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Mr Jeremy Patterson  
Chief Executive  
Powys County Council  
County Hall  
Llandrindod Wells  
LD1 5LG

Reference	640A2013
Date	29 November 2013
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Dear Jeremy

## Improvement Assessment

In my letter of 27 September 2013, I gave my opinion on whether Powys County Council (the Council) had discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning.

I am also required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (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 opinion, and based on audit work undertaken to date the Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure although there is potential to strengthen its arrangements further.**

The Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure:

- the Council published an assessment of its performance during 2012-13 in its *Annual Performance Report 2012-13* (the Report) by 31 October 2013, although a non-technical summary will not be available to citizens until mid-December 2013;
- the Report assesses the Council's performance in the preceding year 2012-13 and sets out how the Council has sought to discharge its duties under the Measure;
- the Report presents evidence to demonstrate the progress the Council has made against its improvement objectives;
- the Report invites citizens to provide feedback to the Council on the Report and describes how to do this;
- the Report includes details of performance and comparisons as measured by the national statutory performance indicators; and

- the role of collaboration and partnership working in supporting the Council's improvement agenda is well integrated into reporting on what the Council has done, why and the difference this has made.

I have identified a number of areas where the Council can strengthen its improvement reporting:

- The Report does not clearly evaluate the Council's progress towards achieving its improvement objectives, focussing on actions completed and new processes introduced rather than the outcomes these are achieving for citizens. A lack of targeted levels of performance to indicate the extent of improvement the Council is aiming to achieve inhibits internal challenge and effective self-evaluation.
- Although a wider range of evidence is included in this year's Report, this does not yet amount to a comprehensive and balanced assessment of performance. There remains an over-reliance on numerical outputs and the extent of feedback from users is limited or anecdotal. Other broader, qualitative information, for example, the result of benchmarking, scrutiny assessments or peer reviews is not provided.
- The Report does not make the best use of comparative information. Although stronger and weaker areas of performance compared with other Welsh councils are identified, there is no rationale provided for the comparisons made (or not made), what these mean and what the Council plans to do differently as a result.

### **Further proposals for improvement**

I am making no new proposals for improvement in this letter as I have reported previously that the Council can and should strengthen its improvement reporting arrangements in the areas identified above. I 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 publish 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