



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report

Vale of Glamorgan 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 Steve Barry, John Golding and colleagues under the direction of Jane Holownia 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 relevant Welsh inspectorates, and the audit work of the Wales Audit Office and the Appointed Auditor 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 the Vale of Glamorgan Council (the Council).
- 2 Overall, the Auditor General has concluded that the Council has strong corporate management arrangements in place and is securing improvement across a range of services. Refining performance review arrangements will enable the Council to establish a clearer view of the outcomes that it has achieved.
- 3 We found that effective financial management, good use of information technology and strengths in people management were ensuring the Council was using most of its resources but that it still had much to do to improve the management of its land and property.
- 4 We also found that the Council can demonstrate improvement in most key service areas but performance for delivering disabled facilities grants remains poor despite improvements in recent years, because children and young people wait on average 1,139 days and adults wait on average 544 days before a grant is delivered. We based this conclusion on the following:
 - the Council is working effectively with partners to improve community safety; co-location of staff has improved local services and speeded up response times; successful action has been taken against illegal sales of alcohol and improved support has led to a reduction in re-offending by young offenders;
 - the Council has made good progress in delivering improvements in social care;
 - while the delivery times for disabled facilities grants have improved, children and young people are still facing lengthy waiting times; and
 - pupil attainment results in schools are good although there has been a decline in attendance in secondary schools.
- 5 Finally, the report sets out our views on the Council's own assessment of its performance and arrangements. We concluded that the Council has good arrangements in place for setting its objectives and monitoring delivery of actions and is in the early stages of improving the way in which it evaluates the impact of what it is doing.

Proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement

Improve performance assessment by

- P1** Continuing the development of outcome focussed measures by moving from reporting arrangements that focus primarily on performance indicators and on the completion, or otherwise, of an action and ensuring that:
- intentions are expressed in a way which allows progress to be measured; and
 - reporting arrangements consistently provide members with an evaluation of performance in the context of the objective that the Council is aiming to achieve.

We have also separately provided the Council with feedback about specific service areas

- P2** Implement specific proposals for improvement arising from the following reviews.

Human Resources

- Introduce regular, formal performance reports assessing key elements of the HR function to enable more routine and systematic scrutiny of the service, by the senior management team and members.
- Prior to any reconfiguration of the HR service, evaluate the current service and options for change to help to ensure that best practice and 'what works' can be perpetuated and that any new model addresses acknowledged weaknesses.
- Ensure that all services consider how skills and learning within their areas can be documented and passed on to other staff to help learning to be retained within the organisation and the development of appropriate succession planning arrangements.

Asset Management

- Ensure that the Corporate Asset Management Plan is updated and clearly demonstrates how assets will support the delivery of corporate objectives.
- Ensure that all assets are mapped and understood in terms of whether they need to be retained as they are, their use changed, or disposed of.
- Develop appropriate performance management arrangements around the use of assets.

Proposals for improvement

Disabled Facilities Grants

Improve performance by:

- Refining processes in accordance with detailed proposals for improvement in Appendix One of our separate report on this subject.
- Introducing modern methods of procurement to develop framework agreements and partnered contracts for Disabled Facilities Grants services.
- Finding out more about what customers think of the Disabled Facilities Grant process and making alterations as necessary.

Improve scrutiny, oversight and strategic management by:

- Adopting Internal Audit recommendations for improving administrative and financial controls and by introducing regular internal audit testing.
- Developing a wider range of quantitative and qualitative measures to enable Cabinet and scrutiny members to evaluate the delivery of the service and the outcomes for applicants.

Detailed report



Introduction

- 6 This report was prepared by the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General. 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), 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 a 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.
- 10 We do not undertake a comprehensive annual review of all council arrangements or services. The Council has adopted 34 improvement objectives across seven priority areas. We did not evaluate all activity but chose to focus on key elements of corporate management arrangements that underpin the way the council is able to make effective use of its resources and the outcome of its activity in specific service areas. This year we did not make any assessment of the delivery of the Council's regeneration objectives. Instead, we looked in detail at how well the Council:
- is meeting its aims for managing its corporate resources and providing community leadership and the progress it is making with partners in the development of the Community Strategy;
 - is meeting its aims for community safety;
 - is meeting its aims for health, social care; and
 - had assessed and reported on its performance against its objectives for 2010-11.

- 11 We have also included reference to work undertaken in 2011 by other regulatory bodies such as Estyn, CSSIW and the Welsh Language Board.
- 12 The conclusions in this report are based on our cumulative and shared knowledge and the findings of the prioritised work undertaken this year.

The Council has good arrangements in place for managing its resources and driving change but still has much to do to improve management of its land and property

The Council manages its finances well and demonstrates strong, accountable financial leadership

- 13 The Council had identified that savings totalling £7.24 million were required in 2011-12, and the budget process for 2011-12 identified £9.3 million of savings (more than actually required). The Council also knows that it will need to meet a shortfall of £17.83 million over the three-year period 2011-12 to 2013-14 and its budget preparations continue to plan for this shortfall. A number of new ways of working are being introduced aimed at securing efficiencies, improving service outcomes and saving money. The financial efficiencies targets have been met and exceeded in recent years, helped by the management culture of financial awareness.
- 14 The Leader, Deputy Leader, the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance, ICT and Property operate as the Council's Budget Working Group and provide clear financial direction. The Council's overarching objective is to continue to provide all the services that it has done in the past, but to provide them more efficiently. Cuts in services to end users are considered to be a last resort. In formulating the budget, discussion and dialogue take place between the finance department and other departments of the Council to ensure that as many as possible of the Council's 'aspirational' objectives are achievable. The Council's highly structured system of corporate performance reporting ensures that effective links can be made between corporate plans (including the Medium Term Financial Plan), service delivery, performance targets and operating finances.
- 15 Each year, for the last eight years, the Council has produced a three-year Medium Term Financial Plan. In 2011-12, the Council will produce two such plans, as it is changing the timing of publication from the summer to January so that the Plan can directly inform the budget making process. These plans are well-written and present financial issues in a way that is likely to be accessible to, and understood by, those who are not financial experts. Financial information underpins decision making. Members review the Council's financial performance on a regular basis. Budget holders can speak to their accountants, and finance reports can be tailored to match their needs in terms of presentation style and timing/frequency. Revenue and capital monitoring reports for each Directorate are presented to the relevant Scrutiny Committee on a monthly basis. These are then assembled together in an overall report to Cabinet.
- 16 The Council has good systems in place to manage many of the changing circumstances and most of the risks it faces. The Council's Corporate Risk Management Group is chaired by the Head of Accountancy and Resource Management. The Group has links to the service planning process and separately identifies financial risks that are specific to particular services or are risks 'across the board'. As far as risks can be identified (such as inflation and reduced income) these are taken on board and built into financial planning. Reputational risk is also considered.
- 17 The external auditor appointed by the Auditor General recently gave his opinion on the Council's accounts and concluded that the financial statements were satisfactory. **Appendix 3** gives more detail.

The Council is making good use of information and communications technology in the provision of services and delivering efficiencies

- 18 The Council has established sound technology foundations and ICT governance arrangements and is using technology to deliver efficiencies and to transform service delivery. The Council is using ICT to enable staff and councillors to work more efficiently by means of electronic document management, supporting mobile working by use of equipment such as 'smart pens' that record information for transfer to computers thereby saving staff time and providing all councillors with computers, broadband connection and access to Council information systems from home. The ways in which people can contact the Council and use services have been improved through website facilities that provide information and enable 'online' transactions, and new ways of contacting the Council and receiving information have been introduced such as text messaging, use of social networks and e-mail services. The performance of the ICT support service is good, enabling the development of other Council services.
- 19 The Council's ICT Strategy 2010-2014 supports and underpins the organisation's improvement objectives and aligns with the Welsh National ICT Strategy. It was developed by the Head of ICT in consultation with Heads of Service, and is underpinned by an implementation plan. The Head of Service reviews the strategy and implementation plan on an annual basis, to ensure the strategy is up to date and intended actions are being delivered. The strategy includes the aims of securing potential savings and efficiencies by

means of collaboration with two other councils.

- 20 The Council manages its ICT assets effectively and arrangements are in place to capture the potential demand from services for ICT support via their service plans. There is scope to better use performance information relating to the take-up and use of the Council's different customer access channels to inform and drive further improvement.

The Council has put robust arrangements in place to develop its Human Resources function

- 21 The Council is developing a Human Resources strategy, intended to be consistent and supportive of its wider corporate objectives. The work of the HR function and the Head of Service is reviewed by the Director of Finance, ICT and Property as part of regular supervision and by the Cabinet Lead for Human Resources as part of the annual appraisal process, and delivery of the Human Resources Service Plan is monitored by the Corporate Resources Scrutiny Committee as well as the Head of Service and his senior managers, although this can be relatively informal.
- 22 The service helps ensure that managers have the new skills they need to drive transformation by providing training in change management and reviewing the impact of that training. Policies such as the absence management policy are in place to improve staff availability, with the Human Resource service supporting managers in the implementation of that policy which in recent years has reduced overall staff sickness absence at the Council. Workforce planning is

in train and the publication of a corporate workforce plan is imminent. This corporate workforce plan will emerge from joint working between service areas and the corporate team, and support the delivery of strategic objectives and financial targets. Risks are identified and monitored by the service management team, as part of the service planning process and as part of the management of corporate risks by the corporate management team (for example, job evaluation is a corporate risk).

- 23 Our overview indicates that there are three areas that the Council needs to improve to enhance the arrangements already in place and protect the best practice that it has already established. The Council is aware of these issues and is either undertaking or has action planned in the immediate future to address them. We will keep a watching brief on this area to monitor progress over the coming months.

Human Resources – proposals for improvement

- Introduce regular, formal performance reports assessing key elements of the HR function to enable more routine and systematic scrutiny of the service, by the senior management team and members.
- Prior to any reconfiguration of the HR service, evaluate the current service and options for change to help to ensure that best practice and 'what works' can be perpetuated and that any new model addresses acknowledged weaknesses.
- Ensure that all services consider how skills and learning within their areas can be documented and passed on to other staff to help learning to be retained within the organisation and the development of appropriate succession planning arrangements.

The Council is in the early stages of improving the way in which it manages its land and property assets but still has much to do

- 24 The Council has been developing its approach to managing its land and property assets. An updated Corporate Asset Management Plan was published in November 2010 and arrangements are in place to refresh it. The Council is enhancing capacity and capability by the addition of six new staff and an Asset Manager. The policy framework necessary to introduce new space standards and ways of working has recently been approved. There is senior level commitment to implementing the changes necessary to improve asset management.
- 25 Work to improve asset management within the Council is at a relatively early stage and there is a significant amount still to do. This work includes:
- understanding how assets can be used more effectively to deliver corporate priorities;
 - mapping assets – what the Council has, what it needs and agreeing a strategy for disposing of assets surplus to requirement;
 - developing relationships with public sector partners in the Vale of Glamorgan, so that opportunities for shared premises, for example, can be realised; and
 - strengthening the performance management arrangements for asset management – including building databases that produce high quality data and setting meaningful targets so that the Council can monitor its progress.
- 26 The Council is aware of these points and has plans in place to address them. Given the financial position of the Council, and the potential savings to be made through better asset management, we think that addressing these weaknesses in asset management should be high on the Council's list of priorities and that mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that the planned changes are supported with the necessary resources and senior level attention.

Asset Management – proposals for improvement

- Ensure that the Corporate Asset Management Plan is updated and clearly demonstrates how assets will support the delivery of corporate objectives.
- Ensure that all assets are mapped and understood in terms of whether they need to be retained as they are, their use changed, or disposed of.
- Develop appropriate performance management arrangements around the use of assets.

The Council has been praised by the Welsh Language Board for improvements in its services

27 The Welsh Language Board praised the Council for achieving the majority of the targets contained within its Welsh Language Scheme. The Board concluded that the Council had complied with its Scheme following its inspection exercise on electoral information and documentation. It also found that improved provision in the Council's customer contact centre had resulted in the centre being able to deal with an increasing number of requests in Welsh. The Board identified priority areas for the Council as now including the implementation of the Linguistic Skills Strategy and completion of the revised Welsh Language Scheme.

The Council and its partners have put strong foundations in place to deliver the Community Strategy: refinement of performance evaluation measures will provide a clearer indication of improvements achieved for citizens

28 Local authorities in Wales have a statutory duty to prepare a Community Strategy showing how they will work with other organisations, through the Local Service Board, to promote and/or improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of their area. The Council has invested considerable effort in developing the Community Strategy to ensure its focus is relevant to local needs and the commitment of all partners. Key to this engagement with partners was the use of a local forum to consider the draft Strategy document, at a conference specifically convened for the purpose. The conference raised the profile of the Community Strategy and enabled some

useful presentations both on ideas and on focus, as well as highlighting problems and concerns to be addressed when delivering the strategy. It also led to a greater awareness about which organisations would lead on which issues, and started the process of identifying how progress would be managed and success measured.

29 The Community Strategy has 10 priority outcomes, and for each outcome there is a list of expected achievements, and also a description of how these will be delivered. The Local Service Board is responsible for four of the 10 priority outcomes and between them the five statutory strategic partnerships (Learning and Skills; Children and Young People; Safer Vale; Health Social Care and Wellbeing, and Regeneration) for the other six priority outcomes.

30 The Community Strategy Delivery Plan (2011-14) is the document that describes how the Community Strategy priorities will be delivered by each of the partners. The Local Service Board also has in place a framework for checking progress and for routinely updating the Plan. Intentions in the Plan are outcome focussed and, with some minor refinement to explain a starting point or clarity about the scale of impact expected, will provide the means of measuring progress.

The Council can demonstrate improvement in most key service areas but performance for delivering disabled facilities grants remains poor despite improvements in recent years

The Council is working effectively with partners to improve community safety and services for specific users

- 31 The Council has been undertaking a range of activities which have contributed to the improvement of aspects of community safety in the area.

Exhibit 1: Good practice: Locating key staff in the same premises has improved the delivery of services and achieved efficiencies

Good Practice: Co-location of key staff leads to improved ways of working

Staff from a number of different agencies involved in working with young people and those at risk of offending were brought together to work from the fire station at Barry. As well as providing office accommodation, space was also created to carry out preventative and rehabilitative work.

The co-location of agencies has resulted in a number of positive outcomes, some that were anticipated and others that were not:

- Sharing office space has speeded up communications and problem solving – success is widely recognised by colleagues and, as a result, a number of other officers are looking to move in (for example, the victim support team).
- The quality of the relationships that fire officers are able to build with young people has been significant and highly valuable, encouraging engagement in preventative activities.

The service delivered has improved:

- Quicker response times to emerging issues, which has contributed to a 12 per cent reduction in overall crime.
- Better use of intelligence, for example mapping where alcohol-related incidents have occurred at weekends enabling more effective and targeted follow-up on Monday mornings. During the summer riots in other parts of the country, a tip off to the team enabled the police to send 25 officers to the target area to prevent unrest. The previous paper system would not have allowed the same speed of response. The right information is now thought more likely to get to the right people, at the right time.
- Greater consistency in the advice given to the public. For example, the police would previously recommend not keeping keys by the door, while the fire service would advise doing this. Anomalies are being noted and clear lines of communication agreed.

32 Because of public concerns about alcohol abuse among young people, and views that they were able to purchase it with apparent ease from some retailers in certain areas, the Council's Trading Standards team undertook a programme of education, training and enforcement action for retailers and a campaign against binge drinking and sales to under 18-year olds. This resulted in fixed penalty notices being issued to some retailers.

33 A Youth Rehabilitation Order is an order imposed by a court which is able to be given to young people under the age of 18 years old when they are being sentenced for having committed a criminal offence. A Youth Rehabilitation Order will usually contain one or more requirements which must be adhered to by that young offender. These may include the requirement for the young person to meet a worker from the Youth Offending Team or the young person may be required to comply with other activities, examples of which are unpaid work, a curfew or specific conditions on where they can live. Youth Rehabilitation Orders were introduced by the Youth Justice Board two years ago. A Youth Rehabilitation Order is intended to help the young person think about the implications of their behavior and plan to resolve difficulties in the future.

34 Youth Offending Team workers are responsible for engaging with the young person to enable and help the young person to understand what it is they need to do. Their role can also involve liaison with the other agencies which may be involved in monitoring aspects of the Youth Rehabilitation Order. The local team had initial concerns regarding the impact on workload, but by introducing preventative programmes it has reduced the

number of first-time entrants to the justice system by 75 per cent and reoffending rates are reducing.

The Council has made good progress in delivering improvements in social care but the delivery of disabled facilities grants remains comparatively weak

The Council has made good progress in delivering improvements in Social Services

35 The role of the CSSIW is to make professional assessments and judgments about social care, early years and social services, and so encourage improvement by the service providers. CSSIW issued its Annual Review and Evaluation of Performance for 2010-2011 for social services in the Vale of Glamorgan in November 2011 which outlines a number of areas of strength as well as areas for improvement or development. The full report can be found on the CSSIW's website. The following paragraphs – 36 to 39 – are drawn from the summary of the CSSIW report.

36 CSSIW found continued evidence of corporate and political support and scrutiny of social services in the Vale of Glamorgan. The leadership of managers in social services is enabling the Council to engage in strategic planning and development of services alongside improving the performance and quality of current services. Despite being a comparatively low-spending Council on some of the bigger social services user groups (children, younger and older adults), the challenging financial climate that has seen social services balance its budget while making savings over the last three years is set to continue with a further four per cent of

savings each year for the next three years. The Council has some significant collaborative and partnership arrangements in place within which it is developing integrated working and regional commissioning with neighbouring authorities and health.

37 There is a significant change agenda to modernise services in the Council, particularly for adults. CSSIW concluded that making a success of the change agenda, within collaborative and partnership working for both children and adults, will be vital if the Council is to achieve its aims and ambitions for services alongside ongoing resource constraint. The Council will wish to ensure that these changes achieve its ambitions to maximise and promote the independence of citizens and can be evidenced by relevant indicators. Additionally the Council has a strategic plan for the development of commissioning of adult services. It has improved the links between contracting and quality assurance but further work is needed to ensure it has sufficient capacity for contracting activity.

38 CSSIW found evidence of improvement in the timeliness of the Council's response to requests for help although, particularly in adult services, there is more to do. There have also been improvements in the quality and consistency of assessment and case management for children. The Council's progress in improving practice in adult services will be the subject of a CSSIW review in 2011-12. The Council has begun to work with a framework that will provide information about the outcomes that its services achieve for adults. CSSIW identified that a similar framework for children's services needs to be developed. Although

CSSIW found evidence of good outcomes being achieved for children and young people, those with complex needs continue to challenge the Council and improvements need to be made to how partner agencies support looked after children and care leavers.

39 CSSIW concluded that the evidence indicated that overall the Council has a relatively longstanding and stable social services workforce. It can retain and recruit staff although a small number of specific frontline posts have proved difficult to fill. The Council has systems in place to support and manage staff including their performance and development. There have been improvements in the effectiveness of the Council's training and development function which supports large numbers of independent sector social care providers as well as social services staff.

The Council is not yet delivering Disabled Facilities Grants effectively, but significant changes are underway that have the potential to improve performance

40 In our 2011 report we said we would monitor the Council's delivery of disabled facilities grants because at the time its performance, as measured by the time taken to deliver a grant, was among the poorest in Wales. In its 2010-11 budget, the Council provided £1.5 million for disabled facilities grants. In 2010-11 the Council completed 145 disabled facilities grants grant applications with an average grant value of £10,300.

41 In its Improvement Plan 2011/12 the Council provides a statement saying that the 'average number of days taken to deliver a disabled facilities grant continues to reduce'. It provides no further narrative but includes

data which, while showing an improvement in average delivery time, still shows the Council's performance to be significantly below the Wales average, and forecasting that it is unlikely to get close to the Wales average for at least another three years.

- 42 Data for performance across Wales shows an average delivery time of 387 days. This ranged from 202 days in Conwy to 680 days reported by Neath Port Talbot.

Exhibit 2: Despite improvements in delivery times in recent years, people in the Vale continue to wait longer for delivery of disabled facilities grants than others in Wales

Average number of days to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant	2009-10	2010-11
Vale of Glamorgan	802	569
Wales	349	387

- 43 The data for the Council also showed that children and young people were particularly disadvantaged, with the time taken by the Council to deliver a grant being over twice as long as the average across Wales.

Exhibit 3: Children and young people experience significant delays in the delivery of disabled facilities grants compared to adults

	Vale of Glamorgan 2010-11	Wales 2010-11
Average number of days to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant for children and young people	1,139	478
Average number of days to deliver a Disabled Facilities Grant for adults	544	386

- 44 In April 2007 the Community Well Being and Safety Scrutiny Committee decided to set up a Task and Finish Group to review the shortage of Occupational Therapists in the Vale of Glamorgan, primarily to see if the waiting times for occupational therapy assessments could be reduced so that the overall waits for disabled facilities grants could be reduced. The Task and Finish Group reported its findings in January 2009.
- 45 While the Council introduced some improvements in response to the findings of the Task and Finish Group, our recent work suggests that this review was too narrow in focus and missed the opportunity to take a wider view of the whole system. Our work indicates that officers have recognised shortcomings in the service and are putting arrangements in place that should address them. The following paragraphs explain the reasoning behind this conclusion.
- 46 The Council's reviews gave some focus to the reasons for the length of time taken by various service providers within the grants process. Although there has been consistent improvement in the last three years, Council officers believe this was made difficult due to the low priority waiting list backlog being dealt with. The time taken to process a disabled facilities grants is still too long and there are big differences in the time taken by the in-house team and private agents, which Council officers believed to be due to major works such as the building of extensions being passed to external agents. Officers told us they are working to address this variation to seek to speed up arrangements partly through avoiding the need to build extensions.
- 47 An internal audit of arrangements undertaken during the summer of 2011 reported that only limited assurance could be placed on the financial and administrative controls within the disabled facilities grants section. The service is responding to the internal audit report with a view to improving controls.
- 48 There is also a lack of clarity of responsibility for the strategic planning and management of the service. Inadequate attention has been given to assessing the strategic demand for the disabled facilities grants service. The only focus has been on reducing delivery time compared to performance in the previous year. We have been advised that the Council intends to improve strategic planning.
- 49 Given the nature of our findings and the importance of this service to vulnerable citizens in need of support for their independent living and wellbeing, we have provided the Council with a separate report explaining issues in more detail, which includes a range of specific proposals for improvement. The Council is aware of the points outlined and has plans in place to address them. We will follow up progress during 2012.

Disabled Facilities Grants – proposals for improvement

Improve performance by:

- refining processes in accordance with detailed proposals for improvement in Appendix One of our separate report on this subject;
- introducing modern methods of procurement to develop framework agreements and partnered contracts for disabled facilities grants services; and
- finding out more about what customers think of the disabled facilities grants process and making alterations as necessary.

Improve scrutiny, oversight and strategic management by:

- adopting Internal Audit recommendations for improving administrative and financial controls and by introducing regular internal audit testing; and
- developing a wider range of quantitative and qualitative measures to enable Cabinet and scrutiny members to evaluate the delivery of the service and the outcomes for applicants.

Results in schools are good but there has been a decline in attendance in secondary schools

- 50 Overall, standards achieved by children and young people in the Vale of Glamorgan, supported by the work of its schools and education service, are good. When a range of contextual information is taken into account, the performance of pupils in the Vale of Glamorgan is above average in all key stages except key stage 2. At key stage 4, performance is very good. On the majority of indicators more than half of secondary schools are in the top quarter when compared to similar schools across Wales.
- 51 The Welsh Government sets educational performance benchmarks for councils in Wales that take account of the relative prosperity of an area. Higher targets are set for more prosperous areas using the level of entitlement to free school meals as an indicator of prosperity. The Vale of Glamorgan is classified as a relatively prosperous area and its benchmark is set to reflect this. Performance in key stages 3 and 4 exceeded the Welsh Government benchmarks in 2010, the last year for which there is data. This has been the case, with only a single exception, in the last four years. Very few local authorities have achieved this level of performance.

52 While attendance has remained good in primary schools, there has been a decline in attendance in secondary schools. Too few secondary schools are in the top quarter for attendance when compared to similar schools in Wales. Secondary school attendance has fallen below the Wales average for the first time and the Council has fallen to 13th place in order of ranking when its benchmark position expects it to be around fifth place. The number of permanent exclusions from schools increased in 2010 and, while fixed-term exclusions reduced, the average number of days lost to all exclusions is climbing.

The Council has good arrangements in place for setting its objectives and monitoring delivery of actions and is in the early stages of improving the way in which it evaluates the impact of what it is doing

- 53 Last year we reported that the Council had adopted 34 improvement objectives in its Corporate Plan in which it set out the action it intended to take over the period 2010-11 to 2013-14. The Council takes a systematic approach to setting objectives and associated actions in its Corporate Plan with the Cabinet reviewing progress against those actions on an annual basis.
- 54 The Council reviewed its Corporate Plan during 2011 and adapted proposed actions. The Council's corporate priorities and improvement objectives which we previously reported were subject to extensive consultation, and links with the Community Strategy are set out in [Appendix 4](#).
- 55 The wording of the Council's improvement objectives, while setting out clear and appropriate intentions, are too broad about the intended 'improvement', sometimes being a statement of the way in which the Council intends to carry out its activities. The Council does, however, include specific underlying actions in its Corporate Plan which provide a clearer statement about intended improvements. The Council could introduce greater clarity by highlighting those activities within the Corporate Plan that it deems its 'improvement objectives', to enable citizens to be clearer about those areas where the Council has decided to concentrate its resources.
- 56 The Council has discharged its duty to publish an assessment of its performance for 2010-11 and published its Improvement Plan 2011/12 on its website in October 2011. The Improvement Plan brings together a lot of information about the performance of the Council in 2010-11 into one large 87-page document. Because of the volume of information presented, the clarity of the message is often lost. This shortcoming applies as much to reporting the successes achieved as to identifying where aims may not have been fully achieved.
- 57 The Council regularly reviews performance during the year by monitoring progress against planned action to meet Corporate Plan intentions. Cabinet members and senior officers also report performance to Scrutiny Committees on a quarterly basis. However, the scrutiny of performance outcomes, rather than reviews against targets or actions, needs to be strengthened.
- 58 At present, quarterly performance reports are often considered by Scrutiny Committees among a large number of other agenda items. This makes it potentially difficult for scrutiny members to devote an adequate amount of time to discussing, analysing and evaluating performance. While performance against targets is reported, there is no evaluation of the impact of activity or an evaluation of the service delivered and in some cases no explanation of performance.
- 59 Last year we proposed that the Council should set outcome measures that enable it to identify the impact of its activity for the community and service users. Progress has been slow. The Council is beginning a review of its performance reporting arrangements with the intention of producing information that gives a clearer picture of the outcome for service users. Our review of the reports to the July 2011 Scrutiny Committees indicates that while it is clear performance is challenged, and the need for specific scrutiny is identified, there remains scope for the Council to refine

current quarterly reporting arrangements and to ensure inclusion of a consistent evaluation of performance.

**Performance assessment –
proposal for improvement**

Continue the development of outcome-focused measures moving from reporting arrangements that focus primarily on performance indicators and on the completion, or otherwise, of an action ensuring:

- intentions are expressed in a way in which allows progress to be measured; and
- reporting arrangements consistently provide members with an evaluation of performance in the context of the objective the Council is aiming to achieve.

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 the Vale of Glamorgan and the Vale of Glamorgan Council

Vale of Glamorgan Council

The Council spends approximately £273.1 million per year (2011-12). This equates to about £2,185 per resident. In 2010-11, the Council spent £29.2 million on capital items.

The average band D council tax in 2011-12 was £1,123.35 per year. This represents an increase of 3.47 per cent compared to the previous year. Of the dwellings within the Vale of Glamorgan, 56.1 per cent are in council tax bands A to D.

There are 47 councillors for the Vale of Glamorgan who represent the community and make decisions about priorities and use of resources. The Council is made up of Members from the following political groups:

- 25 Welsh Conservatives
- 12 Labour
- 6 Plaid Cymru
- 4 Independent

The Council has a Cabinet of 10 councillors who make decisions on strategic and operational issues.

Cabinet

- Leader, Councillor Gordon Kemp, Finance, ICT and Property
- Deputy Leader, Councillor Hunter Jarvie, Legal and Public Protection
- Councillor Geoff Cox, Visible and Building Services
- Councillor Janice Charles, Human Resources and Equalities
- Councillor Anthony Hampton, Education and Lifelong Learning
- Councillor Jeff James, Planning and Transportation
- Councillor Anthony Ernest, Tourism and Leisure
- Councillor Paul Church, Housing and Community Safety
- Councillor Rhodri Traherne, Economic Development and Regeneration
- Councillor Dorothy Turner, Social and Care Services

Corporate Management Team

- Chief Executive, John Maitland Evans
- Director of Learning and Development, Bryan Jeffreys
- Director of Social Services, Phil Evans
- Director of Environmental and Economic Regeneration, Rob Quick
- Director of Legal, Public Protection and Housing Services, Peter H Evans
- Director of Finance, ICT and Property, Sian Davies

Other information

National Assembly Members

- Vale of Glamorgan Jane Hutt
- Cardiff South and Penarth Vaughan Gething

Regional Assembly Members

- Andrew R T Davies
- Eluned Parrott
- David Melding
- Leanne Wood

Members of Parliament

- Vale of Glamorgan Alun Cairns
- Cardiff South and Penarth Alun Michael

For more information see the Council's own website at www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk or contact the Council on 01446 700111.

Appendix 3

Vale of Glamorgan Council accounts and use of resources

Annual Audit Letter to the Members of Vale of Glamorgan Council

The Leader
Vale of Glamorgan Council
Civic Centre
Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4RU

30 November 2011

Dear Councillor Kemp

Annual Audit Letter to the Members of Vale of Glamorgan 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.

Vale of Glamorgan Council complied with reporting requirements relating to its financial performance and use of resources

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.

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.

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 19 September 2011, the most significant of which related to:

- further disclosures in relation to Debtors, Creditors and Cash and cash equivalents, so as to be in line with the Accounting code,
- revisions to the presentation of Section 106 and 278 balances so that they are disclosed as Contributions received in advance, or as Creditors, as appropriate, and
- the inclusion of notes to the accounts explaining the critical judgement and estimates that had been made in the accounts, in line with the requirements of the International Financial Reporting Standards.

From 2010/11 local authorities in Wales were 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.

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.

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts had been completed on 30 September 2011.

The financial audit fee for 2010/2011 is currently expected to be in line with that those set out in the Annual Audit Outline.

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

30 November 2011

Local electors and others have a right to look at the Council's accounts. When the Council has finalised its accounts for the previous financial year, usually around June or July, it must advertise that they are available for people to look at. You can get copies of the accounts from the Council; you can also inspect all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers and receipts relating to them for 20 working days after they are made available. You can ask the auditor questions about the accounts for the year that they are auditing. For example, you can simply tell the auditor if you think that something is wrong with the accounts or about waste and inefficiency in the way the Council runs its services. For more information see the Wales Audit Office leaflet, Council accounts: your rights, on our website at www.wao.gov.uk or by writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ.

Appendix 4

Vale of Glamorgan Council improvement objectives and self-assessment

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.

The Council originally published its seven corporate priorities and 34 improvement objectives in its Corporate Plan 2010. It reviewed them in 2011 and they can be found on the Council's website at: www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Priority area and aim	Improvement Objectives
<p>Community leadership</p> <p>To work with partners to promote good governance, and ensure a co-ordinated approach to delivering the shared vision for the future of the Vale.</p>	<p>To tackle those issues that matter most to local people, with customer focus at the heart of the Council's service delivery.</p> <p>To provide leadership in representing and promoting the interests of the local community and engage effectively with citizens and stakeholders.</p> <p>To promote through partnership working greater co-operation with other organisations that deliver services in the Vale, thereby improving the quality of life of its citizens.</p>
<p>Children and young people</p> <p>To work with partners to ensure that children and young people in the Vale are well informed and supported to access a broad range of quality services that enable them to take full advantage of the life opportunities available in the local community and beyond.</p>	<p>To provide a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities. To ensure every child has a flying start in life of education, training and learning opportunities.</p> <p>To support children and young people to enjoy a healthy life free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.</p> <p>To improve access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.</p> <p>To ensure children and young people are treated with respect, listened to and have their race and cultural identity recognised.</p> <p>To ensure that all children and young people have a safe home and community which support their physical and emotional wellbeing.</p> <p>To ensure children and young people are not disadvantaged by</p>

Priority area and aim	Improvement Objectives
<p>Lifelong learning and skills</p> <p>To work with partners to improve the skills, knowledge and abilities of the citizens of the Vale to help them maximise opportunities and improve their quality of life.</p>	<p>To improve outcomes for learners deemed to be vulnerable due to a range of factors affecting their general wellbeing.</p> <p>To engage with parents, recognising the importance of their role in educating their children and as learners themselves.</p> <p>To progress plans for the development of 21st Century Schools designed to deliver an innovative curriculum within a positive learning environment.</p> <p>To utilise pupil, school and contextual data to target interventions and initiatives to raise levels of pupil attainment.</p> <p>To promote collaboration between schools, colleges, providers of lifelong learning and employers to extend opportunities and increase learning pathways for post-16 learners.</p>
<p>Health, social care and wellbeing</p> <p>To work with partners to meet the diverse needs of our residents in ways that will safeguard and support those who are most vulnerable and in greatest need; help people to keep fit and healthy, and increase social cohesion and equality of opportunity for all.</p>	<p>To improve the health of citizens and encourage healthy lifestyles.</p> <p>To safeguard and protect children, young people and vulnerable adults.</p> <p>To increase the range of accommodation options that enable older people to live independently in the community and develop preventative measures to delay use of residential care.</p> <p>To assess more quickly the needs of adults who require social care and help them use cost effective services.</p> <p>To improve the 'life chance' opportunities for children and young people in need.</p> <p>To reduce homelessness by better prevention, intervention, advice and information.</p>

Priority area and aim	Improvement Objectives
<p>Community safety</p> <p>To work with partners to make the Vale of Glamorgan a safer environment free from crime and disorder and the fear of crime through prevention and positive action.</p>	<p>To increase awareness and support for domestic abuse victims.</p> <p>To increase support for prolific and priority offenders with the aim of reducing offending for those groups.</p> <p>To offer effective treatment and support services whilst targeting the illegal and excessive procurement of alcohol and drugs.</p> <p>To increase public confidence and the engagement of local communities.</p> <p>To reduce antisocial behaviour, offending and reoffending by young people.</p>
<p>Regeneration</p> <p>To work with partners to develop a sustainable community which maximises opportunities for economic growth, social improvement and environmental regeneration and protection.</p>	<p>To protect and enhance the Vale's natural and built environment.</p> <p>To encourage economic growth in partnership with others in order to widen employment opportunities in the Vale.</p> <p>To improve access to and within the Vale and encourage investment in local infrastructure.</p> <p>To encourage the development of a diversified and sustainable community by working in partnership to improve the quality of life of the Vale's residents.</p>
<p>Corporate resources</p> <p>To manage the Council's workforce, money, information and assets efficiently, effectively and securely. Note Cabinet review of priorities and associated actions September 2011.</p>	<p>To provide effective Corporate Management and to improve the use of resources in meeting our strategic objectives.</p> <p>Manage, support and develop our employees to enable them to deliver and maintain the Council's services to the highest possible standard.</p> <p>To make best use of our assets and to procure good, sustainable services and facilities.</p> <p>To deliver OneVale, the Council's transformational change programme and to put information and communications technology (ICT) to its most effective use in order to support service delivery.</p>

Vale of Glamorgan self-assessment of performance

The Council's self-assessment of its performance can be found on its website in its Improvement Plan 2011-12 and progress reports in relation to its Corporate Plan. The website also contains information about service intentions and the quarterly performance reports to the Council's Scrutiny Committees.

www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/our_council/achieving_our_vision/improvement.aspx

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