



Corporate Assessment – Progress with proposals for improvement

Conwy County Borough Council

Audit year: 2014-15

Issued: November 2014

Document reference: 641A2014

Status of report

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The team who delivered the work comprised Melanie Watson (KPMG LLP).

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Summary report

Summary

1. The Wales Audit Office carried out a corporate assessment at Conwy County Borough Council in 2013 as part of its Wales-wide programme. The resulting report set out a number of proposals for improvement.
2. This review sought to answer the following question:
 - **Is the Council effectively addressing the proposals for improvement identified as part of the 2013 Corporate Assessment?**
3. Our approach involved reviewing relevant documentation and speaking to Council officers with a responsibility for addressing the proposals for improvement.
4. Our review found that **the Council is effectively addressing the proposals for improvement identified as part of the 2013 Corporate Assessment**. We reached this conclusion because the Council:
 - has arrangements in place to monitor progress with addressing the proposals for improvement; and
 - can evidence that actions are either on track or completed for each of the proposals for improvement.

Report

The Council is effectively addressing the proposals for improvement identified as part of the 2013 Corporate Assessment

The Council has arrangements in place to monitor progress with addressing the proposals for improvement

5. The Council has an action plan in place to address the proposals for improvement arising from the Corporate Assessment which is regularly reviewed and updated. The Improvement and Audit Group (IAG) oversees actions arising from external regulatory reports such as the Corporate Assessment and progress is reported twice a year to the Audit Committee.

The Council can evidence that actions are either on track or completed for each of the proposals for improvement

6. Detailed findings from our review against each of the proposals for improvement are set out in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Corporate Assessment 2013 - Proposals for Improvement

	Proposal for improvement	Progress in addressing proposals for improvement (October 2014)
P1	<p>The Council should work with its schools and with the regional school improvement consortium, GwE, to improve the value for money of the primary school system.</p>	<p>The Council is awaiting the outcome of a value for money review of GwE.</p> <p>The Council has a Primary School Modernisation Programme (Phase 1) in place. This resulted in the closure of two small schools in 2014, including Ysgol Llangwm which represented the highest cost per pupil in the County Borough. A further four schools are being consulted about prospective closure. Progress against the School Modernisation Programme is reported to the Customer Scrutiny Committee with the next update scheduled for October 2014. Approval is being sought for Phase 2 of the Modernisation Programme.</p> <p>In 2012/13 eight primary schools in the County Borough received critical Estyn inspection reports that required follow-up. Following Estyn re-visits in 2013/14 all eight of the schools are now out of this critical category.</p> <p>Some aspects of attainment in Conwy primary schools improved in 2014. The Foundation Phase indicator shows a four percentage point improvement since 2013 resulting in a comparative ranking of 13th out of 22. The proportion of 11 year-olds achieving the core subject indicator improved slightly in 2013, but the Council's ranking at Key Stage 2 fell from 15th to 17th. Comparative positions for Reading, Writing and Maths is 10th (out of 22) and for Reading, Writing, Maths and Science is also 10th.</p> <p>The budgeted cost of the primary school system (including both delegated and non-delegated funding) has fallen slightly from £5,145 per pupil (3rd highest) in 2013-14 to £5,077 (4th highest) in 2014-15.</p>

	Proposal for improvement	Progress in addressing proposals for improvement (October 2014)
P2	The Council should explain more clearly in reporting its targets the reason for any apparent reduction in the level of ambition being pursued.	The Council's 2014/15 review of its Corporate Plan 2012/2017 sets out clearly the reasons for any change in targets. For example a reduced target from 11 to eight in 2014/15 for beaches attaining awards is due to budget constraints and a review of whether to apply for 'green beach' awards as well as 'blue flag' awards.
P3	<p>The Council should ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cabinet minutes record all relevant scrutiny recommendations; • committee members are clearly distinguishable to all those present at meetings from other councillors and officers; and • overview and scrutiny committees increasingly hold portfolio holders to account rather than officers. 	<p>The Council has revised its cabinet report template to include a new mandatory paragraph (section 11) setting out any relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee comments. Where time does not allow Cabinet reports to be updated with O&S Committee comments or recommendations (such as where the meetings are close together), the draft minutes are tabled at the cabinet meeting and committee officers have been instructed to record scrutiny recommendations in the cabinet minutes.</p> <p>In order to clearly distinguish committee members from other councillors or officers at scrutiny meetings, seating arrangements have been changed. Committee members have an allocated seating area and Chairs and committee officers ensure the allocation is adhered to.</p> <p>A report was presented to the Principal Overview & Scrutiny Committee in August 2014 to consider how portfolio holders should be held to account. The committee recommended that cabinet members attend scrutiny, but prefer officers to present papers so that no undue influence can be given to committee members by portfolio holders. The committee also recommended that instead of the existing 'Meet the Cabinet' sessions, Cabinet Members should be invited to attend the Member Development and Information Forum, in rotation, to advise on future strategic issues or issues relevant to their portfolio. The Forum will give committee members the opportunity to raise questions to cabinet members. It was also recommended that 'Questions to Cabinet Members' should appear as a standing item on all scrutiny committee agendas. These recommendations were agreed by Council in October 2014.</p>

	Proposal for improvement	Progress in addressing proposals for improvement (October 2014)
P4	<p>The Audit Committee should become more systematic in assuring itself that recommendations made in both internal and external audit and inspection reports are being acted on appropriately.</p>	<p>The Council has made more explicit the processes in place to assure itself that internal audit and external regulators recommendations are acted on.</p> <p>Internal procedural flowcharts have been prepared to clarify the processes. All recommendations from external regulators are monitored by the Council's Improvement and Audit Group (IAG). A schedule of outstanding high risk recommendations from Internal Audit Reports with limited assurance will be reviewed twice a year by the Audit Committee, alongside outstanding recommendations from external regulators. High risk recommendations are monitored at SPR's, which are attended by the Audit Committee Chair, the Cabinet Lead for performance and other relevant members. The Head of Audit & Procurement meets with the Chair of Audit Committee monthly. Audit Committee briefing sessions take place quarterly, the week before Audit Committee. The Chair, Vice Chair and Chair of Finance & Resources attend, with the support of the Improvement and Audit Group.</p>
P5	<p>The Council should, in planning and delivering the further significant financial savings necessary in the years ahead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop longer-term financial plans that better allow for the timescales of implementing ambitious transformation programmes; • set suitable and explicit success measures and targets in relation to the Council's transformation programmes; and • ensure a consistent and co-ordinated input from the Human Resources (HR), ICT and asset management teams in supporting service modernisation and transformational change. 	<p>As part of the Council's on-going modernisation, there are three main transformation programmes in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Social Services Transformation Programme; • The Environment, Roads and Facilities (ERF) Restructure Programme; and • The Corporate Modernisation Programme (CMP) (Authority wide). <p>Each of the three transformation programmes are at different levels of maturity. They are each run using project management principles. Each has recognised governance arrangements in place with dedicated project support. Benefits realisation plans are in place. Each benefit has been mapped and actions planned to ensure that the benefit is realised. The Corporate Modernisation Programme is the least mature of the programmes and some benefits are yet to be assigned baseline measures or target measures but plans are in place to determine these.</p> <p>The business case for the Corporate Modernisation Programme (Workwise element) was recently adopted. It examines the options for the implementation of Workwise, the affordability of the preferred way forward and also tests what is feasible in terms of delivery within the known time scale.</p>

	Proposal for improvement	Progress in addressing proposals for improvement (October 2014)
		<p>The Council has prepared a Medium Term Financial Plan for 2015-16 to 2017-18 as part of the budget papers for 2014-15. This plan includes estimates of the savings that could be achieved from the various initiatives that are underway. In this longer-term view of its financial planning, the Council estimates that, over the three years from 2015-16, it will need to find additional income and savings totalling some £29.5 million. Some £14.9 million is expected to come from the transformation programmes, leaving a further £14.6 million to come from a combination of other cost savings and future increases in Council Tax. The Council has improved its Medium Term financial planning process. This process will need to develop as the financial challenges continue.</p> <p>Learning is effectively shared between transformation programmes to support coordination and consistency. For example, the Corporate Modernisation Programme Board and the ERF Board share some common members. The Head of HR is on all three transformation boards. The HR leads for each of the programmes meet regularly to share approaches and issues, and the Project Officer Group meets monthly to do the same. Learning on agile working in areas where it has already been implemented e.g. social services, and ERF have been used to shape the Workwise Framework guidance for the wider Council.</p> <p>Staff not directly involved in the CMP feel well informed about the programme and what it is seeking to achieve, through regular updates via Team Briefs or management meetings.</p>
P6	The Council should work with its partners in the Local Service Board to improve the Board's ability to monitor and manage its performance.	A review by the Conwy and Denbighshire Local Strategic Partnership in February 2014 concluded that it will concentrate its focus on one priority for 2014-15 – <i>Healthy & Independent</i> - and within these three themes of childhood obesity, alcohol misuse, and ageing population. This approach was supported by the Council's Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee in July 2014. The responsibility for delivering economy related outcomes (Outcome 5 for Conwy) will be delivered by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. Other themes will be reviewed by exception. These changes aim to simplify performance monitoring and reduce duplication.

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