



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report 2017-18

## Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council

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This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Ian Phillips and Sara-Jane Byrne under the direction of Huw Rees.

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

Beyond local government, 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.

The Auditor General and staff of the Wales Audit Office aim to provide public-focused and proportionate reporting on the stewardship of public resources and in the process provide insight and promote improvement.

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.

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# Summary report

## 2017-18 performance audit work

- 1 In determining the breadth of work undertaken during the year, we considered the extent of accumulated audit and inspection knowledge as well as other available sources of information including Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's (the Council) own mechanisms for review and evaluation. For 2017-18, we undertook improvement assessment work at all councils. We also undertook work at all councils in relation to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, a service-user-perspective themed review and a review of overview and scrutiny arrangements. At some councils, we supplemented this work with local risk-based audits, identified in the Audit Plan for 2017-18.
- 2 The work carried out since the last Annual Improvement Report (AIR), including that of the relevant regulators, is set out in [Exhibit 2](#).

## The Council is meeting its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement

- 3 Based on, and limited to, the work carried out by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators, the Auditor General believes that the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Measure (2009) during 2018-19.

## Recommendations and proposals for improvement

- 4 Given the wide range of services provided by the Council and the challenges it is facing, it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
  - make proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Council, we would expect it to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
  - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made, the Council must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
  - conduct a special inspection, and publish a report and make recommendations; and
  - recommend to ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 5 During the course of the year, the Auditor General did not make any formal recommendations. However, we have made a number of proposals for improvement and these are repeated in this report. We will monitor progress against them and relevant recommendations made in our national reports ([Appendix 3](#)) as part of our improvement assessment work.

## Audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2017-18

### Exhibit 1: audit, regulatory and inspection work reported during 2017-18

Description of the work carried out since the last AIR, including that of the relevant regulators, where relevant.

Issue date	Brief description	Conclusions	Proposals for improvement
April 2018	<p><b>Aligning the Levers of Change – Workshop Summary</b></p> <p>A series of workshops with members and senior officers focusing on transformation and risk management. A better understanding of the attitudes and behaviours that influence risk and failure can contribute to better decision making and well managed risk taking.</p>	<p>Conclusion from Aligning the Levers of Change workshops:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how a scenario is described influences how risk and failure are perceived;</li> <li>• more people are likely to share learning if the situation is considered ‘safe to fail’ compared to when ‘failure is not an option’;</li> <li>• for ‘safe to fail’ scenarios, with many unknowns many people favoured the use of common sense and freedom to act rather than compliance with process and the rules; and</li> <li>• involving services users in decision making is context specific. It appears to work best in complex situations where there are no clear answers.</li> </ul> <p><a href="#"><u>Taking Risks - how to make it safe to fail</u></a></p>	<p>Given that ‘Failure is not an option’ is likely to create a perception that failure will lead to negative consequences, the Council was asked to consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What steps could it take to describe challenges in a way that encourages well managed risk taking?</li> <li>• How does the council share learning from its activities to help people within its own organisation and more widely? How is this achieved if the learning has come from hard lessons or failure?</li> <li>• What steps could it take to support staff to operate in a way that encourages well managed risk taking?</li> </ul>

Dyddiad cyhoeddi	Disgrifiad byr	Casgliadau	Cynigion ar gyfer gwella
July 2018	<p><b>‘Scrutiny: Fit for the Future?’ Review</b></p> <p>Review of how well placed Councils’ overview and scrutiny functions are to respond to current and future challenges.</p>	<p>Conclusion from scrutiny review report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Council is beginning to respond to weaknesses in its overview and scrutiny arrangements, but further work remains to make it better placed to respond to current and future challenges;</li> <li>• the Council is beginning to respond to weaknesses in its overview and scrutiny arrangements, but scrutiny committees are not effectively holding the Cabinet to account;</li> <li>• scrutiny activity is not always well planned and the Council should consider how its scrutiny function can work differently and engage the public more effectively in its activity in order to be better placed to respond to current and future challenges; and</li> <li>• the Council cannot demonstrate the effectiveness of overview and scrutiny activity as it does not evaluate its impact effectively.</li> </ul>	<p>P1 The Council’s scrutiny committees should ensure that where appropriate Cabinet members rather than council officers are held to account for the efficient exercise of executive functions in accordance with statutory guidance.</p> <p>P2 The Council should ensure that the minutes of overview and scrutiny committee meetings are recorded in sufficient detail to provide a transparent record of discussions.</p> <p>P3 The Council should review the level and type of scrutiny support required to enable the scrutiny function to respond to current and future challenges.</p> <p>P4 The Council should improve the development of scrutiny forward work programming through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring that overview and scrutiny committees take ownership of forward work programmes and committee agendas; and</li> <li>• reviewing its arrangements for planning and undertaking scrutiny activity, and consider different ways of working that best suit the topic area and desired outcome.</li> </ul> <p>P5 The Council should strengthen arrangements for engaging the public in overview and scrutiny activity.</p> <p>P6 The Council should put in place arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny activity.</p>

Dyddiad cyhoeddi	Disgrifiad byr	Casgliadau	Cynigion ar gyfer gwella
			<p>The following proposals for improvement from our 'Good governance when determining service changes' report, issued to the Council in February 2017 also remain applicable<sup>1</sup>.</p> <p>The Council's governance arrangements could be strengthened by introducing greater transparency through:</p> <p>P1 Publishing a Cabinet forward work programme that includes details for forthcoming service change proposals to be determined; and</p> <p>P2 Ensuring that scrutiny committees have the opportunity to determine if they wish to scrutinise proposed service changes, including sufficient time in decision making processes to enable meaningful consideration of proposals.</p>

1 Auditor General for Wales, **Good Governance when determining service changes**, Wales Audit Office, February 2017

Dyddiad cyhoeddi	Disgrifiad byr	Casgliadau	Cynigion ar gyfer gwella
November 2017	<p><b>Annual audit letter 2016-17</b></p> <p>Letter summarising the key messages arising from the Auditor General's statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and his reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice. The Annual Audit Letter is in <a href="#">Appendix 2</a> of this report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources;</li> <li>I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, but the financial outlook is very challenging; and</li> <li>my work to date on certification of grant claims and returns has not identified significant issues that would impact on the 2016-17 accounts or key financial systems.</li> </ul>	None.
<b>Improvement planning and reporting</b>			
October 2017	<p><b>Wales Audit Office annual improvement plan audit</b></p> <p>Review of the Council's published plans for delivering on improvement objectives</p>	The Council has complied with its statutory improvement planning duties.	None
November 2017	<p><b>Wales Audit Office annual assessment of performance audit</b></p> <p>Review of the Council's published performance assessment.</p>	The Council has complied with its statutory improvement reporting duties.	None
<b>Reviews by inspection and regulation bodies</b>			
No reviews by inspection and regulation bodies have taken place during the time period covered in this report			

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake a forward-looking annual improvement assessment, and to publish an annual improvement report, for each improvement authority in Wales. Improvement authorities (defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities) have a general duty to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions'.

The annual improvement assessment considers the likelihood that an authority will comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. The assessment is also the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. Staff of the Wales Audit Office, on behalf of the Auditor General, produce the annual improvement report. The report discharges the Auditor General's duties under section 24 of the Measure, by summarising his audit and assessment work in a published annual improvement report for each authority. The report also discharges his 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.

The Auditor General may also, in some circumstances, carry out special inspections (under section 21), which will be reported to the authority and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). An important ancillary activity for the Auditor General 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 – Annual Audit Letter

Councillor Kevin O'Neill – Leader/ Gareth Chapman – Chief Executive  
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council  
Civic Centre  
Merthyr Tydfil  
CF47 8AN

**Reference:** 293A2017-18

**Date issued:** 30 November 2017

Dear Kevin and Gareth

### Annual Audit Letter Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council 2016-17

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

#### The Council complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources

It is Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council's (the Council) responsibility to:

- put systems of internal control in place to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions and to ensure that its assets are secure;
- maintain proper accounting records;
- prepare a Statement of Accounts in accordance with relevant requirements; and
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 requires me to:

- provide an audit opinion on the accounting statements;
- review the Council's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; and
- issue a certificate confirming that I have completed the audit of the accounts.

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards.

On 28 September 2017 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the 2016/17 financial statements confirming they present a true and fair view of the Council's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the financial statements. The key matters arising from the audit of the financial statements were reported to Members at the Council Meeting on 27 September 2017, in my Audit of Financial Statements Report. I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the financial statements has been completed on 28 September 2017.

Overall, the financial statements and associated working papers provided for audit were of good standard. Your officers were helpful and supplied us with all the information we requested. I reported to you the more significant issues arising from our audit, which are summarised below:

- The Council's draft financial statements presented for audit were much improved on the prior year with regard to content, format and disclosures therein.
- Our audit identified further disclosure amendments required in order to refine the readability of the financial statements, its internal consistency, and compliance with the Code. The resulting final financial statements are Code compliant and will form a good basis for future years.
- The financial statements were supported by accessible and comprehensive working papers at the outset of our audit, helping us to achieve the overall completion timetable.
- We reported two non-trivial uncorrected misstatements within the financial statements. Council agreed with management's decision not to amend for these given their immaterial value with no resulting impact upon our audit opinion.

The Council has made good progress in bringing forward the production of the financial statements. This year the financial statements were available for audit in mid-June. The Council is therefore making good progress towards achieving the 31 May deadline in 2020-21.

Since completion of the audit we have held a joint post project learning exercise with your Finance officers. We have identified areas where we can both learn from this year, and make improvements for the future. We have set up regular meetings to take these issues forward and to start preparations for the challenges that will be brought about by future requirements to bring forward the financial statements preparation and audit.

**I am satisfied that the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, but the financial outlook is very challenging**

My consideration 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 under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

In his Annual improvement report issued in July 2017 the Auditor General concluded that the Council is meeting its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement.

We issued our Savings Planning report to the Council in March 2017 which concluded that whilst the Council lacks some indicative savings plans for future years it continues to strengthen its financial planning framework to better support future financial resilience. The Council has increased investment in its corporate priorities by a planned review and release of earmarked reserves, and has continued the development of its Medium Term Financial Plan which encompasses all medium term financial planning assumptions. The Council now needs to strengthen its financial planning arrangements by providing more details of planned savings proposals when setting the annual budget to improve the transparency of decision-making.

In 2016-17, the Council had a net revenue surplus of £1.643 million which was transferred to the earmarked Budget Reserve. As at 30 September 2017, the Council is forecasting a net revenue deficit of £39,000 for the 2017-18 financial year. Significant pressures exist in some departments which are currently being offset by savings in others. The financial outlook is challenging with a settlement of -1% for 2018-19 and uncertainty beyond.

**My work to date on certification of grant claims and returns has not identified significant issues that would impact on the 2016-17 accounts or key financial systems**

My ongoing work on the certification of grants claims and returns has not identified any significant issues to date in relation to the accounts or the Council's key financial systems. A more detailed report on my grant certification work will follow in the spring 2018 once this year's programme of certification work is complete.

The financial audit fee for 2016-17 is currently expected to be in line with the agreed fee set out in the Annual Audit Plan.

Yours sincerely



**John Herniman**

**Engagement Director**

**For and on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales**

## Appendix 3 – National report recommendations 2017-18

### Exhibit 2: national report recommendations 2017-18

Summary of proposals for improvement relevant to local government, included in national reports published by the Wales Audit Office, since publication of the last AIR.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
June 2017	<a href="#"><u>Savings Planning in Councils in Wales</u></a>	The report did not include any recommendations or proposals for improvement, although proposals for improvement were included in local reports issued to each Council.
October 2017	<a href="#"><u>Public Procurement in Wales</u></a>	The report contained seven recommendations. Six of the recommendations were for the Welsh Government, one of the recommendations was for public bodies: R3 It was clear from our sampling that some procurement strategies are out of date and there has also been a mixed response to new policy and legislation, such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We recommend that public bodies review their procurement strategies and policies during 2017-18 and on an annual basis thereafter to ensure that they reflect wider policy and legislative changes and support continuous improvement.
October 2017	<a href="#"><u>Good governance when determining significant service changes – National Summary</u></a>	The report did not include any recommendations or proposals for improvement, although proposals for improvement were included in local reports issued to each Council. The report was designed primarily to provide insight, share existing practice and prompt further conversations and discussions between councils and other organisations.
December 2017	<a href="#"><u>Local Government Financial Reporting 2016-17</u></a>	The report did not include any recommendations or proposals for improvement.

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2018	<a href="#">How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness</a>	<p>R1 Implementing the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires local authorities to develop services which are focussed on preventing homelessness and reducing demand. These are very different to traditional casework led homelessness services, and prevention work requires new skills and early interaction with users and potential users. We found local authorities' progress in revising and strengthening services is variable (paragraphs 1.12 to 1.20). <b>We recommend that local authorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure their staff are sufficiently skilled to deal with the new demands of mediating, problem solving, negotiating and influencing with homeless people; and</li> <li>• review and reconfigure their services to engage more effectively with homeless and potentially homeless people to prevent homelessness.</li> </ul> <p>R2 The Welsh Government provided funding to support local authorities to implement the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and this funding has been critical in enabling new preventative services to be developed. The funding is in place until 2019-20 but authorities need to ensure they use headspace provided by these resources to revise their services to deliver their responsibilities in the future (paragraphs 1.21 to 1.28). <b>We recommend that local authorities review their funding of homelessness services to ensure that they can continue to provide the widest possible preventative approach needed. Reviews should consider use of Supporting People as well as General Council fund monies to support delivery of the authority's homelessness duties.</b></p> <p>R3 How services are configured and managed at the first point of contact can significantly influence how effective local authorities are in managing and reducing demand. Easy to access services which maximise usage, avoid gate keeping and focus on early solutions can significantly improve the prospects for successful homelessness prevention. We found that some authority point of entry systems are poorly designed which reduces the authority's prospects for early intervention to prevent homelessness from occurring (paragraphs 2.4 to 2.11). <b>We recommend that local authorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• design services to ensure there is early contact with service users;</li> <li>• use 'triage' approaches to identify and filter individuals seeking help to determine the most appropriate response to address their needs; and</li> <li>• test the effectiveness of first point of contact services to ensure they are fit for purpose.</li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2018	<a href="#">How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness</a>	<p>R4 Establishing clear standards of service that set out what the authority provides and is responsible for is critical to ensuring people know what they are entitled to receive and what they need to resolve themselves. We found that authorities are not always providing clear, concise and good quality information to help guide people to find the right advice quickly and efficiently (paragraphs 2.12 to 2.17). <b>We recommend that local authorities publish service standards that clearly set out what their responsibilities are and how they will provide services to ensure people know what they are entitled to receive and what they must do for themselves. Service standards should:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be written in plain accessible language.</li> <li>• be precise about what applicants can and cannot expect, and when they can expect resolution.</li> <li>• clearly set out the applicant’s role in the process and how they can help the process go more smoothly and quickly.</li> <li>• be produced collaboratively with subject experts and include the involvement of people who use the service(s).</li> <li>• effectively integrate with the single assessment process.</li> <li>• offer viable alternatives to the authority’s services.</li> <li>• set out the appeals and complaints processes. These should be based on fairness and equity for all involved and available to all.</li> </ul> <p>R5 Local authorities need to design services to engage with service users effectively and efficiently, but current standards are too variable to ensure service users are getting access to the advice they need (paragraphs 2.18 to 2.24). To improve current performance we recommend that local authorities make better use of their websites to help manage demand by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>testing the usability and effectiveness of current website information using our lines of enquiry set out in Appendix 5;</b></li> <li>• <b>increasing and improving the range, quality and coverage of web based information; making better use of online applications; and</b></li> <li>• <b>linking more effectively to information from specialist providers and advice specialists, such as Citizens Advice.</b></li> </ul> <p>R6 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 introduces a new duty on social services and housing associations to collaborate with local authority homelessness services in preventing homelessness. We found that these arrangements are not operating effectively and service responses to prevent homelessness and assist homeless people are not always being provided, nor are they consistently effective (paragraphs 3.13 to 3.25). <b>We recommend that local authorities set out and agree their expectations of partners identifying how they will work together to alleviate homelessness. The agreement should be reviewed regularly and all partners’ performance reviewed to identify areas for improvement.</b></p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
January 2018	<a href="#">How Local Government manages demand – Homelessness</a>	<p>R7 Local authorities monitoring systems and evaluation approaches to ensure compliance with their responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty are not working as well as they should (paragraph 3.35 to 3.39). <b>We recommend that local authorities address weaknesses in their equalities monitoring, and ensure that their homelessness service accurately records and evaluates appropriate data to demonstrate equality of access for all service users that the local authority has a duty towards.</b></p> <p>R8 Managing demand can be challenging for local authorities. There are some clear lessons to be learnt with regard to the implementation of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 and homelessness prevention duties that can be applied to managing demand in other services (paragraphs 4.24 to 4.27). <b>We recommend that local authorities use the checklist set out in Appendix 10 to undertake a self-assessment on services, to help identify options to improve how they can help manage demand.</b></p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
February 2018	<a href="#">Housing Adaptations</a>	<p>The report contained nine recommendations. One of the recommendations was for the Welsh Government, eight of the recommendations were for local authorities and/or delivery organisations:</p> <p>R1 There are many sources of funding and policies for adaptations, which results in disabled and older people receiving very different standards of service (paragraphs 1.5 to 1.9). To address these discrepancies <b>we recommend that the Welsh Government set standards for all adaptations to ensure disabled and older people receive the same standard of service irrespective of where they live, who their landlord is and whether they own their own home.</b></p> <p>R2 Most public bodies are clear on how their work on adaptations can positively impact on disabled and older people, and have set suitable aims that provide focus for action. For adaptations, having the right strategic goals also establishes a clear basis for decision-making on who should be prioritised for services and how and where to use resources. However, we found that current policy arrangements have a number of deficiencies and public bodies are not maximising the benefit of their investment (paragraphs 3.8 to 3.15). <b>We recommend that local authorities work with partner agencies (health bodies, housing associations and Care and Repair) to strengthen their strategic focus for the provision of adaptations by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>setting appropriate strategic objectives for adaptations that focus on wellbeing and independence;</b></li> <li>• <b>improving the quality of information on the demand for adaptations by using a wide range of data to assess need including drawing on and using information from partners who work in the local-authority area; and</b></li> <li>• <b>linking the system for managing and delivering adaptations with adapted housing policies and registers to make best use of already adapted homes.</b></li> </ul> <p>R3 Ensuring that all those who might need an adaptation have all the information they need in order to apply for and receive an adaptation is important. Good-quality and accessible information is therefore essential for delivery organisations to demonstrate fair access and transparency. However, we identified weaknesses in the quality and coverage of public information relating to housing adaptations (paragraphs 2.6 to 2.15). <b>We recommend that delivery organisations provide information on housing adaptations in both Welsh and English, and accessible formats including braille, large fonts, audio versions and other languages. Information should be promoted widely via a range of media including social media, websites and published information, and also through key partners. Preferably, information should be produced jointly and policies aligned between delivery bodies to improve coverage and usage.</b></p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
February 2018	<a href="#">Housing Adaptations</a>	<p>R4 Given the wide number of routes into services, delivery organisations need to ensure they have robust systems to deal effectively and quickly with applications. However, we found that the processes used by delivery organisations vary widely and often create difficulties for disabled and older people seeking assistance (paragraphs 2.16 to 2.19). <b>We recommend that delivery organisations streamline applications by creating single comprehensive application forms covering all organisations within a local-authority area that are available via partners and online.</b></p> <p>R5 Delivery of adaptations can be delayed by a variety of factors (paragraphs 2.20 to 2.33). To improve timeliness in delivery <b>we recommend that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Welsh Government reviews whether local authorities should continue to use the means test for Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs);</li> <li>• local authorities provide or use home improvement agency services to support disabled and older people to progress their DFG applications efficiently;</li> <li>• delivery organisations work with planning authorities to fast track and streamline adaptations that require approvals;</li> <li>• delivery organisations use Trusted Assessors to undertake less complex adaptation assessments; and</li> <li>• the Welsh Government streamlines its approval processes for Physical Adaptation Grants (PAGs).</li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
February 2018	<a href="#">Housing Adaptations</a>	<p>R6 Most local authorities, housing associations and Care and Repair agencies have established processes to appoint, oversee and manage builder and/or contractor performance. However, we found wide variations in how delivery organisations arrange, contract and deliver building works (paragraphs 2.37 to 2.44). <b>We recommend that delivery organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>introduce formal systems for accrediting contractors to undertake adaptations. These should include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– standards of customer care such as keeping to appointments, keeping the site tidy, controlling noise etc;</li> <li>– vetting of financial standing, tax and VAT status;</li> <li>– promoting good health and safety practices;</li> <li>– requiring the use of warranty schemes;</li> <li>– ensuring that adequate insurance is held; and</li> <li>– requiring references.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>use framework agreements and partnered contracts to deliver adaptations;</b></li> <li>• <b>address weaknesses in the contracting of adaptations, updating Schedule of Rates used to tender work and undertaking competitive tendering to support value for money in contracting;</b></li> <li>• develop effective systems to manage and evaluate contractor performance by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– setting an appropriate range of information to judge performance and delivery of works covering timeliness of work; quality of work; applicant/tenant feedback; cost of work (including variations); health and safety record; and customer feedback;</li> <li>– regularly reporting and evaluating performance to identify opportunities to improve services; and</li> <li>– providing formal feedback to contractors on their performance covering key issues such as client satisfaction, level and acceptability of variations, right first-time work, post-inspection assessment and completion within budget and on time.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
February 2018	<a href="#">Housing Adaptations</a>	<p>R7 Maximising impact and value for money in provision of adaptations requires effective joint working between housing organisations and health and social care services to ensure the needs of often very vulnerable people can be met, and their quality of life improved. However, our findings highlight that delivery organisations continue to have a limited strategic focus on adaptations, concentrating on organisational specific responses rather than how best collectively to meet the needs of disabled or older people (paragraphs 3.16 to 3.21). <b>We recommend that local authorities work with partner agencies (health bodies, housing associations and Care and Repair) to develop and improve joint working to maximise both take-up and the benefits of adaptations in supporting independence by pooling of resources, co-locating staff and creating integrated delivery teams</b></p> <p>R8 Most public bodies recognise the value of adaptations in reducing the risk of falls, preventing hospital admissions and speeding up discharge from hospital. However, the importance of adaptations is not always reflected in local partnership arrangements and outside of Occupational Therapists, health professionals noted that the different local-authority and housing-association systems for administering, approving and delivering adaptations are difficult to navigate (paragraphs 3.22 to 3.24). To enhance take-up and usage of adaptations with health bodies <b>we recommend that delivery organisations jointly agree and publish joint service standards for delivery of adaptations within each local-authority area. The service standards should clearly set out how each agency approaches delivery of adaptations and how they will provide services to ensure people know what they are entitled to receive. Service Standards should:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• be written in plain accessible language;</li> <li>• be precise about what people can and cannot expect to receive;</li> <li>• be produced collaboratively to cover all adaptations services within an area;</li> <li>• set out the eligibility for the different funding streams, application and assessment processes, timescales and review processes; and</li> <li>• offer the viable options and alternatives for adaptations including linking with adapted housing registers to maximise use of already adapted homes.</li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
February 2018	<a href="#"><u>Housing Adaptations</u></a>	<p>R9 Having the right performance indicators and regularly reporting performance against these are important for public bodies to manage operational performance, identify areas of improvement and evaluating the positive impact of services. We found that the current range of performance indicator data is extremely limited and not sufficient to enable a full evaluation of performance (paragraphs 4.5 to 4.20). To effectively manage performance and be able to judge the impact of adaptations, <b>we recommend that the Welsh Government and delivery organisations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• set appropriate measures to judge both the effectiveness and efficiency of the different systems for delivering adaptations and the impact on wellbeing and independence of those who receive adaptations;</li> <li>• ensure delivery organisations report against their responsibilities in respect of the Equalities Act 2010;</li> <li>• ensure performance information captures the work of all delivery organisations – local authorities, housing associations and Care and Repair agencies; and</li> <li>• annually publish performance for all delivery organisations to enable a whole systems view of delivery and impact to support improvement to be taken.</li> </ul>
April 2018	<a href="#"><u>Speak my language: Overcoming language and communication barriers in public services</u></a>	<p>Ensuring that people who face language and communication barriers can access public services</p> <p>R1 Public bodies are required to ensure that people can access the services they need. To take account of the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act and other legislation, we recommend that public bodies regularly review the accessibility of their services to people who do not speak English or Welsh as a main language including Deaf people who use sign language. This assessment can include using our checklist.</p> <p>Developing interpretation and translation services in Wales</p> <p>R2 Our work with public bodies, interpretation and translation service providers and service users has identified some challenges for interpretation and translation services. <b>We recommend that the Welsh Government work with public bodies, representative groups and other interested parties to make sure that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>the supply of interpreters is sufficient especially for languages in high demand such as BSL and Arabic;</b></li> <li>• <b>interpreters with specialist training are available to work in mental health services and with people who have experienced trauma or violence; and</b></li> <li>• <b>quality assurance and safeguarding procedures are in place.</b></li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
May 2018	<a href="#"><u>Reflecting on Year One: How Have Public Bodies Responded to the Well-being of Future Generations</u></a>	The report did not include any recommendations or proposals for improvement.
May 2018	<a href="#"><u>Strategic Commissioning of Accommodation Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities</u></a>	<p>R1 People with a learning disability have a right to live independently. The last 50 years have seen significant changes in the provision of accommodation and support. Service provision has moved to a model that enables people to live in the community in ordinary houses throughout Wales (paragraphs 1.3 to 1.10). <b>We recommend that local authorities continue to focus on preventing people becoming dependent on more expensive placements in care homes by providing effective support at home and a range of step up accommodation by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving the evaluation of prevention activity so local authorities understand what works well and why.</li> <li>• utilising the mapping of prevention services under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 that covers other agencies and service providers.</li> <li>• improving the signposting of additional help so carers and support networks can be more resilient and self-reliant. This should include encouraging carers to make long-term plans for care to maintain and protect their dependants' wellbeing.</li> <li>• sharing risk analysis and long-term planning data with other local authorities, service providers, and partners to agree a shared understanding of the range of options.</li> </ul> <p>R2 Population projections show that the number of people with a learning disability will increase in the future, and those aged over 65 and those with a moderate or severe learning disability will rise significantly (paragraphs 1.3 to 1.10). <b>We recommend that local authorities improve their approach to planning services for people with learning disabilities by building on the Regional Partnership Boards' population assessments for people with learning disabilities and agreeing future priorities.</b></p>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
May 2018	<a href="#"><u>Strategic Commissioning of Accommodation Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities</u></a>	<p>R3 The Welsh Government produced guidance to local authorities, entitled 'developing a commissioning strategy for people with a learning disability' to support authorities in producing strategic plans for the commissioning of learning disability services. In conjunction with codes of practice developed following the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Welsh Government requires local authorities to develop integrated commissioning options with Local Health Board services. The aim is to provide a joined-up and cost-effective approach to the commissioning of services but our review highlighted weaknesses in current arrangements (paragraph 2.4 to 2.12). <b>We recommend that local authorities do more to integrate commissioning arrangements with partners and providers and take account of the work of the National Commissioning Board by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understanding the barriers that exist in stopping or hindering further integration;</li> <li>• improving the quality of joint strategic plans for learning disability services (see also paragraphs 3.11 to 3.14);</li> <li>• establishing investment models and sustainable financial structures, joint workforce planning and multi-year budgeting; and</li> <li>• developing appropriate governance and data sharing frameworks with key local partners that include a clear process for managing risk and failure.</li> </ul> <p>R4 Local authorities' engagement with people with learning disabilities and their carers is variable. Whilst many authority services have positive relationships with advocacy groups, some are less successful in involving these groups and carers in evaluating the quality of services (paragraph 2.18 to 2.20). <b>We recommend that local authorities do more to involve people with learning disabilities and their carers in care planning and agreeing pathways to further independence by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consistently including people with learning disabilities and their carers in the writing, monitoring and development of care plans;</li> <li>• systematically involving carers and advocacy groups in evaluating the quality of services;</li> <li>• involving people with learning disabilities in procurement processes; and</li> <li>• ensuring communications are written in accessible and appropriate language to improve the understanding and impact of guidance and information.</li> </ul>

Date of report	Title of review	Recommendation
May 2018	<a href="#"><u>Strategic Commissioning of Accommodation Services for Adults with Learning Disabilities</u></a>	<p>R5 Local Authorities could do more to involve service providers in commissioning and make the tendering process more effective by making it easier to navigate and more outcome focused. However, providers are not as effectively engaged as they should be (paragraphs 2.28 to 2.38). We recommend that local authorities collaborate with providers, the third sector and suppliers in understanding challenges, sharing data, and pooling expertise by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving the quality, range, and accessibility of tendering information; and</li> <li>• working with providers to shape local markets by coming to a common understanding of the opportunities, risks, and future priorities in providing learning disabilities services.</li> </ul> <p>R6 Most local authorities do not have effective arrangements to monitor and evaluate their commissioning of learning disability services (paragraphs 3.3 to 3.15). We recommend that local authorities develop a more appropriate set of performance indicators and measures of success that make it easier to monitor and demonstrate the impact of service activity by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• co-designing measures, service and contract performance indicators with service providers, people with learning disabilities and their carers;</li> <li>• ensure commissioners have sufficient cost and qualitative information on the full range of placement and care options available;</li> <li>• equipping commissioners with data to demonstrate the long-term financial benefits of commissioning choices, this includes having the right systems and technology;</li> <li>• integrating the outcomes and learning from reviews of care plans into performance measures;</li> <li>• evaluating and then learning from different types of interventions and placements; and</li> <li>• including learning disability services in local authority scrutiny reviews to challenge performance and identify improvements.</li> </ul>



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