

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	26 th June 2024
Report Subject	'Together we can' Community resilience and self-reliance
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Finance and Social Value
Report Author	Chief Officer Housing and Communities
Type of Report	Strategic

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the Audit Wales report “‘Together we can’ Community resilience and self-reliance”, which highlights how building community resilience and self-reliance may help reduce reliance on local authority services in future, if local authorities shift from being a ‘direct provider’ to ‘enabler’.

‘Together we can’ is the third report published by Audit Wales in a series focused on poverty and what local government is doing to tackle it.

The report also highlights the recommendations and expectations of Audit Wales in terms of local authorities next steps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	To consider the findings and recommendations of the Audit Wales “‘Together we can’ Community resilience and self-reliance” report.
2	To note the recommended response in relation to Audit Wales recommendations and support this being reported to appropriate Committees in June 2024.
3	To recognise the work of numerous voluntary organisations and individuals across the County and feedback this to Cabinet when considering the report at its meeting on 18th June.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE AUDIT WALES “‘TOGETHER WE CAN’ COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE” REPORT
1.01	<p>Introduction and overview</p> <p>Audit Wales have undertaken a programme of work focused on poverty and how local government is tackling it.</p> <p>“‘Together we can’ Community resilience and self-reliance” is the third and final report published by Audit Wales in this programme of work. The first report established a baseline of poverty as the major challenge across all levels of government in Wales. The second report explored the use of social enterprises as a means to help deliver more and reduce demand.</p>
1.02	<p>Published in January 2023, the ‘Together we can’ report captures Audit Wales review of how local authorities are helping communities to thrive independently. It explores the priority given to community resilience in local plans and how local authorities are equipping people to be less reliant on public services.</p>
1.03	<p>The report recognises the challenges faced by the public sector over recent years, including austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst there is appreciation of the innovation and creativity of the sector in response, the current cost of living crisis is highlighted as likely to raise demand for services, with limited capacity and opportunities for further efficiencies within local government to be able to respond to those most in need.</p>
1.04	<p>The ‘Together we can’ report suggests that there is a growing interest in local authorities to encourage community resilience, whereby residents are equipped to do more for themselves to reduce reliance on public services.</p> <p>This concept has been around for some time in relation to responses to local emergencies, i.e., flooding, but Audit Wales highlight that it has now begun to feature in corporate plans and strategies more broadly in terms of equipping people to be able to manage the problems they are facing.</p>
1.05	<p>The key findings are summarised in the Audit Wales report and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local authorities face challenging times and have found it difficult to support greater community resilience and self-reliance.• The focus on community resilience in response to emergencies misses opportunities for ‘broader impact’.• Whilst community resilience is a common priority for local authorities in Wales it is poorly defined and narrowly focused.• Growth in areas such as volunteering, Community Asset Transfers, community hubs, and community co-ordinators are cited as demonstrating the commitment of local authorities to transform how they work.• Barriers include capacity, resources and skills shortage.• The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the significant amount of community goodwill that can be built upon.• Local authorities need to seize the opportunity to shift to being an ‘enabler’ rather than ‘provider’.

1.06	<p>Further information</p> <p>Audit Wales suggest that through supporting communities to be more self-reliant local authorities can change, or reduce, what they do and provide. However, they advise that for transformation to be successful, it will require local authority leadership.</p> <p>The report suggests that there is a fundamental shift required, from local authorities being ‘direct providers’ to becoming ‘enablers’.</p>
1.07	<p>Audit Wales make the case for local authorities to clearly define and have a shared understanding of community resilience and self-reliance. Their findings suggest this is lacking despite 19 of the 22 local authorities having well-being objectives linked to promoting community resilience.</p>
1.08	<p>The ‘Together we can’ report indicates that to date local authorities have mainly supported self-reliance through one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering • Empowering communities • Community Asset Transfers • Promoting access to community-based services <p>The report provides examples from across Wales in these four areas. We know that there are some good examples of practice within Flintshire and the Council is cited in the Audit Wales report in terms of the positive response to action taken to address the shortages in social care.</p>
1.09	<p>The barriers to increasing self-reliance and greater community resilience were identified in the report as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of resources, skills, and capacity to lead this work. • Unable to redirect resources. • Lack of trust and perceived lack of appetite in local communities. • Delivery culture of councils. • Limitations in collaborative or joined up working. • No strategic vision. • Lack of understanding of needs.
1.10	<p>Audit Wales highlight an opportunity following the pandemic, which demonstrates that communities can take action and be less reliant, with signs of a ‘resurgence in community activism’ but to sustain this requires a change in how local authorities work.</p>
1.11	<p>In the report, Audit Wales predict that local authorities will deliver less in future and will look very different in years to come.</p> <p>The report identifies some key approaches that local authorities are seeking to reduce demand through building community resilience and self-reliance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a clear future vision. • Having two-way conversations – what will change look and feel like? • Council Members revitalised as community champions. • Reconsidering work of council employees. • Recognition of different solutions being needed in different places. • Retaining wealth locally and ensuring it works for the community.

	Further detail and examples of all these approaches are provided in the report.
1.12	<p>Recommendations</p> <p>In the recommendations section, Audit Wales highlight that they expect each local authority to consider the findings of the review and the recommendations contained within the ‘Together we can’ report.</p> <p>There is also an expectation that the Councils Governance and Audit Committee receives a copy of the Audit Wales report and monitors response to the recommendations made within it.</p>
1.13	<p>The recommendations made by Audit Wales in the ‘Together we can’ report include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local authorities need to have the right systems and arrangements in place. They should conduct a self-evaluation (one is provided by Audit Wales) to evaluate current practice, performance, etc.; identify where improvement is needed; and develop and implement an action plan to tackle any gaps identified or improvements required. 2. The action plan developed following the self-evaluation should be formally approved, and there should be regular reporting and monitoring of performance to scrutiny committees, with flexibility to revise actions in light of evaluation and performance.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Whilst in principle the recommendations made in the ‘Together we can’ report are desirable, implementation of the recommendations would require cross organisational work, with no dedicated resource or capacity within existing teams to oversee and co-ordinate. Although, it is acknowledged that community resilience sits under the Housing and Communities Portfolio in Flintshire.
2.02	Whilst there may be long-term benefits to all in supporting greater community resilience and self-reliance, it will not be easy to achieve and will require Council resource to drive and implement.
2.03	The report recognises the difficulties facing local authorities, some of which are struggling to maintain statutory services, and that switching resources from stretched services is not easy. However, Audit Wales argue that without investment on the ground to grow capacity and resilience, communities cannot respond.
2.04	The Audit Wales report promotes local authorities building community resilience and self-reliance to reduce demand on local authorities and help address the budgetary challenges. Yet there appears to be no cost benefit analysis to suggest that the examples provided in the report are supporting these outcomes. Indeed, the report recognises that for initiatives to be successful there is a need for ongoing local authority involvement.

2.05	Local experience suggests that the examples provided by Audit Wales in the report are unlikely to pay back the time and investment required to implement, let alone provide ongoing savings. So, whilst building community resilience to support well-being and social capital may be desirable, local experience would suggest framing it as a tool to reduce demand and save costs for local authorities is perhaps misleading.
2.06	<p>Therefore, the recommendations made by Audit Wales have been considered. Whilst these are acknowledged and accepted in principle (that is the right arrangements and processes in place may help strengthen community resilience and self-reliance) local experience is that some of the activities Audit Wales refer to do not achieve the outcomes Audit Wales suggest.</p> <p>In addition, the Council cannot achieve the output of the recommendations. Completion of a self-assessment and subsequent action plan is not achievable in the current climate given the financial constraints on the Council and the lack of available capacity/resource to undertake such a cross organisational piece of work, especially if it is unlikely to yield the outcomes suggested.</p>

3.00	IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT
3.01	An Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has not been completed as this report is to provide an overview of the Audit Wales 'Together we can' report.
3.02	The Council must be content with the risk of not undertaking the recommendations and the Council's Governance and Audit Committee must be satisfied with the response in 2.06.

4.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT
4.01	<p>This report has been presented to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12th June 2014 – an additional recommendation was requested to recognise the work of numerous voluntary organisations and individuals across the County and feedback this to Cabinet when considering the report at its meeting on 18th June. • Cabinet on 18th June 2024

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Not applicable

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>'Together we can' Community resilience and self-reliance, published by Audit Wales in January 2023 and available online: https://www.audit.wales/publication/together-we-can-community-resilience-and-self-reliance</p> <p>The material is acknowledged as the Auditor General for Wales copyright.</p>

7.00	CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS
7.01	<p>Contact Officer: Kelly Oldham-Jones – Strategic Executive Officer Jen Griffiths – Senior Manager, Housing and Communities Niall Waller – Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration</p> <p>Telephone: 01352 702143 / 01352 702929 / 01352 702137 Cymraeg/Welsh: 01267 224923</p> <p>E-mail: kelly.oldham-jones@flintshire.gov.uk Jen.Griffiths@flintshire.gov.uk niall.waller@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

8.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
	<p>Auditor General for Wales: Appointed by the Queen and independent of government the Auditor General for Wales is the statutory external auditor of most of the Welsh public sector.</p> <p>Audit Wales: refers to the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office.</p> <p>Wales Audit Office: works to support the Auditor General as the public sector watchdog for Wales. They aim to ensure that the people of Wales know whether public money is being managed wisely and that public bodies in Wales understand how to improve outcomes.</p>