

Committee: **Community Services Scrutiny Committee**  
 Date of meeting: **27<sup>th</sup> February 2020**  
 Report Subject: **Wales Audit Office: Delivering with Less – Environmental Health follow-up review – November 2019**  
 Portfolio Holder: **Councillor Garth Collier, Deputy Leader / Executive Member Environment**  
 Report Submitted by: **David Thompson – Service Manager – Public Protection**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
21/1/20	28/1/20	13.03.20	31.03.20		27/02/20			

**1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to present Community Services Scrutiny Committee with the Wales Audit Office’s (WAO) Delivering with Less – Environmental Health follow-up review (Appendix 1) and the Authority’s response to the WAO’s proposals for further improvement.

**2. Scope and Background**

2.1 As part of his ‘delivering with less’ series of Local Government Improvement Studies, the Auditor General published the report, Delivering with less – the impact on environmental health services and citizens, in October 2014.

2.2 In this report, the Auditor General drew attention to recent and forthcoming legislation, and the concerns of Councils that they would be unable to deliver the commitments contained within it. Many of the legislative proposals referred to in the Auditor General’s 2014 report have subsequently been implemented, including the Housing Act (Wales) 2014 and the Public Health (Wales) Act in 2017. The Auditor General also published local reports for each Council as part of the 2014 study.

2.3 The follow-up review assessed whether there have been any budget and staff changes within the Council’s environmental health services and the extent to which it has addressed the recommendations included in the 2014 national report. For the purposes of this review, WAO focussed on the Council’s progress in addressing recommendations 2,3,4, and 5 of the national report, which are summarised below:

- 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 reductions (Recommendation 2)

- Improve engagement with local residents over planned budget cuts and changes (Recommendation 3)
- Improve efficiency and value for money (Recommendation 4)
- Improve strategic planning (Recommendation 5)

2.4 WAO findings. The review sought to answer the question: **Has the Council acted upon the recommendations in the Auditor General's Environmental health – Delivering with Less report published in October 2014?**

2.5 Overall WAO concluded that: **The Council has made progress in addressing the recommendations raised in 2014. Collaborative working with Torfaen CBC to date has contributed to the Council's ability to deliver with less. Following the withdrawal from the arrangement in November 2019 the Council will face additional financial and operational pressures that may affect its ability to continue providing environmental health services to the same standard.**

2.6 In summary, WAO reached the above conclusion because:

- i. Environmental health services are routinely considered by the Council's scrutiny arrangements. Support to Members is provided proactively and training compares well against what has been observed elsewhere.
- ii. Frontline environmental health services have not been subject to budget cuts in this period, although residents have been consulted on changes.
- iii. The Council has identified its statutory and non-statutory duties and self-assessed against the Best Practice Standards.
- iv. Environmental health priorities have been agreed and documented in the service business plan.
- v. The Council has improved efficiency and maintained performance via outsourcing of services and collaborative working with Torfaen CBC, which resulted in a 38% reduction in Manager grade FTE since 2014.
- vi. Environmental health service objectives are aligned to corporate and wellbeing objectives. The Council currently makes limited use of technology and ICT in service delivery.
- vii. Budgets for environmental health services have reduced from £1.7 million in 2013-14 to £1.5 million in 2019-20, which represents a reduction of approximately 13.5%.
- viii. Following termination of the joint working arrangement the Council will face additional financial pressures and should consider how services may need to change as a result. The financial impact of this decision has been estimated as £35,000 in 2019-20 and £100,000 recurring each year thereafter.

- ix. As a result of the above, the Council is considering reconfiguring its service.
- 2.7 As a result of the review, WAO has identified the following proposals for improvement:
- 2.7.1 The Council should ensure that it has assessed the impact of withdrawing from the collaborative working arrangement with Torfaen CBC on the financial and operational sustainability of the environmental health service. It also needs to consider how to continue to respond to the Council's budget challenge and to new legislation. This may include:
- i. seeking new partnership agreements with other Authorities;
  - ii. review of existing contracts with third party providers to maximise income generation opportunities
  - iii. transformation and innovation, such as use of digital intelligence to predict future patterns of service delivery and/or inform decision-making around service provision.
- 2.7.2 In reconfiguring the service, the Council should ensure that statutory powers and duties are sufficiently prioritised alongside discretionary areas.
- 2.8 The Authority's response to the above recommendations have been tabulated and outlined in Appendix 2.
3. **Options for Recommendation**
- 3.1 **Option 1** – That members consider the report and support the Officer's response to the WAOs recommended proposals
- 3.2 **Option 2** - That members consider the report and the proposals in Appendix 2 and make any alternative recommendations for consideration by Executive Committee.
4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**  
The services under review in this report are statutory front line duties, a number of which also align to the Authority's Regeneration, Environmental and Social Services corporate priorities.
5. **Implications Against Each Option**
- 5.1 ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***  
There are no direct financial implications a result of this report.
- 5.2 ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***  
The Council recognises it needs to address the proposals for improvement from the WAO.
- 5.3 ***Legal***  
There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.4 **Human Resources**

There are no additional workforce implications as a direct result of this WAO report.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 **Performance Information and Data**

Officers have identified the steps that should be taken to achieve these suggested agreed improvements (Appendix 2).

6.2 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Not applicable to this report.

6.3 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

The services that have been subject to WAO review in this report are designed to promote short, medium and longer-term public health gain in the community.

6.4 **Preventative focus**

The services that have been subject to this WAO review are aligned to the prevention agenda by promoting social, physical and mental well-being.

6.5 **Collaboration / partnership working**

Collaboration issues have been discussed as part of the review outlined in this report.

6.6 **Integration (across service areas)**

The services that have been subject to this WAO review positively impact on the work undertaken by other internal departments and other public bodies such as the NHS, Police and other local authorities.

6.7 **EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)**

Not directly applicable in relation to this report.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1 The proposals for improvement from the WAO will be included within the relevant business plan and updated Quarterly. The information will be reported within the Finance and Performance Report to Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee and Executive Committee.

**Background Documents /Electronic Links**

Appendix 1 – WAO Report – Environmental Health follow-up

Appendix 2 – Management Response