



## **HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 23RD JUNE 2015**

**SUBJECT: WALES AUDIT OFFICE REPORT ON ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the feedback from the Wales Audit Office following their review of Environmental Health Services across Wales.

### **2. SUMMARY**

- 2.1 In 2013 the Wales Audit Office (WAO) undertook an audit of Environmental Health Services in Wales interviewing officers and undertaking a survey of staff, Members, and the public. The WAO found that Caerphilly Council is delivering most of its environmental health services at the highest levels (as judged against the Best Practice Standards) and that whilst since 2011-12 the Council has marginally cut expenditure on environmental health and there was a fall in the number of staff, survey respondents are mostly positive about the current standard of environmental health service.
- 2.2 In terms of its all-Wales analysis the WAO found that:
- Councils have many statutory Environmental Health duties but spending is not being protected during the current period of financial austerity, which is making it more difficult to deliver national strategic priorities.
  - Survey respondents are mostly positive about the current standard of Environmental Health service but there is a low awareness of current performance or future plans amongst citizens
  - New environmental health statutory duties are being introduced which councils will find difficult to deliver

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 3.1 Enforcing public protection legislation is a statutory duty and this activity also contributes to the Healthier Caerphilly, Greener Caerphilly, Prosperous Caerphilly, and Safer Caerphilly priorities within the Caerphilly Local Service Board single integrated plan, Caerphilly Delivers, and Objective 1 of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2012.

## 4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 In 2013 the Wales Audit Office (WAO) undertook an audit of Environmental Health Services in Wales against the Best Practice Standards which were created in 2004 by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, in conjunction with Environmental Health Services in Wales. The WAO report was entitled "Delivering with less – the impact on Environmental Health Services and Citizens". It sought to assess how Environmental Health Services in Wales were faring in light of the significant budget reductions that Local Government has been experiencing over the last few years.
- 4.2 For the purposes of their study WAO include the following functions with the scope:
- Communicable Disease Control
  - Food Safety Control
  - Health and Safety
  - Recruitment Training and Development
  - Port Health
  - Pest Control
  - Dog Control
  - Pollution Control
  - Licensing
  - Housing
  - Health Improvement
- 4.3 As part of the study the WAO interviewed officers and reviewed documentation during 2013 and also undertook a survey of all local authority environmental health staff and all elected members in Wales between December 2013 and January 2014. They also made available and promoted an on-line survey for Welsh citizens. For the staff survey the WAO reported the findings specific to Caerphilly Council comparing responses from Council employees with the Welsh survey average. Given the size of the respondent base, for the elected member and citizen survey they only reported findings at an all Wales level.
- 4.4 The WAO survey of environmental health staff found that 100 per cent of Council staff respondents felt they fully understood the requirements of their job and 80 per cent strongly agreed or agreed that they had received sufficient training to do a good job. However, only 43 per cent of Council staff responding to our survey strongly agreed or agreed that they had enough time to do all the work that is required. This is higher than the all Wales staff survey average of 35 per cent.
- 4.5 A greater proportion of staff respondents agreed that the quality of the Council's environmental health services are improving than the Welsh survey average, 65 per cent for the Council compared to the all Wales average of 47 per cent. Likewise, 83 per cent of Council staff respondents felt that the environmental health service met all of its statutory obligations, much higher than the all Wales average of 63 per cent. Sixty five per cent of staff respondents in Caerphilly Council felt that senior managers communicated their plans effectively to staff. This is much higher than the all Wales survey average of 38 per cent. Similarly, 79 per cent of Caerphilly Council respondents felt that councillors and senior managers recognise the importance of environmental health services, higher than the all Wales average of 51 per cent. A greater proportion however felt that the Council encouraged them to develop new and more efficient ways of working, 61 per cent compared to the all Wales survey average of 54 per cent.
- 4.6 The WAO found that Caerphilly Council is delivering most of its environmental health services at the highest levels (as judged against the Best Practice Standards) and that whilst since 2011-12 the Council has marginally cut expenditure on environmental health and there was a fall in the number of staff, survey respondents are mostly positive about the current standard of environmental health service.

4.7 In its all-Wales analysis the WAO found that:

- Councils have many statutory Environmental Health duties but spending is not being protected during the current period of financial austerity, which is making it more difficult to deliver national strategic priorities.
- Survey respondents are mostly positive about the current standard of Environmental Health service but there is a low awareness of current performance or future plans amongst citizens.
- New environmental health statutory duties are being introduced which councils will find difficult to deliver.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This report is for information purposes only, so the Council's Equalities Impact Assessment process does not need to be applied.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 This report is for information purposes only and therefore there are no financial implications. The WAO considered financial data for the period 2011/12 to 2013/14. Environmental Health budgets have reduced since that time in accordance with the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 This report is for information purposes only and therefore there are no personnel implications.

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

8.1 This report has been sent to the Consultees listed below and all comments received are reflected in this report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 Members are requested to note the report.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

10.1 To inform Members of the findings of the WAO study.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

11.1 Officers within the services within the scope of this study enforce a large number of Acts of Parliament which are listed in part 3 of the constitution, Responsibility for Functions.

Author: Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection – Ext. 5316  
Consultees: Cllr. Nigel George, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services  
Cllr Gerald Jones, Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Housing  
Dave Street, Corporate Director, Social Services  
Kenyon Williams, Private Sector Housing Manager  
Shaun Couzens, Chief Housing Officer  
Ceri Edwards, Environmental Health Manager  
Jacqui Morgan, Trading Standards & Licensing Manager  
David A. Thomas, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities and Welsh Language)  
Mike Eedy, Finance Manager  
Sian Phillips, HR Manager

Background Papers: None

Appendices:  
Appendix 1 Wales Audit Office report entitled “Delivering with less – the impact on Environmental Health Services and Citizens – Caerphilly County Borough Council”