2010-11. In his letter to the Council in July 2011, the Ombudsman notes an increase in the number of complaints about the Council that were received by his

office, with Planning and Building Control remaining the largest single area of complaint. He notes that there has been a decrease in the number of complaints taken forward to investigation, although the figure is above the average for councils in Wales. The Ombudsman also expresses concern about the delay in the Council providing responses to his enquiries, with one of the Council's responses taking longer than six weeks due to the complexity of the matter.

integrated impact assessment screening tool, but the Board has raised concerns about the robustness of the assessment. The Council has consistently failed to submit its annual monitoring report to the Board within the agreed timeframe.

The Council is on target to meet its Equalities duties and is active in promoting the Welsh language but its progress in delivering against its Welsh Language Scheme is variable

- 57 The Council states that it supports and promotes equalities throughout the organisation and is developing a Single Equality Plan, which it expects to be in place by April 2012, in order to comply with the new statutory responsibilities being introduced under the Equalities Act 2010.
- 58 The Welsh Language Board reports that the Council has the ability to capture and report data on the linguistic skills of all staff. The data suggests that it has sufficient numbers of Welsh speakers to allow it to provide a comprehensive Welsh language service across all service areas. The Board has praised the Council for updating contracts issued to care home owners providing residential care services on its behalf. Further work is now required to extend the practice to other service areas. The Council has included a question on the Welsh language in its

The Council's delivery of improvement in priority areas is variable

59 We commented above on the Council's improvement objective 'to transform its services to be more efficient and effective for the citizens'. This part of the report sets out how well the Council is improving its services. It reflects the views of CSSIW in relation to adult and children's services, and Estyn in relation to education, and sets out our own findings about the Council's performance against the remaining four improvement objectives that the Council set itself to achieve during 2010-11.

Action is being taken to address weaknesses in social services to support people in need but, due to capacity issues, intended improvements have not been achieved in some areas

60 The Auditor General has relied on the views, work and evaluations undertaken by the CSSIW during the year to assess how well the Council is supporting people in need. The CSSIW's evaluations are summarised in its most recent Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance 2010-11 as set out in a letter to the Director of Social Services of the Council in October 2011. The main conclusions from CSSIW's evaluation are summarised in the following paragraphs.

61 'There are indications that in adult services the Council has begun to make progress in improving the quality of assessment and care management. There is also evidence of improvement in the way the Council undertakes delivery of safeguarding arrangements for adults. This progress needs to be driven and maintained, supported by secure management arrangements in order to achieve long term, sustained improvement.

Developing services which support and promote independence remains a priority in order to support improved outcomes for people who use services in Ceredigion. Integrated working, particularly with health partners will need to be part of this response and there is evidence to demonstrate progress is in going this direction.

62 The lack of capacity identified in children's services has prevented more progress being made over the last year. Although additional staffing was agreed, difficulties with recruiting and sickness absence have impacted on the service to deliver the necessary improvements. There needs to be a more proactive approach to ensuring that essential services such as assessing children's needs do not fall below critical capacity in the future. Some progress has been made in promoting the corporate parenting responsibilities of the Council although the outcomes for looked after children have not reflected this during 2010-11. The Council faces challenging issues in terms of its rurality but given it has the lowest looked after child population in Wales more focus is needed on providing additional services to support children and young people in its care.

63 Key challenges are facing social services in order to deliver on the corporate commitment to make efficiencies, recognising that existing services are too costly and the current level of spend is not sustainable. These plans are now set out in a medium-term financial plan. Part of these savings will be achieved through service configuration and the ability of the Council to deliver this change will be a challenge and require additional skills and capacity, particularly at management level. The continued development of performance

management, programme management and commissioning to support this work continue to be areas for further development. The Council will want to develop the necessary capacity to deliver in these areas. Other workforce issues, particularly the management of sickness also need to be addressed to achieve benefits through both improved efficiency in front line services as well as financial savings.

- 64 The feasibility of a central Wales social care service between Ceredigion and Powys county councils' social services is being explored, and would involve the director of Ceredigion undertaking this role across the two councils. Ceredigion will want to ensure that it has the necessary skills and capacity to support future integration plans both with health partners and to support the possible integration with Powys County Council.'
- 65 In its Annual Evaluation, the CSSIW sets out key areas of strength and areas for development or improvement for the Council's social services, some of which are included in this report. For a full list of these, please find CSSIW's Annual Review and Evaluation report for 2010-11 at <http://wales.gov.uk/cssiwsbsite/newcssiw/publications/lareviews/2011/5530105/?lang=eng>
- 66 We reviewed the Council's assessment of whether it achieved its Improvement Objective to improve the ways it 'safeguards those who are vulnerable in the community'. We found that although the Council has undertaken a number of actions to improve, due to capacity issues, these activities have not translated to improved performance in some areas as evidenced in the CSSIW Annual Evaluation as set out above. This

could mean that service users are not seeing significant change, which is a source of concern that the Council will need to address.

Overall, performance in education is improving as the strong service management team is focussing on the right things to help people develop

- 67 The Auditor General has relied on the work and inspections undertaken by Estyn during the year to assess how well the Council is helping people develop. Estyn did not carry out an inspection of the Council's education services for children and young people during the last year. However, Estyn has provided the Auditor General with a summary of the Council's performance as set out in the following paragraphs.
- 68 'When a range of contextual information is taken into account, the performance of pupils in Ceredigion is good in key stages 1, 2 and 3. At key stage 4, performance is below average on all but one measure. Too many secondary schools are in the bottom quarter when compared to similar schools across Wales.
- 69 In 2010 Ceredigion exceeded two of the three Welsh Government benchmarks for performance in key stages 3 and 4, based on entitlement to free school meals. This was an improvement on the previous two years when Ceredigion only exceeded one of these benchmarks.
- 70 Attendance in primary and secondary schools is improving. The number of short-term exclusions from schools improved significantly in 2010 although longer exclusions did not improve fast enough and

the number of days lost from school in published information as a result is the highest in Wales.

71 Education managers have taken good steps in relation to procedures for safe recruitment of staff in education settings and to safeguarding in non-maintained settings.'

72 More information about education in Ceredigion can be found on Estyn's website <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-reports/?searchTitle=&searchType=All&localAuthority=88&searchPostcode=&searchDistance=10&submitted=1>

73 Our review of the Council's assessment of whether it achieved its Improvement Objective to 'develop education in Ceredigion' found, in most areas, evidence of improved performance. The Council has improved the sustainability of its 14-19 age-group provision by developing and establishing learning partnerships thereby increasing the number of course options available to learners. The Council has taken difficult decisions to close and amalgamate schools, and has managed these processes well and as a result has reduced surplus places.

Many environment priorities are being achieved, and progress has been made in regenerating Aberystwyth, albeit more slowly than the Council intended

74 The Council has delivered on its aims to improve the coastal and flood defences at Borth and has continued to review its options as it planned to at other places vulnerable to flooding in Ceredigion.

75 The Council has undertaken the majority of its actions in relation to reducing its carbon footprint. Increased loft insulation in existing Council buildings and schools, more efficient lighting, street lamp 'turn offs' and more efficient vehicles support further reductions in emissions and provide financial savings. These activities underwrite the Council's commitment to reducing emissions, as does its Eco Schools work, setting the scene for following generations.

76 The Council has opened a new office at Canolfan Rheidol, Aberystwyth, which has been awarded a number of sustainability awards and commended by the Society of Chief Architects of Local Authorities Civic Buildings of the Year Award 2010.

77 The Council has introduced a new refuse collection model, with separated dry recyclables, food waste and residual waste. This model has helped the Council reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill to 37.43 per cent, through diversion to reuse, recycling and composting (or other biological treatment).

78 Progress with the Council's aim of regenerating Aberystwyth has been slower than the Council intended but several elements of the programme have started in recent months. The Council appointed the developers to redevelop the Mill Street Car Park, which will increase car parking, provide quality town centre retail and new Day Centre facilities in Aberystwyth. While the Council was disappointed to be unable to persuade the Lottery to fund a Town Heritage Initiative, it did secure, through the Welsh Government, just over £10 million to support the regeneration project.

The Council recognises that more consistent and robust corporate evaluation and reporting of performance and outcomes are required to focus better on areas needing the most improvement to achieve all of its priorities

- 79 In Welsh local authorities, corporate and service self-assessments are key elements of a number of improvement and assurance frameworks, such as the Wales Programme for Improvement, the Estyn inspection framework for education, the Annual Council Reporting Framework in social services, and the Annual Governance Statements of local authorities. Other self-assessments are required in preparation for regulatory audit and inspections, and at the request of Welsh Government Ministers.
- 80 This section of the report considers how good the Council's self-evaluation of its performance is. Accurate and robust self-evaluation is critical to the Council's ability to:
- recognise the progress it is making;
 - take remedial action when performance is not reaching anticipated levels and desired outcomes are not being achieved; and
 - report on its performance to local citizens in a balanced and evaluative way.
- 81 The Council has recognised the need to strengthen its corporate arrangements and capacity to ensure more consistent and robust self-challenge and evaluation of performance and outcomes across all of its priorities and services.
- 82 The Council's review of its governance arrangements and the Annual Governance Statement provided a thorough review of whether appropriate arrangements were in place. It described the progress it had made to implement the actions identified in 2010-11, and set out five areas for further work in 2011-12:
- strengthen performance arrangements;
 - review the Constitution;
 - address recommendations made by regulators;
 - develop the transformation agenda; and
 - continue to progress the medium-term financial strategy.
- 83 While its corporate self-evaluation and reporting are currently underdeveloped, the Council responds well to external recommendations for improvement from regulators and others. The Council needs to strengthen its corporate self-assurance and evaluation arrangements.
- 84 Councils need good performance information and robust monitoring and evaluation of that information to be able to assess the progress that they are making. The Council has good performance information based on a broad range of accurately produced Performance Indicators (PIs) that should be combined with qualitative and outcome examples where PIs are not available or relevant. The lack of these alternative measures makes it difficult for the Council to make sound judgements on quality and performance in some areas.
- 85 Performance information, including the Council's financial situation and performance on sickness absence, is reported quarterly via the quarterly Business Review process. This monitoring arrangement does not provide enough robust challenge or address general performance against Council priorities, such as the Improvement Objectives and Outcome Agreements. This prevents the Council from effectively managing performance across services in a consistently robust way, and taking action to identify and address problem

areas at an early stage. The Council recognises that its performance management arrangements need to improve and is planning how it can do that. We will monitor the effectiveness of the revised arrangements.

- 86 The Council's assessment of the progress it made in 2010-11 is set out in its Improvement Plan – Performance. This plan provides an account of the activities that the Council and its partners have been undertaking to deliver its improvement priorities over the past year. As well as describing completed actions, the report includes performance statistics which are more fully presented in an appendix.
- 87 Performance statistics are reported in relation to the previous year and targets set, with comments to provide valuable additional context. However, the Council did not take the opportunity to publish comparisons of its performance with that of other Welsh councils or national averages, although it carries out this work for its own internal purposes. Electronic links to all-Wales performance data are provided.
- 88 Reporting is generally fair but does not record all that the Council has done and there are gaps in the information that make it difficult to know if it has achieved all it set out to do. Often the narrative is very brief and contains very little information about the effect the Council's actions have had on people's lives.
- 89 Although focused mainly on positive achievements the report also highlights areas where progress has been slower than anticipated. But as the report does not cover everything, with sometimes both positive and negative information omitted, it is difficult for the public to know if the report is balanced.
- 90 The Council has made efforts to improve its evaluation and reporting of performance to the public. But despite an open approach to reporting, the Council generally lacks a coherent and robust self-evaluation of how well it thinks it is performing and what it is going to do differently as a result.
- 91 The Council has not produced a separate summary but the main report itself is not over long, potentially negating this need. Publicity for the report was fairly limited and the documents are not clearly signposted on the Council's website.
- 92 The Auditor General has determined that the Council has discharged most of its duties in relation to publishing improvement information; however, it has failed to publish a comparison of its performance with other Welsh improvement authorities and other public bodies as outlined in section 15 (2)b(ii) of the Local Government Measure (Wales) 2009.
- 93 The Council should also ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government Local Government Measure (Wales) 2009 guidance; specifically in:
- making the report easier to find (Welsh Government guidance Part 1 – Para 6.9);
 - making the report easier to read (Welsh Government guidance Part 1 – Para 6.9);
 - make communities and citizens aware of the performance assessment (Welsh Government guidance Part 1 – Para 6.14); and
 - actively seeking feedback and comments from citizens and communities (Welsh Government guidance Part 1 – Para 6.14).

- 94 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's social services performance during 2010-11 that the Council had:
- Not been able to report on the numbers of children in need reviews completed during 2009-10 as they are not recorded electronically, although a manual audit has been undertaken for 2010-11.
 - No overarching quality assurance framework for adults 'whilst the one they have is being reviewed in a joint performance management work stream, with the aim of rolling out across both health and social care services'. The CSSIW reports that 'the Council will want to assure itself that adequate measures are in place to support their business in the interim'.
- 95 The Council has made progress against all of the areas we suggested for improvement and a summary of progress against each proposal for improvement is set out in [Appendix 5](#). Further, the Council has welcomed our comments and responded well to this external challenge.
- 96 The CSSIW's recent Annual Evaluation also reports how the Council has progressed in implementing actions and recommendations from previous reviews and inspections. On the whole, progress is reported to have been made to address the actions and recommendations raised in CSSIW reports.

Appendices



Appendix 1

Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake an annual Improvement Assessment, and to publish an Annual Improvement Report, for each improvement authority in Wales. This requirement covers local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

This report has been produced by the Auditor General to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges duties under section 19 to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an Improvement Assessment under section 18 and stating whether, as a result of his improvement plan audit under section 17, he believes that the authority has discharged its improvement planning duties under section 15.

Improvement authorities are under a general duty to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions'. Improvement authorities are defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

The annual Improvement Assessment is the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. The Improvement Assessment is informed by a forward-looking assessment of an authority's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It also includes a retrospective assessment of whether an authority has achieved its planned improvements in order to inform a view as to the authority's track record of improvement. This report also summarises the Auditor General's conclusions on the Council's self-assessment of its performance.

The Auditor General may also in some circumstances carry out special inspections (under section 21), in respect of which he will provide a report to the relevant authorities and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). The Auditor General will summarise audit and assessment reports in this published Annual Improvement Report (under section 24). This will also summarise any reports of special inspections.

An important ancillary activity for the Wales Audit Office is the co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work (required by section 23) which takes into consideration the overall programme of work of all relevant regulators at an improvement authority. The Auditor General may also take account of information shared by relevant regulators (under section 33) in his assessments.

Appendix 2

Useful information about Ceredigion and Ceredigion County Council

The Council

Ceredigion County Council spends approximately £199 million per year (2010-11). This equates to about £2,550 per resident. In the same year, the Council also spent £23 million on capital items.

The average band D council tax in 2010-11 for Ceredigion was £1,097.25 per year. This has increased by 3.22 per cent to £1,132.55 per year for 2011-12; 61.5 per cent of the dwellings within Ceredigion are in council tax bands A to D.

The Council is made up of 42 elected members who represent the community and make decisions about priorities and use of resources. The political make-up of the Council is as follows:

- Independent (12), Welsh Liberal Democrat (9), Labour (1): Coalition
- 20 Plaid Cymru

Ceredigion County Council's Chief Executive is Miss E M Bronwen Morgan:

- Director of Education and Community Services: Mr Eifion Evans
- Director of Social Services: Mr Parry Davies
- Director of Environment Services and Housing: Mr Bryan Thomas
- Director of Finance: Mr W Gwyn Jones
- Director of Highways Property and Works: Mr Huw T Morgan

Other information

The Assembly Members for Ceredigion and the Mid and West Wales Region are:

- Elin Jones – Plaid Cymru (Constituency)
- Rebecca Evans – Labour (Regional)
- Simon Thomas – Plaid Cymru (Regional)
- Joyce Watson – Labour (Regional)
- William Powell – Welsh Liberal Democrats (Regional)

The Member of Parliament for Ceredigion is:

- Mark Williams – Liberal Democrat

For more information see the Council's own website at www.ceredigion.gov.uk or contact the Council at Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron, Ceredigion, SA46 0PA.

Appendix 3

Annual Audit Letter to the Members of Ceredigion County Council

As you will be aware the Auditor General for Wales will be issuing an Annual Improvement Report (AIR) to each local authority by the end of January 2012 and some of the issues that were traditionally reported in the Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter will be included in that report. Therefore I have taken the opportunity to summarise the key messages arising from the Appointed Auditor's statutory responsibilities into this short letter which forms the Annual Audit Letter. The letter is designed to be a standalone document, but will also be presented to the Council and the public as part of the Annual Improvement Report and therefore discharges my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

Ceredigion County Council complied with reporting requirements relating to its financial performance and use of resources

- 1 It is the Council's responsibility to:
 - put systems of internal control in place to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions and to ensure that its assets are secure;
 - maintain proper accounting records;
 - prepare a Statement of Accounts in accordance with relevant requirements; and
 - establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.
- 2 The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 requires me to:
 - provide an audit opinion on the accounting statements;
 - review the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; and
 - issue a certificate confirming that I have completed the audit of the accounts.
- 3 On 30 September 2011 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. A number of matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members in my Audit of Financial Statements report presented to the Audit Committee on 26 September 2011, the most significant of which related to:
 - a reclassification of costs of £1,165,000 to distinguish the interest element of the PFI Scheme from the charge to Children's and Education Services, in order to follow the guidance of IFRIC 12. provide an audit opinion on the accounting statements;
 - the recognition of a liability of £802,000 in regard to finance leased buildings reflected in the balance sheet;
 - a reclassification of £251,000 from provisions to accruals;

- an unreconciled difference between the Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure figure as reported within the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement and the difference in the Net Worth in the Balance Sheet. This has been allocated to 'other gains and losses'. A recommendation was raised requesting that the Council ensures such reconciliations are resolved as soon as they are identified.
- 4 From 2010/11 local authorities in Wales are required to produce their accounts on the basis of International Financial Reporting Standards. The introduction of these new standards imposed significant additional demands on the Council's finance staff. Despite these additional pressures, the accounts were prepared by the statutory deadline.
 - 5 My review of the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness has been based on the audit work undertaken on the accounts as well as placing reliance on the work completed as part of the Improvement Assessment under the Local Government Measure (2009). The main findings from this latter work will be set out in the Annual Improvement Report. In addition I also bring the following issue to your attention:
 - the Council has not yet fully integrated its medium term financial plan with the strategic objectives of the Council. The current plan is being redrafted to be clearer and more outward looking to show clear links with actual service delivery achieved. I will summarise the Council's progress in the Annual Improvement report to be issued in January 2012.
 - 6 I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 30 September 2011.
 - 7 The financial audit fee for 2010/2011 is currently expected to be in line with that set out in the Annual Audit Outline.

John Golding, Grant Thornton UK LLP
For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor

9 November 2011

Appendix 4

Ceredigion County Council's improvement objectives and self-assessment

Ceredigion County Council's improvement objectives

The Council is required by the Welsh Government to make plans to improve its functions and the services it provides. Each year it must publish these plans along with specific 'improvement objectives' that set out the key things that the Council intends to do to improve. The Council must do this as soon as possible after 1 April each year.

Ceredigion's Improvement Plan Objectives 2010-11 set five Improvement Objectives for it to achieve during that year. For 2011-12 the Council has retained these objectives and added a sixth objective for delivery during this year. The Council's improvement objectives from both last year and this year are as follows.

The Council's Improvement Objectives for 2010-11
1 Transforming our services to be more efficient and effective for the citizen.
2 The regeneration of Aberystwyth as a regional and national centre.
3 Developing education in Ceredigion.
4 Measures to protect and provide a sustainable environment.
5 Improve the ways we safeguard those who are vulnerable in our community.

The Council's Improvement Objectives for 2011-12
1 Transforming our services to be more efficient and effective for the citizen.
2 Improve learning opportunities for all of our learners.
3 Providing a high quality and safe environment.
4 Improve the way we safeguard those who are vulnerable.
5 Promote and develop Aberystwyth as a regional and national centre.
6 Promote and develop economic renewal across the county.

The Council's Improvement Plan Objectives 2011-12 can be found on the Council's website at <http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=15057>

Ceredigion County Council's self-assessment of performance

The Council's self-assessment of its performance during 2010-11 was published by 31 October 2011 and can be found in its Improvement Plan Performance 2010-11 on the Council's website at <http://www.ceredigion.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=15694>

Appendix 5

Summary of the Council's progress against the Wales Audit Office's proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
From the Wales Audit Office's Preliminary Corporate Assessment 2010		
<p>The Council should prepare and agree a strategic plan for change setting out how it intends to better equip itself to support future improvement within increasingly limited resources. This should include details of how the Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen its corporate leadership, direction, governance and scrutiny arrangements to ensure that it can make the decisions necessary. 	<p>Transformation programme established and underway. Governance and scrutiny arrangements are being reviewed as part of an approved action plan. The Council has agreed a Vision and Strategic Objectives which set out the Council's approach, and lead directors are progressing work in key areas, for example, building a new senior manager structure, updating the Council's constitution, and forward work programmes and discussions relating to scrutiny committee numbers.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress of the transformation programme and focus our future assessments on the impact (outcomes) of the programme, and the various elements of the programme, and how the Council is measuring, monitoring and evaluating whether the desired outcomes are being achieved.</p>

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
From the Wales Audit Office's Preliminary Corporate Assessment 2010		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a clear direction by identifying key priorities, objectives and measurable outcomes in relation to all its strategic objectives and plans showing how appropriate financial provision and adequate resources will be made available to support its activities to deliver those outcomes. • Clarify its corporate strategy for the development of shared services and alternative models of service delivery that links clearly to its Medium Term Financial Strategy. • Continue to progress its Medium Term Financial Strategy and strengthen its strategic approach to managing resources, tying resources to priorities and informing alternative means of service delivery. 	<p>Part of the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway – Development of the MTFP is a continuous process, the most recent plan being approved by Cabinet in October 2011. The plan has been refreshed and includes additional data following Wales Audit Office recommendations, for example, risk assessment, demographics, workforce planning issues, service issues and developments, service standards and equalities.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>
<p>Review the way it manages people, their performance and skills, to efficiently support the delivery of strategic priorities.</p>	<p>Part of the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway – the Council has produced an HR work plan (August 2011) which is now being implemented and improvements are already underway.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
From the Wales Audit Office's Preliminary Corporate Assessment 2010		
Build on its recent reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of its partnership framework.	Part of the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway – the Council is making positive progress in responding to the Welsh Government agenda on collaborations and is pushing ahead at an LSB level as well as looking at neighbouring councils for opportunities.	The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.
Continue to strengthen its use of ICT, and improve management of performance, risk and projects at a strategic level.	Part of the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway – the Council has recently communicated its proposal to strengthen the performance management arrangements using a 'hub and spoke' model. The risk register has been reviewed and steps taken to strengthen ICT governance are driving change.	The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme and as part of our themed reviews relating to Information Management and Technology.

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
From the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report 2010		
<p>The Council will need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set out clearly what it wants to achieve from its transformation and how it will manage, support, resource and deliver the changes. 	<p>Part of the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway. Programme objectives have been set and responsibility and accountabilities at officer level are clear. A framework has been established and progress is being made.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish improvement objectives earlier next year. 	<p>The Council's Improvement Plan – Objectives were successfully published in May 2011.</p>	<p>No further action.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at existing information for each improvement objective to establish the current position and identify gaps that need to be filled. 	<p>The preparations for the 2012-2013 Improvement Plan will align the transformation strategic objectives with Improvement Objectives.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will review the Improvement Plan – Objectives 2012-2013 in line with legislation and guidance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor progress and demonstrate the results clearly for local residents and citizens. 	<p>Linked to the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway. The Council is undertaking results based accountability (RBA) training to improve the way it plans, monitors and collects evidence to support progress against outcomes. The Council also plans to engage more with the citizens through the citizens' panel.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
From the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report 2010		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure clear links between the Improvement Objectives and the Council's other plans. 	<p>Part of the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway. The Council plans to align its strategic objectives and its improvement objectives and link these to a more robust performance reporting framework. This is to be extended to the development of a single integrated plan at LSB level.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use more than the measures it currently has in its Improvement Plan Objectives to give the public a balanced picture of its performance. 	<p>Linked to the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway. The Council is undertaking RBA training to improve the way it plans, monitors and collects evidence to support progress against outcomes. This will help the Council deliver a more balanced picture of performance going forward.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will review the Improvement Plan – Objectives 2012-2013 in line with legislation and guidance and will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
From the Wales Audit Office's Corporate Assessment Update Letter 2011		
<p>To support the drive for cultural change, roles within Cabinet should be reviewed in the context of assessing whether portfolio arrangements that are aligned with directorates support or present a potential barrier to change.</p>	<p>Governance and scrutiny arrangements are being reviewed, the Leader continues to be involved in assessing portfolio arrangements and has been an integral member of the team looking at structures and service alignment.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>
<p>The organisation of the Scrutiny function should be reviewed with the aim of: reducing the overall number of Committees; monitoring and scrutinising the direction, progress and impact of the transformation programme; and establishing the means of taking a cross-cutting view of service delivery. At its 28 July 2011 meeting the Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee decided that it would scrutinise the work of the Transformation and Efficiency Board.</p>	<p>Governance and scrutiny arrangements are being reviewed, the Council has undertaken a pan-Wales review of scrutiny arrangements and has used this information to support its approach to structures.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>
<p>Data and information should be validated by the appropriate officers and Corporate Directors should be satisfied that reliable data and sign-off procedures are in place prior to submission to other colleagues.</p>	<p>Linked to the Council's Transformation programme which is established and underway. Data published in the Improvement Plan – Performance 2010-2011 was validated by the Corporate Performance Management Officers Group (CPMOG) before presentation to CMT and Cabinet. This involvement will continue going forward for both the improvement objectives and future performance reporting.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will review future performance reports and the performance management process as part of the improvement assessment and will continue to monitor progress as part of our monitoring of the transformation programme.</p>

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