

Audit Wales [Annual Audit Summary 2021](#)
Regulators Local and National Reports
Recommendations/Proposals for Improvement
Report presented to Council on [19 January 2022](#),
Governance & Audit Committee [23 March](#), [7 September](#) and [7 December](#) 2022

Audit Wales Update – March 2023

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 as reported to 7 December	Position at March 2023
<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</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 by the Chief Executive to Manager Briefing Sessions</p>	<p>The Council’s MTFP 2022/23 to 2025/26 set out a number of modelling scenarios (budget gaps) that covered Welsh Government funding settlements ranging from 0% to +5%, this work being informed by close working between Council and Welsh Government Officers to ensure the most up-to-date information was available to inform medium term financial planning.</p> <p>The actual budget gap faced by the Council for 2023/24 was within the range modelled within its MTFP and enabled early planning to be undertaken in the 2022 calendar year to formulate a robust and balanced budget for 2023/24.</p>

Proposals for Improvement	Governance & Audit Committee March 22	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE as reported to 7 December	Position at March 2023
	3-year period informing this work.	– 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.	The Council will continue this approach as part of refreshing its medium-term financial plan in 2023 to support early preparations for 2024/25 budget setting.
<p>Medium Term Financial Planning</p> <p>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>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>	<p>As per November 2022 update.</p>

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

Report	Recommendations	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<p>Springing Forward – Strategic Asset Management Issued June 2022</p>	<p>The Council needs to ensure the Sustainable Development principle is driving and shaping its approach to all its assets. For example:</p> <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. 	<p>Report and Action Plan considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 October 2022</p>	<p>Following the update to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10th October 2022, the Council has agreed an integrated Office Accommodation Strategy and Workspace Plan (together with a Council operating model and working arrangements policy) – this sets out a long term approach to its assets, developed around key sustainable development principles and identifies the outcomes to be achieved, and was agreed by the Council’s Cabinet on 15th May 2023.</p> <p>This will be an on-going programme of work and will be further supported by the Council’s updated Corporate Asset Management Plan 2023 – 28 – this to be drafted and reported later in 2023.</p>
<p>Springing Forward – Workforce – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council Issued July 2022</p>	<p>Extend existing workforce management data to include comparative benchmarking with other organisations to inform planning and strengthen the assessment of workforce initiatives</p>	<p>Report and Action Plan considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 October 2022</p>	<p>Further to the 10th October 2022 update, the Council’s Cabinet agreed an updated Human Resources Strategy 2023 – 28 and Council Workforce Plan 2023 – 28 on 23rd January 2023 that will provide, amongst other things, on-going focus on management information to support workforce initiatives.</p>

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

Report	Recommendations	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE	Position at end March 2023
<p><u>Direct Payments for Adult Social Care published April 2022</u></p>	<p>Summary extract of recommendations - Local Authorities:</p> <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. <p>Local Authorities and the Welsh Government:</p> <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; • 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</p>	<p>Report and Action Plan considered by <u>Community Services Scrutiny Committee</u> on 24 October 2022</p>	<p>As per the 'November 2022 update' to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 24th October 2022.</p> <p>The Council will continue its focus to provide opportunities and support for service users to consider Direct Payments as part of giving people more choice, greater flexibility and more control over the support they receive. This area is part of the Adult Services Service Delivery Plan for 2023/24.</p>

Report	Recommendations	NOVEMBER 2022 UPDATE	Position at end March 2023
	<p>(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 response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<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’s Services 	<p>Children’s Services - Recruitment & retention of a stable workforce 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>Closely monitor the reduction of waiting lists Risk Management plan in place in Children’s Services Enquiry and Assessment Teams with frequent meetings.</p> <p>Placement sufficiency in Children’s Services</p>	<p>Children’s Services - Recruitment & retention of a stable workforce - considerable work has been carried out under the workforce strategy albeit vacancy rates for qualified social worker in Intensive Intervention remains high. The Community Services Scrutiny Committee received an update report on 28th November 2022.</p> <p>The Workforce Steering Group receives progress reports and updates on how risks are being managed. There is a clear focus on a ‘grow our own’ scheme, noting that this takes time to take effect, and retaining and recruiting experienced practitioners continues to be a priority. This area is included within the Council’s Strategic Risk Register and the priorities are subject to on-going review and challenge.</p> <p>Closely monitor the reduction of waiting lists – this area is subject to continuous performance monitoring and reductions have been emerging at the front door and for Disabled Children’s Team cases.</p> <p>Placement sufficiency in Children’s Services – the overall</p>

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		<p>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>Recruitment & Retention – Adults Services</p> <p>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 	<p>need for placements has reduced in line with the Children Looked After Strategy. As part of the national Foster Wales strategy, RCT’s offer to foster carers is developing with further work required to meet targets set.</p> <p>Cabinet has approved the Residential Transformation Strategy and the Operating Without Registration position has been incorporated within the Strategic Risk Register.</p> <p>Recruitment & Retention – Adults Services</p> <p>The Social Care Workforce Steering Group is progressing its work, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Additional interim capacity created within Human Resources and a strategic Organisational Change & Transformation Officer appointed to support this work. •The introduction of an exit interview process and commenced a new entrant interviews/survey and “lost” candidate surveys to understand recruitment attrition. •Using social media to support recruitment and targeted campaigns e.g. recruitment in Support at Home. Early indications are that numbers of

Proposals for Improvement	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
		<p>from social worker to experienced social worker is now embedded 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"> ○ Report to Council on 06/07/22 ○ 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. 	<p>applications have increased as a result.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources are assisting the Commissioning Team to help identify different approaches and share good practice. • 7 home grown students are being supported on the social work course; 1 student on the Rehabilitation for Visually Impaired course; and the plan to support a home-grown student onto the Occupational Therapy course from September 2023. • 11 apprentices will be hosted in total across Adult Services this year. • Between November 2022 and April 2023, 48 new home care starters were recruited, this being double compared to the same period in the previous year.

Proposals for Improvement	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 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. • started utilising the 'We Care' jobs platform provided by Social Care Wales to advertise all relevant care posts. • 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 	

Proposals for Improvement	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
		<p>level to assist applicants further.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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><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. All cases are prioritised based on assessed need and risk. Plans are in place to reduce waiting lists in 2022/23.</p>	<p><u>Waiting Lists in Adult Services</u></p> <p>There has been significant management focus on the waiting list this year with positive results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our waiting list performance for Care and Support teams has been improving with 186 on the waiting list in March 2023 compared to 339 in April 2022. Our waiting list performance for Adaptations Community Equipment (ACE) has improved with 156 (plus 55 parking bays) on the waiting list in March 2023 compared to 671 (plus 64 parking bays) in April 2022. <p>Notwithstanding these positive results, plans are in place to further improve waiting lists in 2023/24 and all cases continue to be prioritised based on assessed need and risk.</p>

Published: 24 March 2021 on CIW Website

Key Findings	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<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, 	<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><u>Children’s Services</u> 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 Services</u> 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 working group to respond to the consultation.</p>	<p>The expected revised Mental capacity Act Code of Practice and the secondary legislation for the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) have still not been published and UK Government finally announced on 5th April 2023 that the LPS would not be implemented within the ‘lifetime of this Parliament’. Welsh Government, which does not have devolved powers in this matter, has expressed its disappointment.</p> <p>In the meantime, the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) remain the statutory regime whereby deprivations of liberty for people living in care homes and hospitals, who lack mental capacity to consent to their care arrangements, who experience continuous supervision and are not free to leave, can be authorised by Local Authorities and Hospitals. Deprivations of liberty of supported living settings and other non-registered care homes and for 16 and 17 year olds can only be authorised on application to the Court of Protection.</p>

Key Findings	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<p>approximately half were because the mental capacity condition was not met.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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>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>	<p>Welsh Government has maintained its level of funding for DoLS for 2023-24. This funding continues to be used to increase the Council's capacity to undertake DoLS assessments. The Commissioned Provider's contract has been extended for a further 6 months, based on the confirmed funding, this being in addition to our in-house DoLS Team.</p> <p>The maximum duration of a DoLS Authorisation is one year and new assessments have to be undertaken in order to give a further authorisation.</p>

Care Inspectorate Wales National Overview

Report of Assurance Checks Published:

November 2021 on CIW Website

Key Findings	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unprecedented increase in demand for social care 2. Partnership working 3. Recruitment and Retention 4. Fragility within Domiciliary Support Services 5. Placement insufficiency within the childcare sector 6. Advocacy 7. Support for Carers 8. 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>	<p>As set out in the 'Council Response'.</p>

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

Published: November 2021

Key Findings	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<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 	<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>All aspects of the focused activity action plan have been implemented and are being monitored by internal Quality Assurance processes.</p>	<p>The Disabled Children's Team action plan has been completed and are subject to continuous monitoring by internal Quality Assurance processes</p>

Key Findings	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<p>children. The child's preferred method of communication should be used, their voice should be consistently sought, heard and captured</p> <p>4. eligibility criteria for access to statutory services must be fully aligned with the 2014 Act</p> <p>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</p> <p>6. opportunities for consultation with disabled children and their parent/carers should be developed and maximised</p> <p>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> <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</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 programme, was presented to C&YP Scrutiny Committee in September 2021.</p>		

Key Findings	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<p>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</p>			

Key Findings	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<p>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>			

Audit Wales - Local Government Studies

At your Discretion - Local Government Discretionary Services

Published: April 2021

Key Facts Arising	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<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 	<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>	<p>As set out in the 'Council Response'</p>

Key Facts Arising	Council response	November 2022 UPDATE	Position at March 2023
<p>importance of councils as key leaders in our communities who provide essential services and a safety net for people across Wales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 			

[Regenerating town centres in Wales](#)

Published September 2021

Mix of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022	Position at March 2023
<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. 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>	Agree with recommendation	As set out in the 'Council's Response'.	As set out in the 'Council Response'.
<p>R2 Many town-centre businesses are impacted adversely by charging for car parking, access to public transport and poor transport infrastructure. 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>	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.	As set out in the 'Council's Response'.	As set out in the 'Council Response'.

Mix of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022	Position at March 2023
<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. 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>	<p>As set out in the 'Council Response'</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>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</p>	<p>As set out in the 'Council Response'.</p>

Mix of Welsh Government and Local Authority Actions	Council's Response	NOVEMBER 2022	Position at March 2023
<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.</p> <p>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>	<p>As set out in the 'Council's Response'.</p>	<p>We continue to make positive progress in our approach to town centre regeneration, for example, the development of an Aberdare Town Centre Strategy is now in the early stages, with early engagement underway, as reported to the Climate Change, Prosperity and Frontline Services Scrutiny Committee on 15th February 2023 and scheduled for consideration by Cabinet in June 2023.</p>