

GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 10 th April, 2024
Report Subject	Audit Wales report: Homelessness services - Flintshire County Council
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Housing and Regeneration
Report Author	Chief Officer (Housing and Communities)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the Audit Wales programme of work for 2023, homelessness was identified as an area of interest. The Council has flagged homelessness and housing needs as high-risk issues through local risk management frameworks and welcomed this review.

The review took place over several months from April 2023 through to September 2023. The final report was issued on the 11th January 2024.

This report outlines the process of the review by Audit Wales and shares the findings and their recommendations for the Council regarding the local approach to homelessness. The report also outlines the Council's response to those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To note the Audit Wales report into Homelessness Services at Flintshire County Council.
2	To note the Council's responses to the recommendations of Audit Wales for future monitoring and oversight purposes.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	PROCESS OF THE AUDIT WALES REVIEW
1.01	<p>The review of Homelessness Services sought to answer the question: In seeking to address homelessness, is the Council effectively adapting its strategic intent to deliver a long-term sustainable preventative approach?</p> <p>In answering the above question, the Audit Wales Team focussed on the following lines of enquiry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does the Council understand the homelessness situation and how it might change over time?• Has the Council set out what it wants to achieve and communicated that intention to its partners within and outside the Council?• Is the Council taking an integrated approach in seeking to deliver its objectives?• Is the Council collaborating effectively with the right partners, within and outside the Council to deliver its approach?• Is the Council allocating resources to deliver better outcomes over the short, medium and long term?• Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress towards, short, medium and longer-term objectives?
1.02	<p>The audit work involved document reviews, interviews with key senior officers and Elected Members, and focus groups with front line staff directly involved in providing homelessness services.</p> <p>The Wales Audit Team also completed a series of drop-in sessions for residents to attend should they wish to do so and held a focus group with a wide range of partner agencies from the third sector and other public services.</p>
1.03	<p>Initial findings were shared by Audit Wales in November 2023 and the final report (Appendix 1) was issued to the Council on the 11th January 2024.</p>
1.04	<p>The findings report and organisational response have been reviewed and supported by Community & Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee (6th March 2024) and Cabinet (12th March 2024).</p>
2.00	REVIEW FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE
2.01	<p>The overall finding of the review by Audit Wales was that: the Council is delivering a high-quality service, but this is unsustainable with the level of current funding.</p> <p>The report also highlights the following:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has a good understanding of the current and future situation. • The Council collaborates well with partners but needs to improve awareness of service demands with political partners. • The Council is reviewing how it delivers its service strategically and operationally. • The Council faces difficult decisions to ensure the service is sustainable in the future.
2.02	<p>The Audit Wales Report offers the following three recommendations for the Council following their review of Homelessness Services in Flintshire:</p> <p>R1: To ensure the service is sustainable operationally and strategically, the Council ensures that funding is available to maintain its levels of service or make decisions on service delivery based on funds available.</p> <p>R2: The Council ensures arrangements for evaluating its homelessness activities are applied to all activities so it can provide assurance of its impact on service users and efficiencies.</p> <p>R3: To better understand the needs of residents, the Council should widen its engagement activity with residents to cover the development and evaluation of all services.</p>
2.03	<p>The Council's response to the Audit Wales report and the three recommendations is attached at Appendix 2.</p>

3.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
3.01	<p>Recommendation 1 focuses on the financial challenges of managing homelessness in Flintshire. Recommendations 2 and 3 can be absorbed through procedural changes within the commissioning and reviewing function of the Housing Support and Homelessness Service.</p> <p>Detailed below are the resource implications for the delivery of Homeless Services and responding to the Audit Wales Report.</p> <p>Revenue: Statutory Homeless Services are funded through Council Fund. Additional duties placed on Councils and the current demands on services and homeless accommodation results in additional expenditure and budget pressures. Whilst some grant is available for 2024-2025 for emergency housing and other discretionary funding for crisis interventions, this is not sufficient to cover the full scale of the financial risk.</p> <p>Capital: Creating more housing will require significant capital investment and has been flagged early within the Councils Capital Programme and Housing Revenue Account Business Plan. The Flintshire Housing</p>

	<p>Prospectus has been approved by Council and shared with our Housing Partners and Social Housing Grant (SHG) supports ambitious plans to increase housing supply at scale and pace.</p> <p>Human Resources: Staff are under significant pressure with high levels of homelessness. Homeless officer caseloads are increasing at a time when Council Funds are under significant strain.</p>
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4.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
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4.01	<p>The following risks along with mitigation will enable the Council to respond to the findings of the Audit Wales Report and ongoing homelessness agenda in Flintshire:</p> <p>Risk: Reputational damage and negative impact to service delivery and Council finances by failing to respond to the findings of the Audit Wales Report.</p> <p>Mitigations: Adopt and deliver the suggested organisational response to the Audit Wales Report as outlined in Appendix 2.</p>
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3.02	Ways of Working (Sustainable Development) Principles Impact	
	Long-term	Positive – Increase in targeted support and alternative delivery methods to ensure services are inclusive for all.
	Prevention	Prevention – Preventing homelessness through ensuring there is adequate support and accommodation to cater for a range of people’s needs.
	Integration	Positive – Increased integration between services and partner organisations
	Collaboration	Positive – Increased collaboration between services, partner organisations and service users
	Involvement	Positive – Service user involvement to help shape effective services so that support is timely, and person centred

3.03	Well-being Goals Impact	
	Prosperous Wales	Positive – With additional funding more jobs will be created to deliver housing related support on a greater scale within Flintshire.

	Resilient Wales	Positive – Creating services that are prevention focused and build resilience to avoid households becoming homeless.
	Healthier Wales	Positive – Reduction in homelessness, overcoming health inequalities associated with homelessness and poor housing conditions and best use of resources to increase targeted support for people with housing issues and other complex needs.
	More equal Wales	Positive – Services are delivered in a way that are inclusive for all. Consideration has been given to local and regional gaps in provision for often marginalised communities such as the homeless, those with mental health or substances issues and the LGBTQ+ community.
	Cohesive Wales	No Impact
	Vibrant Wales	No impact
	Globally responsible Wales	No impact

5.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
5.01	The Audit Wales Team engaged with residents, front line staff, partners and senior leaders and politicians at the Council as part of their review.
5.02	Recommendation 3 of the Audit Wales report highlights a need to extend consultation and engagement activities associated with homelessness in Flintshire and the Audit Response attached as Appendix 2 outlines the approach that shall be taken to achieve better engagement with residents.
5.03	The report was presented to the Community, Housing and Assets Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 6 th March, 2024 and Cabinet on the 12 th March 2024.

6.00	APPENDICES
6.01	Appendix 1: Audit Wales Report into Homeless Services – Flintshire County Council
6.02	Appendix 2: Flintshire County Council - Organisational Response Action Plan

7.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
7.01	Audit Wales Report – Rough Sleeping in Wales: Everyone’s Problem; No One’s Responsibility

8.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
8.01	<p>Contact Officer: Martin Cooil – Housing & Prevention Service Manager Telephone: 07880 423234 E-mail: martin.cooil@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

9.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
9.01	<p>Audit Wales - Is the trademark of two legal entities, the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office. Its role is to assure the people of Wales that public money is being managed well, as well as explaining how public money is being used and how it meets people’s needs.</p> <p>Housing Support Grant (HSG) - The HSG programme brings the historic funding streams for Supporting People, Homelessness Prevention and Rent Smart Wales grants into one single funding stream.</p> <p>Housing Revenue Account (HRA) - The Council is required to keep a HRA to record all income and expenditure relating to the provision of local authority housing. All rental income, including arrears, must be held with a ring fenced HRA account. This means that income can only be used for council housing purposes and not general expenditure. This also allows rental income to be invested locally to help improve and maintain council owned homes and build new council homes.</p>