

Report to	Audit Committee
Date	16 September 2019
Lead Officer	Shân Morris, Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Policy and Planning)
Contact Officer	Shân Morris, Assistant Chief Officer 01745 535 286
Subject	Wales Audit Office Annual Improvement Report 2018/19



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This report presents (Appendix 1) the Annual Improvement Report issued in June 2019 by the Wales Audit Office (WAO) on behalf of the Auditor General.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Based on the work conducted by the WAO during 2018/19, the Auditor General concluded that North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is meeting its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement and is likely to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Measure (2009) during 2019/20.
- 3 There were no formal recommendations issued to the Authority, but six proposals were made for how it could potentially improve the way it complies with the sustainable development principle when it takes steps towards meeting its second well-being objective.
- 4 The Annual Improvement Report also reproduces a series of recommendations made by the WAO in a national report aimed primarily at county councils but which included two recommendations aimed specifically at Public Services Boards' public services partners in relation to rural communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5 Members are asked to note the contents of the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report.

BACKGROUND

- 6 The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 requires the Auditor General to undertake a forward-looking annual improvement assessment and to publish an annual improvement report for each

improvement authority in Wales.

- 7 Improvement authorities in Wales have a general duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions.

INFORMATION

- 8 This year's Annual Improvement Report draws together the summarised findings of the WAO's audit, regulatory and inspection work in 2018/19 which were issued to the Authority between May 2018 and June 2019. It also includes recommendations made in a national report in November 2018 on the challenges of providing local government services to rural communities. In chronological order these were:
 - i. **May 2018** - report based on the WAO's audit of the Authority's annual improvement plan for 2018/19 which concluded that the Authority had complied with its statutory improvement planning duties. There were no proposals for improvement.
 - ii. **November 2018** – national report examining the changing face of rural Wales and looking at the demographic challenges in providing council services to dispersed communities. The report recommends that Public Services Boards' public services partners could potentially respond more effectively to the challenges faced by rural communities by:
 - a) assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their different rural communities using the Welsh Government's Rural Proofing Tool and identifying and agreeing the local and strategic actions needed to support community sustainability; and
 - b) ensuring that the Local Well-Being Plan sets out a more optimistic and ambitious vision for 'place' with joint priorities co-produced by partners and with citizens to address agreed challenges.
 - iii. **December 2018** – report based on WAO's audit of the Authority's self-assessment of its performance during 2017/18. This report concluded that the Authority had complied with its statutory improvement reporting duties, and made no proposals for improvement.
 - iv. **March 2019** – the WAO's annual audit letter in relation to 2017/18 which confirmed that the Authority had complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources. There were no proposals for improvement.
 - v. **June 2019** – report following the WAO's examination under the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. This report identified opportunities for future improvement but made no formal recommendations.

- 9 Follow-up actions based on the proposals for improvement will be incorporated into Service plans for implementation and future reporting.

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	The Annual Improvement Report includes the WAO's conclusions and proposals for improvement based on its examination of the Authority's Well-being of Future Generations Act. Progress in relation to the proposals will be followed up by WAO as part of its future work programme.
Budget	None identified
Legal	The AIR reflects the Authority's duty under the Local Government Measure 2009 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions.
Staffing	None identified
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	None identified
Risks	The report confirms the Auditor General's conclusion that the Authority is likely to comply with the requirements of the Local Government Measure (2009) during 2019/20. The risk of non-compliance is therefore considered to be low.