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Date 17 September 2012  
Our reference 494A2012  
Your reference  
Tel No  
E-mail  
Pages 1 of 7

Dear Mohammed

## Improvement Assessment

I am required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) to report my audit and assessment work in relation to whether Denbighshire County Council has discharged its duties and met the requirements of the Measure.

This letter summarises:

- my views on whether the Council has discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning;
- my views on the Council's compliance with requirements to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement, based on work carried out to date by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators, including:
  - the Council's progress on areas for improvement and recommendations identified in my previous assessments;
  - any relevant issues that may have emerged since my last report, including comments on how the Council is addressing financial challenges; and
  - a brief summary of any reports of relevant regulators issued since my last report.
- my further proposals for improvement and/or recommendations; and
- updates to the Wales Audit Office work plan and timetable for delivering my Improvement Assessment work.

I shall update my views during the year and will provide a further letter by the end of November 2012.

**I am unable to state whether the Council has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure as the Council has not yet published its Improvement Plan for this year**

Following the local government elections in May 2012 the Council appointed a new Cabinet. The composition of the Cabinet has changed but remains politically balanced, in accordance with the Council's constitution. Labour councillors now form the opposition group.

The Council is currently developing a new Corporate Plan and determining whether it can deliver all of its proposed seven draft priorities by 2017. Councillors are leading these discussions, which are now subject to further public consultation, and the Council anticipates the Corporate Plan will be agreed in the autumn of 2012. The Council is undertaking a considerable amount of consultation and engagement with residents and its staff including:

- a Residents' Survey: 2,256 households responded to a survey;
- a Public Survey: 1,228 people responded to a survey on the Council's website and in leisure centres, libraries, and Council reception areas; and
- workshops with young people.

I shall provide a further letter by the end of November 2012 which will assess whether the Council has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure and review the goals (including but by no means limited to performance indicators and targets) that the Council has set for itself in order to monitor its delivery of its improvement objectives.

**Based on, and limited to, work carried out to date by the Wales Audit Office and relevant regulators:**

**I believe that the Council is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement during this financial year**

I have reached this conclusion because:

- the Council is making reasonable progress in both areas for improvement identified in my last Annual Improvement Report;
- the Council's current arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement once the Council further strengthens its ICT governance arrangements and successfully completes Phase One of its ICT strategy;

- an inspection by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (the CSSIW) concluded that the Council is providing responsive and timely assessment to most of the adults presenting with social care needs and is responding to the challenges experienced in implementing and further developing the Council's strategy; and
- Estyn has judged that the Council provides good quality education services for children and young people and that prospects for improvement are good.

### **The Council is making reasonable progress in both areas for improvement identified in my last Annual Improvement Report**

I made two proposals for improvement in my Annual Improvement Report, published in January 2012, and also noted some areas where we would undertake further work. Progress on these matters is summarised below and in Appendix 1:

- I proposed that the Council should use its annual review of its governance arrangements to provide a more robust self-assessment of their effectiveness. The Council undertook a corporate governance review as part of the process to update and agree its *Annual Governance Statement*. The review found that the Council had adequate arrangements in place for meeting the six principles in the framework but the review of the effectiveness of the arrangements identified three significant governance risks:
  - Partnership governance
  - Information governance
  - Elected member performance and development

The Council is drafting its new Annual Governance Statement. We shall be conducting further work at all councils in Wales on the production of the Annual Governance Statements and I shall produce a national report in due course. I shall provide further feedback to the Council later this year.

- I proposed that, by September 2012, the Council should establish in more detail how it will support the *Rhyl Going Forward* delivery plan. Managerial responsibility within the Council for *Rhyl Going Forward* is undergoing a period of transition as part of the reorganisation of duties amongst the Council's heads of service whilst, at senior level, the newly appointed Corporate Director of Economic and Community Ambition will assume responsibility for economic development. I shall provide a further assessment of progress with regard to the *Rhyl Going Forward* delivery plan later in the year, including an evaluation of :
  - how the plan fits with the county regeneration programme;
  - the extent to which the plan confirms the staff and financial resources that will be available to support delivery; and
  - the arrangements for periodic evaluation of progress.

**The Council's current arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement once the Council further strengthens its ICT governance arrangements and successfully completes Phase One of its ICT strategy**

I came to this conclusion because:

The Council has focused on developing customer access channels which are starting to perform well, but is not fully exploiting the potential of technology to deliver service transformation and efficiencies.

ICT governance arrangements do not fully align with and support the delivery of the Council's improvement and transformation priorities and there are weaknesses in technology resourcing arrangements.

**An inspection by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (the CSSIW) concluded that the Council is providing responsive and timely assessment to most of the adults presenting with social care needs and is responding to the challenges experienced in implementing and further developing the Council's strategy**

The CSSIW undertook an inspection of the arrangements for the assessment and care management of adults referred to the Council's Social Services. The report was published in June 2012.

The main conclusions are:

- The service model adopted by the Council is enabling it to provide a responsive and timely assessment to most of the adults presenting with social care needs.
- The Council is able to provide considerable evidence of service-user satisfaction. New practices are being introduced to try to ensure that service-user feedback is embedded in social services interventions and used more effectively to inform performance management and service evaluation and development.
- The Council's strategy is to support the development of a range of services and mainstream community facilities to meet need in a way which encourages independence. Whilst a range of service is being developed, challenges remain in relation to certain specialised areas, such as increasing direct payments.

## **Estyn has judged that the Council provides good quality education services for children and young people and that prospects for further improvement are good**

Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales (Estyn) undertook an inspection of the Council's education services for children and young people. The report was published in February 2012.

The main conclusions are that:

- pupils' overall performance is good and has improved in all key stages, particularly in key stage 4;
- performance has improved against the Welsh Government's expected benchmarks based on free-school-meal entitlement;
- the number of exclusions has reduced and the overall number of days lost to exclusion is the lowest in Wales;
- the Council has very good arrangements to support and challenge schools and knows its schools very well;
- support for school improvement, additional learning needs and social inclusion are all good;
- the number of Denbighshire schools requiring follow-up after an inspection is among the lowest in Wales;
- the Council has made good progress in delivering its Modernising Education programme;
- the culture of very strong leadership from elected members and senior officers has driven significant change and improvement at a good pace; and
- the prospects for improvement are good.

## **Further proposals for improvement/recommendations**

I make no new recommendations or proposals for improvement in this letter. We will continue to monitor and report on the progress made by the Council in implementing the proposals set out in my previous reports and letters.

## **Updates to the work plan and timetable**

My Improvement Assessment Team will keep the Council informed of the detailed arrangements for the delivery of my assessment work. The regularly updated work plan and timetable provides more detail on the work being delivered during this year's assessment and in particular how we will add value by focusing on jointly identified areas or services.

The work plan and timetable takes account of my consultation with improvement authorities over my proposals for 2012-13 performance audit work. In particular, I shall be asking my Improvement Assessment Team to consider during the year the reliance that we can place upon the self-assessment processes (including your review of governance in producing the Annual Governance Statement and your Annual Performance Report). I shall comment on this approach in my Annual Improvement Report.

I am grateful to the Council for the way in which it has helped to facilitate our work. I remain committed to providing appropriate levels of public assurance while supporting you in mitigating the inevitable risks to services and accountability that stem from reducing resources and consequential change.

Yours sincerely



**HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS**

**AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES**

CC: Carl Sargeant, Minister for Local Government and Communities

Huw Lloyd Jones – Manager

Gwilym Bury – Performance Audit Lead

## Appendix 1

Proposals for improvement made in the Annual Improvement Report 2012	Progress
<p>P1 The Council, in common with other authorities in Wales, should use its annual review of governance arrangements to provide a more robust self-assessment of their effectiveness.</p>	<p>I proposed that the Council should use its annual review of its governance arrangements to provide a more robust self-assessment of their effectiveness. The Council undertook a corporate governance review as part of the process to update and agree its <i>Annual Governance Statement</i>. The review found that the Council had adequate arrangements in place for meeting the six principles in the framework but the review of the effectiveness of the arrangements identified three significant governance risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership governance</li> <li>• Information governance</li> <li>• Elected member performance and development</li> </ul> <p>The Council is drafting its new Annual Governance Statement. We shall be conducting further work at all councils in Wales on the production of the Annual Governance Statements and I shall produce a national report in due course. I shall provide further feedback to the Council later this year.</p>
<p>P2 By September 2012 the Council should establish how it will support the Rhyl Going Forward delivery plan including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• showing how it fits with the county regeneration programme;</li> <li>• confirming the staff and financial resources that will be available to support delivery; and</li> <li>• arrangements for periodic evaluation of progress.</li> </ul>	<p>I proposed that, by September 2012, the Council should establish in more detail how it will support the <i>Rhyl Going Forward</i> delivery plan. Managerial responsibility within the Council for <i>Rhyl Going Forward</i> is undergoing a period of transition as part of the reorganisation of duties amongst the Council's heads of service whilst, at senior level, the newly appointed Corporate Director of Economic and Community Ambition will assume responsibility for economic development. I shall provide a further assessment of progress with regard to the <i>Rhyl Going Forward</i> delivery plan later in the year.</p>