Report of the Cabinet Member for Community

Governance & Audit Committee – 11 January 2023

Report on the Audit Wales 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales report recommendations

Purpose:	To provide a briefing to the Governance and Audit Committee on the findings of the Auditor General for Wales review of tackling poverty 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 'Time for Change' Poverty in Wales report recommendations provides a summary of the report and its findings, as well as highlighting the examples of good practice by Swansea Council which were noted in the review. It also defines our response to the eight recommendations and notes areas for further action which we intend to explore further in the refresh of the Council's Tackling Poverty Strategy.

2. Context

2.1 In November 2022, the Auditor General for Wales published the report 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales for presentation to the Senedd – a copy of the report is available at https://audit.wales/publication/time-change-poverty-wales for reference.

2.2 The report shares the finding of the first of three investigations by Audit Wales on the challenge of alleviating and tackling poverty. The overall conclusion of the report is that "the scale of the challenge and weaknesses in current work make it difficult for Welsh and local government to deliver the systemic change required to tackle and alleviate poverty".

3. Content

3.1 The report identifies the 'dimensions' or 'characteristics' of living in poverty in Wales to be:

- Housing issues;
- Fuel and energy issues;
- Clothing and footwear issues;
- Food and water issues;
- Financial issues;
- Exclusion from service issues;
- Emotional and relationship issues.

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

- The number of people living in poverty in Wales is estimated to be rising and deprivation is evident in all parts of the country;
- Wales has consistently had the highest levels of relative income poverty in the UK over the last decade;
- The number of children in poverty is rising sharply, estimated at 34% of children in Wales living in poverty in March 2021;
- Data about pensioners and working-age adults in poverty has remained relatively stable but Wales has the highest numbers across the four nations in the UK;
- The Cost of Living crisis is pushing more people into poverty and has significant impacts on households in low income groups.

3.3 The report highlights the following eight recommendations:

	Recommendation	What the report says
R1	**National strategy and targets for tackling and alleviating poverty**	We *(Audit Wales)* note that there is currently no specific target for reducing poverty in Wales and the current Child Poverty strategy needs to be refreshed. We recommend that in updating its strategy the Welsh Government: • set SMART national actions; • establish a suite of performance measures to judge delivery and impact; • sets target for alleviating and tackling poverty; and • undertake regular evaluation of performance and public reporting
R2	**Local strategies, targets and performance reporting for tackling and alleviating poverty**	We highlight that councils and partners have prioritised work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated delivery landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely. We highlight that evaluating activity and reporting performance are also variable with many gaps. We recommend that the councils use their Wellbeing Plans to provide a comprehensive focus on tackling poverty to co-ordinate their efforts, meet local needs and support the revised national plan targets and actions. This should:

		Recommendation	What the report says
			- include SMART local actions with a greater emphasis on prevention; - include a detailed resourcing plan for the length of the strategy; - be developed with involvement from other public sector partners, the third sector, and those with experience of poverty; - include a robust set of consistent outcome indicators and measures to increase understanding of poverty locally; and - be subject to annual public reporting to enable a whole system view of poverty locally to help improve delivery and support.
R3		**Leadership on the poverty agenda**	We note that just over a third of councils have lead members and lead officers for addressing poverty. Given the importance of effective leadership in driving the poverty agenda forward and breaking silos within councils and between public bodies, we recommend that each council designate a cabinet member as the council's poverty champion and designate a senior officer to lead and be accountable for the anti-poverty agenda.
R4		**Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of grant-funded programmes**	We note that all councils are dependent on grants but weaknesses in programmes mean that funding is not making the impact it could. To ensure councils are able to maximise the impact of funding and tackle the more difficult and longstanding problems, we recommend that the Welsh Government: - provide longer timescales for announcing and receiving bids to enable better resource planning; - move away from annual bidding cycles to multi-year allocations; - enable funding to be more flexibly spent to avoid an emphasis on quicker projects, rather than more impactful interventions that take longer to establish; - allow councils to consolidate funding to reduce bureaucracy; - streamline and simplify processes and grant conditions to reduce the administrative burden; and - keep requests for information and supporting materials from councils to a minimum
R5		**Experience mapping to create inclusive services for people in poverty**	We highlight that people in poverty are often in crisis, dealing with extremely personal and stressful issues, but they often find it difficult to access help from councils because of the way services are designed and delivered. We recommend that councils improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience' through meaningful involvement in decision-making using 'experience mapping' and/or 'Poverty Truth Commissions' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.
R6		**Single web landing page for people seeking help**	We highlight the difficulties people in poverty face accessing online and digital services. To ensure people are able to get the information and advice they need, we recommend that councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website that: - is directly accessible on the home page; - provides links to all services provided by the council that relate to poverty; and; - provides information on the work of partners that can assist

	Recommendation	What the report says
		people in poverty.
R7	**Streamlining and improving application and information services for people in poverty**	We note that no council has created a single gateway into services. As a result, people have to complete multiple application forms that often record the same information when applying for similar services. We highlight that whilst it is important that councils comply with relevant data protection legislation, they also need to share data to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services. We recommend that councils: • establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data; • undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests; • create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services; • undertake a data audit to provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and • review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities.

R8	**Complying with the socio-economic duty**	We set out that while all councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of policy choices and decisions, approaches vary and are not always effective. We recommend that councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent to:
		
		• ensure that they draw on relevant, comprehensive and current data (nothing over 12 months old) to support analysis;
		
		• ensure integrated impact assessments capture information on:
		  o involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is coproducing with;
		  o the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the assessment considers issues in the round and how it links across services provided across the council;
		  o how the council will monitor and evaluate impact and will take corrective action; and
		  o an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment

4. Way Forward

4.1 Our analysis of the findings of Audit Wales' report is detailed in the report at Appendix A. The report recognises evidence of the examples of good work already being done within the Council, our response to the recommendations and the actions planned.

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 Safeguarding People and Tackling Poverty Corporate Delivery Committee regarding on the findings of the Auditor General for Wales review of tackling poverty 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 financial implications associated with this report.

Background papers: None

Appendices:
Appendix A – Report on the Audit Wales 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales report recommendations
Appendix B – 'Time for Change' – Poverty in Wales Report
Appendix C – Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) Screening