



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Regeneration and Sustainable Development Cabinet Board 18th October 2019

Report of Head of Planning & Public Protection Nicola Pearce

Matter for: Decision

Wards Affected: All

Wales Audit Report Re. Environmental Health

Purpose of the Report:

1. To present the Wales Audit Office's (WAO) findings from their follow up work based on the national report: 'Delivering with less –the impact on Environmental Health Services and Citizens' (published in 2014 and local report published 2015).

Background:

2. In 2014, the Auditor General published a national report 'Delivering with Less - the impact on Environmental Health Services and Citizens'. A local report on the same subject specific to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council was published in January 2015.
3. The aim of the WAO follow up review was to:
 - follow up learning identified in the 2014 and 2015 reports

- consider the impact of reductions in local government funding on the Council's environmental health services
 - look at the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for delivering environmental health services
4. Officers from the WAO have presented back the findings (via power point) to the Head of Service and Service Manager, resulting in a positive feedback session (attached at Appendix 1). The WAO will not be publishing the presentation on its website but will include the overall evaluative heading and the proposals for improvement (slides 9 and 10) in the Auditor General's Annual Improvement Report for this Council.

Main Findings:

5. Overall the review found that:
- the Council considers that it is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for Environmental Health services with reduced resources
 - the Council is changing the way it delivers its Environmental Health services to make better use of the resources available but performance management arrangements for the service need strengthening.
6. The review recommended two proposals for improvement (P1 & P2) as follows:

P1: Strengthen business planning by ensuring that the impact of and response to increased demand on resource requirements is clearly set out in the business plan

P2: The Council needs to strengthen performance management by reviewing the information it is using to assess the performance of its environmental health services to ensure it supports a full and accurate assessment of performance to drive improvement; and having a mechanism in place for assuring itself that it is delivering its statutory environmental health services.

7. An action plan to address the proposals for improvement is attached at Appendix 2

Financial Impact:

8. The audit work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office has been delivered within the budget allocated for audit and inspection work.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

9. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

10. No implications.

Workforce Impacts:

11. No implications.

Legal Impacts:

12. Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) and Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Auditor General for Wales is required to carry out audit work of the Council's business throughout the year as agreed in the audit programme and to assess whether the Council has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources.

Risk Management Impacts:

13. The Audit has not identified any corporate governance issues.

Consultation:

14. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations:

15. That Cabinet note the WAO findings following their review of the Council's online services and that the proposed action plan in response to the review findings be approved.

Reason for Proposed Decision:

16. For the approved action plan to be forwarded to the Wales Audit Office.

Implementation of Decision:

17. The decision is proposed for implementation after the three day call in period.

Recommendations:

18. That Cabinet Board note the WAO findings following their follow up review.
19. That Cabinet Board approve the proposed action plan.

Appendices:

20. Appendix 1 – Power point slides: Wales Audit Office Delivering with Less - Environmental Health Services follow up.
21. Appendix 2 – Proposed action plan to address proposals for improvement

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Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales



**Delivering with Less – Environmental Health Services
Follow up
Feedback Presentation to Council Officers – 20.6.19
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**

Reference: 1362A2019-20

Date: June 2019

Authors: Colin Davies, Katherine Simmons and Alison Lewis

What we reviewed

- In 2014, the Auditor General published a national report 'Delivering with Less – the Impact on Environmental Health Services and Citizens'. A local report, specific to Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, on the same subject was published in January 2015.
- This high level review:
 - follows up learning identified in our 2014 and 2015 reports;
 - considers the impact of reductions in local government funding on the Council's environmental health services; and
 - looks at the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for delivering environmental health services.
- Our approach included three interviews with Council officers and a document review. The fieldwork for this review took place in February and March 2019.

Summary

- Our review sought to answer the question:
Is the Council's environmental health service continuing to deliver its statutory obligations with fewer resources?
- Overall we found that:
The Council considers that it is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for environmental health services with reduced resources and we found that the Council is changing the way it delivers its environmental health services to make better use of the resources available but performance management arrangements for the service need strengthening.

The Council considers that is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for environmental health services with reduced resources and we found that the Council is changing the way it delivers its environmental health services to make better use of the resources available

Key Findings

- In 2016 the environmental health function in Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council was restructured. Most environmental health services now sit in the Planning and Public Protection Service. The pest and dog control services now sit within Neighbourhood Services.
- The service restructures have made it difficult to make comparisons between current budget and staffing levels and those reported in our 2014 review. However, the Council was able to provide some evidence to show that the overall staffing levels for delivering environmental health services have decreased by at least a fifth between 2013 and 2019.

The Council considers that is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for environmental health services with reduced resources and we found that the Council is changing the way it delivers its environmental health services to make better use of the resources available

Key Findings (continued)

- Officers reported that a number of experienced staff left the environmental health service as part of the 2016 restructure and this presented a risk to service delivery. In order to address this, the Council continues to use both internal and external funding to increase capacity and resilience within the Planning and Public Protection Service.

- Although it is too early to assess impact, the Council has taken action to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the environmental health service. This includes:
 - reviewing and restructuring services;
 - introducing joint inspections on retail and industrial premises by food hygiene and trading standards sections; and
 - using technology to support service delivery, for example through adopting agile working and introducing apps for the dog control service.

The Council considers that is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for environmental health services with reduced resources and we found that the Council is changing the way it delivers its environmental health services to make better use of the resources available

Key Findings (continued)

- To increase income the Council has begun charging for some services, including the provision of certain types of business advice. It has also approved imposing charges for Housing Health and Safety Rating System inspections (HHSRS) and increasing pest control fees.
- There have been some recent significant, unanticipated fluctuations in demand for the service related to:
 - single events (including the landslide at Pantteg)
 - more long-term influences (such as the increases in infectious disease cases following the implementation of new DNA/molecular testing at the laboratory).

Responding to these pressures has required some re-prioritisation of resources within teams, pulling staff from more proactive work. This has impacted on the Council's performance in some areas.

The Council's performance management arrangements for environmental health services need strengthening to ensure it is able to meet its statutory obligations

Key Findings

- The Council undertakes planning for its environmental health services through business plans for the Neighbourhood Service and Planning and Public Protection Service, and a food and feed service delivery plan (produced in accordance with the Food Safety Act 1990).
- The business plan for Planning and Public Protection currently does not contain staff or financial allocation information (it is based on the corporate template which does not require this information). The Council has identified the need to include financial information and intends to incorporate this from 2019-20 onwards.
- The Council introduced a new integrated corporate performance and risk management system in March 2018. Additional functionality has been purchased to tailor the software to the service's requirements. Integration and development of the corporate performance management system is still in its early stages.

The Council's performance management arrangements for environmental health services need strengthening to ensure it is able to meet its statutory obligations

Key Findings (continued)

- The Council monitors performance, reporting quarterly to Cabinet Board and Scrutiny Members. Service managers recognise the need to ensure that the data being used to assess performance in environmental health services provides a fuller picture of the service, in order to help drive improvement. The performance indicators for the Planning and Public Protection service were reviewed and updated by officers in early 2019 ready for the 2019-20 financial year.
- Officers reported that an assessment of whether the Council was continuing to meet its statutory obligations for environmental health services formed part of the business planning process. However, there is no formal or routine analysis of performance against the Council's statutory environmental health service obligations or against the Wales Heads of Environmental Health Practice Standards.

Overall evaluative heading for inclusion in the Annual Improvement Report

In conclusion our overall finding is that:

- The Council considers that it is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for environmental health services with reduced resources and we found that the Council is changing the way it delivers its environmental health services to make better use of the resources available but performance management arrangements for the service need strengthening.

Proposals for Improvement – for inclusion in the Annual Improvement Report

These are the proposals for improvement that we have identified following this review:

P1 – Business planning

- Strengthen business planning by ensuring that the impact of and response to increased demand on resource requirements is clearly set out in the business plan.

P2 – Performance management

- The Council needs to strengthen performance management by:
 - reviewing the information it is using to assess the performance of its environmental health services to ensure it supports a full and accurate assessment of performance to drive improvement; and
 - having a mechanism in place for assuring itself that it is delivering its statutory environmental health services.

Council Response Form

Council action planned in response to the proposals for improvement issued by the Wales Audit Office (WAO)

Council: Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Report title: Delivering with Less – Environmental Health Services Follow up

Issue date: 1362A2019-20

Document reference: 1362A2019-20

Ref	Proposal for improvement	Council action planned in response to the proposal for improvement issued by the WAO	Target date for completion of actions	Responsible officer
P1	P1 – Business planning • Strengthen business planning by ensuring that the impact of and response to increased demand on resource requirements is clearly set out in the business plan.	Action(s) Intended / Underway: The demands associated with the service are clearly set out within the Planning and Public Protection Business Plan and covers all the areas required within the Corporate Template, the WAO nevertheless required more detail. Following the expression of concern that this level of detail was included in other documents and its inclusion within the Business Plan would result in it become an unwieldy document, it was agreed that future Business plans would sign post to other documents which would in turn include the detail required.	June 2021	Nicola Pearce & Mark Thomas
P2	P2 – Performance management • The Council needs to strengthen performance management by: – reviewing the information it is using to assess the performance of its environmental health services to	Action(s) Intended / Underway: Robust performance management measures are in place within Food Hygiene however at the time of the audit new measures embracing digital technology were being developed for the General Environmental Health Team. These have been further developed since the audit and now provide up to date data on	Ongoing.	Nicola Pearce & Mark Thomas

Ref	Proposal for improvement	Council action planned in response to the proposal for improvement issued by the WAO	Target date for completion of actions	Responsible officer
	<p>ensure it supports a full and accurate assessment of performance to drive improvement; and – having a mechanism in place for assuring itself that it is delivering its statutory environmental health services.</p>	<p>workloads and outputs. However the system has not yet been completed as it is reliant upon continued IT support. As a consequence the service is currently reliant upon a hybrid of new technology as well as more traditional methods for monitoring and analysing performance.</p>		