

Audit Wales [Annual Audit Summary 2021](#)

presented to Council – 19 [January 2022](#)

**Local and National Reports
Recommendations/Proposals for Improvement**

National Reports specific to the Covid 19 pandemic in chronological order

<p>Financial Sustainability of Local Government as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic October 2020</p>	<p>‘Councils and the Welsh Government have worked well together to mitigate the impact of the pandemic to date but the future sustainability of the sector is an ongoing challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Against a backdrop of existing funding pressures, the financial costs of the pandemic are unprecedented in modern times • Some councils were better placed financially than others to respond to the challenges of the pandemic • The cost of the pandemic to councils is significant, although a large proportion of the short-term impact has been mitigated through the provision of extra funding • Audit Wales future work – supporting financial sustainability and recovering planning’
<p>Procurement and supply of PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic December 2020</p>	<p>Observations of the Auditor General to the Chairs of the Welsh Government Public Accounts and Health Social Care and Sport Committees, in advance of publication of wider report in Procurement and supply of PPE during Covid 19 pandemic</p>
<p>Test, Trace, Protect in Wales: An Overview of Progress to Date March 2021</p>	<p>‘Key messages</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The TTP programme has seen different parts of the Welsh public and third sector work together well, in strong and effective partnerships, to rapidly build a programme of activities that is making an important contribution to the management of COVID-19 in Wales. 2. The configuration of the TTP system in Wales has a number of strengths, blending national oversight and technical expertise with local and regional ownership of the programme, and the ability to use local intelligence and knowledge to shape responses. 3. Arrangements for testing and contact tracing have evolved as the pandemic has progressed. But maintaining the required performance in these areas has proved challenging in the face of increasing demand. 4. TTP is a crucial part of the Welsh Government’s approach but has not been the only way it is trying to prevent the virus spreading. Despite increased testing and tracing activity, the virus has continued to spread. In Wales, as in other parts

	<p>of the UK and internationally, testing and tracing has needed to be supplemented with increasingly stringent local and national lockdown restrictions in an attempt to reduce transmission rates.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Lockdowns have only provided temporary solutions to controlling transmission and regardless of progress with vaccines, the TTP programme will remain a key tool in Wales’s battle with the virus for some time to come. 6. Testing volumes increased significantly in response to increasing incidence of COVID-19, and results have generally been turned around quickly. The tracing workforce has expanded rapidly. But when demand has risen across regions at the same time, there has been insufficient contact tracing capacity to meet the increased demand. 7. Most importantly of all, the public has a huge role to stop the virus spreading by following guidance and self-isolating when necessary. There is now good information to show the breadth and range of services and support adopted across Wales during the pandemic. But it remains difficult to know how well the ‘protect’ element of TTP has been working in supporting people to self-isolate. This will become increasingly important as ‘lockdown fatigue’ sets in with its associated challenges for emotional, physical and economic well-being. <p>Challenges and Opportunities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Having better information to improve efficiency and evaluate the impact of TTP 2. Ensuring testing activities are fit for purpose and meet increasing demand 3. Creating a skilled, resilient workforce to deliver TTP 4. Influencing the public to follow public health protection guidance and requirements 5. Applying the learning from the TTP programme to other programmes and future ways of working’
<p><u>Procuring and supplying PPE for the Covid-19 Pandemic</u> April 2021</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The challenge facing the NHS and social care at the start of the pandemic was stark. The stockpile developed for a flu pandemic was inadequate for a coronavirus. Global supply chains had fragmented as countries competed for scarce supplies and some imposed export controls. 2. Public services across Wales responded in an increasingly collaborative way. Shared Services took on an expanded role in supplying PPE to the wider NHS, including independent contractors in primary care (GPs, dentists, pharmacies and optometrists). Shared Services then worked closely with local government to understand demand in social care and then took on an increasing role supplying PPE. Shared Services now supplies almost all social care PPE needs. We recognise the huge individual and collective effort involved in the work to source and supply PPE to frontline staff. 3. Shared Services data shows that, nationally, stocks did not run out although stocks of some items got very low. At times, Wales drew on mutual aid from other countries but ultimately gave out significantly more than it received. The health and care system is now in a much better position, with buffer stocks of most PPE items in place and orders due on key items where stocks are below target. 4. Surveys carried out by the Royal College of Nursing and British Medical Association suggest confidence in the supply of PPE grew shortly after the start of the pandemic, but concerns remain. While we cannot be sure how representative these views are, some frontline staff reported shortages of specific items of PPE, with a small minority saying at times

	<p>they had none at all. In some cases, staff concerns relate to the fact that they want a higher level of PPE than required under the guidance.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. A range of bodies were involved in sourcing PPE globally and in responding to, and working with, local manufacturers. In contrast to the position described by the NAO in England, we saw no evidence of a priority being given to potential suppliers depending on who referred them. 6. Overall, Shared Services developed good arrangements to rapidly buy PPE, while balancing the urgent need to get supplies for frontline staff with the need to manage significant financial governance risks in an area of rapidly growing expenditure. These risks included dealing with new suppliers, having to make large advance payments and significant quantities of fraudulent and poor-quality equipment being offered. 7. Time pressure meant due diligence could not always be carried out to the level it would outside of a pandemic in a normal competitive tendering process. But, for each contract we reviewed, we found evidence of key due diligence checks. And while costs were generally higher than before the pandemic, we saw evidence of Shared Services negotiating prices down. 8. However, Shared Services did not meet the requirements under emergency procurement rules to publish contract award notices within 30 days. Shared Services told us that its staff needed to prioritise sourcing PPE and that there were other administrative reasons for delays. 9. Shared Services’ plan for PPE ran until March 2021. There are now some key decisions to make about the future strategy for PPE, including the size and nature of the stockpile going forwards and the role of Welsh manufacturers.
<p>Financial Sustainability of Local Government COVID-19 Impact, Recovery and Future Challenges - September 2021</p> <p>See also local Financial Sustainability Assessment below</p>	<p>‘Overall findings</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We found that Councils have received significant extra funding to deal with the pandemic, but the future sustainability of the local government sector remains challenging against a backdrop of other financial pressures. 2. After publishing our national summary report in October 2020, we then looked at the financial sustainability of each principal council in Wales. • We produced local reports for each council. 3. Due to the extra funding councils have received in response to the pandemic, the financial position has improved for all 22 councils this year. 4. But the overall picture of councils’ financial sustainability remains mixed, some councils are still better placed than others to respond to future challenges <p>Four steps to help improve councils’ financial sustainability</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Financial strategies - Understand short, medium and long-term challenges and clearly set out the overall priorities for the council’s finances 2. Reserves - Plan your approach to, and use of, reserves to ensure that it supports longer-term financial sustainability 3. Performance against budget - Know what’s realistic for services to achieve and then understand and act on areas of consistent overspends

Proposals for Improvement	Council's Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce – on-going workforce planning arrangements that are informing service reconfigurations / restructures; and • Digital – an updated Digital Strategy 2022 – 26 has been finalised following a pre-scrutiny process (and is being reported to the 21st March 2022 Cabinet for consideration / approval). <p>Service and Finance Officers are working closely together on the financial impacts and opportunities from the above, and updates will be included within the Council's refreshed Medium Term Financial Plan in 2022.</p>

Care Inspectorate Wales - [Assurance Check 2021](#) – confirmed in letter to Director of Community and Children's Services

Published: not yet published on CIW website.

Proposals for Improvement	Council's Response
<p>In March 2020, CIW suspended its routine programme in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable local authorities and providers to focus fully on responding to the challenging circumstances and focussed on two questions</p> <p>How well is the local authority discharging its statutory functions to keep people who need care and support and carers who need support, safe and promote their well being during the pandemic?</p> <p>What is the local authority doing to prevent the need for children to come into care; and are children returning home to their families quickly enough where safe to do so?</p>	<p>The findings from the Assurance check were considered by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on 19 July 2021 • Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee on 21 July 2021 <p>and identified many strengths and noting that the following areas for improvement are reflected and are being progressed in Service Delivery Plans for 2021/22 and 2022/23.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment & retention of a stable workforce • Closely monitor the reduction of waiting lists • Placement sufficiency in Children Services

National Reports

Care Inspectorate Wales and Health Care Inspectorate Wales – Joint report

[Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Annual Monitoring Report for Health and Social Care 2019-20](#)

Published: 24 March 2021 on CIW Website

Key Findings	Council's Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Since many applications for DoLS were from care homes or older adult wards, the majority of applications continued to be for older adults, with more than 85% of applications for people over the age of 65.• More DoLS authorisations were made for males up to the age of 64, but after the age of 85, a significantly higher number of authorisations were in relation to females.• There has continued to be a year on year increase in the number of applications received by supervisory bodies, with a 28% increase received by health boards in 2019-20.• Nearly half of all applications were withdrawn due to the individual either moving to a different care setting, being discharged from hospital or dying before the application is reviewed.• Across Wales, fewer than half of applications were completed within the statutory timeframes.• Of those applications refused by supervisory bodies, approximately half were because the mental capacity condition was not met.• Health boards and local authorities continued to propose very different durations for their authorisations, with health boards proposing considerably shorter durations than local authorities.• Over half of applications had not been assessed within 28 days, suggesting supervisory bodies were unable to assure themselves that people's human rights were not being breached by being deprived of their liberty unlawfully.• Whilst most people were represented by family and friends, the number of people referred to Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCAs) increased compared to 2018-19.• The proportion of authorisations referred to Court of Protection also increased compared to 2018-19.	<p>This is a national annual monitoring report of CIW and HIW on the implementation of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) in Wales, on behalf of Welsh Ministers. The report refers to activity between April 2019 and March 2020.</p> <p>DoLS will be replaced in April 2022 with the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) which were introduced by the Mental Capacity (Amendment) Act.</p> <p>We will implement these changes in line with the new Codes of Practice and Regulations when they are published and our arrangements will be reflected in our Service Delivery Plan for 2022/23.</p>

Care Inspectorate Wales

National Overview Report of Assurance Checks

Published: November 2021 on CIW Website

Future Challenges identified	Council's Response
Unprecedented increase in demand for social care Partnership working Recruitment and Retention Fragility within Domiciliary Support Services Placement insufficiency within the childcare sector Advocacy Support for Carers Grant funding	This report provides a National Overview of the themes and challenges that CIW has identified during their Assurance Checks of the 22 Local Authorities between September 2020 and July 2021. We note the national challenges identified and will take account of them as part of our ongoing service improvements. However, of more direct relevance is the progress and areas for improvement that have been identified in our local (RCT) Assurance Check 2021 which has been reported to both Children's and Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committees referenced above and are being progressed in our Service Delivery Plans for both 2021/22 and 2022/23.

'Let me Flourish' National review of early help, care and support and transition for disabled children in Wales

Published: November 2021

Actions Needed by Local Authorities	Council's Response
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a rights-based approach when working with disabled children and their families must be promoted and taken 2. carers' rights and entitlements must be actively promoted 3. effective arrangements must be in place for communication with disabled children. The child's preferred method of communication should be used, their voice should be consistently sought, heard and captured 4. eligibility criteria for access to statutory services must be fully aligned with the 2014 Act 5. practitioners working with disabled children must be sufficiently skilled and trained in relation to the tasks they perform/are expected to perform when working with children and their families 6. opportunities for consultation with disabled children and their parent/carers should be developed and maximised 7. review and take the necessary action to ensure sufficient and accessible information, and timely advice and assistance is available for disabled children and their families 	<p>The service has taken account of the actions set out in the national report. However, of more relevance is local inspection undertaken as part of the national review. This local inspection took place in December 2019 and considered Disabled Children's Service and Focused Activity in the 16+ Service.</p> <p>An update on the progress of Rhondda Cynon Taf Council's response to the recommendations within the local Inspection of the Disabled Children's Service and Focused Activity in the 16+ Service which took place in December 2019, as part of the national review</p>

Actions Needed by Local Authorities	Council's Response
<p>8. ensure the 'Active Offer' of a service delivered in the Welsh language is consistently promoted and provided</p> <p>9. ensure the 'Active Offer' of independent formal advocacy is consistently promoted and provided</p> <p>10. review and ensure effective quality assurance systems and information recording systems are in place to assess and evaluate the quality and impact of work with disabled children and their families, and for the purpose of service planning, delivery and adherence to statutory requirements</p> <p>11. safeguarding thresholds and processes must be well understood by practitioners and partners and as rigorously applied in relation to disabled children as they are for non-disabled children</p> <p>12. sufficiency of suitable local placements, and play, social, recreational, training and employment opportunities for disabled children must be maximised to meet the needs of disabled children and young people</p> <p>13. transition planning must be undertaken in a timely manner and include disabled children, their families and relevant professionals/agencies</p> <p>14. ensure adherence to the Children and Young People's Continuing Care Guidance – January 2020</p> <p>15. opportunities for greater collaboration and joint commissioning with regional partners must be maximised</p> <p>16. ensure required action is taken to comply with the requirements of the Statutory Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services</p> <p>17. ensure suitable arrangements are in place for the forthcoming implementation of and compliance with the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS)</p>	<p>programme, was presented to C&YP Scrutiny Committee in September 2021.</p>

Audit Wales - Local Government Studies

At your Discretion - Local Government Discretionary Services

Published: April 2021

Key Facts arising	Council's Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining whether a service is discretionary or statutory can be complicated and does not reflect the important work of councils • Despite providing essential services that people depend on, councils have had to make difficult choices on what to protect in responding to over a decade of austerity Service review processes help councils make tough choices but do not always draw on all key data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Citizens are willing to get involved in helping shape and run services, but councils are neither effectively nor consistently involving them in decisions 	<p>The Council has well embedded Service Self-Evaluation and Service Delivery Planning arrangements that ensure its statutory responsibilities are met and also recognise the key role discretionary (and preventative) services play in contributing</p>

Key Facts arising	Council's Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councils are not confident that they can continue to deliver all their services in the face of rising and complex demand • COVID-19 offers an opportunity to reevaluate and reset the role and value of local government <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of councils as key leaders in our communities who provide essential services and a safety net for people across Wales ○ Councils need to build on their response to COVID-19 and take the opportunity to transform the way they provide services and interact with communities 	<p>to statutory duties and, importantly, how they support communities and provide better outcomes for residents across the County Borough.</p> <p>These arrangements will continue to be central in informing opportunities to shape future service delivery, in consultation with citizens, to ensure the Council continues to provide good quality and affordable services in line with the needs of communities across Rhondda Cynon Taf.</p>

[Regenerating town centres in Wales](#)

Published September 2021

Mixture of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response
<p>R1 Non-domestic rates have not been reviewed in recent years, and the levels charged do not reflect the current rents being achieved in many town centres.</p> <p>We recommend that the Welsh Government review Nondomestic Rates to ensure the system better reflects town centre conditions when the payments holiday ends in March 2022.</p>	<p>Agree with recommendation</p>
<p>R2 Many town-centre businesses are impacted adversely by charging for car parking, access to public transport and poor transport infrastructure.</p> <p>We recommend that the Welsh Government work with local authorities to review transport challenges facing town centres and agree how best to address these.</p>	<p>Agree with recommendation. Transport and access issues and opportunities are key to bringing forward town centre investments and regeneration plans and strategies such as those for Pontypridd, Porth and Mountain Ash.</p>
<p>R3 The Welsh Government has directly provided and levered in just under £900 million through 13 funding schemes to help regenerate town centres. However, some aspects of the Welsh Government's management of the funding are considered problematic. To ensure local authorities are able to maximise the impact of funding and tackle the more difficult and longstanding problems that would help transform their town centres, we recommend that the Welsh Government:</p>	<p>Agree with the recommendations.</p> <p>We will continue to work closely with WG colleagues to develop improved approaches to delivering funding for town centre regeneration in the most effective way. RCT is leading on the management and delivery of several regional and national WG funded initiatives which puts us in a strong position to understand</p>

Mixture of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consolidate funding to reduce bureaucracy by streamlining processes and grant conditions and keeping requests for information and supporting materials to a minimum; • move away from annual bidding cycles to multi-year allocations; and • rebalance investment from capital to revenue to help local authorities address staff capacity and skills shortages. 	<p>where improvements can be made and to suggest how best these can be implemented.</p>
<p>R4 The Welsh Government has provided all 22 local authorities with training on how best to use existing enforcement, financial assistance and debt recovery powers, but they are not being consistently nor effectively utilised to support regeneration. We recommend that local authorities take appropriate action, using these existing powers and resources available to achieve the best possible outcome for town centres by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using alternative methods of enforcement before using Compulsory Purchase Orders as a last resort; • integrating enforcement strategies with wider departmental strategies across housing, environmental health, planning and regeneration teams to make more effective use of existing skills and resources; and • ensuring there is capacity and the right expertise to use the full range of powers, working in collaboration with other councils to achieve good outcomes. 	<p>Agree with the recommendations. Staff and relevant Cabinet Members have benefitted from training funded by WG and provided by an independent expert. We have also prepared an Empty Property Action Plan which identifies priority targets for enforcement, and which includes input from all relevant Services. A good example is at Guto Square, Mountain Ash where concerted action and enforcement has led to a successful Compulsory Purchase Order resulting in the redevelopment of derelict land at the centre of the town for a new public space with multiple uses.</p>
<p>R5 The Welsh Government's 'Town Centres First' approach looks to put the health of town centres at the heart of the decisions taken by the Welsh Government, local authorities, the wider public sector, businesses and communities. This requires a high degree of integration between cross-cutting policy frameworks and decision making to promote town centres above much else. We recommend that the Welsh Government set out how it plans to deliver this in practice, its expectations of partners and the practical steps it will take to make this ambition a reality.</p>	<p>Agree with the recommendation</p>
<p>R6 Town centres are changing, and local authorities need to be receptive to these changes and plan to manage these shifts. We recommend that local authorities use our regeneration tool to self-assess their current approaches to identify where they need to improve their work on town-centre regeneration (the tool is here)</p>	<p>Agree with the recommendation. We continually review our approach to regenerating Town Centres to meet our Corporate priorities as part of our annual Performance evaluation and Service Self Evaluation processes. We have used the Audit Wales Self Evaluation Tool as part of our consideration to our approach to town centre regeneration and are generally satisfied we meet the themes Intention, Involvement, Informed and Intervention. However, we are not complacent and will continue to adapt and improve our approach as circumstances, issues and opportunities change. For example, we intend to continue to develop</p>

Mixture of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response
	<p>appropriate strategies, placemaking plans and frameworks to cover all of our key towns, pilot new ways to improve how we monitor town centre usage through footfall related technology and ensure that we make better use of the suite of enforcement measures that are available to bring forward redevelopment. An example of this is the draft Pontypridd Placemaking plan which was considered by Cabinet on 28th February 2022.</p>