

focus on outcomes; and develop the role of audit, inspection and regulation in supporting this agenda.'

Paper 8 - Welsh Government

The White Paper '*Reforming Local Government: Power to Local People*' (Feb 2015) proposed a number of changes relating to Corporate Governance and Improvement including introducing a system of annual self-assessment to support Local Authorities in improving their corporate capability and capacity. It noted that evaluation of the impact of Outcome Agreements³, and by extension Part 1 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, found that they have generally been effective in achieving better corporate focus on improvement and outcomes, although it was difficult to assess whether they had led to performance improvements. The White Paper also noted that the *Learning to Improve*⁴ report found improvement plans have fallen short in supporting the public to hold their Councils to account, and are not sufficiently used by local Scrutiny Committees. *Learning to Improve* also raised questions about the consistency, objectivity and usefulness of the Wales Audit Office's annual improvement assessments in supporting Local Authorities to improve. The annual assessments focus on making improvement 'auditable' has led to too much reliance on external assessment rather than local accountability. This does not always provide either the Local Authorities, Welsh Ministers or the public with the assurance they are seeking.

The response to the White Paper on self-assessment and Peer review were generally supportive. Local Authorities and the WLGA emphasised the benefits of peer assessment being sector-led. In the Public Policy Institute for Wales report '*High Performing Councils: recipe not alchemy*'⁵ (July 2015) it was noted that honest regular organisational self-assessment and embracing searching criticism from peers and inspectors was an indicator of a successful council.

³ Do Outcome Based Approaches to Service Delivery Work? Local Authority Outcome Agreements in Wales, Dr Jennifer Law, University of South Wales, 2013, <http://caspp.southwales.ac.uk/publications/>

⁴ Learning to Improve, Welsh Government, 2013, <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/7945310/?lang=en>

⁵ <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/High-Performing-Councils-Thinkpiece-Final.pdf>