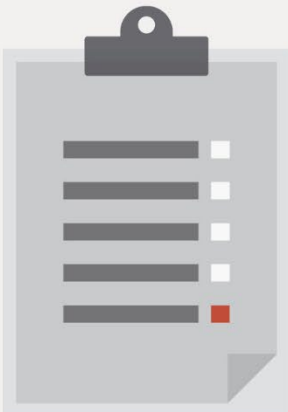


Seeking Views on the Auditor General's Work Programme

March 2022



Overview

This consultation invites views to inform the Auditor General's future audit work programme for 2022-23 and beyond. In particular, it considers topics that may be taken forward through our national value for money examinations and studies and/or through local audit work across multiple NHS, central government and local government bodies. This consultation does not concern the audit of accounts, which is the majority of the Auditor General's work, as such work is essentially fixed in statute.

Our [Annual Plan 2021-22](#) provides further details about our overall aims, ambitions and work programmes. On behalf of the people of Wales, we examine public spending and identify ways to improve public services. Our work supports the effective scrutiny of public money by the Senedd and locally elected representatives. We are entirely independent of government.



Audit Wales is the non-statutory collective name for the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office, which are separate legal entities with their own legal functions. Audit Wales is not a legal entity. Consequently, in this document, we make specific reference to the Auditor General or Wales Audit Office in sections where legal precision is needed.

How to respond

Please send us your response by following one of these options:

- you can complete our [online consultation form](#); or
- you can download a [Word document via the online consultation form](#), to complete, and then email or post your answers using the details below.

We would welcome responses by **8 April 2022** if at all possible, but will consider responses received after this time to inform our ongoing work programme planning.

We welcome responses in either Welsh or English.

Work Programme Consultation

Audit Wales

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If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language please contact us using the details provided above or by telephone on 029 2032 0500.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay.

This document is available in Welsh.

Confidentiality and data protection

Information provided in response to this consultation may be published or disclosed in accordance with access to information legislation (chiefly the Freedom of Information Act 2000, but also data protection legislation, including the General Data Protection Regulation, and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want any information you provide to be treated as confidential, you should tell us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give any assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Auditor General or Wales Audit Office.

Personal data will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation. Where such data falls within the scope of a request for information from another person, the provisions of data protection

legislation and the Freedom of Information Act will need to be considered in the particular circumstances. While no situation can be prejudged, this is likely to mean that information concerning senior officials and public figures is likely to be disclosed while the names and addresses of ordinary members of the public are likely to be withheld.

Welsh language

Audit Wales are required to comply with Welsh Language Standards that provide for the Welsh language not to be treated less favourably to the English language. More information can be found on our [Welsh language arrangements on our website](#). When reviewing this consultation, we would welcome your views on whether you consider there to be anything in this consultation that undermines or supports this requirement. We would also welcome your thoughts on any revisions that could be made to support opportunities to use the Welsh language or ensure we do not treat the Welsh language less favourably than the English language.

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Auditor General's foreword

I am delighted to invite your views on the shape of my audit work programme for 2022-23 and beyond.

This is the second time we have consulted formally on my work programme since I became Auditor General in July 2018, although a lot has changed in the environment for public services over that time. As we develop and deliver the future work programme, we will be putting into practice key themes in our new five-year strategy, namely:

- the delivery of a strategic, dynamic, and high-quality audit programme; supported by
- a targeted and impactful approach to communicating and influencing.

A strategic, dynamic, and high-quality audit programme

When I became Auditor General, public services were already under severe pressure due to austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic has only served to exacerbate those pressures.

As we start to emerge from the pandemic, it is inevitable that its impact will continue to have a significant influence on our work. Unprecedented sums have been spent as public services have responded. We will prioritise work that examines the additional money that has been spent in Wales as the result of the pandemic and the value for money achieved. Public services face the challenge of dealing with the legacy of the pandemic within the constraints of stretched public finances. Considering how public services are recovering and the pandemic's longer-term impact will also be a key area of focus for us.

Many of the challenges we face in Wales today – in areas such as inequality, public health, and the climate emergency – are complex, interconnected and span the remits of a range of organisations. During the pandemic we have seen public bodies working closely in partnership. Even before this, we were seeing an increase in the number of collaborative delivery models, such as partnerships, city regions and the increasing use of arms-length bodies and subsidiary companies to deliver services.

It is imperative that our audit focus evolves to reflect how public services are organising themselves to respond to the challenges we face. We intend to place a greater emphasis in our audit products on thematic reporting, comparisons across audited bodies and the identification of good practice to better support public services to improve. We will also continue to embed consideration of the sustainable development principle and the 'five ways of working' across our audit work.

The pandemic has demonstrated in the strongest terms that new issues and challenges can arise when least expected. This is an important lesson for us in developing our forward work programme. We will build greater flexibility into the design and delivery of our programme to allow us to respond to new and emerging issues in real time.

To support all these aims, we are investing more in our research and development capacity and capability. In addition, our [2022-23 Estimate submission](#) highlighted our desire to switch a portion of our funding for 2023-24 and beyond from fees charged to individual NHS and local government bodies to the Welsh Consolidated Fund. This proposal will form part of our fees consultation later this year.

The single biggest area of our work supports the delivery of my annual opinions on financial statements. During 2022 and 2023 we will focus on bringing forward the reporting timetable to pre-pandemic patterns without compromising our absolute commitment to audit quality. However, this work gives us a wealth of intelligence from which to provide powerful and unique insights. In the coming years we plan to develop a range of outputs that make greater use of this intelligence. In 2022-23, our capacity to do so will be limited but we nonetheless plan to deliver a small number of important pieces of such work, in parallel with bringing forward the reporting timetable.

A targeted and impactful approach to communicating and influencing

If we are to assure the people of Wales, explain how public money is being spent and inspire Welsh public services to improve, it is vital that our work is impactful and that our messages hit home.

Our ability to achieve this in large part relies on the extensive direct contact that Audit Wales staff have with colleagues in the bodies we audit and elsewhere. In addition, however, we intend to continue our drive towards shorter, sharper, and responsive audit products, including real-time commentary on important topical issues.

To enhance the impact of our audit products we will also be placing greater emphasis on ensuring that their form and presentation are more engaging and inspiring with clearer and bolder language to emphasise the messages we wish to convey.

Finally, I recognise the pressures that those working across public services continue to face. I am also mindful that we are launching this consultation having also invited views recently on our proposed equality objectives for 2022-2026. These consultations are taking place at a crucial time for public services and so I would therefore greatly value your thoughts on the possible areas of focus for future audit work that we outline.

Many thanks,



Adrian Crompton, Auditor General for Wales

Key issues for public services

- 1 In September and October 2021, we published a series of reports as part of our [Picture of Public Services](#) analysis. We summarised key trends in public finances and set out some of the key issues facing public services.



A changing world

- Climate change: achieving a fair and just transition
- Equalities: responding to demands for a fairer and more equal society
- Constitution: managing the opportunities and risks of new relationships within the UK



The ongoing pandemic

- Direct costs of response
- Economic hit knocks-on to public finances
- Legacy costs of long-term impacts



Transforming service delivery

- Systems and culture to support new approaches to service delivery
- Purposeful collaboration
- Long-term planning and prevention
- Harnessing technology where appropriate
- Using data to learn across the whole system

- 2 We will use these themes to help shape our work programme alongside our broader analysis about key risks, major policies and programmes, public service expenditure and performance. We will also consider the overall balance of our audit coverage across different policy areas set out in the Welsh Government's [Programme for Government 2021-2026](#)¹ and the broader context of the seven [well-being goals for Wales](#).

¹ While we may look at issues of value for money (economy, efficiency, and effectiveness) with regard to the way key policies and programmes are implemented, it is not a function of the Auditor General or the Wales Audit Office to question the merits of the policy objectives of the Welsh Ministers.

Possible areas of focus for future audit work

Developing our programme

- 3 Various factors influence decisions about the work that we undertake within the context of the Auditor General's powers and specific duties², for example, in respect of local government studies and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015³.
- 4 Below we set out potential areas of focus for audit work from 2022-23 onwards alongside some description of work already undertaken, in progress or planned. We have used the themes from our Picture of Public Services 2021 report, although some of the possible areas of focus will cover multiple themes.
- 5 It would be impossible for us to deliver work across all the possible areas of focus. We will need to prioritise while remaining flexible to emerging issues. That is why we want your views on what you see as the key priorities – the areas that most merit audit review and, crucially, where you think we can make a significant impact.
- 6 Some of the areas of focus we choose to take forward may lend themselves to different types of output – short briefings, blogs, data tools or facilitating an exchange of ideas and practice through other means – rather than a full report.
- 7 Alongside this consultation, we will be developing risk-based plans for local audit work at individual NHS and local government bodies. We will also need to design into our programme work to discharge the Auditor General's duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 at the six relevant central government bodies where we do not routinely undertake performance audit work⁴.
- 8 As we look to work efficiently and minimise demands on audited bodies, we will also have regard to work undertaken or planned by other external review bodies. This includes, for example, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, Estyn, the various commissioners in Wales and the Public Services Ombudsman. We will also liaise with other bodies that focus on public services – such as the Wales Centre for Public Policy and the Wales Governance Centre – and will consider opportunities for our work to inform scrutiny by Senedd committees.

² Our [Guide to Welsh Public Audit Legislation](#) summarises the Auditor General's powers and duties and the Auditor General's [Code of Audit Practice](#) prescribes the way in which his audit and certain other functions are to be carried out.

³ We have [consulted](#) previously on our approach to work under the 2015 Act during 2020-2025. Wherever possible we are looking to integrate our consideration of the sustainable development principle into our value for money examinations and studies and local audit work rather than undertaking stand-alone reviews.

⁴ Natural Resources Wales, the National Library of Wales, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales, Sport Wales and the Arts Council of Wales.

The ongoing pandemic



- 9 We have already carried out audit work on the COVID-19 response. Early in the pandemic we launched our COVID-19 Learning Project, with blogs and other outputs offering insight into some of the key issues and local responses, including for example Free School Meal provision.
- 10 We also carried out in-depth reviews of the Test, Trace Protect Programme, the supply and procurement of Personal Protective Equipment and the vaccination programme. As part of our Picture of Public Services work and reporting in NHS finances, we've tracked and explained public spending on the pandemic response.
- 11 We are currently carrying out further work looking at the NHS waiting list backlog, building on our earlier report identifying opportunities for restarting and resetting the planned care system after the first COVID-19 wave. Alongside this we are looking at the whole-system challenges facing unscheduled care services which have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including pressures on the health and care interface leading to patients being delayed in hospital when medically fit to leave. Our work on planned and unscheduled care will be complemented by work that looks at the workforce challenges and pressures that the pandemic has exposed in the NHS and social care.
- 12 We are also looking to build on our audit of accounts work to provide audit commentary on the management of grants awarded to businesses in response to the pandemic, including safeguards against fraud. And we are examining local government's work in supporting social resilience and self-reliance, drawing in the lessons from communities' responses to the pandemic.
- 13 **For future years**, we propose to continue to track and report on COVID-19-related spending and to focus work on recovery and resilience. We may also look at future pandemic preparedness, subject to aligning with the UK public inquiry.
- 14 We are keen to maintain a focus on service areas that have been affected by the pandemic and where additional funding has been earmarked to support recovery. This could include work that examines backlogs in NHS treatment in more detail, including in specific areas such as cancer services. It could also cover efforts to catch up on lost learning across education. We are also considering looking at how primary care services are transforming as they recover, with a potential focus on equitable access to services and more integrated approaches to primary care including links with other services such as social care and housing.
- 15 We are considering work that looks more broadly at the resilience of the social care sector given the fragilities that have been exposed in that sector by the pandemic. We are also considering looking at mental health services which will be more important than ever in managing the legacy of the pandemic. We are having early conversations with other inspection and regulatory bodies about our respective interests in relation to mental health services for children and adolescents.

A changing world



Climate and nature emergency

- 16 We are currently carrying out a 'baseline review' as part of our commitment to a long-term programme of work on climate change. We are looking at how public bodies are taking action to reduce carbon emissions and meet the 2030 decarbonisation targets.
- 17 Drawing in part on the baseline review, we will also be reviewing the carbon reduction plans of each of the 22 principal councils as part of our local performance audit programme and have already undertaken more detailed work in this area at some individual local government bodies. We are also in the early stages of scoping work on flood risk management.
- 18 **For future years**, we will be taking forwards further work informed by feedback from our baseline review. We are considering initially looking at green travel, to include active travel and possibly the Welsh Government's review of new road-building projects.
- 19 Other potential areas for future work in the following years could include further work on technical aspects of carbon reduction, such as carbon budgeting or audit of carbon savings. Or looking at mitigating the impacts of emissions and adaptation to climate change, for example in terms of general emergency planning as well as specific areas of concern such as air pollution and biodiversity.

Tackling inequality

- 20 Our work under the theme of tackling inequality reflects a broad definition of equality as encompassing protected characteristics as well as socio-economic status. We are currently carrying out a study looking at public bodies' use of Equality Impact Assessments. We also have work underway looking at local government's efforts to tackle poverty.
- 21 **For future years**, we are considering a programme of work looking at health inequalities, which the pandemic has exposed. We are also considering looking at some of the programmes to improve the life chances of children and young people – for example to bridge attainment gaps in education, fostering, early years and the Youth Guarantee.
- 22 We have identified a range of specific service areas we could examine that support vulnerable people, such as those at risk of being homeless and rough sleeping to follow on from previous audit work, people with substance misuse issues and carers. There are also some key plans and initiatives we are considering looking at including roll-out of the socio-economic duty, delivery of strategies on race equality, Welsh language, loneliness and isolation, and efforts to combat modern slavery.

Managing opportunities and risks following Brexit

- 23 Over recent years, we have delivered work looking at aspects of Brexit. We have looked at efforts to manage the potential impacts of Brexit for the use of EU funding. We have also reported on public services' preparations for a no-deal Brexit and their subsequent preparations for the end of the transition phase.
- 24 **For future years**, we are considering work looking at some of the immediate financial consequences: making use of the remaining EU funding in time and getting ready for the replacement scheme for structural funds, which will be run by the UK Government. We are also considering looking at replacement for other EU programmes, such as for agricultural and rural support and international student exchanges.
- 25 Finally, we are thinking about undertaking work on support for particular sectors impacted by changes to the international trading environment, including possibly exporters and Welsh ports.

Transforming service delivery



Administration, finances and management

- 26 We currently have a range of work underway looking at administration, finances and public management, including our audit of accounts work and local work across NHS and local government bodies that considers whether they have proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of public money.
- 27 We are currently at the latter stages of a review of workforce planning in the Welsh Government. Our Springing Forward work in local government is looking at aspects of the recovery from COVID-19, including workforce planning and the use of buildings. We are also carrying out work across local government, looking at the use of social enterprises to deliver services.
- 28 **For future years**, we will continue to focus on financial sustainability and financial planning as a key challenge for public services. We intend to keep making more use of the intelligence and evidence gathered from our financial audit work, building on the work we have done to report on NHS finances and the Welsh Government's accounts.
- 29 We will be keeping track of governance arrangements around the creation of new bodies, including the new Corporate Joint Committees in local government, where the Auditor General will have a statutory role, and the planned Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to fund, regulate and support all post-16 education. We are also considering some work looking at governance and oversight of the national parks, particularly given plans to create a new national park in the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley.

- 30 Another possible area of future focus relates to the changing public service landscape and approaches to delivery. This may feature specific topics, such as performance reporting and management. We are also thinking about how we can look at specific service areas or programmes through the lens of the ambitions for citizen-centred, asset-based services that are informed by seldom heard voices.
- 31 Our work on public administration will also consider what we can build into our work programme that might support the Senedd Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee in examining topics relevant to its remit.

Digital and use of data

- 32 We are currently at the early stages of a study looking at broadband infrastructure/digital inclusion and following up previous work on cyber resilience. Our review of local government's efforts to tackle poverty includes a strand of work looking at digital poverty.
- 33 We are now starting our routine audit work with the new body Digital Health and Care Wales, which will include work looking at the effectiveness of that organisation's delivery of informatics support to the health and care system. Following our 2020 report, we have been tracking developments in the roll-out of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS).
- 34 **For future years**, we are considering work looking at the shift of service provision online, building on lessons learned during the pandemic with a service user focus. And we are considering some work, possibly with a good practice or research focus, looking at the use of cloud computing.
- 35 With digital and data an increasingly important aspect of routine service delivery, these are likely to feature as key elements of our reviews of specific service areas and topics, with a focus on the extent to which digital developments and analysis of data are supporting service transformation.

Collaborative working

- 36 Over recent years we have looked at multiple areas of collaboration in service delivery. For example, our review of Public Service Boards and our review of the Integrated Care Fund. We've also recently reported on collaborative work around care home commissioning for older people and across emergency services.
- 37 **For future years**, we are considering specific work to look at governance of partnerships, including the Regional Partnership Boards – potentially linked to work on the health and care interface. We are considering looking at shared services within and between different sectors, notably the NHS and local government.
- 38 We think that there may be value in undertaking some work, possibly with a good practice focus, around what helps and hinders collaboration at the frontline of public service. Another potential area of focus is looking at how public services collaborate with other partners, in the voluntary sector, with communities and with

private bodies. This may be through a specific piece of work or by incorporating it into a focus through studies on specific topics.

Long-term programmes and investments

- 39 The Welsh Government and public services have a range of plans for key policy and investment programmes that are intended to impact on the longer-term well-being of the population. Many of these are set out in the Programme for Government and are also covered elsewhere in this document under other themes. We currently have work underway looking at key programmes, including work on affordable housing.
- 40 **For future years**, we are considering looking at a range of services and programmes. This could include work on managing the legacy of coal tips and building safety and control, particularly in light of Grenfell. We are considering work on the long-term use of capital funding and infrastructure, possibly revisiting work on the school estate as well as capital planning and use in the NHS and local government more broadly (potentially looking at some specific large projects) and the Wales Infrastructure Investment Strategy.
- 41 We are keen that our work has a focus on prevention and early intervention, one specific area could be progress in tackling obesity and promoting healthier lifestyles. We are also thinking about further work looking at housing as a key enabler of well-being. A further potential area of focus could be around economic development, including the foundational economy, tourism and visitor market and vocational skills gaps.

Follow-up work and any other feedback

- 42 In addition to the topics identified above, we will consider follow-up work in areas that we have looked at previously. We have listed below topics reported on through our national programmes of work since April 2018⁵.
- 43 We would also welcome any other feedback that you may wish to provide about our work programme based on the content of this consultation document. Please note that details of how to contact us more generally, for example to raise a specific concern about public spending, are available on our [website](#).

⁵ In our annual report and accounts each year, we include in this list some other outputs such as data tools, guides and discussion papers or audit commentary in the form of correspondence to the Senedd Public Accounts Committee (now the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee).

National reports since April 2018

2021-22		
<u>Procuring and Supplying PPE for the COVID-19 Pandemic</u>	<u>Student Finances</u>	<u>Taking Care of the Carers: Supporting NHS staff well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic</u>
<u>At Your Discretion – Local Government Discretionary Services</u>	<u>Regenerating Town Centres in Wales</u>	<u>The Welsh Government's Warm Homes Programme</u>
<u>Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee Governance Arrangements</u>	<u>Picture of Public Services</u>	<u>Care Home Commissioning for Older People</u>
<u>Rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Wales</u>	<u>Financial Sustainability of Local Government – COVID Impact, Recovery and Future Challenges</u>	<u>Joint working between Emergency Services</u>
2020-21		
<u>Findings from the Auditor General's sustainable development principle examinations</u>	<u>Better law making: the implementation challenge</u>	<u>Providing free school meals during lockdown</u>

2020-21

<u>Ensuring value for money from Rural Development Grants made without competition</u>	<u>Commercialisation in local authorities</u>	Cyber resilience in the public sector ⁶
<u>Rough sleeping in Wales – everyone’s problem; no one’s responsibility</u>	<u>Local government – financial sustainability</u>	<u>Doing it differently, Doing it Right? Governance in the NHS During the COVID-19 Crisis</u>
<u>Raising the game – tackling fraud in Wales</u>	<u>National Fraud Initiative</u>	<u>Test, Trace, Protect in Wales: an overview of progress to date</u>
<u>The refurbishment of Ysbyty Glan Clwyd – Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board</u>	<u>Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS)</u>	<u>In-sourcing the Welsh Government’s ICT service</u>
<u>Cracking the code: management of clinical coding across Wales</u>	<u>Covering teachers’ absence – follow-up</u>	
<u>10 Opportunities for resetting and restarting the NHS planned care system</u>	<u>Commentary on the Welsh Government Consolidated Accounts 2019-20</u>	

⁶ Taking account of the possible risk of provoking cyber-attacks, we decided to distribute the report privately to audited bodies rather than publishing it on our website.

2019-20

<u>The effectiveness of local planning authorities in Wales</u>	<u>Fuel poverty</u>	<u>A joint review of quality governance arrangements at Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board</u>
<u>Counter-fraud arrangements in the Welsh public sector</u>	<u>Review of Public Service Boards</u>	<u>Financial management and governance – Community and town councils 2018-19</u>
<u>Integrated Care Fund</u>	<u>Public spending trends in Wales</u>	<u>A465 (Section 2) road improvement – interim findings</u>
<u>Front door to adult social care</u>	<u>Primary care services in Wales</u>	<u>Arrangements for interim senior staff appointments – Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board</u>
<u>Well-being of young people</u>	<u>Progress in implementing the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence act</u>	

2018-19

<p><u>A picture of primary care in Wales</u></p>	<p>Waste Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Procurement of Residual and Food Waste Treatment Capacity</u> • <u>Municipal Recycling</u> • <u>Preventing Waste</u> 	<p><u>Financial Management and Governance – Town and Community Councils 2017-18</u></p>
<p><u>Speak my language: Overcoming language and communication barriers in public services</u></p>	<p><u>Management of follow up outpatients across Wales</u></p>	<p><u>Fiscal Devolution in Wales (follow-up)</u></p>
<p><u>Reflecting on year one – How have public bodies responded to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015</u></p>	<p><u>Radiology Services in Wales</u></p>	<p><u>Internal Audit Arrangements at Town and Community Councils in Wales</u></p>
<p><u>Strategic Commissioning of Accommodation Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities</u></p>	<p><u>Local Government Services to Rural Communities and Provision of Local Government Services to Rural Communities: Community Asset Transfer</u></p>	<p><u>The Welsh Government's youth discounted bus fare scheme – My Travel Pass</u></p>
<p><u>The Welsh Government's relationship with Pinewood</u></p>	<p><u>Managing the impact of Brexit on the Rural Development Programme in Wales</u></p>	<p><u>Expenditure on agency staff by NHS Wales</u></p>

2018-19

<u>Primary Care Out of Hours Services</u>	<u>Welsh Government financial support for business</u>	<u>Preparations in Wales for a 'no deal' Brexit</u>
<u>Managing the impact of Brexit on EU Structural Funds</u>	<u>The maturity of local government in use of data</u>	<u>Review of arrangements that supported the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal's First Investment Decision</u>



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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.