

Appendix 2:  
WAO Annual Improvement Report - Response to Recommendations from WAO National Reports

| Date of Report | Title of Review               | Lead Service           | Link to WAO website   | R<br>e<br>c<br>o<br>m<br>m<br>e<br>n<br>d<br>a<br>t<br>i<br>o<br>n | Recommendations   | DCC Response  |
|----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| May-14         | Good Scrutiny? Good Question! | Legal, Democratic & HR | <a href="http://www.audit.wales/publication/good-scrutiny-good-question-auditor-general-wales-improvement-study-scrutiny-local">http://www.audit.wales/publication/good-scrutiny-good-question-auditor-general-wales-improvement-study-scrutiny-local</a> | R1   | Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny   | A meeting was held between Cabinet and Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group (SCVCG) to discuss this aspect (this was prior to the WAO report's publication. It was agreed that relevant lead members would be invited to attend scrutiny meetings when appropriate to present reports within their portfolio and answer questions on them. It was emphasised that they would not be expected to attend unless formally invited to attend. Heads of Service and relevant officers would be expected to attend in a technical/advisory role. The Leade Members' attendance is required for the purpose of holding to account and answering questions, they do not attend to influence the scrutiny process.                                  |
|                |                               |                        |   | R2   | Ensure that scrutiny members, and specifically scrutiny chairs, receive training and support to fully equip them with the skills required to undertake effective scrutiny | Sessions on chairing, questioning and work planning skills were arranged locally with external trainers provided by the the WLGA. First few sessions were well attended, but later ones had to be cancelled due to low numbers indicating their intention to attend.  |
|                |                               |                        |   | R3   | Further develop scrutiny forward work programming to  |   |
|                |                               |                        |   |  | a)provide a clear rationale for topic selection   | Denbighshire has utilised a 'proposal form' for officers to complete for a number of years. This proved an useful method to cut down on unnecessary items appearing on scrutiny work programmes. Consequently, recently the SCVCG has developed a member proposal form which individual members have to complete stating why they think a topic merits scrutiny's attention. This form asks members (and committees at a later stage) the PAPER test for each subject: P - public interest; A - scrutiny's ability to influence and change things; P - performance, is it an underperforming area/service; E- extent, does it affect a large number of residents or a large geographical area; R - replication, is anyone else examining it |
|                |                               |                        |   |  | b) be more outcome focussed   | the application of the PAPER test for all topics helps members and officers focus on the benefits of the scrutiny process and scrutiny's Ability to influence and change eventual outcomes  |
|                |                               |                        |   |  | c) ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; and   | A copy of the Member Proposal Form is attached - on its reverse side is a flow chart which both scrutiny committees and SCVCG are asked to follow when determining whether a topic is suitable for scrutiny. This flowchart emphasises the the need to determine the desired outcome and consider the scope and extent of the scrutiny work required and the most appropriate method to undertake it  |
|                |                               |                        |   |  | d) align scrutiny programmes with the Council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements  | Performance Scrutiny Committee regularly considers reports on the Corporate Plan and Complaints, and identifies any shortcomings or areas of concern for more detailed scrutiny. It also consider the Director of Social Services' Draft Annual Report and identifies areas within that for more detailed scrutiny if appropriate. Scrutiny members also serve on individual service challenge groups and have the opportunity to challenge on a regular basis any areas of concern and escalate them up to consideration by the whole committee if they deem its appropriate.  |
|                |                               |                        |   | R4   | Ensure that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation and that its activities are complementary with the work of external review bodies  | Corporate Governance Committee initially receive all regulators and auditors' reports. If they identify areas of concern which they think would merit scrutiny they can refer them to the SCVCG who will decide on the most appropriate action to be taken - the Chair and Vice-chair of the Corporate Governance Committee serve on the SCVCG therefore there is a good link into scrutiny's work and vice-versa   |
|                |                               |                        |   | R5   | N/A   |   |

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|        |   |           |   | R6 | Ensure that the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and acted upon to improve the function's effectiveness; including following up on proposed actions and examining outcomes                       | This is an area which has been identified for development. At present we undertake an annual self-evaluation exercise for the purpose of the Scrutiny Committees' Annual Report. However, it could be beneficial to undertake specific evaluation exercises following the completion of certain T&F Group reviews to learn lessons for future review exercises.  |
|        |   |           |   | R7 | Undertake regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Scrutiny Officers' Network         | As per above, we have undertaken an annual self-evaluation exercise for the purpose of the Annual Report. This year we developed a questionnaire based on the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government scrutiny'. However, despite the questionnaire being issued to all councillors and senior managers, a very low number were returned - even though a number of reminders were sent. For future exercises we may need to refine our process for undertaking our self-evaluation.  |
|        |   |           |   | R8 | Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study  | We have had the action plan in place for approximately 12 months and we are constantly updating it. This document is fluid and can be amended to reflect the everchanging scrutiny environment and include areas of improvement identified through process such as the self-evaluation exercises.  |
|        |   |           |   | R9 | Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders   | These 10 principles were adopted by the SCVCG on scrutiny's behalf as guides to future scrutiny activities in Denbighshire on 23 September 2014  |
| Jul-14 | Young people not in education, employment or training - Findings from a review of councils in Wales | Education | <a href="http://www.audit.wales/publication/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-findings-review-councils-wales">http://www.audit.wales/publication/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-findings-review-councils-wales</a> | R1 | Together with partners, map and review expenditure on NEETs services to better understand the resources required to deliver the Framework  | We were successful with Conwy BC in obtaining funding for the Progressive Engagement project between 2012 and 2014. Hosted by Coleg Llandrillo, Rhos, PEP mapped provision funded by ESF, lottery and other sources that targeted the 19-24 age group. This also involved a dialogue with young people themselves. We have also mapped provision for 16-18 year olds as part of Denbighshire's Youth Engagement Implementation Plan. See attachments.  |
|        |   |           |   | R2 | Clarify their strategic approach to reducing the proportion of 19-24 year olds who are NEET as well as their approach for 16 to 18 year olds   | DCC is lead for the N W Region's ESF 11-24 TRAC Project, endorsed by the N W Economic Ambition Board and targeting the prevention and reduction in young people vulnerable to becoming NEET. The full Business Case has been submitted to WEFO for the 11-18 element of the Project (June 2015), and the 16 - 24 element will be submitted in September 2015. The Conwy & Denbighshire Youth Engagement Strategic Group was established in 2013 to achieve the object of reducing the number of young people becoming NEET aged 16 - 24  |
|        |   |           |   | R3 | Focus on young people with significant or multiple barriers to engaging with education, employment or training rather than those who are more likely to re-engage without significant additional support | The Conwy & Denbighshire Youth Engagement Strategic Group has partners from Education, Youth Service, wider youth services in the third sector, FE, health, DWP, to look at strategic issues and receives reports from the Additional Learning Needs group that focuses on the progression of leavers from the special school's in Conwy & Denbighshire. Individual care leavers and those who have had involvement with the social services are reviewed and followed up in Denbighshire Transition Meetings, convened by Social Services, and for school aged pupils through the Multi Agency Panels in each of our high schools.  |
|        |   |           |   | R4 | Develop their objectives and targets for reducing the number of young people NEET so that they can be held to account and their work aligns with the Welsh Government's targets and objectives           | Monthly 5 Tier Report from Careers Wales are reported to the Denbighshire 14-19 network, the Secondary Schools Senior Leadership teams (every 6 weeks) and the Children Young People and Families Group, with progress noted against the WG Targets and Objectives. DCC produces a yearly update to Youth Engagement and Progression Implementation Plan for WG that is followed up by a monitoring visit by WG.   |
|        |   |           |   | R5 | Ensure that elected members and partners fully understand that councils have a clear responsibility for leading and coordinating youth services for 16 to 24 year olds                                   | This refers to the broader range of youth support that the council and partners engage in and offers to young people in that age group. Recent service challenge and budget cutting processes - involving a number of stakeholders, including young people and county council members - have considered the context that services working with young people up to 24 yrs. WEFO bids are being progressed to implement new additional activity with partners through the Learning Pathways network. The Youth Service is one of those partners and other 'youth services' are engaged in this process. In addition we meet to review progress of post 16s through a Youth Panel following updates from Careers Wales. |
|        |   |           |   | R6 | Improve the evaluation and relative value for money of the services and interventions in their area that are intended to reduce the proportion of young people who are NEET                              | The ESF Potensial Project targeted reducing NEETs at 16 - a full evaluation has been published. The new Regional TRAC project will be reporting regularly on outcomes and WEFO outputs in line with WEFO guidelines  |

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| Oct-14 | Delivering with less - the impact on environmental health services and citizens  | Planning & Public Protection                   | <a href="http://www.audit.wales/publication/delivering-less-%E2%80%93-impact-environmental-health-services-and-citizens">http://www.audit.wales/publication/delivering-less-%E2%80%93-impact-environmental-health-services-and-citizens</a> | R1  | Revise the best practice standards to:   | The Wales Heads of Environmental Health Group and Technical Panels will be leading on reviewing and updating the Best Practice Standards on behalf of all Welsh Local Authorities. Some Denbighshire officers will be attending the technical panels and will contribute to the review.   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   |   | a) align the work of environmental health with national strategic priorities   |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   |   | b) identify the wider contribution of environmental health in delivering strategic priorities of the Welsh Government, and   |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   |   | c) identify the benefit and impact of environmental health services on protecting citizens   |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | R2  | Provide scrutiny chairs and members with the necessary skills and support to effectively scrutinise and challenge service performance, savings plans and the impact of budget restrictions   |   | In addition to work being undertaken by the WLGA in response to this report, please see response to Good Scrutiny? Good Question! Report, above                          |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | R3  | Improve engagement with local residents over planned budget cuts and changes in services by:   |   | In Denbighshire the Local Authority continues to engage with local residents on planned budget cuts through the Freedoms & Flexibilities and Cutting Our Cloth processes |  |  |
|        |  |  |   |   | a) consulting with residents on planned changes in services and using the findings to shape decisions  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   |   | b) outlining which services are to be cut and how these cuts will impact on residents; and   |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   |   |  |   |  | c) setting out plans for increasing charges or changing standards of service |  |
|        |  |  |   |   |  |   |  | R4   | Improve efficiency and value for money by: |
|        |  |  |   | a) identifying the statutory and non-statutory duties of council environmental health services  |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | b) Agreeing environmental health priorities for the future and the role of councils in delivering these   |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | c) Determining an 'acceptable standard of performance' for environmental health services (upper and lower) and publicise these to citizens  |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | d) Improving efficiency and maintaining performance to the agreed level through:  |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | i) collaborating and/or integrating with others to reduce cost and/or improve quality   |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | ii) outsourcing where services can be delivered more cost effectively to agreed standards   |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | iii) introducing and/or increasing charges and focusing on income-generation activity   |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | iv) using grants strategically to maximise impact and return; and   |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | v) reducing activities to focus on core statutory and strategic priorities  |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | R5  | Improve strategic planning by:   | We have used the approach of analysing costs, benefit and income when deciding on future environmental health services. We are considering an improved environmental health and wider Public Protection database system, following the all Wales procurement exercise.  |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | a) Identifying, collecting and analysing financial, performance and demand/need data on environmental health services   |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | b) analysing collected data to inform and understand the relationship between 'cost:benefit:impact' and use this intelligence to underpin decisions on the future of council environmental health services; and |  |   |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | c) agree how digital information can be used to plan and develop environmental health services in future  |  |   |  |  |  |
| Jan-15 | Managing the Impact of Welfare Reform Changes on Social Housing Tenants in Wales | Finance & Assets/Customers & Education Support | <a href="http://www.audit.wales/publication/managing-impact-welfare-reform-changes-social-housing-tenants-wales">http://www.audit.wales/publication/managing-impact-welfare-reform-changes-social-housing-tenants-wales</a>                 | R1  | Improve strategic planning and better coordinate activity to tackle the impact of welfare reform on social-housing tenants by ensuring comprehensive action plans are in place that cover the work of all relevant council departments, housing associations and the work of external stakeholders | An Anti-Poverty Group is being established in the Council. Its goal is to bring strategic oversight across all four national anti-poverty programmes, as well as keeping abreast of latest issues and research in order to reduce poverty and its associated problems in the county. This is likely to cover welfare reform and social housing. |  |  |  |
|        |  |  |   | R2  | Improve governance and accountability for welfare reform by:   |   |  |  |  |

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|  |  |    | a) appointing member and officer leads to take responsibility for strategic leadership on welfare reform and be accountable for performance, and   | A dedicated Officer at Director level (Nicola Stubbins) and and Elected Members at Cabinet level (Hugh Irving) are in place   |
|  |  |    | b) ensuring members receive adequate training and regular briefings on welfare reform to be able to challenge and scrutinise performance and decisions   | There are groups and boards in place for welfare reform , including the Welfare reform group, Citizens Advice Bureau meetings, and an Operations Board .  |
|  |  | R3 | Ensure effective management of performance on welfare reform by:   |   |
|  |  |    | a) setting appropriate measures to enable members, officers and the public to judge progress in delivering actions   | Outcomes and measures are being monitored with the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and KPI's are being monitored in relation to the Revs & Bens Contract   |
|  |  |    | b) ensuring performance information covers the work of all relevant agencies and especially housing associations, and  | We have a range of Performance Reports in place and monthly operations meeting for managing the work of our associated agencies.  |
|  |  |    | c) establishing measures to judge the wider impact of welfare reform   | Denbighshire area network, LSB  |
|  |  | R4 | Strengthen how welfare-reform risks are managed by creating a single corporate-level approach that coordinates activity across the Council and the work of others to provide adequate assurance that all the necessary and appropriate actions to mitigate risk are taking place | The officer/Member Welfare Reform group is in existence (and has been for a few years) with this purpose.   |
|  |  | R5 | Improve engagement with tenants affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy through:   |   |
|  |  |    | a) the provision of regular advice and information in the options open to them to address the financial impact of the change in their circumstances  | See response to R4 above. Also, a number of key actions are being developed to provide a more strategic direction to the management of DCC's housing stock and improve our engagement with tenants. |
|  |  |    | b) the promotion of the 'Your benefits are changing' helpline, and   |   |
|  |  |    | c) the provision of support to tenants specifically affected by the removal of the spare-room subsidy to participate in regional/national employment schemes   |   |
|  |  | R7 | Improve management, access to and use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) by:  |   |
|  |  |    | a) establishing a clear policy or guide that is available in hard copy and online to the public that sets out the Council's policy and arrangements for administering DHP  | An All Wales DHP policy was approved by Cabinet March 2015  |
|  |  |    | b) clearly defining eligible and non-eligible housing costs covered by DHP in application forms, policy documentation and applicant guidance leaflets  | Included in All Wales DHP Policy  |
|  |  |    | c) clearly setting out the maximum/minimum length of time that such payments will be provided  | This forms part of the application letters following a decision by DCC  |
|  |  |    | d) setting an publishing the timescale for the Council making a decision on DHP applications   | The publishing time scale is 10 days  |
|  |  |    | e) including information within public literature on the Council's policy for right to review of appeal of a decision and the timescales an process to be followed in deciding on these; and   | Within All Wales DHP policy   |
|  |  |    | f) clearly define the priority groups for DHP in public literature to ensure that those seeking assistance, and those agencies supporting them, can assess whether such payments are a viable option to address their housing and financial needs                                | Within All Wales DHP policy and with the Third Sector and partners  |