

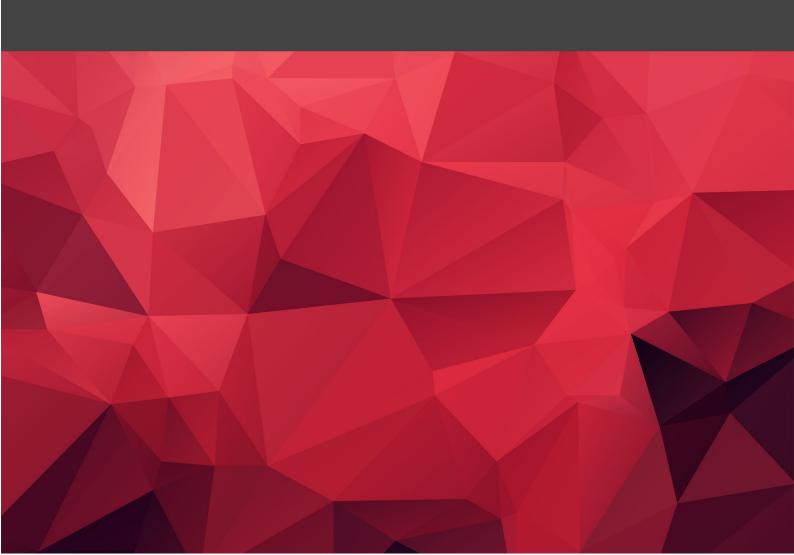
Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru Auditor General for Wales

Follow-up review of corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children – **Torfaen County Borough Council**

Audit year: 2018-19

Date issued: November 2019

Document reference: 1617A2019-20



This document has been prepared for the internal use of Torfaen County Borough Council as part of work performed in accordance with section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and section 18 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

No responsibility is taken by the Auditor General or the staff of the Wales Audit Office in relation to any member, director, officer or other employee in their individual capacity, or to any third party.

In the event of receiving a request for information to which this document may be relevant, attention is drawn to the Code of Practice issued under section 45 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The section 45 Code sets out the practice in the handling of requests that is expected of public authorities, including consultation with relevant third parties. In relation to this document, the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office are relevant third parties. Any enquiries regarding disclosure or re-use of this document should be sent to the Wales Audit Office at infoofficer@audit.wales.

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.

The team who delivered the work comprised Gareth Jones, Amanda Jenkins, Nicola Thompson managed by Non Jenkins under the direction of Huw Rees.

Contents

The Council has made progress in addressing our previous recommendations, but needs to ensure more cohesive oversight and assurance.

Summary report

Summary	4
Assessment of progress against the recommendations from our 2015 report and	
proposals for improvement from our 2014 report	6

Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- We undertook this review to seek assurance that the Council has acted upon our previous national recommendations and local proposals for improvements for corporate arrangements for safeguarding children. We considered the findings of our 2014 report into the Council's arrangements to support safeguarding of children¹. We also considered the Council's progress in implementing the recommendations contained in the Auditor General's report, **Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils** (July 2015)².
- We undertook the review during August October 2019. The Council provided a self-assessment of its progress in addressing the recommendations and proposals for improvement made in 2014 and 2015. The Council provided documents to support its self-assessment. We then interviewed key officers and the lead member for Corporate Safeguarding.
- Our review has been limited to reviewing the Council's self-assessment of its progress against our previous recommendations and proposals for improvement. We have not tested the effectiveness of the Council's safeguarding arrangements in practice as part of this review.

What we found

- 4 Our review sought to answer the question: Can the Council provide assurance that it has addressed the recommendations and proposals for improvement contained in the Auditor General's national and local reports published in 2014-15?
- Overall, we found that; The Council has made progress in addressing our previous recommendations but needs to ensure more cohesive oversight and assurance.
- The Council considers safeguarding to be an important area of its corporate activity and is developing a consistent and coherent corporate approach to safeguarding children. The Council has acted to address all of our previous recommendations but has yet to fully address the previous national recommendations set out in the table below. Exhibit 2 that follows sets out our assessment of the Council's progress in implementing each national recommendation and local proposals for improvement.

¹ Auditor General for Wales, Local Authority Arrangements to Support Safeguarding of Children – Torfaen County Borough Council, October 2014

² Auditor General for Wales, Review of Corporate Safeguarding Arrangements in Welsh Councils, July 2015

Exhibit 1: national recommendations that have yet to be fully addressed

The table below sets out the national recommendations that the Council has not yet fully addressed.

National recommendations that have yet to be fully addressed

- R3 Strengthen safe recruitment of staff and volunteers by:
 - ensuring that Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and compliance with safe recruitment policies cover all services that come into contact with children:
 - creating an integrated corporate compliance system to record and monitor compliance levels on DBS checks; and
 - requiring safe recruitment practices amongst partners in the third sector and for volunteers who provide services commissioned and/or used by the council which are underpinned by a contract or service level agreement.
- **R4** Ensure all relevant staff, members and partners understand their safeguarding responsibilities by:
 - ensuring safeguarding training is mandated and coverage extended to all relevant council service areas, and is included as standard on induction programmes;
 - creating a corporate-wide system to identify, track and monitor compliance on attending safeguarding training in all council departments, elected members, schools, governors and volunteers; and
 - requiring relevant staff in partner organisations who are commissioned to work for the council in delivering services to children and young people to undertake safeguarding training.
- **R6** Improve accountability for corporate safeguarding by regularly reporting safeguarding issues and assurances to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced and council-wide set of performance information covering:
 - benchmarking and comparisons with others;
 - conclusions of internal and external audit/inspection reviews;
 - · service-based performance data;
 - key personnel data such as safeguarding training, and DBS recruitment checks; and
 - the performance of contractors and commissioned services on compliance with council safeguarding responsibilities.
- **R8** Ensure the risks associated with safeguarding are considered at both a corporate and service level in developing and agreeing risk management plans across the Council.

Assessment of progress against the recommendations from our 2015 report and proposals for improvement from our 2014 report

Exhibit 2: assessment of the Council's progress in addressing the national recommendations

The table below sets our assessment of the Council's progress in addressing the national recommendations and local proposals for improvement.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
Local Proposal for Improvement 1	Summary – partially met
Ensure there is a cohesive and consistent approach to safeguarding across the Council which covers all services that regularly come into contact with children	The Council recognises that its approach to Safeguarding of children requires constant development and refinement. Since the previous reports the Councils has developed a more cohesive and coherent approach to safeguarding across all services that have regular contact with children. The Council established a Corporate Safeguarding Leads Group (CSLG, 'the group') in 2015 and this group plays an important role in overseeing the Council's policy. The group consists of designated Safeguarding leads and deputies in all service areas and the Council has recently widened the group's membership to include Torfaen Leisure Trust. The group meets on a quarterly basis and has clear terms of reference. The Council has established an internal assurance mechanism through its biannual Quality Assurance Framework that all service areas and Torfaen Leisure Trust are required to complete. The Council's Internal Audit service tests compliance with Safeguarding policies and procedures in schools and departments on a regular basis and undertakes specific Safeguarding related audits. However, at the time of our fieldwork we found that; • the Council was not able to provide information relating to the number of staff who have undertaken training beyond the mandatory basic Safeguarding training. • only 18% of elected members had undertaken basic Safeguarding training training by 31 March 2019.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
	 although the CSLG undertakes a biannual safeguarding self-assessment across all service areas, the quality of the information contained in some of those assessments was limited. The Council, however, does not have a clear process for using the outcome of the self-assessment to drive forward improvements in its safeguarding approach. the Council has also developed a Safeguarding Strategy to add to its corporate policy, however, at the time of our fieldwork that was not finalised. the Council's Corporate Safeguarding policy does not currently reflect a number of emerging issues that impact on Safeguarding including human trafficking, child criminal exploitation and domestic violence. As such, the Council has further work to do to fully address this local proposal for improvement. In doing so, the Council should also look to:
	 finalise its Safeguarding Strategy; ensure that the key areas for development identified through the quality assurance framework process inform service and corporate consideration of safeguarding risks; periodically review CSLG to ensure that it is fulfilling its terms of reference effectively; strengthen Safeguarding communication to ensure that key messages are consistently and effectively shared with all staff, members, volunteers and contractors; and strengthen corporate oversight of the training and recruitment of contractors and volunteers across all services.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report

R1 Improve corporate leadership and comply with Welsh Government policy on safeguarding through:

- the appointment of a senior lead officer who is accountable for safeguarding and protecting children and young people with corporate responsibilities for planning improvements;
- 2. the appointment of a lead member for safeguarding; and
- regularly disseminating and updating information on these appointments to all staff and stakeholders.

Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress

Summary – Fully met

The Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy first agreed in 2015 sets out that the Chief Executive Officer has the overall responsibility for ensuring that there are effective safeguarding arrangements for children, young people and adults. This includes suitable policies, practices and procedures and that they are implemented appropriately. The Chief Executive Officer is also responsible for ensuring effective corporate governance arrangements and that all statutory requirements are being met.

The Council has appointed a senior lead officer, the Social Care Statutory Director who 'has the final and indivisible responsibility for safeguarding issues.' The Statutory Director is responsible for ensuring that the Council has appropriate safeguarding measures to protect children, young people and adults at risk and is responsible for reporting at a corporate level to Elected Members on the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements. The Director chairs the Corporate Safeguarding Leads Group (CSLG) and that group is charged with providing assurance to the lead member for Safeguarding.

In May 2019, the Council updated its Cabinet responsibilities and the Lead member for Children was appointed as the Executive member with responsibility for Corporate Safeguarding.

The Council has a clear Safeguarding communication strategy and recently published an updated list of designated officers in each service area. The Council includes a question around staff awareness off how to make a safeguarding referral in its regular staff survey. The most recent survey showed that 96% of the staff surveyed knew how to report a safeguarding issue and this was an increase from 78.1% in the previous survey.

At the time of our fieldwork, the arrangements for providing information about the key safeguarding officers and lead member to other stakeholders, including contractors and volunteers was unclear. Contractual terms do not refer to the key officers and lead member. The Council's policy does not clearly set out the role of the lead member, despite their appointment.

The Council could consider the following options to further strengthen its arrangements:

 update its policy to ensures that it reflects the recent changes to lead member responsibilities and clarify accountabilities for all lead officers;

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
	 provide regular reminders of safeguarding lead officers to all staff (office based and remote) using appropriate methods; strengthen arrangements to ensure that all relevant contractors and volunteers are aware of the key Safeguarding officers and members; and review its Communications strategy and adapt as needed to reflect lessons learnt across the council and, where relevant, other councils.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
National Recommendation 2	Summary –Fully met
Ensure there is a corporate-wide policy on safeguarding covering all council services to provide a clear strategic direction and clear lines of accountability across the Council.	The Council has agreed a corporate safeguarding policy which was initially introduced in 2015. The policy applies to all service areas and provides a clear strategic direction and lines of accountability across the Council. There is appropriate distributed leadership with clear roles for team managers, individual staff as well as Safeguarding leads. The policy is regularly updated to reflect key legislative changes and emerging areas of safeguarding risks. The CSLG has a clear role in assuring the Lead Member that the Council's procedures are robust where matters of safeguarding children and adults are in question. The CSLG also brings together interdepartmental work in safeguarding and ensure effective whole council communication and ensures that appropriate training is available for officers and members.
	 At the time of our fieldwork we found that: the Council's policy does not clearly refer to several safeguarding related risks including human trafficking, modern day slavery, domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation. These risks are however referred to in the Council's training materials and on its Safeguarding intranet pages.
	The Council could consider the following options to further strengthen its arrangements:
	 update its Corporate policy toinclude emerging Safeguarding related topics, including human trafficking, domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation; and ensure that the policy clearly sets out the relevant governance arrangements

Local Proposal for Improvement 2	
Develop a Corporate Safeguarding Policy that clearly specifies roles, responsibilities and procedures for safeguarding	See narrative above

the 2015	recommendations from report and local Is for improvement from report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
National	Recommendation 3	Summary – Partially met
Strengthe	en safe recruitment of staff	
and	volunteers by:	The Council has a clear safe recruitment policy and associated process around Disclosure and Barring Service
1.	ensuring that Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and compliance with safe recruitment policies cover	(DBS) checks for staff and services that come into contact with children. The Council has developed useful flowcharts to support managers to identify the appropriate level of DBS check for all posts in Council and schools. The Council has a system (IFOR) linked to its payroll system that records the level of check required for each role in the Council, and that system also records DBS check details and sends reminder to managers to renew checks for each post holder. The payroll system was not tested to verify these details as part of our review.
2.	corporate compliance	Although not required by legislation the Council's policy is to renew DBS checks every 3 years. The Council's HR team hold a record of DBS checks for volunteers and these details are held on another system, but the HR team has oversight across both systems. The HR team also has close liaison with education service and schools to understand safe recruitment.
3.	system to record and monitor compliance levels on DBS checks; and requiring safe recruitment	The Council is currently rolling out safe recruitment training to managers using a bespoke training session and in 2016 implemented a volunteer recruitment policy which sets out clearly the steps that recruiting managers should follow when recruiting volunteers safely in all service areas and schools. Earlier in 2019, the CSLG assessed safeguarding expectations within contract specifications and has recently agreed minimum standards to be included in all contracts going forward.
	practices amongst partners in the third sector and for volunteers who provide services commissioned and/or used by the council which	An Internal Audit report on Playschemes in Autumn 2018 found that, based on a small sample of volunteers, the Safe Recruitment guidance was not being fully complied in respect of DBS checks being completed prior to volunteers starting their role but as outlined in the Council's policy risk assessments were in place for all those individuals prior to their employment starting
	are underpinned by a contract or service level agreement.	 However, at the time of our fieldwork we found that in May 2019, CSLG rated safe recruitment processes of volunteers and contractors as being under development. At that time, the CSLG identified that this needed to be added to the policy but as of the time of our fieldwork it had not.
		 the monitoring of Safe recruitment practices in commissioned services is the responsibility of individual managers and therefore there is no central oversight of that monitoring to provide assurance.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
	As such, the Council has further work to do to fully address this national recommendation. In doing so, the Council should also look to: • seek assurance around safe recruitment practices for contractors, agency workers and commissioned services

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
Local Proposal for Improvement 4	See narrative above
Develop a Council wide safe recruitment policy for staff and volunteers who work with children.	

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report

Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress

- **R4** Ensure all relevant staff, members and partners understand their safeguarding responsibilities by:
 - ensuring safeguarding training is mandated and coverage extended to all relevant Council service areas, and is included as standard on induction programmes;
 - creating a corporate-wide system to identify, track and monitor compliance on attending safeguarding training in all Council departments, elected members, schools, governors and volunteers; and
 - requiring relevant staff in partner organisations who are commissioned to work for the Council in delivering services to children and young people to undertake safeguarding training

Summary Partially met

The Council has identified a training budget for corporate safeguarding and funded a mandatory e-learning Safeguarding basic awareness module for all staff. The HR team monitors the take up of this training but take up below is below the target level of 75% by 31 March 2019 with 68% of staff having completed the basic training. However, following a review of the data that figure had dropped to 58% in early August. In comparison, 81% of Council staff have completed the Level 1 Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) training as mandated by Welsh Government. The Council's HR team provides face to face training for those staff who are unable to access e-learning. The Council's education safeguarding lead monitors training levels for school staff and governors and those take up rates are shared with HR team. The Council has set out a clear requirement that staff have to refresh their basic training every 2-3 years.

The Council has developed and implemented a Safeguarding Training framework which covers all staff and has a number of levels of training depending on a staff member's role. The Council supports staff to undertake additional training relevant to their role. However, at the time of our fieldwork the HR team does not report on data beyond mandatory training as that is held within departments so no corporate oversight.

The Council ensures that Safeguarding is included in corporate induction processes and its policy is that new employees must complete the mandatory Safeguarding module and Level 1 VAWDASV within 2 months of starting role. In 2017, the Council finalised guidance on the importance of Safeguarding in induction, probation, training and performance management. In social care, safeguarding training for relevant staff in commissioned services is monitored as part of the regular contract monitoring process.

However, at the time of our fieldwork we found that;

- Safeguarding training is not currently mandated for elected members with take up of training being 18% at the end of March 2019. We were informed during our fieldwork that this rate had increased to 29% in August 2019. The Director of Social Care has raised this low take up of training with elected members when presenting his annual Director of Social Services report in early summer 2019.
- the Council had recently introduced minimum standards for safeguarding for working with partners, volunteers and contractors but these do not explicitly mandate safeguarding training.
- the Council's Volunteer recruitment policy states that 'Volunteers should receive induction and training appropriate to their role' but the Council does not mandate that training.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
· ·	 whilst Social Care contracts mandate Safeguarding Training for relevant staff in commissioned services, the Council's Safeguarding Quality Assurance framework does not require service areas to confirm if such training is required across contracts in other service areas. The Quality Assurance Framework document does not ask service areas to provide assurance around training of relevant staff in commissioned services. the Council does not mandate and monitor safeguarding training take up of agency staff centrally. As such, the Council has further work to do to fully address this national recommendation. In doing so, the Council should also look to: monitor take up of the Safeguarding training framework for staff across all levels and in partner organisations.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
Local Proposal for Improvement 4	Partially met
Ensure all elected members and staff who come into contact with children on a regular basis receive training on safeguarding and child protection issues and the Council's corporate policy on safeguarding. This should also include volunteers.	See commentary above

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report

Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress

R6 Improve accountability for corporate safeguarding by regularly reporting safeguarding issues and assurances to scrutiny committee(s) against a balanced and council-wide set of performance information covering:

- benchmarking and comparisons with others;
- conclusions of internal and external audit/inspection reviews;
- service-based performance data;
- key personnel data such as safeguarding training, and DBS recruitment checks; and
- the performance of contractors and commissioned services on compliance with council safeguarding responsibilities.

Summary – Partially met

The Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy states that the CSLG will provide an annual report to Council. However, in practice the group does not provide such a report and the Director of Social Services' annual Report presented to full Council includes a specific section on Safeguarding. The CSLG's terms of reference also provide that the group provides assurance to the Executive member that the Council's procedures are robust where matters of safeguarding children and adults are in question.

The Council's Healthier Communities Scrutiny has received regular reports on progress on actions arising from external audit recommendations, including the previous Wales Audit Office national and local safeguarding reports.

The CSLG receive Performance Indicator reports on a range of measures covering recruitment, training, attendance at CSLG and policy reviews. The CSLG has recently been reviewing its performance indicators to ensure that these remain relevant and appropriate.

However, at the time of our fieldwork we found that:

- the Director of Social Services' annual report includes an overview of safeguarding activities, however, the report for 2018-19 did not provide a clear assurance statement to the reader about the robustness of the Council's procedures for safeguarding children and adults and did not include relevant performance information; and
- the performance indicator measures currently used by CSLG do not provide the level of assurance required across all relevant areas of safeguarding activity as they do not include:
 - service-based performance data;
 - benchmarking and comparisons with other councils; or
 - information on the performance of contractors or commissioned services.

As such, the Council has further work to do to fully address this national recommendation. In doing so, the Council should also look to:

• update its policy to review the accountability for Corporate Safeguarding and ensure that reporting arrangements reflect those accountabilities.

fror pro	ional recommendations n the 2015 report and local posals for improvement n the 2014 report
R7	Establish a rolling

Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress

R7 Establish a rolling programme of internal audit reviews to undertake systems testing and compliance reviews on the council's safeguarding practices.

Summary - Fully met

The Council's Internal Audit service produces an annual rolling programme of work based around the key system reviews managed via an Audit Universe. There is scope in the programme to look at other unplanned areas which may emerge based on the assessment of risks. All members of the Internal team have completed the basic safeguarding training. The team considers safeguarding when undertaking their reviews.

Internal Audit check schools' compliance with the Council's safe recruitment policy including DBS checks as part of the rolling programme of school audits. Where Internal Audit identify recommendations follow up audits are always carried out within 12 months.

In 2016, the Internal Audit service reviewed the Council Safeguarding arrangements (adult and children) including revised corporate arrangements and made a number of recommendations that it followed up in 2017. In early 2019, Internal Audit reviewed the Protection of vulnerable adults. The Internal Audit service has also undertaken reviews of the safe recruitment of volunteers in the Kerbcraft scheme and also the Council's playscheme.

At the time of our fieldwork we found that:

- the Internal Audit service does not have sight of the outcomes of the quality assurance framework for Safeguarding to inform their work programme; and
- the CSLG had recently agreed to request sight of Safeguarding related findings from Internal Audit reports as a matter of course to understand potential trends and ensure lessons learnt are considered corporately.

The Council could consider the following options to further strengthen its arrangements:

- ensure that Internal Audit receives the relevant outcomes of the quality assurance framework to help inform their work programme; and
- consider how the CSLG can receive Safeguarding related findings from Internal Audit reports as a matter of course to ensure potential trends and lessons learnt are considered corporately.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
Local Proposal for Improvement 6 Include safeguarding within the internal audit programme to strengthen accountability and challenge.	See narrative above.

National recommendations from the 2015 report and local proposals for improvement from the 2014 report	Wales Audit Office assessment of Council's progress
R8 Ensure the risks associated with safeguarding are considered at both a corporate and service level in developing and agreeing risk management plans across the council.	The Council's Quality Assurance Safeguarding review framework completed every 2 years by all service areas provides insight into the Safeguarding related risks and could be used to help inform an understanding of Safeguarding risks across the Council. The Council considers that Safeguarding is part of its core business and therefore has removed Safeguarding from its Corporate Risk Register. The removal of the Safeguarding risk from the Corporate Risk Register was subject to review and challenge by the Council's internal governance group. The rationale for the removal of the risk was the implementation of the Corporate Safeguarding policy and associated procedures. Although the internal risk group agreed to remove that risk it did not anticipate that the Safeguarding risk disappearing completely but requested that the risk be restated and worded and re-scored. The Council continues to retain a related risk focused on caseloads which includes consideration of Safeguarding. The mitigating actions for that risk include Implementing the Wales Audit Office Safeguarding Action Plan and Improved governance arrangements around corporate safeguarding plan and policies. However, at the time of our fieldwork we found that: • the Council does not currently use the information generated from its Quality Assurance Framework to inform its assessment of safeguarding risks in individual service areas. As such, the Council has further work to do to fully address this national recommendation. In doing so, the Council should also look to: • use the information contained within its Quality Assurance Framework to inform its assessment of safeguarding risks in individual service areas and to monitor any themes that may impact on relevant risks on the Corporate risk register.
Local Proposal for Improvement 3 Ensure appropriate and timely action is taken to address significant risks and under performance.	See narrative above

Wales Audit Office 24 Cathedral Road Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone.: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

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: post@archwilio.cymru

Gwefan: www.archwilio.cymru