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Dear Richard

Improvement Assessment

This letter summarises the key conclusions arising from my work in respect of improvement planning under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure). I am also required, under the Measure, to give an opinion on whether the Council has discharged its duties in respect of improvement reporting and met the requirements of the Measure.

In my letter of 13 September 2013, I was unable to give my opinion on whether Isle of Anglesey County Council (the Council) had discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning. The Council had delayed the publication of its Improvement Plan to give the newly elected members sufficient time to review the Council's Improvement Objectives and align these with the improvement programme and Medium-Term Financial Plan. Additionally, a six-week public consultation, entitled 'Making a Difference', fed into the Improvement Plan. The Council subsequently published its Improvement Plan in November 2013.

Improvement Planning

The Council has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

I have reached this conclusion because:

- the Improvement Plan 2013-14 (the Plan) sets out the Council's improvement objectives, which comply with Welsh Government guidance;
- the results of engagement and consultation activities with the public and stakeholders have informed the development of the improvement objectives;
- improvement areas highlighted by external regulators and the former Commissioners have informed the development of the improvement objectives;
- the Plan is influenced by the analysis of the outcomes and weaknesses from last year's Performance Review of 2011-12 and the Council's first ever self-assessment, carried out in April 2013; and

- the Council has chosen a reasonable range of indicators against which to judge its performance.

The Plan describes the Council's priorities succinctly and clearly and explains how the priorities reflect the views of the public as well as those of the Council and other partners. The Plan was published following the analysis of the public-facing engagement process and further discussions at Council, Scrutiny and Executive meetings in October and early November 2013.

The Council has defined 56 Improvement Objectives, but these are helpfully grouped together under 19 Development Priorities. These, in turn, cover three major service areas including Education, Adult Services and Children's Services. The Council has encapsulated what it is trying to achieve in each service area using bold and outcome-based phrases such as, 'Transforming our Adults provision to empower older people on Anglesey by giving them as much independence, choice and control as possible in their future care' and 'Improve our Education provision to enable the Island's children, wherever they are, irrespective of background and circumstance to achieve their full potential'. These aims are ambitious in their breadth, especially as many require partnership working.

The Council has helped to define its ambition for the year ahead by choosing a number of outcome indicators for most of its Improvement Objectives. Each set of indicators encapsulates the improvements that the Council hopes that citizens will experience during 2013-14. In setting its targets for these indicators, the Council has carefully considered current and past performance.

These objectives are the Council's priorities for 2013-14, but the Council also acknowledges in its Plan the need to progress outstanding areas of work originating from its Corporate Business Plan 2012-2015. These areas will also be reviewed and reported regularly through the Council's revised performance management framework.

Each service area in the Plan contains a useful section entitled 'What do our citizens tell us', which identifies learning points from previous consultations and emphasises the Council's commitment to feedback and engagement.

Improvement Reporting

In my opinion, and based on audit work undertaken to date, the Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

I have reached this conclusion because:

- the Council published its Performance Report, a self-assessment and year-end review (the Review) of its performance during 2012-13, by 31 October 2013;
- the Review provides an assessment of the Council's performance in the preceding financial year (2012-13) and sets out how the Council has sought to discharge its duties under the Measure;
- the Review includes a clear evaluation of whether or not the Council believes it achieved its Improvement Objectives;
- the Review includes details of the Council's performance and compares it against the national statutory performance indicators; and
- the Review includes sections on how the Council has sought to collaborate.

Further proposals for improvement/recommendations

No new proposals for improvement are being suggested in this letter. We will continue to monitor and report on the progress made by the Council in implementing the proposals set out in my previous reports and letters. I will undertake more detailed work on the arrangements that support the Council's performance management and reporting over the following months and report this, as well as summarising all of my work and that of relevant regulators during 2013-14, in an Annual Improvement Report for the Council that I will aim to issue by the end of March 2014.

Yours sincerely

HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS

Auditor General for Wales

CC: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business

Huw Lloyd Jones – Manager

Andy Bruce – Performance Audit Lead