

**Audit Wales [Annual Audit Summary 2021](#)
Regulators' Local and National Reports
Recommendations/Proposals for Improvement
Report presented to Council on [19 January 2022](#)**

Reports presented to Governance & Audit Committee [23 March](#) and also [7 September 2022](#)

**Update - September 2022
Local Reports**

Audit Wales

[Financial Sustainability Assessment](#) *'The Council continues to be well placed to manage its financial sustainability'*

Published: November 2021

Proposals for Improvement	Governance & Audit Committee March 22	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<p>Planning assumptions The Council needs to be assured that it has contingency plans in place to be able to manage less positive scenarios than it planned for in its medium-term financial planning.</p>	<p>The Council's latest Medium Term Financial Plan (2021/22 – 2024/25) sets out a range of forecasted budget positions over a 3-year period based on assumed differing levels of Welsh Government funding. In line with the Council's approach to refreshing its Medium Term Financial Plan, discussions are on-going with Welsh Government to inform these arrangements (including taking account of the indicative Wales-level core revenue funding allocations for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as set out in the 2022/23 final local government settlement) and to ensure the Council's financial planning processes continue to be based on a sound set of assumptions.</p> <p>In parallel, work is on-going across the Council to identify budget saving and efficiency opportunities and review all base budget requirements over the medium term, with the range of forecasted budget positions over the 3-year period informing this work.</p>	<p>The Council has reviewed and updated its MTFP, covering the period 2022/23 to 2025/26 (link to the latest document MTFP (2022/23 to 2025/26)), taking into account refreshed expenditure and funding level forecasts. With specific regard to funding level forecasts, a range of funding levels have been modelled including the indicative settlement levels for 2023/24 and 2024/25 announced by Welsh Government as part of the final Local Government Settlement for 2022/23. The updated MTFP has been reported to Cabinet (26/9/22), Council (28/9/22), School Budget Forum (24/11/22), a high level overview provided to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (29/11/22) and key messages on the financial outlook have been relayed</p>

Proposals for Improvement	Governance & Audit Committee March 22	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<p>Medium Term Financial Planning Discussions are ongoing about the Council's estate, workforce and digital capabilities and these need to be formalised in the Council's financial planning arrangements.</p>	<p>The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (2021/22 – 2024/25) sets out key areas that form part of an on-going programme of work to assess further budget saving opportunities whilst ensuring service resilience is maintained. This includes review of (amongst other things):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's Estate - currently being progressed as part of a Built Asset Review; • 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 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>	<p>by the Chief Executive to Manager Briefing Sessions – these updates ensure that officers and elected Members are fully aware of the financial challenges facing the Council and has informed the delivery of an on-going programme of work to review all service areas to identify budget reductions options for consideration as part of setting balanced and deliverable budgets over the medium term.</p> <p>The Council's updated MTFP Plan (2022/23 to 2025/26) sets out in more detail the work being undertaken in key areas that will underpin future budget strategies and how they align with medium term financial planning arrangements (i.e. Section 12 of the MTFP document 'Financial Planning and Balancing the Budget').</p>

Audit Wales Local Reports presented to Governance and Audit Committee in September 2022

Report	Recommendations	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
Springing Forward – Strategic Asset Management Issued June 2022	The Council needs to ensure the Sustainable Development principle is driving and shaping its approach to all its assets. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Council should develop a longer-term approach to its assets; and • the Council will need to fully integrate its workforce and digital strategies with its longer-term plans for its assets. 	Report and Action Plan considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 October 2022
Springing Forward – Workforce – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Issued July 2022	Extend existing workforce management data to include comparative benchmarking with other organisations to inform planning and strengthen the assessment of workforce initiatives	Report and Action Plan considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 October 2022

Audit Wales National Report presented to Governance and Audit Committee 7 September 2022

Report	Recommendations	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
Direct Payments for Adult Social Care published April 2022	Summary extract of recommendations Local Authorities: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review public information in discussion with service users and carers to ensure it is clear, concise and fully explains what they need to know about Direct Payments. 2. Undertake additional promotional work to encourage take up of Direct Payments. 3. Ensure advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice on Direct Payments to service users and carers. 4. Ensure information about Direct Payments is available at the front door to social care and are included in the initial discussion on the available care options for service users and carers. 5. Provide training to social workers on Direct Payments to ensure they fully understand their potential and feel confident promoting it to service users and carers. 6. Work together to develop a joint Recruitment and Retention Plan for Personal Assistants. Local Authorities and the Welsh Government: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Clarify policy expectations in plain accessible language and set out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • what Direct Payments can pay for; • how application and assessment processes, timescales and review processes work; 	Report and Action Plan considered by Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 24 October 2022

Report	Recommendations	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how monitoring individual payments and the paperwork required to verify payments will work; • how unused monies are to be treated and whether they can be banked; and • how to administer and manage pooled budgets. <p>Public information should be reviewed regularly (at least every two years) to ensure they are working effectively and remain relevant.</p> <p>Welsh Government:</p> <p>8. Ensure that people who receive both NHS continuing healthcare and Direct Payments have greater voice, choice and control in decision making.</p> <p>Local Authorities and the Welsh Government:</p> <p>9. Work together to establish a system to fully evaluate Direct Payments that captures all elements of the process – information, promotion, assessing, managing and evaluating impact on wellbeing and independence.</p> <p>10. Annually publish performance information for all elements of Direct Payments to enable a whole system view of delivery and impact to support improvement</p>	

Published: November 2021 on CIW Website

Proposals for Improvement	Council’s Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<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 	<p><u>Children’s Services - Recruitment & retention of a stable workforce</u> Since the time of the assurance visit, a Workforce Strategy has been agreed and is being implemented by the Workforce Steering Group. This is being brought to Community Services Scrutiny Committee in November.</p> <p><u>Closely monitor the reduction of waiting lists</u> Risk Management plan in place in Children’s Services Enquiry and Assessment Teams with frequent meetings.</p> <p><u>Placement sufficiency in Children’s Services</u> Foster Wales plans are being implemented. Residential Transformation Strategy is scheduled for pre –Scrutiny by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee in November 2022.</p> <p><u>Recruitment & Retention – Adults Services</u> We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •established a Social Care Workforce Steering Group comprising of the Group Director Community and Children’s Services, Directors of Adult and Children’s Services, Director of Human Resources and Human Resource operational leads to oversee development of a Workforce Strategy. •committed additional staff resource to Human Resources to develop and implement an overarching Workforce Strategy and action plan to meet the needs of social work and Social Care. •introduced a new pay and career structure for Social Workers in Summer 2021. The progression from social worker to experienced social worker is now embedded

Proposals for Improvement	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
		<p>with staff making the appropriate career promotion after 3 years in practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •introduced allowances for our social workers undertaking Practice Educator roles. As a result, we have increased our hosting of social work students, allowing us to maintain the placements we can provide for the social work degree program. •improved pay and terms and conditions for other Council staff, including front line social care staff, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Report to Council on 06/07/22 o Report to Council on 28/09/22 •changed our Occupational Therapy (OT) service model to reflect a growing problem in recruiting qualified OT staff, changing the skill mix and tasks appropriately to new OT Assistants and introducing a market supplement for OTs which assisted in filling vacancies. •increased funding available to start remodelling of our Adult Care & Support Teams to better meet increased need and demand. •settled staff into the Council's hybrid working model, supported by the agile working framework, and flexitime has resumed from suspension through the pandemic which has had a positive response. •continued to invest in our long established 'Growing our Own' scheme by funding and supporting staff to access the Social Work degree course with a guaranteed Social Worker role on completion of registration. •started working with Cardiff University and the University of South Wales to establish a new Social Work Bursary Scheme, so that we will offer reimbursement of course fees to a number of students who are also residents of RCT. This will be in return for a commitment by the student to join the Council as a Social Worker on qualifying.

Proposals for Improvement	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
		<p>•taken advantage of the Council's Apprentice programme by employing a number of apprentices across care roles, an evaluation is due to take place shortly.</p> <p>•started utilising the 'We Care' jobs platform provided by Social Care Wales to advertise all relevant care posts.</p> <p>•continued to take part, along with other Agencies from the Care sector in the Council's Virtual and more recently, reintroduced face to face Careers Fair. Human Resources staff attend and provide hands on/real time support to those who wish to make job applications. The application form has been streamlined to a minimal level to assist applicants further.</p> <p>•agreed to improve our Exit Interview process from which reasons for leaving will be better understood and will give management the ability to make changes where appropriate.</p> <p><u>Waiting Lists in Adult Services</u></p> <p>Some people continue to wait longer than we would like for us to assess and review them. Despite additional resources and prioritisation to reduce waiting lists, we continue to operate waiting lists in Care & Support; ACE and Sensory Services, which have been exacerbated by increases in demand, many with higher levels of frailty and complex needs, and some staff vacancies and absences.</p> <p>All cases are prioritised based on assessed need and risk. Plans are in place to reduce waiting lists in 2022/23.</p>

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	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<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. 	<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>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE</u></p> <p><u>Children's Services</u></p> <p>Internal policies have been updated, and training is being sought. At present we still await the Code of Practice which is on hold pending the publication of the new draft Mental Capacity Act 2019 Code of Practice and the draft Regulations for Wales. These were published in March 2022 for a 16 week consultation, the outcome of this consultation is not expected until late 2022.</p> <p><u>Adult's Services</u></p> <p>Implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards to replace the existing Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards planned for April 2022 has been delayed and no new date as yet been set. As a result, planning and preparation was put on hold pending the publication of the new draft Mental Capacity Act 2019 Code of Practice and the draft Regulations for Wales. These were published in March 2022 for a 16 week consultation, the outcome of this consultation is not expected until late 2022. We have established a regional</p>

Key Findings	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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>working group to respond to the consultation.</p> <p>In the meantime, we have directed our efforts at increasing the confidence of social care staff in the application of the Mental Capacity Act 2019 by commissioning additional training and clearing the backlog of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) applications which has accumulated over time. The DoLS waiting list currently at 386 as at end of Qtr 2 but is reducing as we continue to commission external capacity, using Welsh Government Grant, to complete assessments on the Council's behalf to supplement the work of in-house team. This work will be completed in 2022/23.</p>

Care Inspectorate Wales

National Overview Report of Assurance Checks

Published: November 2021 on CIW Website

Future Challenges identified	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Unprecedented increase in demand for social care2. Partnership working3. Recruitment and Retention4. Fragility within Domiciliary Support Services5. Placement insufficiency within the childcare sector6. Advocacy7. Support for Carers8. Grant funding	<p>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.</p>	<p>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</p>

'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	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. a rights-based approach when working with disabled children and their families must be promoted and taken2. carers' rights and entitlements must be actively promoted3. 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 captured4. eligibility criteria for access to statutory services must be fully aligned with the 2014 Act5. 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	<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</p>	<p>All aspects of the focused activity action plan have been implemented and are being monitored by internal Quality Assurance processes.</p>

Actions Needed by Local Authorities	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 8. ensure the 'Active Offer' of a service delivered in the Welsh language is consistently promoted and provided 9. ensure the 'Active Offer' of independent formal advocacy is consistently promoted and provided 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 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 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 13. transition planning must be undertaken in a timely manner and include disabled children, their families and relevant professionals/agencies 14. ensure adherence to the Children and Young People's Continuing Care Guidance – January 2020 15. opportunities for greater collaboration and joint commissioning with regional partners must be maximised 16. ensure required action is taken to comply with the requirements of the Statutory Code of Practice on the Delivery of Autism Services 17. ensure suitable arrangements are in place for the forthcoming implementation of and compliance with the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) 	<p>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 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	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<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 • 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>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 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>	<p>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</p>

Regenerating town centres in Wales

Published September 2021

Mix of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<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>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</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>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</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> <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>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 where improvements can be made and to suggest how best these can be implemented.</p>	<p>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</p>

Mix of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<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>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</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>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</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</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</p>	<p>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</p>

Mix of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE
<p>improve their work on town-centre regeneration (the tool is here)</p>	<p>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 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>	