



Report of the Cabinet Member for Community

Governance & Audit Committee – 25 October 2023

Report on the Audit Wales ‘Together We Can’ – Community Resilience and Self-Reliance Report Recommendations

Purpose:	To provide a briefing to the Governance and Audit Committee on the findings of the Auditor General for Wales review of community resilience and self-reliance in Wales and its recommendations for action by local authorities.
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For Information	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Swansea Council’s Report on the Audit Wales ‘Together We Can’ – Community resilience and self-reliance report recommendations provides a summary of the report and its findings, as well as highlighting the action taken by Swansea Council to date. This includes our response to the three recommendations and notes areas for further action which we intend to explore further.

2. Context

- 2.1 On 23 January 2023, Audit Wales published the report ‘Together We Can’ – Community resilience and self-reliance. The report looks at the priority placed on community resilience and self-reliance in local authority plans, and how local authorities are equipping people to be less reliant on often over stretched local authority services. A copy of the report is available for reference at <https://www.audit.wales/publication/together-we-can-community-resilience-and-self-reliance> .

2.2 The report shares the finding of the third of three investigations by Audit Wales on the challenge of alleviating and tackling poverty. The overall conclusion of the report is that “local authorities face a challenging and uncertain financial future but find it difficult to empower people and communities to be more self-reliance and less dependent on services”.

3. Content

3.1 The report identifies that there are many different interpretations and meanings of community resilience and self-reliance, with the report finding different local authorities taking various approaches to defining it. It broadly uses these terms to mean:

- Community preparedness for adverse situations (to cope or thrive in adversity);
- Support from within the community to promote individuals' independence;
- Everything in between (such as addressing complex societal issues like poverty).

3.2 The main barriers to creating more self-reliant and resilience communities identified through this review include:

- A lack of resources to drive the transformational change in this area;
- Inability to redirect resources from service delivery to supporting communities;
- Relationships between local authorities and community residents;
- A lack of appetite from communities to become more self-reliant;
- Internal culture to be direct providers of services, not enablers and influencers;
- Local-level partnership and collaborative working to influence communities;
- Lack of strategic vision and understanding the needs of the community;
- Wider challenges such as poverty, rurality, transportation and digital exclusion.

3.3 Some other highlights of the report it is worth noting include:

- Most Local Authorities are operating with no clear definition of resilience or self-reliant communities and only three could define the characteristics of a self-reliant individual;
- Local authorities that included 'communities' within their corporate plan objectives were recognised for defining their commitment to supporting communities to develop;
- Volunteering is a key theme but requires a shift in culture and needs to be nurtured carefully to avoid burnout of the volunteering section;
- Empowering communities to do more for themselves can take a range of approaches from making grant processes more agile to a less risk averse approach to Community Asset Transfers (CAT);
- Community leaders, activities, and town / community councils play an important role in the community engagement and involvement for this work;

- The role of local authorities is moving from providing services to supporting communities to do more for themselves is unclear and requires planning and getting the right balance.

3.4 The report highlights the following recommendations:

Recommendation	
R1	<p>To strengthen community resilience and support people to be more self-reliant, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authorities use the evaluation tool (attached) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-evaluate current engagement, management, performance and practice; • identify where improvement is needed; and • draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified in completing the evaluation tool.
R2	<p>To help local authorities address the gaps they identify following their self-evaluation, we recommend that they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formally approve the completed Action Plan arising from the evaluation exercise; • regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and • revise actions and targets in light of the authority’s evaluation and assessment of its performance.

4. Way Forward

- 4.1 Our analysis of the findings of Audit Wales’ report is detailed in the report at Appendix A which includes a completed evaluation conducted by two oversight groups that coordinate the delivery of the Corporate Priority ‘Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities’ – these are the **Swansea Council Poverty Forum** and the **Enabling Communities Group**.
- 4.2 The evaluation identifies 10 key actions to define, deliver and continuously improve our vision for resilient and self-reliant communities in Swansea. These actions will fall under the governance of the Corporate Priority ‘Tackling Poverty and Enabling Communities’ and progress will be monitored and reported via the two oversight groups above.

5. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 5.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

5.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

5.3 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

5.4 An Integrated Impact Screening has been completed for this report with no further assessment required (See Appendix C). This is an IIA Screening for the 'For Information' Report to the Governance and Audit Committee regarding the findings of the Auditor General for Wales review of community resilience and self-reliance in Wales and its recommendations for action by local authorities. A full IIA will be carried out as part of the development process for the Tackling Poverty Strategy in due course.

6. Legal implications

6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

7. Finance Implications

7.1 There are no immediate financial implications associated with this report. The actions noted in section 4 will be undertaken in line with departmental budgets..

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A – Report on the Audit Wales 'Together We Can' – Community resilience and self-reliance report recommendations

Appendix B – 'Together We Can' – Community resilience and self-reliance Report

Appendix C – Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) Screening