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Pages	1 of 19

Dear David

Improvement Assessment

I am required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) to report my audit and assessment work in relation to whether Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (the Council) has discharged its duties and met the requirements of the Measure.

This letter summarises:

- my views on whether the Council has discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning;
- my views on the Council's compliance with requirements to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement, based on work carried out to date by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators, including:
 - the Council's progress on areas for improvement and recommendations identified in my previous assessments;
 - any relevant issues that may have emerged since my last report, including comments on how the Council is addressing financial challenges; and
 - a brief summary of any reports of relevant regulators issued since my last report.
- my further proposals for improvement and/or recommendations; and
- updates to the Wales Audit Office work plan and timetable for delivering my Improvement Assessment work.

I shall update my views during the year and will provide a further letter by the end of November 2013.

The Council has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure. However it should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

I have reached this conclusion because my audit and assessment work found that the Council's Improvement Objectives and its annual improvement plan, the 'Corporate Improvement Plan Stage 1 Forward Looking Plan 2013-14', (the Plan), meet the requirements of the Measure. The Plan includes an explanation of why and how the priorities were chosen and how the Improvement Objectives reflect the key priorities for the Council and focus specifically on areas where there is a need to improve the quality of life for local people.

The basis for selecting each of the improvement objectives is clearly set out in a section entitled 'why we have chosen this as a priority'. This section contains information including service user feedback, Welsh Government priorities, regulator recommendations, strategic partners' views, stakeholder engagement and community issues. In May 2013 the Council also undertook a public consultation survey on its improvement objectives through its website. The survey found that support for individual Improvement Objectives varied from 64 per cent to 89 per cent.

Each of the Improvement Objectives includes a series of actions to be delivered in 2013-14. However, the quality of the action plans varies. A number of the actions do not directly link to the Improvement Objectives and consequently contribute little to their achievement. For example, the focus of the objective to improve services by developing digital access channels is on enabling citizens to access council services in a way that they prefer, but one that also achieves that in the most efficient or cost effective way. The actions are focussed on consultation, promotion and engagement. The Council tells us that information relating to activity to improve efficiency or cost effectiveness or demonstrate cost savings will be added at a later stage.

The Council has made some improvements to the links between the Improvement Objectives and accompanying measures of success, baseline data and targets for improvement, although some areas are still inconsistent and are not always evidenced. Some links are very clear and show the intended impact of improvement, such as the Improvement Objective to improve school attendance. The actions and measures focus on attendance and the end result is clear. In other Improvement Objectives, the measures for assessing whether anyone is better off are not as detailed or effective. For example, the Improvement Objective to increase and sustain employment opportunities for the citizens of Blaenau Gwent through direct support to new and existing businesses. Here, the measures focus more narrowly on existing programmes but no information is included on the resources that are being committed to this activity and no targets are set for 2013-14 in any of the improvement objectives. This is particularly relevant as resources are reducing and the Council has not fully achieved its targets in the past.

The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 set out specific requirements for local authorities in Wales. They were required to develop and publish Equality Objectives and a Strategic Equality Plan by 2 April 2012. There is significant alignment between the requirement to produce Equality Objectives and the 'Fairness' element that authorities must pay consideration to in setting improvement objectives under the Measure. We found that the Council's Improvement Plan focuses on services to protected groups under the Equality Act. Examples include Improvement Objectives to support looked after children, vulnerable older people and children at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

Whilst the Council has made some progress during the last month, it has not been quick or robust enough and based on, and limited to, work carried out to date by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators I continue to hold the view that the Council is unlikely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement during this financial year

In recent years I have reported that unless inconsistencies and weaknesses in how the Council is run were addressed, it was unlikely that the Council would sustain significant improvement. In my most recent Annual Improvement Report of April 2013 I concluded that to be successful and secure the improvements sought, the Council needed effective leadership, consistent management and delivery to ensure that the changes it is embarking on result in better outcomes for citizens. With fewer resources available to support improvement, the existence of some failing services, poor performance and limited capacity, the Council faced significant challenges in delivering better outcomes for its citizens.

Based on my most recent improvement assessment work I believe that whilst the Council is now making some progress to address the significant challenges it faces, this action has not been quick or effective enough. As so much remains to be done, the Council is unlikely to make the necessary arrangements to improve and to achieve the scale and pace of change needed during this financial year. I have reached this conclusion because:

Leadership and decision making is still too inconsistent and the Council has not introduced proposals to address its predicted financial pressures and inconsistent service performance with sufficient urgency

Whilst the Council is now introducing proposals to reduce expenditure, some of these are not robust, could impact adversely on improvement and it is uncertain if they will deliver the significant savings needed.

The Council faces significant financial challenges in 2013-14, 2014-15 and beyond, and needs to reduce expenditure by nearly £14 million if it is to deliver a balanced budget at 31 March 2015. In recent years reserves have been used to address revenue overspends and some services have not reduced expenditure in line with savings targets. At the end of 2012-13 the Council estimated the 2012-13 revenue budget was overspent by approximately £0.5 million. The Council's use of reserves to address budget deficits in recent years has led to the Council Fund reserve falling from £5.715 million in 2009-10 to £3.509 million in 2010-11 and to just £2.259 million in 2011-12.

At the end of the 2012-13 financial year, the Council's revenue budget was overspent by approximately £0.1 million which further reduced its Council Fund. However, during 2012-13, the Council was able to transfer £4.209 million from its Housing Revenue Account so that at 31 March 2013, the Council Fund Reserve stood at £6.368 million. Even with the increased Council Fund reserve, based on current expenditure forecasts and on the assumption that the current level of overspending continued, the Council would have used all reserves before the end of 2014-15 unless it was able to agree and deliver significant savings by the end of 2014.

Whilst all Councils are facing significant financial challenges, Blaenau Gwent faces a considerably greater challenge if it is to make savings of some £14 million over the next 18 months, with only £6.368 million held in the Council Fund Reserve and having made slow progress in agreeing savings plans until recently. In his report to the Council on 2 August 2013, the Chief Executive highlighted that an immediate priority for the Council was to identify, risk assess, deliver and secure savings up to £10 million for 2014-15. The Chief Executive's report indicated that this is necessary in order for the Council to survive into the next financial year and provide some foundations so as to allow the Council to be placed on a more sustainable footing into the future.

The Chief Finance Officer's report, which was also submitted to the Council on 2 August 2013, highlighted that the recent Welsh Local Government Association Peer Review had provided an impetus for the Council to take action in certain areas and a two phased approach to achieve the required level of savings was agreed. Phase 1 of the approach was estimated to achieve savings of £2.3 million under a best case scenario. Phase 2 of the approach indicated that, again under a best case scenario, further savings of approximately £2.7 million could be achieved by acting on the results of proposals highlighted in recent external consultants' reports (Peopletoo and RPT Consulting).

The remaining savings of £5 million will require further consideration by the Council in the autumn after it has received the results of the current PricewaterhouseCoopers review on overall council services. Due to the extremely difficult financial challenge facing the Council, it is vital that it acts urgently to enable it to take informed decisions about its medium to long term service delivery options and requirements. These decisions will need to be taken account of by the Council when updating and revising its Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Council now appears to have started to act with some urgency to address its financial position following the clear messages we have given in our reports and letters over the last two years and those of the Welsh Local Government Association external peer review undertaken in July 2013.

Nevertheless, given the significance of this situation to the future financial viability of the Council, it was reported to the Council's Audit Committee on 24 September 2013 that the Appointed Auditor is considering whether to use his powers under Section 25 of the Public Audit Wales Act 2004 to make a statutory recommendation to the Council.

Members are not receiving reports containing the level and quality of information necessary to support informed and appropriate decision making and the Council's track record in identifying and delivering savings is inconsistent and not sufficiently robust

To allow members to make informed and appropriate decisions about future service delivery and the design of those services, the level and quality of information contained in reports to members by officers needs to be improved. Reports can often be confusing, not sufficiently evidenced and do not always provide clear information on the rationale for recommendations, the impact of decisions or the outcome if decisions are not taken.

Recently the Council has begun to focus on introducing stronger financial management arrangements to limit potential overspends in 2013-14 and to identify options for future changes to service delivery from 2014-15 onwards. The Council's June 2013 report has since been supplemented by a further report to Council in August 2013 seeking agreement to implement a further series of savings proposals in 2013-14 and 2014-15. The report however lacks detail and clarity making it difficult for members to understand and make decisions. For example, the report double counts some savings proposals and lacks information on the financial impact of others, such as changes to the redundancy policy.

Notwithstanding the deficiencies in the quality of key reports, it is clear that this renewed focus and impetus needs to be maintained and continued throughout 2013-14 and beyond if the Council is to meet the unprecedented financial challenges it faces. Members will need to be kept regularly informed of the Council's financial position by officers during 2013-14, including details of the forecast position as at 31 March 2014. Clear explanations need to be provided to confirm whether or not savings plans and balanced portfolio budgets are going to be achieved.

The Council's track record in identifying and delivering savings is inconsistent and not sufficiently robust. For example, the single largest cost pressure in the revenue budget is for community care services. In October 2012 the Council set up a Task and Finish Group of the Social Care Scrutiny Committee to review the overall Social Services financial position to identify options for reducing expenditure. The Task and Finish Group identified a number of savings options that were formally reported to the Scrutiny Committee in January 2013. Members considered these were unrealistic and unachievable and none of the proposals were recommended by Scrutiny for implementation.

However, the Council has more recently recognised that the Task and Finish Group's proposals needed to be reconsidered, and have now been adopted by Council. In 2012-13 the Council agreed a series of savings proposals amounting to £1.860 million to be delivered in 2013-14 to address identified cost pressures. In June 2013 the Council reported that £328,000 of savings were unachievable in 2013-14 but insufficient detail was provided to explain why this was the case. However, the most recent report of September 2013 now notes that £426,000 of savings are unachievable. The monitoring reports often do not clearly state what alternative plans are being brought forward to bridge this gap or what action is being taken to reduce expenditure in other areas.

Whilst the Council has continued to deliver essential services with less money, it has increased expenditure by using General Council Fund reserves and the long-term sustainability of current methods of service delivery is unclear

We have also recently reviewed how some council services are managing with fewer resources. We concluded that whilst the Council has continued to deliver essential services with less money, like many other councils it has increased expenditure by using General Council Fund reserves as well as implementing savings. However, with continuing demand pressures there is a risk that some services are becoming financially unsustainable. We found that delivery of approved savings targets within services has not always been successful. We concluded that the long-term sustainability of current methods of service delivery is unclear and some services are managing significant risks.

The Council has engaged consultants to identify savings across the Council. This work is ongoing and the Council plans to implement the findings of these reviews in the autumn of 2013. It is acknowledged that this work will not contribute significantly to the immediate savings the Council has to make in the next eight months but could assist in delivering savings in 2014-15. However, details on what actions will be pursued are not yet finalised.

The Council has also restructured its senior management and has cut the number of chief officers and heads of service from 24 to 17. This reduction will provide the Council with savings of almost £1 million over the next five years. Whilst this restructuring will help to address the serious financial challenges the Council faces and to strengthen capacity in the corporate centre, it further reduces capacity within the senior leadership group.

The Council has not addressed the significant inconsistencies in service performance with sufficient urgency

In my Annual Improvement Report 2013 I concluded that the Council's performance is mixed with big variances across different services and more work is needed by the Council to address the significant environmental, social and economic challenges Blaenau Gwent faces. We came to this conclusion because we found that:

- The Council is supporting vulnerable adults to maintain their independence and is mostly performing well in comparison to other Welsh councils but social services face significant challenges and are likely to be unsustainable without additional resources or implementing new ways of working.
- Education services remain unsatisfactory.
- The current economic recession is contributing to rising unemployment, and the number of new private businesses in Blaenau Gwent has fallen despite significant investment by the Council. In terms of competitiveness, Blaenau Gwent is ranked the least attractive area in the UK for inward investment.
- It is unclear whether significant capital investment is improving the condition of roads in Blaenau Gwent. Safety as measured by road casualties has improved significantly but the Council has not encouraged the use of public transport.
- Town Centre regeneration activity is not resulting in significant improvements for citizens.
- Performance on creating a clean, safe and sustainable environment and improving waste management and recycling services is improving but on some indicators the Council remains well below the Welsh average.
- Processing Housing Benefits claims is improving.
- The Council is improving its Welsh language services and more work is planned for 2013-14.

In my Annual Improvement Report of April 2013 I noted that the Council had limited capacity to drive improvement and the recent changes have been made to address this issue. However, the overall reduction in senior management creates a risk that the Council may be unable to manage or deliver improvement in the future. Whilst the Council is always open to and sought additional external capacity and support over the last year, the level of external support and intervention provided to the Council by the Welsh Local Government Association, the Education Commissioner, consultants, Local Government Data Unit and others raises doubts about the Council's capability to manage its own affairs effectively without depending increasingly on external support to improve.

The Council is strengthening its improvement planning arrangements

The Council has continued to progress delivery of its Corporate Recovery Programme and in the last year has begun to address inconsistencies and weaknesses in service business planning, risk management and self-evaluation arrangements. The Council is bedding in new corporate approaches in each of these areas and is, with external support from the Local Government Data Unit and the Welsh Local Government Association, strengthening these core components of the Council's improvement planning processes. For many services this is the first year of implementing these new corporate approaches and we acknowledge that this work is progressing from a low base for some services. Nonetheless, the roll out and embedding of these new arrangements should enable the Council to start to address the fundamental weaknesses we have previously reported.

Much of this work is being coordinated through the internal Corporate Improvement Network (CIN) group, which has membership from all Directorates and is accountable for driving improvements in performance management. To support the work of the CIN, the Council has recently made a number of appointments to key posts in the corporate centre. These posts carry responsibility for improvement planning, performance management, democratic services and human resource management.

Members are demonstrating an appetite for effective scrutiny and decision making

The Council has also made some progress in addressing some of the cultural problems and behavioural weaknesses that have beset scrutiny in recent years. We have found an improvement in members' questioning and challenge and a growing appetite to hold officers to account. For example, we found some of the scrutiny meetings are now more effectively chaired and members are focussing on challenging services in an appropriate non-confrontational manner.

However, long standing weaknesses in the effectiveness of some scrutiny committees, which we have previously reported, still remain. These weaknesses include the quality of some reports hindering effective scrutiny and the inability of some officers to adequately respond to lines of enquiry and questioning from members. Effective scrutiny is hampered when the officers attending meetings are unable to speak to items, answer members' questions or effectively present reports. At this time we hold the view that some officers have not yet made the step change needed to support effective governance and proper accountability.

The quality of information on which major decisions have to be made could be clearer with key information more plainly set out and proposals fully costed. This would give greater assurance that the critical decisions members are making or scrutinising are based on all the relevant data. To improve the quality of reporting, the Council has engaged with peer support from the Welsh Local Government Association to review the Council's approach to financial planning and reporting.

Systems to manage performance information in some services are still not consistent and robust

Every council needs to have good information and use it well if it is to provide good services and make them even better. The Council has well-established systems for reporting its performance and we have recently audited these systems to assess how effective and reliable these arrangements are. The measures we selected for audit are local measures developed by the Council. All those audited are measures the Council uses to judge how well it is delivering its improvement objectives and whether it is making a difference for its citizens. We found that of the ten measures audited two were amended due to calculation errors.

In addition there are two measures that have been qualified across all councils in Wales, namely: the number of additional affordable housing units provided during the year as a percentage of all additional housing units provided during the year; and the rate of delayed transfers of care for social care reasons per 1,000 population aged 75 or over. We will report on the performance of services in our Annual Improvement Report.

Progress on proposals for improvement

I have previously reported a number of recommendations and proposals for improvement and also noted some areas where we would undertake further work. Progress on these matters as reported by the Council is summarised below and described in more detail in [Appendix 1](#).

The Council has accepted all of the areas for improvement we identified in our recent work but there is an inconsistent picture in how well the Council is making progress in responding to our findings. Good progress has been made in some areas, for example, the Council's work on ensuring its services comply with the Welsh Language Act and the strengthening of its equality impact assessment (EQIA) framework. However, work remains to be done in other areas such as the development of service standards. Where actions are ongoing, we will continue to monitor and report on the Council's progress in implementing them. Further information about our findings in some of these areas is provided separately in interim updates to the Council where appropriate.

Further recommendations/proposals for improvement

I have set out below two statutory recommendations for improvement under section 19 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The Council must respond to these recommendations publicly within 30 days.

Recommendations

R1 Address weaknesses in financial planning by improving the quality of reports to members on budgets savings proposals by clearly setting out:

- the anticipated impact of decisions;
- the timescale for delivery;
- the amount of savings that will be achieved and by when;
- who is accountable for delivering savings; and
- how the delivery of savings will be monitored.

R2 Strengthen scrutiny of decision making by:

- addressing deficiencies in the quality of reports to scrutiny committees;
- ensuring officers are provided with appropriate training on the role of scrutiny and presenting information to members; and
- ensuring the right officers attend scrutiny committees to present reports and deal with members' questions.

In addition, I have recommended that the Minister for Local Government and Government Business uses her powers under Section 28 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to provide support to the Council. I do not believe that the Council has the capacity to identify and implement the action necessary to address its serious financial difficulties. The provision of suitably skilled and experienced external support is necessary to enable the Council to take the prompt and significant action now required.

No new proposals for improvement are being suggested in this letter. We 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.

Updates to the work plan and timetable

My Improvement Assessment Team will keep the Council informed of the detailed arrangements for the delivery of my assessment work.

The regularly updated work plan and timetable provides more detail on the work being delivered during this year's assessment and in particular how we will add value by focusing on jointly identified areas or services.

The work plan and timetable takes account of my consultation with improvement authorities over my proposals for 2013-14 performance audit work. In particular, I shall be asking my Improvement Assessment Team to consider during the year the reliance that we can place upon the self-assessment processes (including your review of governance in producing the Annual Governance Statement and your Annual Performance Report). I shall comment on this approach in my Annual Improvement Report.

I am grateful to the Council for the way in which it has helped to facilitate our work and hope to see even more effective and efficient arrangements developing over time. I remain committed to providing appropriate levels of public assurance while supporting you in mitigating the inevitable risks to services and accountability that stem from reducing resources and consequential change.

Yours sincerely



HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS

AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES

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

Non Jenkins – Manager

Nick Selwyn – Performance Audit Lead

Appendix 1

Statutory Recommendations	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
<p>1. Develop and agree an action plan which addresses the issues raised in the Corporate Assessment Report, issued in November 2011, in consultation with key stakeholders including the WLGA and the Welsh Government.</p>	<p>Whilst some progress has been made in implementing the action plan it is not yet embedded or mainstreamed across the organisation.</p> <p>The Council has undertaken a review of the actions undertaken to close some actions (this was agreed at update sessions with the Leadership, Executive Member, Chief Executive, Corporate Management Team (CMT) performance management PM lead and Head of Policy and Performance). An audit of closed actions is recorded via Ffynnon. The delivery programme has recently been reviewed by Executive/CMT and then CMT July 2nd) and some actions may be mapped into relevant service plans.</p>	<p>Statutory recommendation ongoing</p>
Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
<p>1. Apply the approach to setting Improvement Objectives focused on achieving improved outcomes for citizens to planning, delivering, monitoring and reporting the full range of the Council's functions and activities.</p>	<p>None reported.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing.</p>
<p>2. Evaluate and report on the impact of reduced budgets on frontline services to identify and deal with risks that emerge from disinvestment decisions.</p>	<p>The service based impact assessment report has been completed and presented to the Council. The recommendations from this report have not yet been finalised. The Council now provides regular updates regarding the Works and Six Bells renewal area to CMT, Executive and the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. A project management framework has been agreed for the Council and a working group established to lead its implementation, reporting to the CIN. An introductory training module, focussing upon the need for and benefits of effective project management, has been developed.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>

Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
	<p>A further training module is being developed which will focus on project delivery and the utilisation of the BG framework and associated template documentation. The use of the framework and templates is currently being piloted on a number of projects across the organisation.</p> <p>Through our observations of Executive, Council and Scrutiny we have identified a continued issue with quality of information/options presented to members and their capacity/willingness to make informed decisions on these issues.</p>	
<p>3. The Council should continue to address the proposals and actions for improvement identified in previous external audit and regulation reports.</p>	<p>The progress monitoring plan is in place in the Council and provides quarterly updates to the regulators meeting. This should include an additional update on the portion of the Outcome Agreement grant used to support corporate improvement, as many of the actions identified have been developed specifically to support Wales Audit Office proposals for improvement of delivery of the Corporate Assessment programme.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>
<p>4. Improve information on unit costs, activity costs, benchmarks and other financial performance measures to support informed financial decision making.</p>	<p>Unit cost data is gathered in the waste services department and is utilised as a part of the performance measures. This data is gathered for Waste Services across Wales via the CSS and WLGA benchmarking group. An annual report is prepared by the Wales Audit Office and submitted to the ministerial programme board. It is not clear what is happening with regard to other services.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>
<p>5. Develop an approach to challenging the value for money and sustainability of existing patterns and methods of service provision across all services and apply it consistently.</p>	<p>The Council's MTFS action plan will include cross portfolio service reviews, which (among other things) will consider statutory/non-statutory services to inform future service provision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Improvement Team established; • executive sign off of process; and • review has commenced. 	<p>PFI ongoing</p>

Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
<p>6. Continue to improve compliance with the Measure and accompanying guidance, strengthen self-assessment arrangements and improve performance reporting.</p>	<p>Whilst significant progress has been made to address this proposal for improvement much remains to be done.</p> <p>There have been significant developments in terms of self-evaluation, business and service planning and risk management arrangements. The Council has also improved its use of performance comparisons, and held Result Based Accountability sessions to support development and measurement of new improvement objectives. Scrutiny Committees, Executive and Council meetings are still receiving limited performance information. The information they do receive contains insufficient detail. There is no real scrutiny of performance information.</p>	PFI ongoing
<p>7. Set out how citizens will benefit from the improvements set out in its objectives, and ensure they are achievable in the context of reduced resources.</p>	<p>The Citizen Panel 2013-14 programme has been developed including focus groups on Welfare Reform and Alcohol Misuse, a summer Quality of Life perception survey, and debates and workshops on active citizenship.</p> <p>The Single Integrated Plan 'Making a Difference' took place Dec 2012 – March 2013. 700 web visitors led to over 150 responses. Responses were diverse and covering key demographic and geographical areas.</p> <p>An Engagement Strategy has been developed to ensure that Blaenau Gwent is appropriately positioned to meet the statutory requirements from <i>Shared Purpose: Shared Delivery</i>.</p> <p>The Council carried out the Have your say on Blaenau Gwent Council's Proposals for Council Saving Targets 2013/14 consultation exercise in Jan/Feb 2013. In total, 106 participants provided feedback.</p> <p>The Council also consulted on its proposed Improvement Objectives, between April and May 2013. In total, 127 participants provided feedback.</p>	Close

Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
8. Develop success measures which are supported by information about how the Council performs now, what its targets are, an analysis of cost and how its performance compares with other councils.	The improvement objectives have recently been completed for 2013-14 and a significant amount of work has been done to improve the quality of the content and presentation of the data within them. Some of the improvement objectives still have issues with breadth and alignment.	PFI ongoing.
9. Identify minimum service standards for all service areas against which performance can be monitored.		PFI not started
10. Undertake an EQIA in line with the Equality Act 2010 when revising the Forward Facing Plan on the Improvement Objectives and address the conclusions that arise from this exercise.	An EQIA screening exercise was undertaken on the Corporate Improvement Plan (CIP) and each of the improvement objectives. This exercise identifies if a fuller EQIA is required. In addition EQIA is undertaken on savings proposals put forward. Please note this proposal relates to the CIP endorsed at Council and in that sense is closed (obviously EQIA continues as part of key governance policies). An EQIA screening exercise was also undertaken with partners on the draft single integrated plan (to which the CIP is aligned).	Close
11. Improve the quality of information used to identify the likely financial impact of increasing demand for services, changing demographics and an assessment of the Council's statutory and non-statutory service provision.	No update provided (see 4 and 5).	PFI ongoing

Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
<p>12. Revise the Medium Term Financial Strategy to include an action plan showing how the predicted deficits will be addressed and how service based pressures will be managed going forward.</p>	<p>No update provided (see 4 and 5).</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>
<p>13. Address weaknesses in the range and coverage of project reports through the inclusion of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • across-year budget performance information that shows total project cost, sources of funding, commitments, unallocated monies and funding yet to be secured; • project risks and mitigation activity to address these risks; and • an assessment of progress against the project action plan targets and actions including individual project milestones. 	<p>A report to the Executive Committee January 2013 – actions emanating from the report have now been taken forward. (See 2)</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>
<p>14. Review the current range of project performance data and ensure a comprehensive range of appropriate outcome-focused performance measures are in place for major projects which will allow an assessment of impact and outcomes to be made.</p>	<p>Project performance data using the Results Based Accountability template is being prepared linking into the business planning process. A corporate Project Register has been established which held by the Service Improvement Team. This project register will enable the Authority to effectively measure the impact and outcomes of major projects.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>
<p>15. Regularly report performance on major projects to the Executive and Scrutiny on a quarterly cycle updating performance and progress on project action plans so as to strengthen accountability for the project.</p>	<p>Project performance data using the Results Based Accountability template is being prepared to commence quarterly reporting building up the current reporting to the scrutiny report. Template completed and existing information being transferred across for use in next quarterly reporting.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>

Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
<p>16. Act more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expressing the Council's view of its success in achieving its Improvement Objectives; • using a wider evidence base of information to enable the Council to assess whether it has met its Improvement Objectives; • extending the use of comparative information with other comparable bodies; and • maximising accessibility to citizens and stakeholders of the Council's performance assessment. 	<p>The Council has done further work to ensure that performance information relating to improvement objectives is more robust. For example, the CIP stage 1 forward facing plan 2013/14 includes for each improvement objective an evaluative statement, clearer targets, linked resources and accountability linked to the responsible officer and relevant portfolio and scrutiny committee.</p> <p>Inclusion of a wider evidence base and the use of comparative information has also progressed and this work is set to continue as part of the self-evaluation work and business planning work which is entering the next phase (as set out above).</p> <p>As part of the corporate developments to self-evaluation discussions are currently taking place to review the scope of the proposed CIP monitoring groups to include them in the development of the internal challenge mechanisms.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>
<p>17. Improve performance management by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthening corporate capacity to drive improvement; • agreeing strategic responsibilities for performance management; and • developing and introducing more joined-up, coherent and robust arrangements to manage report, evaluate and improve performance. 	<p>Corporate capacity to drive improvement has been reviewed. New arrangements to consolidate capacity have been developed including nominating a member of CMT as the lead director responsible for overseeing the new arrangements, a review of the membership of CIN and the establishment of the strategic groups to monitor progress against the three CIP outcomes, each chaired by a member of CMT.</p> <p>The CIN will be supported by the service area performance officers. The CIN has been established and meets on a regular basis. All CIN members attended the recent SE workshops. A sub group of the CIN including representatives from each directorate has been established to consider the performance reporting format that will be utilised in 2013/14..</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>

Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
	<p>As part of the training needs analysis members identified PM training and CIN members will be involved in delivering the planned interactive session scheduled for September</p> <p>The corporate performance team will provide the direction agreed by CMT and drive improvement on all aspects of performance and improvement (including information provided to scrutiny) via the new arrangements. It will also provide support, advice and guidance to the strategic monitoring groups of the CIP outcomes.</p> <p>As part of the corporate developments to SE, discussions are currently taking place to review the scope of the proposed CIP monitoring groups to include them in the development of the internal challenge mechanisms.</p>	
<p>18.Ensure all services have effective arrangements to manage, report, evaluate and improve performance which are consistently reported against agreed minimum standards and are subject to robust scrutiny and challenge.</p>	<p>In order to progress this recommendation at a directorate level, the Environment and Regeneration Directorate has allocated to a Head of Service the responsibility of improving the arrangements for managing, reporting and evaluating the performance of the directorate, supported by a dedicated directorate performance officers group. At a directorate level the Environment and Regeneration Directorate has consolidated the reporting processes to the scrutiny committee through one department and report author.</p> <p>In addition, a peer review is being undertaken by a small group of senior officers and Heads of Service into the 2013/14 business plans and risk registers in order to scrutinise and challenge the work produced across the directorate.</p>	<p>PFI ongoing</p>

Proposals for improvement	Council reported progress @end July 2013	Status
	<p>Developmental work for scrutiny has resulted in new processes and procedures being introduced. Work has been undertaken to embed the new arrangements consistently across all committees. Evaluation processes have been developed and further areas for improvement identified as part of the work recently undertaken on the Wales Audit Office shared learning study. An action plan for further improvement and monitoring is under development as part of this work.</p>	