



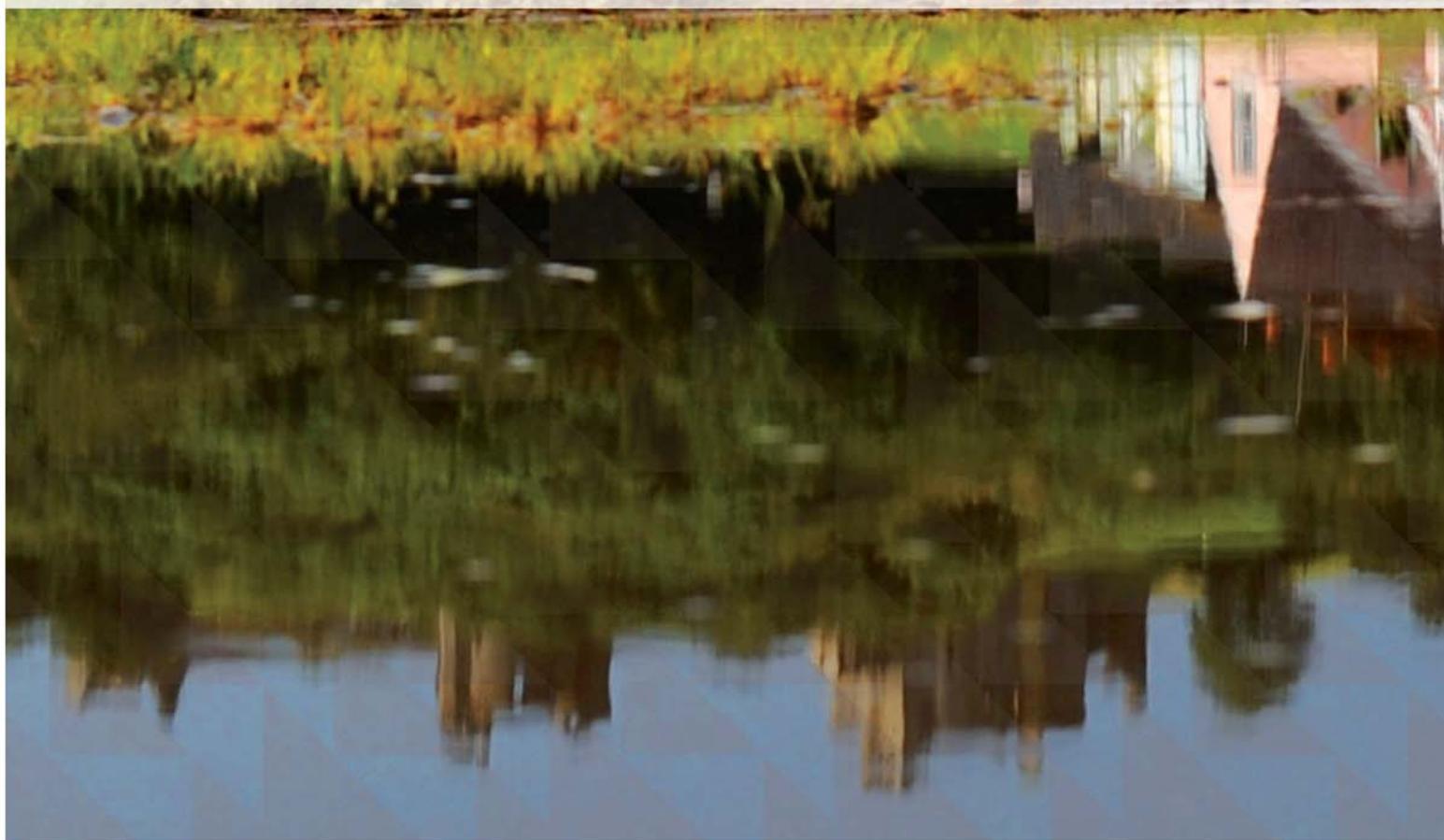
WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report

## Carmarthenshire County Council

Issued: January 2012

Document reference: 677A2011



# 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, 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 the Council.
- 2 Overall the Auditor General has concluded that the Council's planning, delivery, and monitoring arrangements are driving improvement, but it needs to further strengthen its evaluation and simplify its reporting of performance to the public.
- 3 We found that planning and arrangements to deliver improvement are improving although some member decisions have made implementing some plans difficult. We reached this conclusion because:
  - the Council has made good progress since our Preliminary Corporate Assessment in 2010;
  - the Council is reviewing some of its governance arrangements, although its plans for further service improvement and efficiencies will be undermined if members do not take some challenging decisions;
  - the Council is well placed to address its financial challenges, although the scale of change needed will continue to require clear leadership and direction;
  - progress is being made on key Human Resources areas, equal pay and a revised pay structure but more work is needed to better plan the Council's workforce;
  - the Council is using technology to deliver and support service transformation, but further improvements could be achieved to strengthen some arrangements;
  - the Council is committed to collaborating and has a single integrated plan in place;
  - the Council is making good use of appropriate consultation and engagement methods with the public to inform and progress policies; and
  - the Council has complied with its Welsh Language Scheme duties and is preparing to implement a new Strategic Equality Plan in April 2012.
- 4 We also found that the Council is improving in most of its priority areas. We based this conclusion on the following:
  - Strong, mature and proactive leadership in both Children's and Adult social services is driving improvement but members will need to make some challenging decisions. Good progress is being made towards achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2015.
  - Overall, performance in education is improving as the leadership and processes in the service continue to strengthen and focus on the right things to help people develop.
  - Improvements have been made to help create and maintain the area as a safe, prosperous and pleasant place.

- 5 Finally, the report sets out our views on the Council's own assessment of its performance and arrangements. We concluded that arrangements to collect and monitor performance information are in place and, whilst efforts to improve evaluation and reporting of performance to the public have been made, they need to be further strengthened and simplified.

# Proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
<b>P1</b>	The Council should take and adhere to the decisions necessary to enable it to deliver agreed plans to achieve efficiencies.
<b>P2</b>	The Council should ensure that its review of the constitution promotes the principles of good governance.
<b>P3</b>	The Council should continue to address the proposals and actions for improvement we have set out in our themed study feedback reports.
<b>P4</b>	The Council should strengthen its approach to evaluating and reporting its performance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• rationalising and simplifying its reporting arrangements to ensure that the information needed to evaluate performance is readily accessible, better consolidated and consistently presented in a way that meets the needs of local citizens;</li><li>• comparing its performance with other service providers by exploring opportunities for benchmarking to challenge current delivery arrangements and learn from good practice elsewhere; and</li><li>• continuing to develop tailored, outcome-based measures of success to demonstrate the difference the Council's actions are making to the lives of local citizens.</li></ul>

# 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) 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](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk) or writing to us at 24 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9LJ.

## **The Council's planning, delivery, and monitoring arrangements are driving improvement overall, but it needs to further strengthen its evaluation and simplify its reporting of performance to the public**

- 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.

## Planning and arrangements to deliver improvement are improving although some member decisions have made implementing some plans difficult

### The Council has made good progress since our Preliminary Corporate Assessment in 2010

- 11 In August 2010 the Auditor General's Preliminary Corporate Assessment concluded that the Council's arrangements and strong leadership make it well placed to deliver future improvements if the Council as a whole focuses on achieving better outcomes for the people of Carmarthenshire within limited resources.
- 12 In January 2011 the Auditor General published his first Annual Improvement Report, which showed that it had responded positively to the messages and areas for improvement set out in his Preliminary Corporate Assessment report. It noted that the pressure had grown on all public services to make the best use of all their resources. County councillors across all political parties, and partners, had been involved in identifying priorities, options and ideas for savings. The Council had started to develop the way in which it demonstrates that its actions are making a difference to the people of Carmarthenshire and those that use its services. It recognised the need for further improvement in its management of grants, people, ICT, and land and property.
- 13 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 the previous reports and the Council's new Improvement Plan containing its Improvement Objectives for 2011-12. The Auditor General confirmed that he was satisfied that the Council was discharging its duties under the Measure and that this was likely to comply

with its requirements during this financial year. This conclusion was reached on the basis that:

- the Council was making progress on the areas for improvement identified in the preliminary corporate assessment of 2010;
  - the Council has made good progress in developing plans to address weaknesses in people management arrangements, but still has work to do in relation to workforce planning;
  - the Council's approach to engaging with the public is good; and
  - the Council is well placed to address its financial challenges, although the scale of change needed will inevitably continue to require clear leadership and direction.
- 14 Three areas for improvement were identified:
    - bring forward plans to extend the use of 'Insight' Human Resources data so that accountable managers have access to the information necessary to identify and address workforce issues;
    - strengthen business planning and financial management by ensuring that the links between strategic and improvement objectives and the Medium Term Financial Plan are clear, and ensuring that the budget reflects current activity levels through further and more fundamental reviews of budgets; and
    - develop a suite of performance indicators to measure value for money and promote internal benchmarking between key service areas in order to provide appropriate information for scrutiny and challenge and help identify scope for further efficiencies.

- 15 A summary of the Council's progress against all of the proposals for improvement in each of our reports is set out in [Appendix 5](#).
- 16 These and other activities have allowed the Council to build capacity through making better use of resources and helped realise efficiencies that last year amounted to £10.8 million – 3.5 per cent of its budget.
- 17 Last year a number of common areas for further improvement emerged from the Auditor General's improvement assessments across local government. Findings about the Council's progress in some of these areas are summarised below and more detail has been provided separately to the Council where appropriate.

**The Council is reviewing some of its governance arrangements although its plans for further service improvement and efficiencies will be undermined if members do not take some challenging decisions**

- 18 Our 2010 Preliminary Corporate Assessment made proposals for the Council to consider reducing the number of its scrutiny committees to further improve their effectiveness.
- 19 The 2011 Corporate Assessment Update letter commented on the progress made and noted that the Council plans to review its constitution in the run up to the 2012 local government elections. This will include a review of the number and remit of scrutiny committees. We will continue to monitor progress and report on this issue.

- 20 Since then, the Council has made some amendments to its constitution to reflect: the requirements of the new Local Government Measure 2011; issues in planning committees; and the increasing numbers of notices of motion received. These amendments were put forward to the Council by its Business Management Group which comprises the leaders and deputy leaders from each of the largest political groups of the Council.
- 21 The Council should ensure that, in reviewing the constitution, it encourages open and thorough discussion, debate, scrutiny, questioning, reporting of decisions by officers and members, and public engagement across its committees. The Council will consider the number of scrutiny committees ready for implementation after the local government elections in May 2012.
- 22 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's performance during 2010-11 what aspects of its leadership and governance arrangements for social services the Council does well and what it needs to improve or develop:
- 'What the Local Authority does well:
- Improving leadership with significant changes in some areas of adult services.
  - Strong effective leadership in children's services.
  - Good corporate engagement in the improvement agenda.

What the Local Authority needs to develop/improve:

- Providing the political support for driving forward the modernisation agenda in older people's services and avoid reliance on the residential model.
- Further development of a range of cost effective services to promote and support independence.
- Record of the impact of scrutiny committee on performance.<sup>1</sup>

- 24 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:  
[www.wales.gov.uk/cssiwsbsite/newcssiw](http://www.wales.gov.uk/cssiwsbsite/newcssiw)

**The Council is well placed to address its financial challenges, although the scale of change needed will continue to require clear leadership and direction**

- 25 Our 2011 Corporate Assessment Update letter reported that the Council is well placed to address its financial challenges, although the scale of change needed will continue to require clear leadership and direction. The Council is broadly delivering against its budget in the current financial year, although there are overspends within Social Services. As mentioned above, there are also instances where Members have reversed previous policy decisions, which has had a detrimental financial impact. These policy changes include providing free black refuse bags to householders and modernising and rationalising residential care homes.

- 26 The Council is currently refining its medium-term financial plan. As we reported last year, the scale of financial change required will be challenging and will continue to require clear leadership and direction.

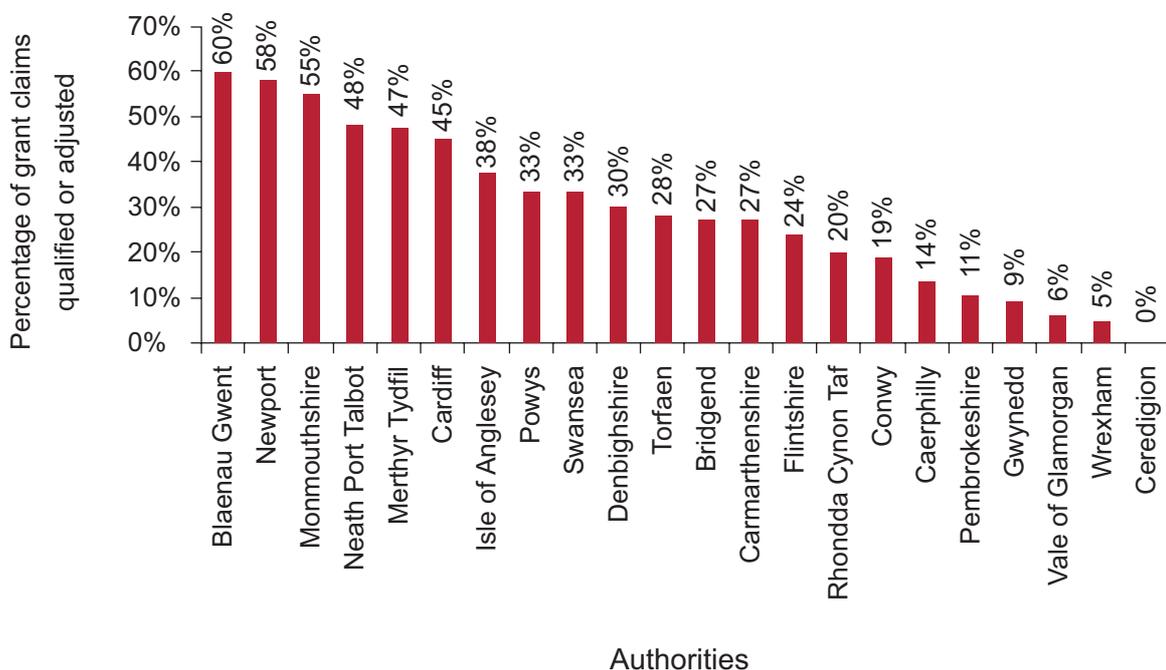
- 27 Our 2010 Preliminary Corporate Assessment proposed that the Council should strengthen its grants management arrangements to ensure that they more robustly support the delivery of projects and to mitigate the risk of claw back of funding.

- 28 Since then the Council has made good progress through a Grants Panel and a range of training and other support for staff involved in grants management. Our audit work on the Council's 2010-11 grants is ongoing and will be reported to the Council's Audit Committee early in 2012.

- 29 Our national report on Grants Management in Wales included the following graph showing the proportion of each council's grant claims that are adjusted or qualified:

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

Percentage of grant claims adjusted or qualified for 2009-10, by Welsh councils



Source: Wales Audit Office national report – Grants Management in Wales

- 30 This shows that Carmarthenshire had 27 per cent of its grant claims adjusted or qualified, which puts the Council’s performance close to the Welsh average.
- 31 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 and provide customer access to these benefits, although there is some risk of service failure in its security arrangements for these benefits. We also reported that the Council is contributing about £240,000 towards the cost of providing the service,

which is one of the lowest contributions in Wales. The average cost per claim handled by the Council is significantly below the Welsh average. We propose to undertake a further review of the Council’s housing benefit service in 2012 and will also follow up the progress it has made in relation to our work on housing and council tax overpayments.

- 32 Our review of the Council’s assessment of whether it achieved its Improvement Objective ‘to work with its partners to make better use of resources and realise savings’ found that the Council delivered nine of its 10 2010-11 targets. For example:

- The Council has further developed strategic asset management and addressed the key findings of the Wales Audit Office's review of buildings management.
- Disabled access to 14 Council buildings has been improved during 2010-11. The buildings selected for improvement were those most used by the public, to maximise the opportunities provided from the investment. Over 70 per cent of the Council's buildings open to the public are now accessible.
- However, the Council has not yet fully achieved its target to rationalise buildings to reduce costs and release assets for disposal to fund capital improvement.

33 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's Performance during 2010-11 that: 'Carmarthenshire's children's services have been recognised as being one of the most cost effective across Wales. There will need to be continued integration and maximising of joint funding in the face of growing demands and shrinking resources to maintain this position.'

34 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 areas for improvement were identified. The Annual Audit Letter is included in [Appendix 3](#).

### Progress is being made on key Human Resources areas, equal pay and a revised pay structure but more work is needed to better plan its workforce

35 We reported in our 2011 Corporate Assessment Update Letter that the Council has made progress on key Human Resources (HR) areas. But managing employee relations will be a challenge and the lack of comprehensive corporate workforce planning information limits the Council's ability to identify and address skills and capacity issues. The letter proposed that the Council bring forward plans to extend the use of HR data available from the 'Insight' IT system, so that accountable managers have access to the information necessary to identify and address workforce issues, as an area for improvement.

36 Since then the Council has made good progress in addressing equal pay issues. The Council has still to conclude its negotiations to achieve a single status agreement for equal pay, but anticipates doing so towards the end of the 2011-12 financial year. As part of this, the Council is evaluating jobs and it anticipates reaching agreement with staff during the next six months. The resolution of both job evaluation and single status should provide the Council with more certainty over its future pay costs, as it continues to refine the medium-term financial plan. The Council is also currently looking to make efficiency savings through a voluntary severance scheme.

37 The CSSIW also reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's social services performance during 2010-11 that the Council does some things well and needs to develop or improve other issues relating to its HR and workforce. These include:

'What the Local Authority does well:

- Recruitment of foster carers.
- Recruitment and induction of social workers.
- Providing specialist training for identified needs.

What the Local Authority needs to develop/improve:

- Improvement in the corporate human resource support through both the development of practice and processes.
- Working to reduce the number of temporary manager appointments across in-house care services.'

**The Council is using technology to deliver and support service transformation, but further improvements could be achieved to strengthen some arrangements**

40 Our review of the way the Council uses technology, which is essential for transforming the delivery of public services, improving outcomes for citizens and delivering efficiency savings, concluded that:

- the Council's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous

improvement if the Council strengthens ICT governance and delivery arrangements and aligns ICT plans and activity with corporate priorities and improvement plans;

- there are weaknesses in the current arrangements which need to be addressed: the current ICT Strategy does not align with Corporate Improvement Objectives; governance arrangements respond to service needs rather than corporate improvement plans and development cost analysis; and decision making arrangements are not consistently and robustly assessed and applied; and
- the Council is using technology to deliver and support service transformation, but further improvement could be achieved by consistent and robust programme and project management arrangements, and better use of performance information.

41 The Council has just appointed a new ICT Manager, this is a joint post shared with Dyfed Powys Police. The new manager will undertake a fundamental restructure of both the Council's and Police's IT services helping to reduce costs and raise performance.

42 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 collaborating and has a single integrated plan in place

- 43 Our Preliminary Corporate Assessment in 2010 noted that the Council demonstrates particular strengths in leading and collaborating on improvement. It is fully committed to collaborating with external partners and is always looking for opportunities to work with others locally, regionally and nationally with a number of positive features of collaborative working.
- 44 Since then the Council, with its Local Service Board (LSB) partners, has launched a Single Integrated Plan which rationalises all statutory plans into one plan. The LSB implements the Single Integrated Plan and holds other key partnerships to account for progress in delivering improvements to the citizens of Carmarthenshire, as set out against the key priorities of the Plan. The LSB has set a number of indicators that measure the outcomes of its efforts on the population of the county and has started to use these as a basis for monitoring progress. The LSB is also starting to rationalise the number of partnerships in Carmarthenshire.
- 45 The Council's Chief Executive is the Mid and West Wales regional leader on the Welsh Government's Public Service Leadership Group which was set up to provide national leadership for collaboration and to drive the pace of improvement in public services in Wales.
- 46 We are currently reviewing the partnership approach that was taken in Carmarthenshire to agreeing and implementing the Council's Access to Social Housing Policy with the county's Registered Social Landlords, and will report the findings in our next Corporate Assessment Update.
- 47 The CSSIW reported in its recent Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's Performance during 2010-11 what the Council does well and needs to develop or improve in relation to partnership working as follows:
- 'What the Local Authority does well:
- Achievement of formal partnership arrangements (section 33) to support joint working in adult services.
  - Service development and improvement which demonstrate integrated partnership working.
  - Partnership working to maximise benefits for children and young people.
  - Continuously improving integrated access arrangements via Careline+.
  - Very positive improvement to reduce delayed transfer of care.
  - Taking forward the integration of social and health care assessment, particularly for older people.
  - Increasing range of services for older people which support and promote independence.
  - Ongoing analysis and development of the role of the adult safeguarding board.
  - Progress in developing the safeguarding structure and process.

- Ongoing improvement in maintaining people of all ages within the community.
- Reducing number of older people supported in residential care settings.

What the Local Authority needs to develop/improve:

- Protocol between children and adult services to promote identification of young carers, and their needs.
- Effective accountability arrangements for the line management of staff across the west Wales adoption service.
- Implement priorities identified by the Council for improvement in safeguarding practice.
- Improving commissioning and care management links to ensure any pre-placement knowledge is shared.'

**The Council is making good use of appropriate consultation and engagement methods with the public to inform and progress policies**

50 Our 2011 Corporate Assessment Update Letter reported that the Council is making good use of appropriate consultation and engagement methods with the public to inform and progress policies and objectives. Our review found evidence of good practice in the Council's approach to engaging with the public and this is set out below:

**Good Practice**

The Council is seeking to reduce its own carbon footprint, and is also encouraging residents to do the same through engaging with communities to support local carbon reduction projects and initiatives. A pilot project called 'Byw Sir Gâr' was set up by the Council and its partners in 2009 and due to its success, Carmarthenshire's Community Challenge was launched by the Prince of Wales as part of the first Start Festival in the National Botanic Garden of Wales. The Challenge is open to any individuals and groups in the county, who will be given the opportunity and support to develop their own innovative and local solutions to the future challenges that we face.

51 The CSSIW reported in its Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's Performance during 2010-11 that the Council is improving performance in the resolution of complaints in adults' services and facilitating opportunities for participation for service users, but needs to develop or improve:

- 'evidence that service users' views are recorded and they have copies of assessments and care plans;
- evidence that the views of carers including foster carers have an impact on the development of services; and
- evidence of how service user views are influencing service planning.'

52 The CSSIW also notes that: 'The Council reports that there has been an increase in service users' engagement, which has been evidenced through audit. The family support strategy was developed last year with a high level of consultation with service users.

The Council reports it has developed a number of initiatives to facilitate opportunities for service users and providers to shape services. Young people have participated in the interviewing process for posts in children's services and a number of events have been organised to elicit the views of young people. A participation strategy is in place and a three year participation programme is being implemented. Overall the Council is making good progress in this area, and should be in a good position to evidence how the views of service users have influenced the delivery of services.'

- 53 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 that, although there has been an increase in the number of complaints about the Council that were received by his office, there has been a large reduction in the number of complaints taken forward to investigation by him. However, both figures are above the average for councils in Wales. The statistics he provided indicated that Planning and Building Control remained the single biggest subject of complaint, followed by Housing. Both areas of complaint were almost double the local authority average. As with the statistics for 2009-10, the highest number of complaint outcomes relating to the Council were classed as 'premature' or 'investigation not merited'. The Ombudsman stated that he was pleased to note that the number of upheld reports did not exceed the local authority average, as well as Carmarthenshire's good performance in responding to requests for information from his office.

### The Council has complied with its Welsh Language Scheme duties and is preparing to implement a new Strategic Equality Plan in April 2012

- 54 The Welsh Language Board praised the Council for its ability to provide a comprehensive and consistent Welsh language service through its 'Carmarthenshire Direct' service. The Board also welcomed the Council's ability to provide data on the linguistic skills of its workforce. An inspection exercise conducted on electoral information and documentation found that the Council had complied with its Welsh Language Scheme. The Council continues to develop Welsh language content on its website, but there is still a considerable amount of work to be done and it remains a priority issue.
- 55 The Council has stated that it is committed to its legal responsibilities to ensure a fair and diverse society across the county. The Council provides a variety of services to a variety of people and wants to make sure that everyone receives the best possible services. The Equality Act 2010 brings together and replaces previous legislation and simplifies and strengthens the law, making it easier for people to understand and comply with. The majority of the Act came into force on 1 October 2010 and during the year the Council is working with key partners and stakeholders to develop a Strategic Equality Plan. The public and key partners will be consulted on the draft plan and an action plan will be prepared for implementation from April 2012 onwards.

## The Council is improving in most of its priority areas

56 We have commented above on the Council's improvement objective 'to work with its partners to make better use of resources and realise savings'. 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 six improvement objectives that the Council set itself to achieve during 2010-11.

**Strong, mature and proactive leadership in both Children's and Adult social services is driving improvement but members will need to make some challenging decisions. Good progress is being made towards achieving the Welsh Housing Quality Standard by 2015**

57 The Auditor General has relied on the 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 Carmarthenshire County Council in October 2011. The main conclusions from CSSIW's evaluation are summarised in the following paragraphs.

58 'In adult services there is evidence of improved leadership and direction. There is evidence of improving access arrangements. The single access point, Careline+ continues to provide a good base for further

development for the Council. There has been a significant improvement in reducing the delays in discharge from hospital for older people. This historically has been difficult to address and the recent improvement has been achieved by close working with colleagues in Hywel Dda Health Board. It has required the development of a range of new services which support and promote independence. There has been sound analysis of systems to understand and deal with the causes of delays and improved efficiency in processes. The reduction in older people who enter residential care is another area of improvement. The Council now faces the challenge of continuing to deliver and further improve on this performance.

59 Learning disability and safeguarding services are also on an improvement journey. There has been a positive response to the CSSIW inspection in both these areas and the Council has worked hard to deliver the necessary changes. Progress has been made, particularly in safeguarding practice where the newly established team shows strong potential and improvements have already been demonstrated. Modernising learning disability services is a longer term task and the Council is now beginning to demonstrate some progress. It is important that it maintains momentum, as historically changes have been very slow in coming to fruition. A priority across the whole of adult services identified in this report is to improve on the timeliness of assessment and review of care plans. The Council will want to ensure that it has the necessary plans and resources in place to address these delays in 2011-12.

60 Children's services have continued to perform well across most areas. There is evidence of strong effective leadership following the appointment of a new corporate director for children, and an established management team which has a focus on quality in addition to performance management. There is a proactive approach to analysing trends and managing any issues impacting on efficient service delivery. This has assisted the Council to act effectively to address growing demands on resources. Given the growth in referrals, child protection cases and an increase in the looked-after child population this approach will need to be a continued focus for the future.'

61 In its Annual Evaluation, 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 copy of these, please find CSSIW's Annual Review and Evaluation report for 2010-11 at [www.wales.gov.uk/docs/cssiw/publications/LA\\_evaluation1011/111028carmarthenen.pdf](http://www.wales.gov.uk/docs/cssiw/publications/LA_evaluation1011/111028carmarthenen.pdf).

62 The Wales Audit Office's review of the Council's assessment of whether it achieved its Improvement Objectives to support people in need found the following:

- The Council has made good progress against its housing quality improvement objective for 2010-11. Actual performance was better than the target set by the Council and the progress made will help bring all its stock up to the Carmarthenshire Housing Standard by the Welsh Government's Housing Quality

Standard extended deadline of 2015. During the year, the Council received national recognition for its housing-related activities, including a Best Housing and Regeneration award from the Association of Public Service Excellence. Eighty-seven per cent of tenants expressed satisfaction with the improvements to their homes.

- The Council delivered against 10 of its 11 2010-11 targets for safeguarding vulnerable adults and children. These include: continuing to develop its workforce and provide training for practitioners; and keeping vacancies to its target of 10 per cent.
- The Council delivered on 16 of its 19 improvement objective targets for 2010-11 to support older people to play their part in the life of their communities and support them to live independent lives whenever possible in their own homes. These include a reduction in the rate of delayed transfers of care for social reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 and over from a monthly average of 22 in 2009-10 to 12 in 2010-11. The Council estimates that it saved a total of 12,187 hours of service delivery, through use of the enablement service, during 2010-11. But although the number of adult clients provided with a direct payment has grown, it is not increasing as quickly as the Council had planned, it has plans in place to address this.

**Overall, performance in education is improving as the leadership and processes in the service continue to strengthen and focus on the right things to help people develop**

- 63 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.
- 64 'When a range of contextual information is taken into account, the performance of pupils in Carmarthenshire is above average in key stages 1 and 2 and slightly below average in key stage 3. At key stage 4, performance is above average on those measures that involve English or Welsh and mathematics. Performance is average or below on other published indicators.
- 65 In 2010 Carmarthenshire 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 the same as in the previous year but not as good as in 2008 when Carmarthenshire exceeded all benchmarks.
- 66 Attendance in primary and secondary schools is below average when contextual information is taken into account. The number of exclusions from schools improved significantly in 2010 and is better than the average for Wales.'
- 67 Our review of the Council's assessment of whether it achieved its Improvement Objective 'to modernise the standard of school premises so that they are fit for purpose for the 21st century and accommodation and facilities are fit for the community they serve' found that the Council has delivered its 2010-11 targets including:
- Introducing a revised Support and Challenge framework.
  - Delivering a curriculum to ensure that every young learner (14-19) has at least 30 options through the Carmarthenshire 14-19 Network.
  - Undertaking six strategic reviews during 2010-11 on areas identified for potential reorganisation. These reviews aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the schools network and remove a significant number of surplus pupil places from the system.
  - Establishing a system for young people in Carmarthenshire to be able to benefit from youth work opportunities.
  - Encouraging the achievement of adults undertaking Community Education Courses. There are currently 525 adult learners of whom 89 per cent are undertaking accredited courses. The 2010-11 ratio of accredited to non-accredited courses has improved to 63:19, compared with 73:44 in 2009-10.
- 68 Other targets relating to attainment and attendance, which are reported in Estyn's summary paragraphs above, were all met.

### Improvements have been made to help create and maintain the area as a safe, prosperous and pleasant place

- 69 Our review of the Council's assessment of whether it achieved its Improvement Objectives to provide a safe, prosperous and pleasant place to live found that the Council has met its 2010-11 targets for achieving a carbon neutral county and improving energy efficiency. The Council is on target to improve energy efficiency in its public buildings. The Council has achieved its target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in its public buildings and in council houses. It has also improved the energy it uses to run Council buildings.
- 70 The Council has taken steps to help householders understand how they can cut down on energy use and save money. It has focused on a number of key areas to improve, including older people and families as these groups are more likely to suffer the effects of high fuel prices. It has also concentrated its efforts on the parts of the county that are most likely to be affected with high fuel costs.
- 71 The Council has also met all of its 2010-11 targets for having a robust response to the current economic climate by supporting business and ensuring those most in need claim their correct entitlements. During the 2010-11 financial year the Council helped companies in the county by providing £667,069 of financial support, mainly through the Local Investment Fund Scheme. The Council supported 95 new and existing local businesses through this scheme. It has also offered to help through the new Loan Scheme, Youth Loans and Hardship Loans. The Council says it is confident that it will meet its target of offering more than
- £1.9 million of financial support over a three-year period.
- 72 The Council has paid 94 per cent of its invoices within 30 days. However, the Council did not create a new 30 acre/£15 million Strategic Employment Site in Cross Hands during 2010-11 as it had intended. This project was designed to allow around 1,000 new jobs to be created in the area. The Council needed extra funding from the Welsh Government to deliver the project and says it was delayed when the project was placed on the Welsh Government reserve list and the project could not therefore be completed in 2010-11. After submitting a new business plan, the Council has been awarded a funding package of £9 million from the Welsh Government. The development will be implemented and managed by the Council, which is investing £4 million in the scheme. The Council can now undertake the project in 2011-12.
- 73 The Planning service continues to have a high public profile and, as noted earlier, Planning and Building Control remains the single biggest subject of complaint to the Ombudsman, followed by Housing. Both areas of complaint received almost double the local authority average but most complaints were classed as 'premature' or 'investigation not merited' and the number of upheld reports did not exceed the local authority average. Planning applications determined within eight weeks deteriorated from 79 per cent to 74 per cent over the period April to June 2010 to April to June 2011. However, Carmarthenshire is one of only three councils in Wales to have current approval from CADW to determine grade two listed building consents. We will follow up progress made by the planning service in 2012.

Arrangements to collect and monitor performance information are in place and, whilst efforts to improve evaluation and reporting of performance to the public have been made, they need to be further strengthened and simplified

- 74 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.
- 75 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 its performance to local citizens in a balanced and evaluative way.
- 76 The Council is working towards achieving sound self-evaluation and assurance. Our audit of the Council's performance indicators concluded that the Council has robust systems to collect performance information and, based on our sample testing, the data reported is accurate. The Council needs to ensure that it is collecting, using and reporting the most appropriate data to help it to: improve; challenge and evaluate whether it has improved; and report to members and the public.
- 77 The Council's assessment of the progress it made in 2010-11 is set out in its Annual Report, together with a number of detailed appendices and a separate Summary document. Together these provide extensive, comprehensive and detailed information on performance and about what the Council has done over the past year – both on its own and working with others – to support improvement.
- 78 As well as describing completed actions, the report includes a broad range of performance and other information. Current performance is compared to the Council's past performance and targets, as well as to the performance of other councils in Wales. A genuine attempt is made to assess the impact of the Council's actions under the heading 'is anyone better off?' although the Council recognises that more needs to be done to develop tailored measures of impact.
- 79 Reporting is generally fair and balanced. Although focused mainly on positive achievements, the report also highlights areas where progress has been slower than anticipated. More use could also be made of benchmarking beyond readily available performance indicator data. The Council has also included a feedback questionnaire, seeking comments from the public on the content and presentation of the report.
- 80 The Council has made efforts to improve its evaluation and reporting of performance to the public but needs to further improve its annual report to the public to make it a more coherent and robust self-evaluation of how well it thinks it is performing. The information is very detailed and extensive but is

fragmented throughout a number of different parts relating to the report making it less transparent than intended.

- 81 The Council has made a genuine attempt to produce a summary which is more accessible to the public than the full report. However, the volume and range of information are still quite complex. There is scope for the Council to further consider what information can best be presented to the public, and in what format, to enable them to judge how well it is performing and to hold it to account.
- 82 Publicity for the report and summary was also fairly limited and the documents are not clearly signposted on the Council's website.
- 83 The Council has continued to improve its well-developed arrangements for managing performance, planning, delivery and monitoring progress. An extensive amount of detailed performance information is reviewed regularly by managers and members. Scrutiny committees now receive more detailed half yearly reports on all performance indicators and key actions contained in the improvement plan, although we have not yet assessed the effectiveness of these new arrangements. Scrutiny task and finish groups are set up to assist with developing policy and service improvement.
- 84 The Auditor General has determined that the Council has discharged all of its duties in relation to publishing improvement information. However, the Council should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government 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); and
  - making it clearer why comparisons have or have not been made (Welsh Government guidance Part 1 – Paras 4.2 to 4.4).
- 85 The Council's review of its governance arrangements and the Annual Governance Statement provided a thorough and honest review of whether arrangements were in place and operating as intended.
- 86 In its Annual Review and Evaluation of the Council's Performance during 2010-11 CSSIW reported a number of strengths and areas to improve or develop relating to how the Council monitors, evaluates and reports on its performance. These include:
- 'What the Local Authority does well:
- Performance management and quality assurance in children's services.
  - Identification and analysis of issues affecting performance (in children's services).
- What the Local Authority needs to develop/improve:
- Establishing quality assurance framework across adult services.'
- 89 It also notes that 'there has been sound analysis of systems to understand and deal with the causes of delays and improved efficiency in processes. Children's services continue to operate a framework of performance management and quality assurance with a well established system of audit and evaluation'.

- 90 The CSSIW's recent Annual Evaluation also reports how the Council has progressed in implementing actions and recommendations from previous reviews and inspections. It reports that 'the inspection of learning disability services undertaken by CSSIW in October 2010 identified that progress against the identified improvements had been made but structural changes and staff appointments were not complete at that time. Since then the outstanding actions have been completed and the Council is now able to demonstrate continuous improvement in this service'.
- 91 The Council secured the full Outcome Agreement grant available from the Welsh Government for meeting the outcome targets set in the Agreement.

# 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 Carmarthenshire and Carmarthenshire County Council

#### The Council

Carmarthenshire County Council spends approximately £412 million per year (2010-11). This equates to about £2,300 per resident. In the same year, the Council also spent £73.5 million on capital items.

The average band D council tax in 2010-11 for Carmarthenshire was £1,144.76 per year. This has increased by 3.74 per cent to £1,187.59 per year for 2011-12; 75.7 per cent of the dwellings within Carmarthenshire are in council tax bands A to D.

The Council is made up of 74 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:

- 29 Independent; 11 Labour: Coalition
- 30 Plaid Cymru
- 2 People First
- One Welsh Liberal Democrat (Independent)
- One not affiliated

Carmarthenshire's Chief Executive is Mark James.

He is supported by:

- Education and Children's Services: Robert Sully
- Social Care, Health and Housing: Bruce McLernon
- Technical Services: Richard Workman
- Regeneration and Leisure: David Gilbert
- Resources: Roger Jones

## Other information

The Assembly Members for Carmarthenshire are:

- Rhodri Glyn Thomas, Carmarthen East and Dinefwr, Plaid Cymru
- Angela Burns, Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire, Conservative
- Keith Davies, Llanelli, Labour

The Members of Parliament for Carmarthenshire are:

- Jonathan Edwards, Carmarthenshire East and Dinefwr, Plaid Cymru
- Simon Hart, Carmarthenshire West and South Pembrokeshire, Conservative
- Nia Griffiths, Llanelli, Labour

For more information see the Council's own website at [www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk](http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk) or contact the Council at Carmarthenshire County Council, County Hall, Carmarthen, SA31 1JP.

## Appendix 3

# Annual Audit Letter to the Members of Carmarthenshire County Council

As you will be aware the Auditor General 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 my 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.

### **Carmarthenshire County Council complied with reporting requirements relating to its financial performance and use of resources although we have identified improvements in some areas**

- 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 and the Dyfed Pension Fund'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 the Audit Committee in my Audit of the Financial Statements report.
- 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 Although I have issued an unqualified opinion on the accounts, we have identified the following improvements:
- for next year the Council needs to improve the accounts working papers in some areas and the disclosure of operating lease commitments and related party transactions needs to be expanded; and
  - although we did not identify any material weaknesses in the Council's internal controls, controls within the fixed assets, debtors and ICT systems need to be improved.
- 6 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. There are no significant matters I wish to bring to your attention at this stage.
- 7 The Council has a well developed medium-term financial strategy but the Council faces significant financial pressures in the future. This is referred to further in the Annual Improvement Report.
- 8 Last year I reported that the Council needed to improve grants management. Our work in this area is ongoing and will be reported to the Council's Audit Committee in early 2012.
- 9 I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 30 September 2011.
- 10 The financial audit fee for 2010-11 is expected to be in line with that set out in the Financial Audit Outline.

Anthony Barrett

Appointed Auditor

## Appendix 4 Carmarthenshire Council's improvement objectives and self-assessment

### Carmarthenshire 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.

Carmarthenshire's Improvement Plan 2010-11 set seven Improvement Objectives for it to achieve during that year. For 2011-12 the Council has set six objectives for delivery during this year. The objectives from both last year and this year are as follows.

<b>The Council's Key Improvement Objective Priorities for 2010-11</b>	<b>The Council's Key Improvement Objective Priorities for 2011-12</b>
1 Work with our partners to make better use of resources and realise savings.	1 We will continue to invest in the health and well being of the Council's tenants by bringing their homes up to the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard.
2 To work together to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Carmarthenshire and in particular during 2010-11 to focus on making good progress in improving the quality of housing by delivering the work programme for the Carmarthenshire Homes Standard.	2 We will provide support so that people can live independent lives.
3 We will continue to safeguard our vulnerable adults and children.	3 We will modernise school provision and tackle surplus school places by implementing the 21st Century Schools Programme.
4 We will support older people to play their part in the life of our communities and support them to live independent lives whenever possible in their own homes.	4 We will reduce energy use by the Council.
5 Work towards achieving a carbon neutral county and improve energy efficiency.	5 We will minimise the amount of waste we send to landfill.
6 Have a robust response to the current economic climate by supporting business and ensuring those most in need claim their correct entitlements.	6 We will support businesses and the local economy in the current financial climate.
7 To modernise the standard of school premises so that they are fit for purpose for the 21st century and accommodation and facilities are fit for the community they serve.	

The Council published its improvement objectives in its Improvement Plan 2011-2012 which can be found on the Council's website at:

[www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/english/council/performance/pages/improvementplan.aspx](http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/english/council/performance/pages/improvementplan.aspx)

### **Carmarthenshire 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 Annual Report 2010-2011 on the Council's website at:

[www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/english/council/performance/pages/annualreportonourperformance1.aspx](http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk/english/council/performance/pages/annualreportonourperformance1.aspx)

## 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
<p>The Council should consider reducing the number of its scrutiny committees to further improve effectiveness.</p>	<p>The Council has plans in place to review its constitution in the run up to the local government elections in May 2012; this will include a review of the number and remit of the Scrutiny Committees.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of its ongoing Improvement Assessment.</p>
<p>The Council as a whole needs to ensure that it works together in agreeing a realistic medium term financial plan.</p>	<p>The Council has further developed the MTFP, for example it has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• delivered Members' seminars;</li> <li>• consulted Scrutiny Committees on Corporate budget overall and on its own portfolio savings options;</li> <li>• signed off the MTFP by the full Council;</li> <li>• held a third Tier Managers' Conference; and</li> <li>• held CMT/HOS workshops.</li> </ul>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of its ongoing Improvement Assessment.</p>

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
<p>The Council should further develop a more outcome-based approach to improvement to demonstrate the difference that its projects, plans and actions are having on the lives of the people of Carmarthenshire. In doing so the Council could benefit from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consolidating and evaluating the improvement data it collates to demonstrate the extent to which it is achieving better outcomes;</li> <li>• reviewing and challenging its improvement actions, measures and targets to ensure that they effectively address areas for improvement; and</li> <li>• making clearer the links between its key actions and the performance measures and outcomes it particularly aims to achieve.</li> </ul>	<p>The Council has taken a more outcome focused approach to performance assessment, and has tackled the difficult question 'is anyone better off?' in its recent annual report building on its report card concept. The Council also engages with citizens through a citizen survey and is promoting a more outcome focused approach to its business plans.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of its ongoing Improvement Assessment.</p>

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
<p>The Council should strengthen grants management arrangements to ensure that they more robustly support the delivery of projects and to mitigate the risk of claw back of funding.</p>	<p>The Council has undertaken a number of activities in this area including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reviewing and updating the Projects Grants Manual;</li> <li>• assessing Training Needs and putting training programmes in place for managers;</li> <li>• provided additional 1:1 support for project managers; and</li> <li>• reviewing corporate project management arrangements.</li> </ul>	<p>The Wales Audit Office is currently reviewing progress and expects to report to the Council in early 2012.</p>
<p>The Council will need to publish its improvement objectives according to the Assembly Government's requirements much sooner next year.</p>	<p>The Council's Improvement Plan was successfully published in June 2011.</p>	<p>No further action.</p>

Proposals for improvement	Summary of Council progress	Wales Audit Office action
<p>The Council should review its improvement planning arrangements to ensure that a clear, consistent plan is agreed and communicated to councillors, staff and the public; and as part of this process the Council will need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make the improvement objectives clearer;</li> <li>• correct the discrepancies between the measures used in the Plan and those used in the Council's performance management systems to measure the achievement of the improvement objectives; and</li> <li>• make sure that the correct version of the Plan is on the Council's website.</li> </ul>	<p>The improvement plan sets out what the Council wants to achieve, what it has done so far, why this is important and what it will do next. However, the plan could usefully highlight more prominently those specific actions the Council is proposing to do differently to secure improvement, and the difference these will make to local citizens. The improvement plan is detailed and technical; however, the Council has developed a short summary which is much easier to understand. The improvement plan and summary have been published within the required timescale and a month earlier than last year. Both are available in electronic format on the Council's website and are being publicised through the local press, residents' newsletters and notices in libraries and customer service centres.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will review the Improvement Plan 2012-2013 in line with legislation and guidance.</p>
<p>Bring forward plans to extend the use of 'Insight' HR data so that accountable managers have access to the information necessary to identify and address workforce issues.</p>	<p>A commitment has been given during November 2011 to the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee to demonstrate the potential of Insight HR with a commitment to implement from April 2012.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of its ongoing Improvement Assessment.</p>

<b>Proposals for improvement</b>	<b>Summary of Council progress</b>	<b>Wales Audit Office action</b>
<p>Strengthen business planning and financial management by ensuring that the links between strategic and improvement objectives and the MTFP are clear, and ensuring that the budget reflects current activity levels through further and more fundamental reviews of budgets.</p>	<p>The Council has continued to develop its annual Priority Based Budgeting (PBB) which has over the past five years redirected around £10 million to priority areas – principally (though not exclusively) to adult social care, and to a lesser extent children’s social services. The Council includes challenges by other Directors and panels of officers and members via scrutiny within its PBB process. The final budget is signed off by the Executive Board and the Council.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to monitor progress as part of its ongoing work relating to the MTFP.</p>
<p>Develop a suite of performance indicators to measure VFM and promote internal benchmarking between key service areas in order to provide appropriate information for scrutiny and challenge and help identify scope for further efficiencies.</p>	<p>The Council is planning to research more into this area and engage with officers from other councils through the Wales Improvement Network.</p>	<p>The Wales Audit Office will continue to support the Council through its work on the MTFP.</p>



Wales Audit Office  
24 Cathedral Road  
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: [info@wao.gov.uk](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk)

Website: [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru  
24 Heol y Gadeirlan  
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn Testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: [info@wao.gov.uk](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk)

Gwefan: [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)