



## Report of the Cabinet Member for Business Transformation & Performance

To the Service Improvement and Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel  
24<sup>th</sup> June 2019

### WAO report on local government use of data: Swansea findings

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| <b>Purpose:</b>                          | To brief the Service Improvement and Performance Scrutiny Performance Panel on 24 June 2019                       |
| <b>Content:</b>                          | A briefing on the Wales Audit Office report, ' <i>Local government use of data: City and County of Swansea</i> '  |
| <b>Councillors are being asked to:</b>   | Consider the information provided and to forward views to the Cabinet Member via a letter from the Panel Convener |
| <b>Lead Councillor:</b>                  | Councillor Clive Lloyd, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Business Transformation & Performance                |
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#### 1. Background

- 1.1 In December 2018, the Wales Audit Office (WAO) issued a report on how local authorities in Wales were making use of data in order to inform their decision-making. The report was based partly on returns from a previously circulated questionnaire to Council managers and Councillors. The report contained sections focusing on individual Welsh local authorities based on the returns received from each authority. Swansea Council had a 30% response to the questionnaire.
- 1.2 This report provides a briefing to the Scrutiny panel on the findings, action plan and the ongoing governance arrangements through the Information Governance Board. In addition, this briefing highlights other projects underway around data, outside of the WAO findings.

## 2. Key WAO Findings

2.1 The WAO report is divided into four key areas, as follows:

- Vision, Leadership and Culture;
- Data protection;
- Skills and capacity; and
- Evidence-based decision making.

2.3 On *Vision, Leadership and Culture*, the report outlined a continuum for local authorities ranging from a risk averse approach (silo working) to one which openly shares data within the organisation, with the public, and with its citizens. It is important at this point to identify that the data which this section refers to is not personal data or, where the data source is personal data, it has been anonymised so that no individual can be identified.

2.4 While praising specific examples within the Council, e.g. work to create a customer ID, and specific work done in Child and Family Services with Looked after Children, the report found that Swansea Council did not take a corporate approach to the use of data. While this conclusion may have been expected from the circulation of a questionnaire, it did not pick up current projects already in progress, i.e. The work which Digital Services is undertaking in this field. Under its open data initiative, Digital Services intends to comprehensively address the issue of silo working and develop a corporate approach.

2.6 On *Data Protection (DP)*, the report outlined a continuum ranging from an authority which uses DP to block the sharing of personal data, to one which constructively uses the legislation to empower appropriate data sharing. This section does not contain any feedback from the Swansea Council questionnaire responses, which suggests the feedback was such that no defining points could be made. The statistics which are provided relate to all Welsh local authorities and suggest a degree of confusion about what is legitimate data sharing. This is understandable as it a complicated issue. Furthermore, at the time of the compilation of the report (pre-GDPR), there was no Swansea Data Protection Officer (DPO) in post to give a more detailed outline.

2.7 In practice the Council has a number of initiatives which could indeed have featured in Part 3 of the report, '*Good practice examples for councils to learn from*'. One example relates to how the Council's Poverty and Prevention Unit have been seeking to analyse the Single Household Benefit Extract (SHBE), data held by the Council's Revenues and Benefits section, in order to better target services that support people experiencing poverty, or are at risk of experiencing poverty. The DPO and Deputy DPO became involved in order to explain how data sharing could be completed in a legal and safe manner. Meetings took place with officers to establish whether the Council had the requisite competence to act, whether the data processing met a legal basis for processing and finally how it interacted with overarching Council strategies and policies. The result of those discussions was the production of an appropriate policy document that provided the framework and legal basis for data sharing. The advice and assistance has permitted a data sharing activity that will allow targeted services to the most vulnerable.

- 2.9 On *Skills and Capacity*, the report described the need for the Council to map staff who have a role in analysing and managing data and to build and develop capacity in data usage. Identifying capacity, staff training and continuous professional development form important planks of the Swansea action plan.
- 2.11 On *'Evidence-based Decisions'*, the report outlines a continuum from an authority which only analyses its own historical performance data to one which makes open data available in real time to a wide range of organisations. The report acknowledges the responses on this subject were mixed but all the same recommends that data should be easily accessible to decision makers.
- 2.12 As an example of good practice already being delivered, the Council is rolling out Office 365 and cloud services in order to strengthen its data management capabilities. Digital Services is also helping departments to collaborate, drive performance, and inform decision-making through these new tools including, artificial intelligence (AI), Cognitive Services and Machine Learning.

### **3. Summary**

- 3.1 The Council recognises the importance of the effective use of data and it is making significant efforts to meet the challenges through the wider work of the Information Governance Board.
- 3.2 The action plan is being developed taking account of all the WAO recommendations and wider projects. The plan also incorporates data implications emerging from both the revised Digital Strategy and regional working drivers from the Welsh Government. Information and data from future consultations and engagement, or areas of co-production, will also inform the Council's decision-making. The action plan will be brought back to the Scrutiny panel in the next quarter.
- 3.3 The Information Governance Board is responsible for leading and monitoring the action plan.

### **4. Legal implications**

No specific implications related to this report. Legal implications emerging from the action plan relating to GDPR and the Data Protection Act will be addressed on a project by project basis.

### **5. Finance (if required)**

No specific financial implications related to this report. Any financial implications emerging from the action plan will be highlighted in the next report.

### ***Glossary of terms:***

'Personal data' is defined as any data relating to living individuals from which they can be identified, either directly from the data itself or by another individual when combined with other data that is in, or likely to come into, their possession.

'Open data' is defined as data that is routinely published and freely available to everyone to use and republish as they wish, without restrictions from copyright, patents or other mechanisms of control.

**Background papers:** none.