

**Report to:** Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 14<sup>th</sup> April 2016

**Lead Member/Officer:** Lead Member for Social Care (Adults and Children's Services)/  
Head of Community Support Services

**Report Authors:** Older People's Strategy Development Officer/  
Service Manager – Communities and Wellbeing

**Title:** Supporting the Independence of Older People – Wales  
Audit Office Report

---

## 1. What is the report about?

This committee report describes the findings and recommendations of the Wales Audit Office report, "*Supporting the Independence of Older People: Are Councils Doing Enough?*" and it describes how Denbighshire is responding to the recommendations. The recommendations and actions identified are attached to this report within an Action Plan. (Please see Appendix 1)

The report can be found via the following link:

<http://www.audit.wales/publications/Independence-of-Older-People>

A summary of the report is attached as Appendix 2

## 2. What is the reason for making this report?

All local authorities in Wales are expected to consider the findings and recommendations of this Wales Audit Office report as it has important implications for our corporate performance in delivering services that support older people in Denbighshire, including the range of preventative services that exist.

## 3. What are the Recommendations?

That Partnerships Scrutiny Committee considers this report, comments and endorses the need for a corporate approach to implementing its recommendations through the range of actions as listed in the Action Plan (Appendix 1). It is proposed that that the recommendations are addressed via the Older People Reference Group, which already has responsibility for implementing Denbighshire's Ageing Well Plan.

## 4. Report details

4.1 During 2015, the Wales Audit Office examined whether Councils are working effectively to support the independence of older people outside of Health and Social Care. The work was undertaken jointly with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales and the office of the Older People's Commissioner in Wales. This is an important report which addresses the impact of budgetary cuts on the ability of local

authorities to maintain a range of services, which are considered important in helping to prevent the need for health and social care interventions and support the independence of older people. They include services in the following areas:

- Practical support services
- Advice and information services
- Community based facilities
- Housing and housing based services
- Transport

4.2 The report makes the point that it has been very difficult for local authorities to maintain these type of services when the funding available to them has reduced substantially in recent years, at the same time as having to deal with meeting the needs of an increasing older population, including higher numbers of people aged 85 + with more complex needs.

4.3 The report identifies that Welsh Government funding to local authorities has reduced by 10% in the years between 10/11 and 14/15 whilst expenditure on services which can support prevention reduced by 16.8 % in the year 13/14 to 14/15.

*“To compensate for protecting social care services, councils have had to make difficult decisions and cut funding elsewhere, often in preventative services that help older people to live independently. These are the very services the 2014 Social Services and Well-being Act is promoting as essential to maintaining people in their home and outside of the expensive health and social care system.”*

4.4 The Independence of Older People report considers whether Local Authorities provide effective leadership on; issues relating to older people, the impact of reduced budgets on older people`s services and the ways that Local Authorities performance manage services for older people. It concludes that Councils in Wales often focus too much on the delivery of social services and do not always recognise the important contribution that other services can make in supporting and sustaining the independence of older people. It also makes reference to the fact there was a surfeit of often disconnected plans and strategies which do not capture key issues regarding older people.

4.5 Furthermore, the report found that while there are some innovative examples of councils supporting older people, the wider preventative services that can help to reduce demand for health and social services are undervalued.

*“Older people want to retain their independence and health for as long as possible. To do this often requires the provision of practical support services, which can make a significant positive impact to the continued independence, and well-being, of older people. These are services such as buses and community transport, and assistance with cleaning, gardening and shopping. Being able to get out and about, keep active and develop new skills can make a positive impact on helping older people to continue to live independently and avoid expensive health and social care services.”*

4.6 The report also found there is often a lack of data, which makes it difficult for councils to demonstrate the impact of their services in supporting the independence of older people and weakens the decision making and scrutiny when setting future priorities.

4.7 The report concludes that if Councils continue to cut spending on preventative services then problems such as loneliness and isolation amongst older people will be exacerbated. There is a need to empower individuals and communities to take more

control and shift the reliance away from care services and look more closely at the value of services that maintain independence and promote wellbeing. (This message is, in fact, a central one within the Social Services and Well-being Wales Act which is being implemented this month)

4.8 As part of our Supporting Independence in Denbighshire Strategy, Community Support Services have developed a range of initiatives to strengthen preventative services for older people in Denbighshire. They include:

- Producing an Ageing Well Plan which identifies a range of actions in relation to developing age-friendly and dementia supportive communities, addressing social isolation and loneliness, falls prevention and developing greater opportunities for developing new skills and employment for older people
- Utilising the Intermediate Care Fund grant to develop a range of initiatives such as Community Navigator, a third sector project to enhance the range of options available to support people in the community
- Continuing to support the third sector at the same level despite budgetary cuts, but ensuring that supporting independence is a key condition for grant funding. New projects, which specifically support the independence of older people, have also been developed, such as Y Waen.
- Strengthening our Single Point of Access service as part of our drive to improve access to advice and information
- Developing the Community Led Conversation initiative, which includes the establishment of 'Talking Points', which aim to reach out to people within their own communities and prevent the need for referrals to be made for services
- Hosting a major event regarding Social Isolation and Loneliness
- Changing our approach to assisting individuals in preparation for the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act, so that there is much greater emphasis on prevention and a focus on the strengths of individuals and the support available within their families and communities rather than trying to fit them to particular services

4.9 Over the next twelve months our Supporting Independence in Denbighshire Strategy will be developed further so that there is a much stronger corporate approach to supporting older people within their communities. The Wales Audit Office report refers to some of the key services which are of vital importance to older people. They include; public libraries, public toilets, supported housing, public transport, visiting and befriending, fitting safety and security devices and assistance with minor household tasks. According to the report, many of these type of services have been very vulnerable to budgetary cuts in recent years but they are of vital importance in supporting people within their communities and preventing or delaying the need for far more expensive health and social care services.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

One of the Council's priorities is that vulnerable people are protected and able to live as independently as possible'. The issues covered by the Wales Audit Office report are very relevant to this particular priority.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

There are no financial implications on a particular service area in terms of additional costs. However, we are already funding a range of initiatives both on a corporate basis and Community Support Service basis which contribute to the independence of older people, for example, a range of third sector services which receive grant funding.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report**

This report does not require an Equality Impact Assessment as it makes no changes to policy or service delivery.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

The Wales Audit Office's report was prepared following extensive consultation with a number of older people, third sector agencies, a range of Denbighshire County Council officers and Denbighshire's Older People's Champion. The Older People's Reference Group, which has representation from a number of agencies, will be involved in taking forward key recommendations as it has a key role in implementing our Ageing Well Plan.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

Not applicable

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

The main risks are that, without an effective corporate approach to preventative services for older people and an increasing number of older people with complex needs, mainstream services for older people will become unsustainable.

## **11. Power to make the Decision**

The County Council has an agreement in place with the Wales Audit Office that, when they publish a National Study, we will formally respond through the relevant Service taking a report to the most appropriate Committee. This report should set out our response to the National Study, and its recommendations. The County Council's response to this report is important in relation to the Wales Audit Office's pending Corporate Assessment.

Article 6.3.2(c) states that scrutiny may consider any matter which affects the area or its inhabitants.

### **Contact Officer:**

Service Manager: Communities and Wellbeing, Community Support Services

Tel: 01824 706632