

Powys County Council

Annual Audit Summary 2023

This is our audit summary for Powys County Council. It shows the work completed since the last Annual Audit Summary, which was issued in March 2023. Our audit summary forms part of the Auditor General for Wales' duties.



More information about these duties can be found on our [website](#).

About the Council

Some of the services the Council provides



Key facts

The Council is made up of 68 councillors who represent the following political parties:

- Welsh Liberal Democrats 21
- Welsh Conservatives 14
- Welsh Labour 9
- Independents 8
- Independents for Powys 6
- Not specified 6
- Plaid Cymru 3
- Green 1

The Council spent £322.8 million on providing services¹ during 2022-23².

¹ We define spending on services as the cost of services charged to the general fund from the Expenditure Funding Analysis, less any Housing Revenue Account cost of services, plus precepts, levies, and debt interest.

² Source: 2022-23 Statement of Accounts

Key facts

As at 31 March 2023, the Council had £64 million of useable financial reserves³. This is equivalent to 19.8% of the Council's annual spending on services⁴.

Powys has 1% of its 79 areas considered to be within the most-deprived 10% of areas in Wales, this is the second lowest of the 22 unitary councils in Wales⁵.

The population of Powys is projected to increase by 1% between 2023 and 2043 from 132,600 to 133,900, including a 6% decrease in the number of children, an 8% decrease in the number of the working-age population and a 22% increase in the number of people aged 65 and over⁶.

The Auditor General's duties

We completed work during 2022-23 to meet the following duties

- **Audit of Accounts**
Each year the Auditor General audits the Council's financial statements to make sure that public money is being properly accounted for.
- **Value for money**
The Auditor General examines whether the Council has put in place arrangements to get value for money for the resources it uses, and he has to be satisfied that it has done this.
- **Sustainable development principle**
Public bodies need to comply with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet their well-being objectives. The Auditor General must assess the extent to which they are doing this.

³ We define useable financial reserves as reserves usable for revenue costs, where the purpose is not protected by law. This is the total of the general fund, earmarked reserves and schools' balances. It excludes Housing Revenue Account reserves, capital receipts and capital grants unapplied.

⁴ Source: 2022-23 Statement of Accounts

⁵ An area in this context is defined as a 'Lower Super Output Area'. Source: Stats Wales

⁶ Source: [Stats Wales, Population Projections](#)

What we found

Audit of Powys Council's 2022-23 Accounts

Each year we audit the Council's financial statements.



To meet the Auditor General's duties we complete specific projects, but we also rely on other audit work, and the work of regulators such as Care Inspectorate Wales and Estyn (the education inspectorate). We take the findings of our audit work into account when assessing whether the Council has put in place arrangements to secure value for money. Our findings and conclusions are summarised below.

For 2022-23:

- the draft statements were presented for audit on 30 June 2023. This was before the deadline of 31 July 2023 set by the Welsh Government.
- the quality of the draft statements presented for audit was good.
- the Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the Authority's financial statements on 28 November 2023, before the deadline agreed with the Welsh Government of 30 November 2023. The impact of the new auditing standard requirements was covered in our audit plan considered by the Audit Committee on 28 July 2023.
- the Authority's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance. They were consistent with the financial statements prepared by the Authority and with our knowledge of the Authority.
- several changes were made to the Authority's financial statements arising from our audit work, which were reported to the Audit Committee in our Audit of Financial Statements Report in November 2023.
- in addition to the Auditor General's responsibilities for auditing the Authority's financial statements, he also has responsibility for the certification of 11 grant claims and returns. Our work to date has not identified any significant issues.
- the Auditor General issued the certificate confirming that the audit of accounts for 2022-23 has been completed.

Assurance and risk assessment review

We reviewed the arrangements the Council has put in place to secure value for money in the use of its resources. We produced the following reports from our assurance and risk assessment work:

- Assurance and Risk Assessment Review work in 2021-22 – we focussed in particular on the Financial Position, Implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and Self-assessment arrangements and Carbon reduction plan.

We found that:

- additional Welsh Government funding has helped improve the Council's financial position in recent years, but the Council needs to develop a sustainable plan to address substantial emerging cost pressures.
 - the Council is putting in place arrangements to assure itself that it is meeting the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and produced its self-assessment report.
 - Powys has a clear understanding of the scale of this agenda and comprehensive structures are in place to develop and manage activity. However, it has not yet published a fully costed net zero action plan and needs to undertake further work to fully understand the cost of all its planned activity contributing to the net zero agenda.
- As part of our Assurance and Risk Assessment Review ongoing work during the 2022-23 audit year, we produced the following report:
 - Setting of Well-being objectives – We looked at the Council's approach to setting its well-being objectives. We found that the Council has applied the Sustainable Development Principle in setting its Well-being Objectives. However, it should draw on more diverse citizen views and fully embed its new monitoring arrangements.

Review of the Planning Service (May 2023)

We undertook this review to seek assurance and provide insight on whether the Council's planning service is effectively and sustainably meeting its objectives and contributing towards the achievement of the Council's corporate priorities. We reported that 'We have concerns about the fundamental strategic, operational and cultural weaknesses of the Council's Planning Service. These weaknesses hinder its ability to consistently and sustainably support staff and Members to deliver an effective service that helps the Council achieve its corporate objectives.'

Springing Forward: Asset Management (October 2023)

We reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its assets with a focus on office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivers services to its residents. We looked at how the Council strategically plans the use of its assets, how it monitors the use of its assets and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements. We reported that 'The Council has developed a clear Asset Management Strategy but has not yet aligned its business plan and performance monitoring.'

Review of Digital Strategy (December 2023)

During 2022-23, we examined the Council's strategic approach to digital, and specifically the extent to which this has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources. We found that the Council has a clear and well-developed strategic approach to digital.

Other inspectorates

We also took into account the reports of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn as well as any subsequent actions taken by the Council in response.

Ongoing work

We also looked at the key challenges and opportunities facing the Council. These could have an effect on the Council's ability to meet its legal obligations in relation to the sustainable development principle and the use of its resources.

Our ongoing work includes:

- Assurance and risk assessment
- Thematic review – financial sustainability
- Thematic review – commissioning
- Corporate Governance Review (2023-24 audit work) and Scrutiny Follow-up work (2022-23 audit work to be undertaken at the same time as the Corporate Governance Review as agreed with the Council)
- Unscheduled Care (2022-23 audit work). Report being finalised

The Auditor General is independent of government and was appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General. The Wales Audit Office is held to account by the Senedd.

The Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, fire and rescue authorities, national parks, and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies, assesses compliance with the remaining requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and may undertake special inspections under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Senedd Commission, and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

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, as described above. Audit Wales is not a legal entity.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.