



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

19th MARCH 2019

COUNCIL CORPORATE AND SERVICE SELF ASSESSMENTS

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE IN DISCUSSION WITH THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL (COUNCILLOR ANDREW MORGAN)

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for Members to consider the corporate and service self assessments of the Council for 2018.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Cabinet:

- 2.1 Review the corporate self assessment and consider whether it is an accurate and robust reflection of the position of the Council and its services.
- 2.2 Require the Chief Executive to make any appropriate adjustments and to present this report to the Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee for their review at the next possible meeting.
- 2.3 Request that the areas for improvement identified in the corporate and service self assessments are incorporated into the Council's Corporate Performance Report for 2018, which is audited by the Wales Audit Office.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To continue to improve the Council's corporate and service planning processes that result in better, more efficient and effective public services.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 All organisations, whatever their size, the product or service they offer, public or private sector, need to know themselves well, identify their agenda for improvement, promote innovation and sector-leading

practice and improve the quality of their products and services to meet the changing needs and demands of their customers or service users.

- 4.2 The basis of this process is called self evaluation or self assessment. Crucially, in the public sector, where the self assessment process focuses on impact and outcomes of the services being delivered, it leads to improvements in the experiences and the outcomes for the service user, whether that is, for example, educational outcomes of learners or enabling more older people to live independently in their own homes.
- 4.3 Self assessment is a process, not a one-off event. It is the first, essential step in a cyclical process of bringing about change and improvement. It is based on professional reflection, challenge and support among practitioners and professionals. Effective self assessment involves taking wide-ranging decisions about actions which result in clear benefits for all service users. Most of all, it is about striving for excellence within the resources available.
- 4.4 At the heart of self assessment are three questions:
 - **How well are we doing?**
 - **How do we know?**
 - **How can we improve things further?**
- 4.5 While every aspect of the Council's provision is a legitimate focus for self assessment, the emphasis should always be on outcomes, i.e. on an evaluation of the impact of each aspect of service provision on the outcomes for the customer/resident/user etc.
- 4.6 The process of self assessment should be **continuous** and an embedded part of the Council's working life. Self assessment should be based on a wide range of information about strengths and areas for improvement which is collected throughout the year (though it will often be appropriate to conduct some aspects of self assessment at longer intervals, and not necessarily each year). The Council and its partners should use information from self assessment to plan for improvements, to undertake improvement work and to ensure a regular cyclical process of monitoring and evaluation that leads to further improvement.

The diagram below shows the cyclical nature of effective self assessment:



- 4.7 This is the fourth year the self assessment process has been undertaken. Over the past few months, Cabinet Members, officers and staff from across the Council have contributed to the corporate and service self assessments. There is no single formula or approach for self assessment. The services we provide can vary from simple stand alone provision to complex processes, frequently requiring highly effective partnership and collaborative working arrangements, with the Council at the core. However, a standard model of service self assessment has been adopted building on the model developed last year. A copy of the model adopted is in Appendix A.
- 4.8 The corporate self assessment considers the performance of the corporate body of the Council. The corporate self assessment was based on the Wales Audit Office questions that are posed to local authorities as part of the WAO's Corporate Assessment audits. At the centre of the corporate self assessment undertaken in 2018 are the following questions:
1. Is the authority making progress on achieving its planned improvements in performance and outcomes?

2. Does the authority's vision and strategic direction support improvement?
3. Do the authority's governance and accountability arrangements support robust and effective decision making?
4. Is the authority managing its resources effectively to deliver its planned improvements in performance and outcomes?
5. Are the authority's collaboration and partnership arrangements working effectively to deliver improved performance and outcomes?
6. Is the authority effectively managing its improvement programme?
7. Is the authority effectively managing its public body duties for the implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations Act?
8. Is the authority effectively implementing the Welsh Language Standards

4.9 The completed Council corporate self assessment, is set out in Appendix B.

4.10 The service self assessments have been challenged, reviewed and signed off by the respective Cabinet Member and the Group Director, and have been subject to an independent challenge by the Chief Executive. A list of the service areas that have completed a service self assessment are listed in Appendix C.

4.11 The outcome of the service self assessment is that each service area has to:

- Set out 5 key priority actions it will deliver in 2019/20;
- Set out a small number of performance measures and targets from which Members and officers can assess the performance of the service.

4.12 This information will form the basis of a Delivery Plan for each service for 2019/20 and which will form the basis of the Priority Plans reported to Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committees each quarter. The actions arising from the corporate self assessment process will not be included in a separate action plan but are incorporated within the Delivery Plans of individual services.

5 HOW WELL ARE WE DOING AND HOW DO WE KNOW?

5.1 The performance of the Council has improved consistently over the past few years. This improvement has been evidenced in particular in education, homelessness, waste management, social services and highways services. The number of national performance indicators has been reduced by Welsh Government and little progress has been made

in introducing alternative measures. Therefore, often consistent and accurate comparative information is limited and so our focus has been on improving the Council's performance based on the range of historical indicators.

- 5.2 The continued improvement is driven by the strong and focused leadership from the Leader and Cabinet. It is evident that good progress is being made in delivering the majority of the commitments set out in the Corporate Plan. Over the course of the next year, the Corporate Plan will be reviewed and through the engagement of Scrutiny Committees, residents and staff, will be updated to set out the ambitions for the five years to 2025.
- 5.4 Political leadership of the Council has been stable for a number of years, and this has led to consistency in managing the necessary reductions in public sector funding, maintaining a strong financial base and a focus of improvement in service delivery. In a previous [Annual Improvement Report](#), the Wales Audit Office reported that *"With a strong corporate focus upon the effective use of its resources, supported by strengthened service planning and governance arrangements, the Council is well placed to overcome some significant future challenges"*.
- 5.5 The Wales Audit Office in its report ["Scrutiny: Fit for the Future"](#) recognised the progress made by the Council in improving its political scrutiny arrangements and made five proposals for improvement to further strengthen the arrangements. These proposals are being addressed, working with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the scrutiny committees.
- 5.6 The Council continues to seek to improve its approaches to community engagement. This is beginning to have some success with the recent budget consultation with over 4,000 individuals providing their views on how the Council should set its 2019/20 budget, well over double the number that participated in the prior year.
- 5.7 The capacity of the Council is enhanced by sound financial management and capable senior officers. The Council has robust arrangements in place to develop and implement savings plans to manage the reduction in public sector funding and has a track record of delivering the plans to ensure the Council delivers a balanced budget each year.
- 5.8 The Council has continued to challenge its use of earmarked reserves and the level of risks, and coupled with its proactive approach to generating efficiency savings early in the financial year has enabled the Council to release a further £33.5 million in 2018 to be invested in key infrastructure projects, focused on "investing for the future". The Council has a three year capital programme exceeding £200m and can demonstrate that spend and investment follows policy and corporate

prioritisation, for example in relation to Education (21st Century Schools), accommodation for the elderly and adults with disabilities, Wellbeing (leisure, parks, playgrounds), Waste Management, Highways and Children's services.

- 5.9 The Council has strengthened its performance management framework during the year and sought to ensure that it is consistently applied. Steps have been taken to improve the self assessment process; the quality of service and action planning through new Delivery Plans; and the creation, monitoring and evaluation of individual staff development plans, currently being rolled out to officers graded GR11 and above.
- 5.10 The recruitment, development and management of our staff has also been effective over the past few years, managing a reducing workforce yet still investing in the development of staff and the appointment of graduates and apprentices to the Council. Over the past two years over 80 graduates and apprentices have been appointed, creating excellent job and training opportunities across a range of key service areas. Progress has been made during the year to improve the productivity of the Council's workforce through improved sickness absence management, however the level of sickness absence varies significantly between services and in some services is still too high. A small team of HR specialists is working with the services with the highest sickness rates and through a range of approaches, the sickness levels have fallen.
- 5.11 The Council has made good progress in reducing office accommodation as part of its Asset Management Plan. The Council's office accommodation has already been reduced by over 20% and further opportunities to maximise occupancy of existing buildings are being explored. The roll out of agile working is making good progress, with some of our larger frontline services adopting agile working approaches reducing accommodation requirements of this group of staff and improving their productivity.
- 5.12 A priority continues to be the need to digitalise as many as possible of the Council's services to provide the customer experience now expected by the public. More resident and business transactions with the Council are available on-line, with 86.7% of all contact with the Council being via the website, and plans are being implemented to offer more transactions/services on-line.
- 5.13 Regeneration is a priority for the Council, and through effective working with Welsh Government, a number of schemes that impact on our town centres and employment sites are being developed and implemented. Good examples, include the large Department of Work and Pensions regional office being built on Treforest Industrial Estate, the transport hub in Porth and the planned improvements to the town, the major developments in Pontypridd, the former Black Lion public house and

Boot Hotel being renovated to offer housing, retail and restaurant space in Aberdare and the introduction of the town centre improvement grants which have been a success in Mountain Ash, Treorchy and Tonypany. This is coupled with the recent investment in a number of major highways and rail schemes, funded by the Council and Welsh Government, which will have a significant impact on the town centres of Porth, Treorchy, Mountain Ash and Llantrisant.

- 5.14 The Council is also shortly to see the benefits of the [Cardiff Capital Region City Deal](#) with the announcement of the significant investment in the Valley Lines in October 2018, a planned investment in a new railway station at Treforest Industrial Estate, an increase in park and ride facilities and the new Metro Depot being developed at Nantgarw, which will host the 200 apprenticeship posts offered by the new Metro provider.
- 5.15 The Council shows good community leadership in its full engagement in [Cwm Taf Public Services Board](#). The Council is working effectively with its partners to introduce the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales). It has an open culture with good working relationships between councillors, officers and partners.
- 5.16 The Council is also using partnerships to help deliver its own strategic plans. Priorities are based on a sound understanding of local needs, which have been developed with the help of effective research and consultation exercises. Shared priorities, in particular, are benefiting from closer partnership working, for example, in the areas of community safety and health. A good example is the [StayWell@home](#) early intervention service in the two A&E hospitals with social workers working from 8am to 8pm alongside medical staff in the initial assessment of possible A&E admissions and being based in the hospitals focused on ensuring an early but safe discharge from hospital. This has had a major impact on the Council's delayed discharges of care performance indicator where we have improved from one of the worst in Wales to being in the top three performing councils.
- 5.17 This is a positive initiative, however, there are still other opportunities to improve the way we interact with our partners such as Mental Health Services for children and adults. It is important that the Council continues to prioritise these issues and takes the lead on delivering the necessary change/improvement as part of the Public Services Board.
- 5.18 The Corporate Assessment has sought to challenge the status quo and deliver an accurate appraisal of the Council. Within each section there are a number of potential areas for improvement and the associated action will be included in the respective Corporate Service Business Plan.

5.19 These actions will be monitored by the Senior Leadership Team quarterly and a summary shared with the Cabinet.

6 HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THINGS FURTHER?

6.1 The key priority areas for improvement identified as part of the Corporate Self assessment are to:

- Through the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, accelerate the implementation of the Council's individual as well as its statutory partnership duties through the delivery of the Cwm Taf Well-being Plan, to deliver better outcomes for the people in RCT and Cwm Taf and improve the joint planning and delivery arrangements;
- Continue to focus attention on areas where the Council's performance, when compared to other councils in Wales, is amongst the worst, e.g. school attendance and numbers of children looked after.
- Continue to gather and understand the views, needs and aspirations of residents to provide inform and support decision making at all levels of the Council;
- Continue to strengthen the Scrutiny arrangements to further support service delivery and improvement, in response to the recent WAO report;
- Continue to review the governance arrangements to ensure they are supporting improved challenge, support, scrutiny and pre-scrutiny across the Council;
- Continue to improve the productivity of staff through effective staff absence management, and through the better use of technology in the workplace;
- Continue to implement the Council's Digital Strategy, encouraging more residents and businesses to communicate/transact with the Council on-line. This also includes the Council making better use of data through simplifying data collection systems and making certain data available to the public as part of the Government's Open Data expectations;
- Continue to challenge and review the collaborative arrangements to ensure that they are fit for purpose and have the capacity to deliver;
- Further strengthen the performance management arrangements in order that they increase accountability for performance and continue to improve the scrutiny and challenge processes.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required with regard to the corporate and service evaluations.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 One of the key areas of challenge in the corporate and service self assessment has been to seek residents/customers/service users views on the services provided. During 2018 the Council and its services have sought residents/customers/service users' feedback on the services we provide, through various means. This information is being used by individual services to inform how they plan and deliver services. This continues to be an area for improvement and will be developed further in 2019.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 9.1 There are no financial implications aligned to this report. Any investment required to address any of the recommendations will be reported and considered separately.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no legal implications aligned to this report.

11 LINKS TO THE CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT

- 11.1 This report seeks to identify how well the Council is performing and what needs to improve in accordance with the requirements and aspirations of the Council's Corporate Plan and to establish its progress in meeting the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act to improve the Economic, Social, Environmental and Cultural Well-being of the people and communities of RCT.

12 CONCLUSION

- 12.1 The Council has undertaken its fourth annual corporate and service self assessment of its services to better inform its improvement planning arrangements to ensure it delivers its services efficiently and effectively. Services use this information to inform and improve the planning and delivery of key services. This improvement is reflected in many of the performance measures.

Other Information:-

Relevant Scrutiny Committee:

Finance & Performance Scrutiny Committee

Background Papers:

None

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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Background Papers:

None.

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