

Annex 1: Potential study topics for 2019-20 to 2021-22

Central government and cross-cutting studies

Topics that could start in 2019-20

1. UK comparative spending trends analysis	The Office for National Statistics produces data on public spending across the UK. We would use the data to produce a factual analysis, looking at trends over time in Wales and comparison with other parts of the UK. This work would provide insight into public spending and support scrutiny and understanding of financial decisions.
2. Preparations for Brexit	Brexit will potentially have significant implications for public bodies in Wales. The Auditor General has started a programme of work looking at devolved public services' preparations for the implications, risks and opportunities of Brexit. Work is already underway to develop a baseline of arrangements being put in place. Future work could look in greater depth at particular service or policy areas with greatest exposure to risks or opportunities from Brexit.
3. Changing approaches to public services	Public services in Wales are going through a period of significant change. To support change and transformation, we would look in detail at some of the big ideas that are being explored and tested across Wales. This could include approaches such as 'co-production'; 'asset-based development'; 'complexity and systems thinking'; 'trauma/ ACE informed practice' 'data analytics' and 'digital first/ online services'. This work would start in 2019-20 but would run over several years, with multiple outputs including short reports and blogs as well as possible webinars and other social media activity. It would link closely with our previous and future Good Practice Exchange work.
4. Work-force planning in Welsh Government	The Welsh Government has seen a significant reduction in the number of staff it employs. In part, this reduction reflects choices made in response to financial pressures. This study would look at how the Welsh Government is planning its workforce in light of the changing environment in which it operates.
5. Welsh Government central ICT services	The Welsh Government's agreement for its core IT service, Merlin, ends in January 2019 and the service will be brought in-house. A study starting towards the end of 2019-20 would give an opportunity to look at the basis for this decision, including expected costs and benefits, and the extent to which the new arrangements are delivering in line with those expectations.

<p>6. Digital resilience</p>	<p>Public bodies face a growing risk of cyber-attack and the Public Accounts Committee has recently raised concerns about outdated IT infrastructure in the NHS. A study would look at how public bodies are ensuring that their IT systems are resilient, robust and secure so that, in the event of serious incidents, systems can be recovered quickly and services can keep running.</p>
<p>7. Preventing fraud and corruption</p>	<p>Losses from fraud are costing the UK public sector hundreds of millions of pounds every year. Commentators and analysts agree that the incidence of fraud is continuing rise across the UK and globally. The Auditor General participates in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI), which provides a valuable insight into the magnitude and extent of fraud but does not provide a robust evaluation of the underlying arrangements to prevent and detect fraud and corruption. A review of the effectiveness of arrangements for preventing fraud and corruption across public bodies would complement and build upon the work being done under NFI.</p>
<p>8. Qualifications Wales</p>	<p>The Qualifications Wales Act 2015 established an independent exam regulator. Qualifications Wales regulates GCSEs, AS and A levels taken by students in Wales. It aims to ensure that qualifications, and the qualification system, are effective and to promote public confidence in qualifications and the Welsh qualification system. This report would look at the new organisation's governance, structure and strategic approach in light of wider changes to the exam system.</p>
<p>9. Student finance</p>	<p>In autumn 2018, the Welsh Government introduced new student finance support arrangements for higher education students following its response to the September 2016 Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales. In this context, our audit review would consider issues relating to the overall administration of the student finance system, including the implementation of the new arrangements and the Welsh Government's modelling of future repayments. Work in this area could potentially inform a wider follow-up review of our 2013 report on Higher Education Finances to revisit the overall financial health of the higher education sector in Wales</p>
<p>10. Welsh Government's free childcare offer</p>	<p>The Welsh Government is committed to implementing the Labour manifesto commitment to 30 hours of free childcare for working parents of 3-4 year olds. It aims to support the Welsh economy by helping parents to return to or increase the hours they work. Pilots are on-going. The Government states the offer will available to all eligible families by October 2020. There has been National Assembly scrutiny of the offer including by the Children, Young People and Education Committee (most recently in July 2018) and the Equalities, Local Government and Communities Committee (July 2018). This study would look at how the Welsh Government has learnt from the pilots to ensure that its investment delivers the intended benefits and achieves value for money.</p>

11. Fuel poverty/ energy efficiency	<p>In 2012, a third of Welsh households were in fuel poverty (paying more than 10% of their income to heat their home). The Welsh Government has a target to eradicate fuel poverty by 2018. It has several programmes aimed at tackling fuel poverty, primarily Nest and Arbed alongside wider anti-poverty programmes. A review could look at progress in tackling fuel poverty, in particular progress made through both income maximisation and energy efficiency schemes.</p>
12. Managing changes to grant schemes	<p>The Welsh Government is reducing the number of individual grants it provides and merging them together. For example, the Welsh Government has merged several funding streams into two grant schemes: one housing grant scheme (Housing Support Grant of £126.7 million p.a.) and one non-housing related grant scheme (Children and Communities Grant of £134 million p.a). The study would look at how the Welsh Government has managed changes to grant schemes and consider whether it has taken on board previous audit recommendations about grants management. The study could complement follow-up on our work on the Supporting People programme.</p>
13. Major events	<p>The Welsh Government's Major Events Strategy for 2010 to 2020 identified a series of specific events that it wanted to attract to Wales as well as specific measures of the benefits of major events. This study would look at the extent to which the Welsh Government achieved its objectives and evidence on the cost and benefits of major events in Wales. A study during 2020 would be timely as recommendations could inform thinking about any renewal of the strategy.</p>

Topics that could start in 2020-21 or 2021-22

14. Picture of Public Services 4	<p>We have produced three Picture of Public Services reports: in 2010, 2011 and 2015. A fourth report would look at the key financial and delivery challenges and opportunities for public services in Wales. It would be opportune to produce a report in 2020 – 5 years on from the last report and a decade from the original Picture of Public Services report that first flagged the then impending period of public sector spending cuts.</p>
15. Financial planning in central government	<p>Over recent years, the Wales Audit Office has looked in depth at financial planning in the NHS and local government, but we have not covered central government. Several recent Wales Audit Office reports have highlighted a short-term horizon in Welsh Government's budgets, partly driven by external challenges. This study would look at the mechanics of financial planning across Welsh Government departments and its sponsored bodies. It would not examine the merits of policy decisions about the allocation of funding.</p>

16. Impact assessments of spending decisions	<p>All public bodies are required to carry out impact assessments of certain decisions, including the impact on equalities issues. A study could focus on the Welsh Government's approach to equalities impact assessments of budget decisions, which has been evolving over recent years. A broader study could take a cross-cutting look at impact assessments of budgets across the Welsh public sector.</p>
17. Invest to Save / Innovate to Save	<p>Invest to Save was set up in 2009 to provide funding for projects that could deliver savings over time. Innovate to Save was set up in response to reviews of Invest to Save by the National Assembly's Finance Committee; an external consultancy firm and the Public Policy Institute for Wales. A study could look at progress made since previous reviews, the level of savings made by the schemes and the key enablers/ barriers to greater use of invest save.</p>
18. Welsh Revenue Authority	<p>The Welsh Revenue Authority is a non-ministerial department of the Welsh Government. It collects and manages 2 devolved Welsh taxes on behalf of Welsh Government. This includes Land Transaction Tax and Landfill Disposals Tax. The revenue is estimated to total more than £1 billion over 4 years. Building on our previous work on fiscal devolution, this study would focus on the quality of the service the Welsh Revenue Authority provides to the taxpayers it collects from.</p>
19. Welsh Treasury tax projections	<p>The Welsh Government has taken responsibility for new devolved taxes, including property taxes, landfill taxes and, from 2019-20, an element of income tax. As a result, the Welsh Government now faces greater uncertainty in its budget and needs to forecast the likely income from these various taxes. Building on our previous work on fiscal devolution, this study would look at the Welsh Government's approach to forecasting and the accuracy of its projections.</p>
20. Wales Infrastructure and Investment Plan	<p>The Welsh Government introduced the Wales Infrastructure and Investment Plan (WIIP) in 2012. It set out the ambition for infrastructure spending over the 10 years to 2022. The Welsh Government's 2018 mid-term review of WIIP recognises that it needs to update some aspects of its approach in order to reflect changes in priority and legislation, such as the Well-being of Future Generations Act. An examination of the implementation of the current WIIP could feed in to the development of a new plan in Spring 2022.</p>
21. Asset management	<p>Welsh public bodies own assets worth many hundreds of millions of pounds. These include buildings, sports facilities, land, and business parks. In 2010, the Wales Audit Office produced a report on buildings management across the Welsh public sector. Since then there have been efforts to improve asset management, including through the National Assets Working Group. This study would look at how, ten years on from that work, public bodies are managing their assets, with a focus on how they are working together to share assets and reduce costs.</p>

<p>22. Contract management</p>	<p>Over several years, the Auditor General has identified numerous instances of inadequate contract management. Poor and inadequate contract management is a huge risk to value for money. The Welsh public sector is putting £6 billion per year in to the hands of the private and third sectors and therefore requires significant investment in the right quality staff and procedures to prevent repeated contract management failures. This report would look at the steps public bodies are taking to ensure they have appropriate contract management procedures in place.</p>
<p>23. Prevention</p>	<p>Public services have long aimed to shift the balance of activity away from intervening to resolve crises, towards preventing problems. This piece of work would look at what prevention means in practice, the potential benefits (including the degree of evidence to support claims for cost savings) and the key barriers to shifting resources towards preventative activity. This work would have a strong good practice focus, seeking out practical examples of prevention with demonstrable benefits.</p>
<p>24. Public sector workplace: equalities</p>	<p>Public bodies have a range of policies and activities in place to implement their equalities duties as employers. This study would look across public services at the approaches to creating a diverse public-sector workforce, in particular looking for good and interesting practices to share.</p>
<p>25. ICT asset management across the public sector</p>	<p>Public bodies need to manage their ICT assets to replace out-of-date technologies, support digital transformation and the service modernisation agenda. Given funding constraints, public bodies face a challenge to prioritise investment in ICT assets. A review would look at arrangements for the strategic, financial, procurement and inventory management arrangements in place to support the life-cycle management of all IT assets.</p>
<p>26. Public sector broadband aggregation (PSBA)</p>	<p>Launched in 2007, the PSBA is a Wales-wide managed network which connects public sector organisations in Wales to a private secure Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Wide Area Network (WAN). The network provides ICT network services to over 100 public service organisations in Wales supporting nearly 5000 public sites across the country. BT is currently supplying the network across Wales through a contract with the Welsh Government signed in October 2014. This study would look at whether the Welsh Government got a good deal and if public bodies using the network are making best use its potential benefits.</p>
<p>27. Business Finance 2</p>	<p>In December 2017 the Welsh Government launched it's 'Economic Action Plan' to support its national strategy 'Prosperity for All', which aims to grow the Welsh Economy and reduce inequality. Part of this action plan involves providing financial support to businesses. In November we reported on the Welsh Government's provision of financial support to business under its previous strategic approach, 'Economic Renewal'. We will carry out further work to look in depth at decision making and controls over business finance, in the context of its updated strategy.</p>

<p>28. City Deals</p>	<p>There are three main deals across Wales: the Cardiff City Deal Region, Swansea City Deal and the North Wales Growth Deal. While the relevant local authorities have played a key role, there is an increasing involvement from other organisations, notably Welsh Government and NHS bodies. A study could look at the city deals in the wider context of national and regional economic development and renewal strategies, building on local audit work already underway.</p>
<p>29. Developing international relations</p>	<p>The Welsh Government sets out in Prosperity for All, that it intends to take a strategic approach to the expansion of international offices, based on an assessment of economic opportunity for Welsh businesses. A budget of £6.4m in 2019-20 will support this expansion. A study would look at how the Welsh Government is going about this work, how it identifies the economic opportunities for Welsh businesses and how it manages or proposes to manage the expansion of its international offices.</p>
<p>30. Development Bank for Wales</p>	<p>Established in October 2017, the Development Bank of Wales aims to fill an estimated £500 million annual investment funding gap for Welsh SMEs. It intends to generate over £1 billion of investment support for Wales over the next five years and has several other ambitious targets. A study in this area could provide some early insight into whether the new Development Bank of Wales is delivering on these aims and improving on the performance of its predecessor body Finance Wales, which was considered unfit for purpose in a Welsh Government commissioned independent review.</p>
<p>31. Integrated transport (possible focus on walking and cycling)</p>	<p>The Welsh Government has committed to delivering a public transport network which makes it easier for walkers and cyclists to integrate their journeys with public transport. The Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee recently blamed a lack of leadership, funding and ambition for the lack of significant outcomes to date in this area. This study could look at the Welsh Government's plans for integrating forms of active travel with public transport systems or more widely could focus on the Welsh Government's overall strategic approach to integrated transport.</p>
<p>32. Bus travel / concessionary fares</p>	<p>Although vital for many people, particularly in rural areas, the bus industry is struggling. Passenger numbers, bus routes and public subsidy are all reducing. A significant amount of public funding is provided through Welsh Government schemes. Public consultations on the future of these schemes have recently taken place. In September 2016, the Welsh Government announced a five-point plan which sought to stabilise and support the industry in the short term and find longer term solutions. This work could explore progress against the five-point plan and any wider issues related to the provision of bus services.</p>

33. Update on National Botanic Garden Wales and Millennium Centre	<p>The Millennium Commission and Welsh public bodies jointly funded a number projects in Wales. The Auditor General reported on two which ran into significant financial difficulties (Funding of the National Botanic Garden of Wales, November 2005 and The Millennium Centre, February 2008¹). Original business plans for both stated that they would be self-funding; both currently receive grants from the Welsh Government to meet running costs. This study would look at the ongoing value for money of Welsh Government and other public funding for both projects.</p>
34. Natural Resources Wales	<p>Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is the largest Welsh Government sponsored body with a expenditure of around £190 million in 2017-18 and a staff of 1,900 across Wales. We reported on the early development of Natural Resources Wales in February 2016 and have examined the award of timber sales contracts as part of our audit of accounts, reporting most recently in July 2018. A future study could consider the ongoing development of NRW, but with a particular focus on a specific area or areas of what are a wide and complex range of roles and responsibilities, which contribute to delivering Welsh Government policy objectives relating to the environment, economy and quality of life. The exact area of responsibility that we might look at has yet to be determined.</p>
35. Air quality	<p>Wales has some of the worst air quality in the UK, contributing to around 2,000 deaths each year. Legislation on air quality is largely set through EU standards that have been incorporated into domestic UK and Welsh law. Following a court case, the UK Government and Welsh Government are updating their plans to reduce air pollution. Air quality is largely managed through local authority level plans and strategies. A study could look at the Welsh Government's leadership of efforts to improve air quality, and could also cover local government's planning and work to improve air quality locally.</p>
36. Biodiversity	<p>There is evidence that over the past decade the most threatened species in Wales have declined and many are under threat of extinction. A study could look at whether the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales are well placed to be able to lead and facilitate the cross-sector collaboration needed to achieve a step-change in the resilience of Wales' biodiversity and natural resources.</p>

¹ Archived version of the report

37. De-carbonisation of public services	<p>The public sector is responsible for less than only 1% of total emissions in Wales but has a critical role to play in influencing emissions reduction; through procurement practices, through its leadership role, and through delivery of services. The Welsh Government's national Strategy, prosperity for all, includes a commitment to the decarbonisation of public services. A short study could look at the Welsh Government's leadership of efforts to reduce carbon emissions. This could also be expanded out to take account of efforts across public services in Wales.</p>
38. Animal diseases	<p>Outbreaks of animal diseases can have a profound impact on the rural economy, well-being of farmers and a high cost to the public purse. There is a complex picture of national and EU rules governing animal welfare and the management of outbreaks of disease. A study in this area would examine the Welsh Government approach to animal diseases, including its approach to prevention of disease and contingency plans for a disease outbreak.</p>
39. Curriculum reform	<p>The Welsh Government is engaged on the biggest programme of curriculum reform since the introduction of the national curriculum in 1988. It intends that a new curriculum for early years to year 7 will be rolled out from September 2022. This study would look at the readiness of the Welsh Government and its partners to implement the curriculum and costs associated with developing and implementing the change.</p>
40. Support for learners with additional learning needs (ALN)	<p>The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 establishes a statutory framework for supporting children and young people with ALN. During scrutiny of the Bill, the Welsh Government's estimates of the costs and benefits of the new arrangements changed leading the Assembly's Finance Committee to express concern about assumptions on which estimates are based. A study could look at Welsh Government's funding for ALN and progress against the transformation plan. A wider study could include local authorities' and regional consortia's preparedness for implementing the new framework and early feedback from schools and learners.</p>
41. Careers advice	<p>The national strategy, Prosperity for All states that the Welsh Government will 'provide targeted careers advice to help young people to access jobs'. Careers Wales is the lead organisation for careers advice and support for 16 to 18-year-olds, but its core funding has been reduced significantly. This study would look at how careers advice has adapted to the funding and other pressures and the implications for students.</p>

<p>42. Affordable housing</p>	<p>The provision of affordable housing in Wales is a key priority in the national strategy, Prosperity for All. The Welsh Government has a target of building 20,000 homes by 2021. It runs several schemes to incentivise house building and also to support people in buying their own homes. The Minister for Housing and Regeneration commissioned an independent review into affordable housing supply, which began in April 2018. A study could look at the effectiveness and coherence of the different schemes the Welsh Government manages, including any variation in costs and value for money. It could also include a review of councils' contribution including the robustness of local housing market assessments.</p>
<p>43. Mainstreaming tackling poverty</p>	<p>Communities First was the Welsh Government's flagship tackling poverty programme with a budget of about £30 million per annum. In February 2017, the Welsh Government announced that the programme would be phased out by March 2018 and replaced with a holistic 'whole of government' approach to tackling poverty focussed on employment, early years and empowerment. This study would consider how well the Welsh Government is managing the transition and subsequent mainstreaming of a new approach top tackling poverty.</p>
<p>44. Valleys Taskforce</p>	<p>In July 2017, the Ministerial Taskforce for the South Wales Valleys published Our Valleys, Our Future – an ambitious, high- level plan, setting out a wide range of actions to transform communities across the Valleys. Following the publication of Our Valleys, Our Future, the taskforce has developed and published a detailed delivery plan, which shows how each of the priorities and actions will be achieved by 2021. This study could look at progress against the actions in the plan, including the setting up of seven strategic hubs, and whether they are helping to deliver the broader aims or transforming Valleys communities.</p>
<p>45. Increasing physical activity</p>	<p>The cost of physical inactivity to Wales is estimated to be £650 million per year. The Welsh Government intends to maintain the level of funding for sports and physical activity during 2018-19 and has committed to increasing physical activity. However, no significant change in increased physical activity in adults was recorded between 2016-17 and 2017-18. The National Assembly's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee is also currently conducting an inquiry into physical activity of children and young people. This study would assess the value for money of efforts across public services to promote physical activity across all age groups.</p>
<p>46. Public services at the end of life</p>	<p>Surveys show that most people want to die at home. However, most will die in a hospital and spend a significant time there during their final years – at significant cost. This study would explore the costs associated with the final years of life and look at ways in which public services could collectively enable more people to have a better, and lower cost, end of life experience.</p>

<p>47. Increasing purpose-built housing developments for social care</p>	<p>In the national Strategy, Prosperity for All, the Welsh Government says it will build more purpose-built housing developments that would allow people to live independently within a protected and sheltered environment, located close to easily accessible public transport. This study would look at the underpinning plans and arrangements for delivering this commitment.</p>
<p>48. Tackling obesity</p>	<p>Obesity is one of the biggest public health challenges facing Wales with multiple associated health risks and significant associated costs to the NHS. 59% of adults and one in four children in Wales are either overweight or obese. The 'All Wales Obesity Pathway' describes 4 tiers of intervention that health boards are required to have in place for children and adults. Alongside this are a range of other national and local initiatives associated with physical activity healthy eating. There have also been relevant legislative changes in recent years including the Public Health (Wales) Act, the Active Travel (Wales) Act and the Well Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. A study could examine how the obesity pathway is being used to drive change and how public bodies in Wales are working together to tackle obesity and bring about the behaviour changes which are necessary to secure improvements.</p>
<p>49. Health and housing</p>	<p>There is a well-established link between housing and people's health. Poor housing, often coupled with fuel poverty, can result in a range of physical health problems and can also affect people's mental health. Building on our 2018 Housing Adaptations report, and applying the principles of prudent healthcare, this review would provide an opportunity to assess how well the health service and partner agencies are working together to secure health improvements through better housing. The breadth of the topic would require careful scoping to focus the work on areas of greatest impact. This may include economic modelling to provide indicative assessments of the impact of housing on health both fiscally and in terms of health outcomes. It could also include a review of existing good practice and an assessment of what would be needed to scale this up, providing insight into the barriers to, and enablers of success.</p>
<p>50. Roll out / implementation of the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS)</p>	<p>We touched on plans for the WCCIS in our January 2018 report on informatics systems in NHS Wales. The system is intended to give frontline carers, therapists, mental health workers and community nurses the ability to co-ordinate patient cases through a shared electronic record of care with the aim of improving treatment. The Welsh Government contributed £6.7 million to fund the set-up costs for the whole of Wales, with a further £2 million provided through the Integrated Care Fund to support implementation during 2016 and 2017. However, as at May 2018, it was reported that only 11 local authorities and one health board had implemented WCCIS. This study will look at the effectiveness of the national and local implementation arrangements and would consider whether the investment to date has provided value for money.</p>

Health related studies

Topic	Description
1. Progress in delivering 'A Healthier Wales'	<p>A Healthier Wales is the Welsh Government's vision for the NHS in Wales. It responds to the findings and recommendations of the Parliamentary Review of Health and Social Care. This would be a series of reviews looking at whether the Welsh Government and partners have delivered the actions set out for the end of each year and set out progress against other actions and the wider goals of A Healthier Wales. The first review would be produced in 2019-20 and could focus in particular on the progress being made by national programme board, including those covering Planned Care, Unscheduled Care and Primary Care. Several recent WAO reports have raised concerns that these boards are not having the intended impact.</p>
2. NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP)	<p>The NWSSP encompasses a range of services – including primary care contractor services, procurement, facilities management, employment, legal and risk, and internal audit – and influences a significant amount of NHS expenditure. Focusing on one or more aspects of its work, this study would examine the performance of the NWSSP in streamlining back-office functions, maximising the value of NHS spending, and improving service delivery.</p>
3. Perinatal mental health services	<p>1 in 10 women experience mental illness during pregnancy or the first year after birth. Prosperity for All, the national strategy, includes a commitment to create a new community perinatal mental health service and review the need for inpatient facilities in Wales. The Welsh Government announced £1.5 million of funding for the development of community services in 2016 with further funding available in 2017-20 as part of its £20 million additional investment in mental health services generally. The Welsh Government published a blueprint for perinatal health services in July 2018. This study could look at the provision of perinatal mental health services across Wales and the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's investment.</p>
4. NHS Transformation Fund	<p>The Welsh Government has introduced a £100 million a year fund for transforming NHS services. This study could look at how the Welsh Government is managing the fund and early evidence of beneficial change. We think this would be a study best carried out in year two or three of our plan, to give the fund time to bed in.</p>

<p>5. Managing and meeting unscheduled care demand</p>	<p>Our 2013 report found that despite a considerable focus on unscheduled care, transformational changes to support sustained improvement had not been fully implemented. Issues of rising demand, financial constraints, workforce challenges and problems with patient flow through the hospital remain. This study would examine whether NHS Wales has progressed the local and national recommendations identified in our previous work. It could have a specific focus on initiatives such as the new 111 service and Choose Well, as well as considering how the wider system is addressing perennial challenges such as ambulance handover delays, and other issues highlighted in the recent ‘amber review’ of calls to the Welsh Ambulance Service.</p>
<p>6. Delivery of the Respiratory Health Delivery Plan 2018-20</p>	<p>In February 2018, the Welsh Government published an update to its Respiratory Health Delivery Plan for the period 2018-2020. The plan highlights the need to reduce variation and to share best practice, and sets out the actions that NHS Wales will take in response. This study would examine whether NHS Wales is effectively delivering against the plan. This could include a detailed focus on one or more prevention or early diagnosis area, such as smoking, COPD or asthma. The study could also consider the ambition of the plan and the success criteria.</p>
<p>7. Antimicrobial prescribing</p>	<p>Unless tackled in a systematic and evidence-based way, antimicrobial resistance creates the risk that we will return to an era when common infections and minor infections could be life-threatening. An increasing incidence of antibiotic prescribing, and significant variation in prescribing behaviour were some of the factors behind the development and publication of a Welsh Government antimicrobial resistance delivery plan in 2016. A study could examine implementation of the delivery plan at a national and local level, including analysis of key trends in antimicrobial resistance, antibiotic prescribing and healthcare associated infection. It could also consider progress in promoting public awareness of the issue and of when and why an antibiotic prescription is not clinically appropriate.</p>
<p>8. Procedures of limited clinical value</p>	<p>A key principle of prudent healthcare is to ‘do only what is needed, no more, no less; and do no harm’. Procedures of limited clinical value, or interventions not normally undertaken, have been identified by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence and other national advisory bodies, as procedures that either have insufficient evidence of clinical or cost effectiveness or are a relatively low priority for NHS resources.</p> <p>This study would examine the extent to which procedures of limited clinical value are being undertaken across Wales. The study would also examine the arrangements that health boards have in place to monitor compliance with the recognised list of procedures.</p>

<p>9. Value for money from management consultancy</p>	<p>NHS bodies often engage management consultants to help identify solutions to issues in areas including strategic planning, financial and corporate governance, service redesign, and developing more efficient and safer ways of working. This study would seek to quantify the expenditure on management consultants by NHS bodies in Wales in recent years and review the procurement and contract management arrangements that NHS bodies have in place ensure that they are getting good value from this expenditure. It could also seek to understand the factors that drive the use of management consultancy in the NHS</p>
<p>10. Promoting effective self-care</p>	<p>Self-care has become increasingly important to the NHS. Budgets are becoming more difficult to manage in light of the increasing health burden caused by long-term conditions, an ageing population and conditions related to lifestyle choices such as smoking. Prevention of disease and increasing efforts to educate and support patients in managing their own health is a key solution to making the best use of limited resources. This study could examine the extent to which NHS bodies are promoting effective self-care across their communities. The study could model the potential benefits such as reduced GP visits, outpatient appointments and hospital; admissions and more effective use of medicines which can accrue from establishing self-care programmes for patients. It could also look at some of the key enablers which need to be in place to support the effective roll out of such programmes.</p>
<p>11. Wound management</p>	<p>Wound care is something of a silent epidemic. Across the UK, it is estimated that at least £4billion a year is spent on wound care (at least 5% of the NHS's overall budget). In Wales, expenditure on wound dressings alone in acute and community settings is in excess of £12 million a year. While there have been cost savings initiatives to help control expenditure, there is likely to be significant scope for further savings in the ordering and supply of wound dressings and by eliminating unnecessary costs and waste. Better wound management also improves the quality of care experienced by patients. A study could examine these issues and look more broadly at the progress that is being made with the introduction of recognised best practice in prevention and treatment, including the work of the Welsh Wound Innovation Centre opened in September 2014.</p>
<p>12. Clinical waste</p>	<p>In 2013, the NHS in England and Wales spent over £86m on the disposal of clinical waste. This figure was expected to rise year on year as landfill became more expensive alongside the need for NHS bodies to become more sustainable. This study will examine the effectiveness of NHS bodies' approaches to managing clinical waste in the context of legislative and good practice guidance, recycling targets and wider sustainability goals.</p>

<p>13. Sickness absence / NHS staff well-being</p>	<p>Some 5.7 per cent of NHS staff time is currently being lost to sickness absence across Wales: the highest level since 2010. The direct cost associated with this level of sickness absence is estimated to be in the region of £120 million, not including the costs associated with backfill such as bank and locum use. This study would examine the steps being taken to reduce sickness absence across NHS bodies, but could also look at whether enough focus is being placed on promoting employee health and wellbeing.</p>
<p>14. Addressing workforce challenges in the NHS</p>	<p>Pay restraint alongside increasing demand for services are just some of the challenges facing recruitment and retention across health and social care. Staff shortages have resulted in increased reliance on agency staff with significant cost implications. In many services, staff morale has become a problem, as has uncertainty over Brexit. The Welsh Government's Programme for Government includes clear commitments to take action to attract and train more health professionals. The Train, Work, Live campaign is an example of such action. In addition, a new special health authority, Health Education and Improvement Wales has been created to play a leading role in the education, training and development of the healthcare workforce in Wales. A study could examine the progress that is being made in developing more sustainable workforce models for the NHS that address the immediate and longer-term workforce challenges. Should this work be taken forward, we would seek to align it appropriately with any local government specific work on the social care workforce in order to support commentary on integrated workforce development across health and social care</p>
<p>15. Clinical equipment</p>	<p>It has been estimated that the cost of NHS equipment and other assets that are identified as being beyond their useful economic life is in the region of £300 million. These assets include clinical equipment which NHS bodies are struggling to maintain, storing up problems for the future. The replacement costs for equipment, alongside backlog maintenance of assets, are significantly higher than the capital budgets for NHS bodies, against a backdrop of reducing discretionary capital funding. As well as significant financial risks, out-of-life equipment present risks to quality, safety and service delivery. This study would have a strong value for money focus with a particular emphasis on the effectiveness of health bodies' strategic approaches to replacing and maintaining equipment.</p>

Local government studies

<p>1. Joint ventures between local authorities and the private sector</p>	<p>Local government is continuing to innovate and change as it looks for ways to protect front line services. Given the growth in joint ventures, and the inherent risks presented for councils and citizens where these new models of delivery do not work, this would focus on reviewing whether councils have established robust frameworks for considering joint ventures, setting up delivery models and managing the risks associated with these new ways of working. We would seek to identify case studies from England where the joint ventures are better established and use our findings to develop a support toolkit and advice note for decision makers.</p>
<p>2. Social enterprises</p>	<p>Social enterprises are becoming increasingly common vehicles for delivering services that are not an 'essential' service for an authority but still important to the local community. This model is becoming increasingly popular. In considering a social enterprise model for delivering a service, it is vital to be clear on the right model of social enterprise, the income stream is sustainable, a clear business plan is in place; and to develop the right structures and involve the right people early. The review would look at the strength of business cases and the impact of local authority decisions. We will focus on developing support material on introducing a successful social enterprise.</p>
<p>3. Effectiveness of outsourcing local authority services to private businesses</p>	<p>This review will look at the value for money that local authorities are achieving through their approaches to outsourcing. The review will consider whether anticipated financial savings have been realised; the quality of services to citizens; whether needs are being met; and what mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability. The review will identify the factors that contribute to service failure; review council procurement and commissioning policies; contracts, options appraisal and tendering documents; and examine longitudinal performance data.</p>
<p>4. Commercialisation in local authorities</p>	<p>The need to look at different ways to make savings, safeguard services and generate income is important for local authorities and other public bodies. The commercialisation of public services is not a new thing, but recent years have seen the public sector becoming more entrepreneurial and inventive in the ways in which it delivers services. Given the risk inherent in extending commercial activity in to non-traditional areas of operation, this review will look at the work of councils to create a strong commercial outlook, how they are developing commercial skills, their policies, vision, monitoring and reporting abilities and broader delivery infrastructure. We would seek to use our findings to develop support materials to assist authorities in developing their commercial activities and to identify common pitfalls to avoid.</p>

<p>5. The effectiveness of regional delivery of local authority services</p>	<p>In early 2017 the Welsh Government consulted on proposals for increased regional working. In its White paper the Welsh Government acknowledged that “regional working is not easy. It requires commitment and dedication; it must be built on a foundation of trust and willingness to compromise for the greater good. It requires clarity of purpose about what the collaboration is trying to achieve, and also clarity regarding roles and responsibilities, governance, accountability and financing mechanisms; not just for the organisations delivering services, but for the people receiving services.” This review will consider whether local authorities are clear about their outcomes when working regionally and whether governance arrangements are driving improvements in outcomes for people.</p>
<p>6. Local authority call-centres / first point of contact services</p>	<p>Against a backdrop of rising customer expectations and reduced budgets, contact centres that deliver dynamic customer service play a key role in managing demand, reducing mistakes and achieving cost-savings across public sector services. Local government also has to make sure that the services it provides continue to meet the needs of citizens and is delivered and made available in ways that guarantee that citizens’ rights and entitlements are met. This review would consider the effectiveness of local government contact arrangements to identify efficiencies and improvements in how local government provides front end contact services for citizens. Work would be undertaken at a sample of local authorities and we would also engage directly with citizens on both their priorities for future engagement but also the services which matter most to them.</p>
<p>7. The impact of austerity on local authority discretionary services</p>	<p>At a time when local authorities have less resources available to provide services and demand on Welsh public services is increasing, discretionary services are at risk of being lost. The review will focus on judging how well local authorities understand, plan for and meet the needs of those people in need of discretionary services. The review will look at the scale of changes in discretionary provision across Welsh local authorities. Due to breadth of activity, we are suggesting a tracer service (or services) to truly understand the impact of the loss of discretionary services on both the local authority, its citizens but also other public service providers. The study will contribute to an understanding of the Well-being of Future Generations Act sustainable development principle, in particular preventative ways of working.</p>
<p>8. Local authorities building social resilience and self-reliance in citizens and communities</p>	<p>An increasing body of research has provided clear evidence that social capital is associated with higher levels of well-being, self-reliance, and community resilience. Local authorities are having to face up to extended and long-lasting periods of tough settlements whilst at the same time dealing with increasing demands. The review will focus on judging how well council services identify risk, plan for and meet the needs of communities in developing resilient communities. We will examine how data, involvement activity and communications initiatives inform local authority strategic thinking to develop self-sufficiency, and how community risk registers inform operational planning. Community resilience has strong connections with the sustainable development principle.</p>

<p>9. Are councils fit for the future and able to improve?</p>	<p>Why and how local councils improve is not well understood. The Wales Centre for Public Policy states “there is no universal theory of public service improvement which can be applied to all services and in all contexts although there is a wealth of practical knowledge approaches that have been effective” (Improving Public Services: Existing Evidence and Evidence Needs 2016). A review of why and how local government improves will also be of benefit in developing new audit methodologies. A key challenge for local government is to maintain its commitment to a universalism that respects diversity, rather than standardisation.</p>
<p>10. Welsh language</p>	<p>Obligations to provide services bilingually (Welsh and English) have long been placed on public bodies in Wales. Under the Welsh Language Act 1993, public organisations had to produce and adhere to a corporate Welsh language scheme, which specified commitments to undertake certain activities bilingually and to generally promote the language. This review will examine councils’ perception of their duties and responsibilities under the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 as well as the arrangements put in place to ensure equal treatment of both the Welsh and English languages. This study may be delivered jointly with the Welsh Language Commissioner (or any successor bodies).</p>
<p>11. Meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers</p>	<p>Gypsies and Travellers are one of the most disenfranchised groups in society. In terms of health and education, they are one of the most deprived groups in the Britain. The Welsh Government is working to tackle this and ensure equality of opportunity for all Gypsy Travellers across Wales, and this has recently led to the development of a policy framework for the provision of services to Gypsies and Travellers in Wales - Travelling to a Better Future: Gypsy and Traveller Framework for Action and Delivery Plan. This covers planned improvements to accommodation; planning; health; and education. The review will focus on judging how well council services plan for and meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers. This would be a cross cutting review of council services and would touch upon, for example, education, social care, housing, planning, access to benefits and waste.</p>
<p>12. Tackling child poverty</p>	<p>Poverty can be perceived as an enduring and persistent problem in Wales. The Welsh Government through the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 has placed a duty on local authorities to publish a strategy to assist in eradicating child poverty, although the expectation is that this will be included in the Well-being Plan. This review will focus on judging how well councils and/or Public Service Boards are performing in addressing child poverty within their local authority area and whether they have a sufficiently strategic approach. The review will consider the steps being taken to maintain and provide services which are critical to helping to address child poverty. We will also use a tracer to understand how well partners are working to address identified aspects of child poverty. Our proposed tracer is food poverty and its impact on poor health.</p>

<p>13. Review of councils' home to school transport schemes</p>	<p>Every school day thousands of pupils are assisted by local education authorities to travel from their homes to school or college. In 2015-16 Welsh councils spent £113.7 million on home to school transport but income was only £5.9 million. The most common mode of transport is contract hire of buses and taxis closely followed by the provision of bus passes. Controversy surrounds the service over the question of eligibility. Children are entitled to free transport if the journey between their home and school meets certain distance criteria or is judged unsafe. This review would consider how councils are managing home to school transport services and benchmark performance comparing charges and compliance with recent policy guidance.</p>
<p>14. The role of councils in tourism</p>	<p>The Welsh Government estimates that around 10 per cent of all employment in Wales relates to tourism and around 6 per cent of domestic added value comes from tourism. Tourism affects all local authorities in Wales. The Welsh Government has published a tourism strategy covering the period 2013-2020 which seeks to increase the economic impact of tourism in Wales. This study will assess how effective councils are at developing tourism and how actions to develop tourism are balanced with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.</p>
<p>15. Re-modelling trading standards</p>	<p>The Public Protection services of a council include environmental health, trading standards, pollution control, pest control, weights and measures, building control, advice services, licensing, food safety, health and safety and animal health. The majority of law enforcement is carried out by local authority Trading Standards services. This audit would review how effectively councils are managing changes in trading standards services. The work would focus on consumer protection and how well service users are protected from scams. We will also consider implementation challenges in respect of the Public Health (Wales) Act.</p>
<p>16. Fostering services</p>	<p>Foster carers provide a vital service to thousands of vulnerable children across the country, but the narrative around foster care is too often overtly negative. The positive role of foster carers in improving the lives of vulnerable children should be more widely acknowledged. This audit will assess the effectiveness of local authority: care to children in need who require fostering services; support to existing foster carers and the quality of management arrangements; and actions to increase foster care provision. The review would also look at unit costs and the quality of current services (including their impact) to ascertain value for money in foster provision.</p>

<p>17. Direct payments</p>	<p>Direct Payments were set up by the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act (1996) which came into force in April 1997 and was initially available only to a specific group of people qualifying for social care. Take up of Direct Payments in Wales has historically been poor with performance significantly lagging behind England. The number of individuals receiving Direct Payments and the amount spent is small compared to England and local authorities' policies, practices and promotional activity do not encourage vulnerable adults to apply for and use Direct Payments. This review would consider how authorities are delivering their responsibilities to encourage and widen usage of direct payments. Comparison with England to draw out why authorities generally achieve higher levels of performance will be considered to identify options for local authorities in Wales to adopt.</p>
<p>18. Social care workforce – planning for the future</p>	<p>The social care market in Wales is operating in challenging circumstances. The number of social work staff employed by local authorities has fallen by 17.4% from 19,936 in 2005-06 to 16,465 in 2016-17. Whilst local authorities' expenditure on adult social care has risen from £935.1 million in 2007-08 to £1.1 billion in 2015-16, services face some significant challenges. Demand for services is rising and the population is ageing. This review will look at the changing patterns of employment within social care in Wales to judge how well placed social services are to deliver the commitments of the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 and the principles of the Welsh Government's Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action. Should this work be taken forward, we would seek to align it appropriately with any specific work on the NHS workforce in order to support commentary on integrated workforce development across health and social care</p>
<p>19. Bringing back into use empty homes and buildings</p>	<p>The number of empty private sector dwellings empty for more than six months is growing in Wales. Between 2009-10 and 2015-16 there has been a 35% increase in the number of empty homes rising from 18,980 empty private homes in 2009-10 to 25,628 in 2015-16. Overall, 14 authorities saw an increase in long term empty private dwellings over this period. This review will review progress by local authorities' in reducing empty homes and buildings and the effectiveness of current approaches. The review will assess the financial benefits of bringing empty homes and buildings back into use looking at a cost benefit analysis for local authorities in prioritising this work. We would seek to identify case studies from outside Wales as well to develop a support toolkit and advice note for decision makers.</p>