

Appendix 1:  
WAO Annual Improvement Report - Response to Proposals for Improvement

Date of Report	Title of Review	Lead Service	Link to WAO website	Proposal	Recommendations
Jun-15	DCC Annual Improvement Report	BIM	<a href="http://www.audit.wales/publication/denbighshire-county-council-annual-improvement-report-2015">http://www.audit.wales/publication/denbighshire-county-council-annual-improvement-report-2015</a>	P1	Ensure that the roles and responsibilities are clear for the achievement of the new affordable housing objective

DCC Response

Following recommendations from Wales Audit Office in the Council's Annual Improvement Report May 2014, that the Council clarify its approach to affordable housing delivery, the Council has taken a number of actions to address the issue:

**Restructure** – the Council's approach to housing strategy and policy has been strengthened by combining strategy and policy development in one service area – Planning and Public Protection. Previously responsibility for housing strategy and policy development was split between Housing & Community Development and Planning & Public Protection. The Planning policy and housing strategy teams have been merged to form the Strategic Housing & Planning Team. This is enabling the development of a clearer approach to affordable housing policy.

Officers in the new combined team are working closely with Officers in Property (including those responsible for the Council's housing stock) and finance to ensure affordable/social housing issues are being dealt with together, while maximising the opportunities presented by the HRA to provide more affordable/social housing.

Cabinet members' portfolios have been amended, with one Cabinet member having responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the overarching Housing Strategy, of which Affordable Housing is a key theme.

**Establishment of an Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group** - The Task and Finish Group was chaired by the Cabinet Lead Members with responsibility for planning and housing and comprised councillors from Scrutiny and Planning Committee, supported by the Corporate Director: Economy and Public Realm and relevant Heads of Service (Housing, Planning and Public Protection and Finance and Assets). The Task and Finish Group considered a range of affordable housing issues in depth and agreed a series of clear recommendations for actions aiming to improve the delivery of affordable housing and simplify policies. The recommendations for action from the Task and Finish Group were endorsed by the Council's Community Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in June this year. These actions will form part of Denbighshire's Housing Strategy Delivery Plan, which will sit alongside the emerging Housing Strategy. The Delivery Plan will identify clear priorities, resource requirements and the relevant Lead Member and Head of Service with responsibility for ensuring delivery of each action.

**Progress on key actions identified by the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group –**

- \* Currently investigating innovative housing funding and delivery mechanisms for affordable housing and good practice at other local authorities, such as joint venture schemes, private investment, establishing a housing delivery company, innovative actions to bring empty homes back into use and address eyesore sites. This also includes identifying a wider range of development partners to assist in increasing the supply of affordable housing.
- \* Asset review underway to establish best use and potential to develop/ redevelop Council-owned land. A cross-departmental group has been established to promote and facilitate the redevelopment of several Council-owned sites.
- \* Work has also commenced on promoting other potential development sites and formalising pre-planning application discussions with developers. Consultation is currently underway on draft development briefs for 3 major sites allocated for housing.
- \* Work has commenced on drafting a revised Commuted Sums policy which would allow for a wider range of options for spending commuted sums gathered in lieu of affordable housing units, and this will be completed following agreement of the Draft Local Housing Strategy.
- \* Work is underway in conjunction with Grwp Cynefin to review and simplify the affordable housing application process and register, alongside developing a marketing strategy. Re-launch and promotion of the register will be carried out following this process.
- \* Work has commenced on a standard approach to S106 agreements, with the aim of simplifying and speeding up the planning process, whilst ensuring that it meets mortgage providers' requirements.

**Development of Denbighshire's Housing Strategy** - The emerging Denbighshire Housing Strategy has identified creating a supply of affordable homes as a key theme. One of the priority actions highlighted for the Council will be to develop and implement a clear programme for the delivery of affordable housing with partners which:

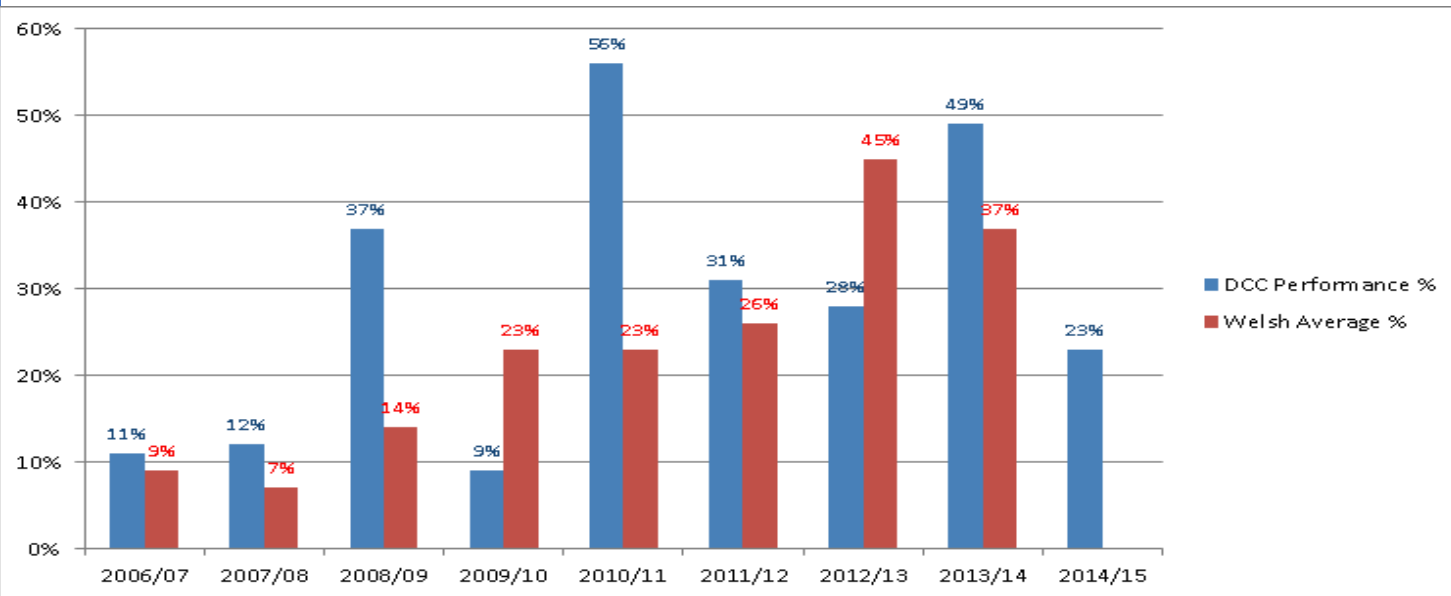
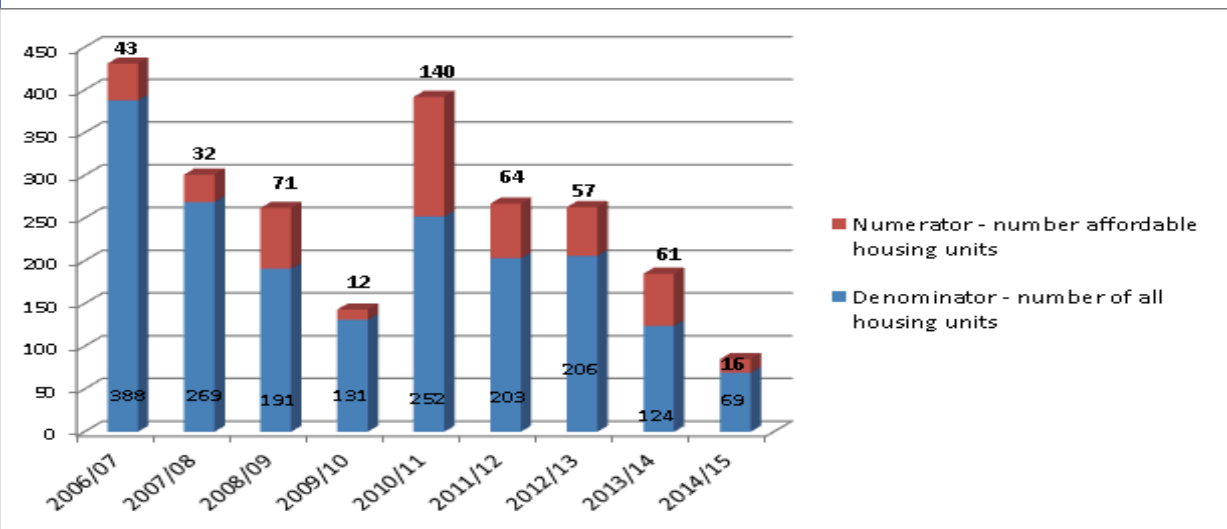
- \* Establishes a targeted programme for spending Section 106 and HRA funds
- \* Maximises use of external funding, including Social Housing Grant
- \* Identifies suitable sites already in Council ownership and establishes a programme for delivery
- \* Identifies investment opportunities for using capital funding
- \* Identifies opportunities for collaboration on development on other public sector land

**Performance Indicators**

\* According to the NSI (PLA/006) Denbighshire delivered 16 affordable homes in 2014/15 (based on 2013/14 data), giving a performance figure of 23%. However, the all Wales data has not yet been made available to the Council (normally released in September of each year) it is not clear how the Council's performance in terms of percentage of affordable housing delivered compares with others Welsh authorities.

\* In the past 8 years (excluding 2014/15) Denbighshire has been above the Welsh average, in performance terms, on 6 occasions. Please see graphs below:

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				P2	Review its working practices against the recommendations in the Auditor General's 2014-15 Local Government National Reports, and implement improvements as necessary
DCC Response					
In future the lead Head of Service will produce a report for committee (whichever is appropriate) on DCC's response to it. The Service Challenge process will also pick up on relevant national studies and highlight relevant recommendations					