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Pages	1 of 3

Dear Will

Improvement Assessment

In my Corporate Assessment Report 19 September 2013, I gave my opinion on whether the Council had discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning.

I am also required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) to give an opinion on whether Newport City Council (the Council) has discharged its duties in respect of improvement reporting and met the requirements of the Measure.

In my opinion, and based on audit work undertaken to date the Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure although there is potential to strengthen its arrangements further.

The Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure:

- The Council published an assessment of its performance during 2012-13 in its *Improvement Plan 2012-13 Year End Review* (the Review) before 31 October 2013.
- The Review assesses the Council's performance in the preceding financial year (2012-13) and sets out how the Council has sought to discharge its duties under the Measure.
- The Review evaluates the Council's success in achieving its improvement objectives and expresses its view clearly. However, the Council should ensure that this evaluation is signed off through the appropriate officer/Member governance mechanism in the future.
- The Review enables citizens to provide feedback or make comments on the Review.
- The Review includes details of performance and comparisons as measured by the national statutory performance indicators.
- The Review includes a short section on the ways in which the Council has sought to collaborate.

I have identified a number of areas where the Council can improve its Performance Report:

- Not all of the data in the Review is correctly stated and consistent with the data that the Council reported to the Welsh Government. Currently data in the Review for the National Strategic Indicator WMT/004 differs from the reported figure. In addition, not all of the rankings in the Review are consistent with reported rankings. Currently the rankings for the National Strategic Indicators EDU/002i and SCC/033b (e) differ from the reported figures. Issues with indicators being misquoted were raised in the Annual Improvement Report, March 2013.
- The Review includes an update on the actions set out in the 2012-13 improvement plan, full-year performance on the basket of performance indicators associated with each Improvement Objective and performance on National Strategic Indicators. However, the Council could broaden the range of measures associated with some Improvement Objectives. Some of the Council's evaluations were limited due to a narrow basket of measures. For example, the objective 'to ensure families and vulnerable people are maximising their income by receiving the benefits to which they are entitled' has two measures, neither of which measure benefit take-up.
- Councils are encouraged to use information from peer reviews, scrutiny assessments, benchmarking data and other more qualitative information such as customer satisfaction. The Review lacks this breadth of analysis and could include a wider evidence base that would help the Council to more effectively self-evaluate its performance and report more comprehensively on improvement. For example, the Council told us that improvements have been made to the systems for monitoring complaints, but analysis of complaints is not included in the Review.
- The Review does not make the best use of comparative information, including historic performance and comparison with others. The Review does not include Public Accountability Measures or comparisons with other similar councils, which it has included in previous years, and only includes historic performance from 2011-12. There is no explanation for comparisons made, what these mean and what is happening as a result. Other, broader analyses of comparative performance exist in the Council so this is a missed opportunity to share the information with a wider audience.
- The Review does not provide information on the benefits of collaborative activity to date. This should include what has been delivered or whether intended outcomes are being achieved. This type of information would enable the Council to measure, evaluate and report more transparently on the actual benefits achieved through collaborative activities.

- The Council could do more to maximise the accessibility of the Review to citizens and stakeholders. The Review is highlighted on the homepage of the Council's website and more detail is provided on the website's performance pages, where the full Review can be downloaded. Hard copies are available in major Council buildings and a summary is also available. The Welsh language version was made available online several weeks after publishing the English version. The Council could improve accessibility of the report by providing information on how to request alternative formats and providing Welsh language versions of the Review at the time of publishing.

Further proposals for improvement

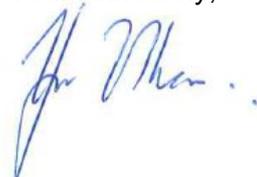
I am making further new proposals for improvement in this letter in addition to proposals for improvement that I set out in my Improvement Assessment Letter in December 2012. I will continue to monitor and report on the progress made by the Council in implementing the proposals set out in my previous reports and letters.

Proposals for improvement

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| P1 | Ensure that the Council's overall statements and red, amber green ratings evaluating its success in achieving its improvement objectives are signed off through the appropriate officer and member governance mechanisms. |
| P2 | Ensure that the data in the Year End Review is correctly stated and consistent with reported data. |

I will undertake more detailed work on the arrangements that support the Council's performance management and reporting over the following months and report this, as well as summarising all of my work and that of relevant regulators during 2013-14, in an Annual Improvement Report for the Council that I will issue by the end of March 2014.

Yours sincerely,



HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS

Auditor General for Wales

cc: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business

Non Jenkins – Manager

Jackie Joyce – Performance Audit Lead