

## Flintshire County Council

### Annual audit summary 2020

This is our audit summary for Flintshire County Council. It shows the work completed since the last Annual Improvement Report, which was issued in July 2019. 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 70 councillors who represent the following political parties/groups:

- Welsh Labour 34
- Independent Alliance 16
- Welsh Liberal Democrats 6
- Welsh Conservative 6
- New Independents 4
- Independents 3
- Not a member of any political group within Flintshire County Council 1

The Council spent £315.8 million on providing services during 2019-20, the sixth highest spend of the 22 unitary councils in Wales.

As at 31 March 2020 the Council had £24.3 million of usable financial reserves. This is equivalent to 8% of the Council's annual spend on services, the second lowest percentage of the 22 unitary councils in Wales.

## Key facts

Flintshire has three of its 92 areas deemed the most deprived 10% of areas in Wales, this is the fifth lowest of the 22 unitary councils in Wales<sup>1</sup>.

The population of Flintshire is projected to increase by 3.1% between 2020 and 2040 from 156,444 to 161,258, including a 5.1% decrease in the number of children, a 2.9% decrease in the number of the working-age population and a 27% increase in the number of people aged 65 and over<sup>2</sup>.

## The Auditor General's duties

### We complete work each year 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 Council has to put in place arrangements to get value for money for the resources it uses, and the Auditor General has to be satisfied that it has done this.
- **Continuous improvement**  
The Council also has to put in place arrangements to make continuous improvements, including related plans and reports, and the Auditor General has to assess whether the Council is likely to (or has) met these requirements.
- **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.

<sup>1</sup> An area in this context is defined as a 'Lower Super Output Area'. Source: Stats Wales

<sup>2</sup> Source: Stats Wales



Since the Spring of 2020, the ongoing pandemic has affected our audit work. We recognise the huge strain on public services and have reshaped our work programme and found new ways of working to reduce its impact on public bodies' response to COVID-19, while still meeting our statutory duties.



**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.**

## What we found

### Audit of Flintshire County Council's 2019-20 Accounts

Each year we audit the Council's financial statements.

#### For 2019-20:

- The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the Council's financial statements on 14 September 2020, in line with the statutory deadline. The auditor's report also included an emphasis of matter describing material valuation uncertainty clauses in valuation reports on the Council's property and on Pooled Property Funds held by the Clwyd Pension Fund caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Council's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance. They were also consistent with the financial statements prepared by the Council and with our knowledge of the Council.
- The quality of the draft statements presented for audit on 12 June 2020 was good. This was a significant achievement given the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A number of changes were made to the Council's financial statements arising from our audit work, which were reported to the Audit Committee in our Audit of Financial Statements Report on 9 September 2020.
- The Auditor General issued the certificate confirming that the audit of accounts for 2019-20 had been completed on 14 September 2020.
- In addition to the Auditor General's responsibilities for auditing the Council's financial statements, he also has responsibility for the certification of a number of grant claims and returns. Our work to date has not identified any significant issues.
- Key facts and figures from the 2019-20 financial statements can be accessed [here](#).

## **Well-being of Future Generations Examination – an examination of the well-being objective to protect and enhance the natural environment**

The examination that we undertook in 2019-20 considered the extent to which the Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when protecting and enhancing the natural environment, a step the Council is taking to meet its well-being objectives. We concluded that the Council has applied the sustainable development principle in developing the step and in taking actions to deliver it, and it has further opportunities to embed the five ways of working as it moves forward. The report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Continuous Improvement**

The Auditor General certified that the Council has met its legal duties for improvement planning and reporting and believes that it is likely to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 during 2020-21.

## **Financial Sustainability**

During 2019-20 we examined the financial sustainability of each council in Wales. In March 2020, we concluded that the Council takes a high-risk approach to its financial strategy and is not prepared to compromise the range, quality or safety of services; the resulting use of reserves to balance the budget is not sustainable. The report can be viewed [here](#).

## **National Fraud Initiative**

In October 2020, the Auditor General published his report on the findings of the latest National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data-matching exercise in Wales. The exercise helped public bodies in Wales, including the 22 unitary authorities, identify fraud and overpayments amounting to £8 million. The report can be accessed on our website [here](#). NFI continues to be developed and in the forthcoming NFI exercise (NFI 2020-2022), local authorities will have access to matches designed to help identify potential fraudulent applications for COVID-19 business support grants.

## **Household Recycling Centres**

During 2019-20, we did a review to consider do the needs, experiences and aspirations of Flintshire service users inform the design and delivery of services to more closely meet their needs, considering in particular the Council's approach to household recycling centres. In December 2019, we concluded that the Council, following its clearly set out vision, continues to invest in Household Recycling Centres and has listened to service users to help it secure public satisfaction, but increasing public understanding of how to recycle more effectively has potential benefit. The report can be viewed [here](#).

## Digital Strategy

During 2019-20, we did a diagnostic review to consider whether the Council is well placed to deliver on the ambitions in its Digital Strategy. In May 2020, we concluded that the Council has a clearly defined digital ambition and recognises the opportunities to improve it further. The report can be viewed [here](#).

## Other Inspectorates

We also considered the reports of Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn as well as any subsequent actions taken by the Council in response. CIW undertook focused activity in Children's Services in October 2019 and Adult Services in February 2020 and published its findings in the [Flintshire Local Authority Performance Review April 2019 – March 2020](#).

There were no other Flintshire County Council inspections in this period, but as usual Estyn inspected local schools, and services that are registered with CIW in Flintshire were subject to regular review.

## Local Government Studies

As well as local work at each council, each year we also carry out studies across the local government sector to make recommendations for improving value for money. Since the last annual improvement report we have published the following reports:

### The 'Front Door' to Social Care (September 2019)

We considered the effectiveness of the new 'front door' to social care, looking specifically at services for adults. We found that whilst councils are preventing social-care demand, information, advice and assistance are not consistently effective. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

### Review of Public Services Boards (October 2019)

We inspected how Public Services Boards are operating; looking at their membership, terms of reference, frequency and focus of meetings, alignment with other partnerships, resources and scrutiny arrangements. We concluded that Public Services Boards are unlikely to realise their potential unless they are given freedom to work more flexibly and think and act differently. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

### Progress in implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (November 2019)

We examined how the new duties and responsibilities of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act are being rolled out and delivered. We found that victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence are often let down by an inconsistent, complex and fragmented system. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Rough Sleeping in Wales – Everyone’s Problem; No One’s Responsibility (July 2020)**

We looked at how well public services are responding to the issue of rough sleeping. Overall, we found that responding to COVID-19 is an opportunity for public bodies to start addressing long standing weaknesses in partnership working which has stopped them from tackling rough sleeping in the past. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Better Law Making (September 2020)**

This report draws on five reports published between 2019 and today looking at how local authorities are responding to the challenge of implementing new legislation. Implementation is a complex task which needs to be fully thought through by the Welsh Government and the Senedd whenever they bring forward and make any new legislation. The paper highlights the difficulties faced by local authorities and their public sector partners in implementing their new responsibilities. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Commercialisation in Local Government (October 2020)**

Councils have conducted commercial activity for a long time, and many councils are exploring additional commercial opportunities to mitigate against the financial pressures they face. Our report is specifically targeted at helping elected members and senior officers to examine and judge the potential impact on their organisations when considering whether to undertake commercialisation. It will also help councils to demonstrate how well they are discharging their value for money responsibilities. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Planned work for 2020-21**

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

The most significant risk and issue facing councils and the wider public sector during 2020-21 is the COVID-19 pandemic. We have shaped our work to provide assurance and challenge in a way which helps to support the Council through this period. Our work plan for 2020-21 includes:

- Recovery planning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- COVID-learning project – helping to identify and share learning from the way in which public bodies have responded to the pandemic
- Assurance and risk assessment
- A review of the Council’s financial sustainability
- A review of the Council’s Rent Arrears processes
- A review of the Council’s Cultural Services
- North Wales Economic Ambition Board
- Commissioning Older People’s Care Home Placements – North Wales Councils and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

The Auditor General is independent of government, and is 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, 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 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.