

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23

<p>GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE 7th December 2022</p>	<p>AGENDA ITEM NO. 7</p>
<p>REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE</p>	<p>The Council's Draft Annual Self-Assessment 2021/22 incorporating the Council's Corporate Performance Report</p>

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is for the Governance and Audit Committee to review the Council's draft Self-Assessment for 2021/22 in advance of consideration at a meeting of the Council in January 2023, in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) Act 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Review the draft Self-Assessment and consider whether it is an accurate and robust reflection of the position of the Council and its services and meets the requirements of the [Local Government and Elections Act 2021 Part 6](#).
- 2.2 Make observations / recommendations for change, as deemed appropriate, prior to consideration by Council.
- 2.3 Require the Chief Executive to update the draft Self-Assessment in line the Governance and Audit Committee's feedback, as appropriate, and for the Committee's feedback to be included in the report to Council.
- 2.4 Note that following approval of the self-assessment by Council, the document will be published within four weeks of it being finalised.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To continue to improve the Council's self-awareness through the range of self-assessment tools and approaches in place across the organisation.
- 3.2 To evidence how the Council is meeting the new duty set out in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, '*for each Council in Wales to keep under review the extent to which it is meeting the 'performance requirements', that is the extent to which:-*
- *it is exercising its functions effectively;*
 - *it is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively;*
 - *its governance is effective for securing the above.'*

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 For many years, the Council has prepared Annual Corporate Performance Reports in order to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. This Measure is now disapplied. The 'freedom' from the Measure has enabled the Council to reflect on the previous arrangements and to take a more proportionate, pragmatic and timely approach to planning and reporting the Council's priorities, make better use of the plethora of information already made widely available and reduce the reporting burdens so far as possible.
- 4.2 Local Authorities in Wales are now required to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Act requires an annual self-assessment to be undertaken of the Council, assess performance against priorities, identify areas for improvement and put plans on place to deliver those improvements. This is therefore the first year of our new style annual Corporate Performance Report which provides a summary of our 2021/22 Self-Assessment and acts as a signpost to the new and existing information we have used to keep our performance under review. Our annual Self-Assessment comprises information about:
1. **How we have delivered our Priorities** – reporting our progress and plans through the wide range of information already available to residents, communities and our stakeholders about how we are delivering our Priorities i.e. our Well-being Objectives, through our formal quarterly [Performance and Resources reports](#) to Cabinet and Council Committees and the Council's various Social Media channels.

2. **Our assessment of our corporate functions – including how we are meeting the Socioeconomic Duty.**
 3. **The Self Evaluation of our services.**
 4. **Our application of the Sustainable Development Principle** and information that shows how we are implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 4.3 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.
 - 4.4 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.
 - 4.5 Self-assessment is a continuous 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.
 - 4.6 The Council introduced annual self-assessment processes in 2016 and has a good track record of open and honest self-assessment at corporate and service levels. This is evidenced in the latest Audit Wales ‘Assurance and Risk Assessment Review’, to be reported to the 7th December 2022 Governance and Audit Committee meeting, which recognised *‘that the self-evaluation arrangements are well embedded and supported by robust corporate challenge.’*
 - 4.7 The self-assessments, at both service and corporate levels, encourage and enable self-awareness across the Council; are crucial to informing, supporting and challenging front line services alongside the corporate support in place to continually improve and giving assurance that we are delivering our priorities.
 - 4.8 These processes use different sources of evidence to give assurance and provide information about where we are doing well and how we can do better to improve outcomes for the customer/resident/user etc.

- 4.9 Between early 2020 and Autumn 2021, many of the internal performance processes were held in abeyance to allow appropriate direct focus on the response to and recovery phases from the Covid pandemic. However, regular and comprehensive quarterly financial and performance management reports including monitoring reports continued to be provided to, and considered by, elected Members. This ensured that the business of the Council continued and information about the response and recovery phases of the pandemic was considered.
- 4.10 In April 2021 the Performance and Governance arrangements arising from the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021, Part 6, were enacted. Among other things, Part 6 of the Act seeks *‘to establish a more regularised performance and governance system which will place an onus on the principal council to take ‘ownership of its own improvement, and should seek to build reflection on performance and action to improve into its system’*. Section 91 of the Act requires the Council to.....
- ‘....produce a self-assessment report in respect of each financial year. The report must set out its conclusions on the extent to which it met the performance requirements during that financial year, and any actions it intends to take, or has already taken, to increase the extent to which it is meeting the performance requirements’*.
- 4.11 A position statement in respect of our readiness to meet the new statutory duty, particularly in the light of our earlier established performance culture, was considered by [Cabinet in March 2021](#).
- 4.12 In September 2021, the full self-assessment processes restarted. Over the past few months, Cabinet Members, officers and staff from across the Council have contributed to the corporate and service self-assessments alongside the continuing robust challenge of performance in the many and varied reports to Cabinet, Scrutiny and Governance and Audit Committees. There is no single formula or approach for self-assessment.
- 4.13 Given the disruption and refocus of the Council’s arrangements in 2020/21, the Council’s 2021/22 Self Assessment has sought to provide a ‘stock take’ of the service and corporate functions together with consideration of the robustness of the management and monitoring arrangements in place that evidence that we are delivering our priorities and enable the Council to be assured that
- it is exercising its functions effectively;
 - it is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and
 - its governance is effective for securing the above.’

5. THE COUNCIL'S 2021/22 SELF ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 Performance and Governance arrangements arising from the Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 requires the Self-Assessment to be considered by Governance and Audit Committee in advance of consideration by Council.
- 5.2 The information considered in assessing our performance for all our services, activities and functions runs into thousands of pages, and many more hundreds of hyperlinked documents, policies, strategies, a small selection of which can be found [here](#). The available 'catalogue' of evidence includes updates contained in Cabinet Reports as part of the Cabinet work programme, and its Sub Committees and Steering Groups; Scrutiny and Pre-Scrutiny reports; Governance and Audit Committee considerations; Improvement and differing Regional Partnership Boards as well as Joint Committees. Much of this information is and has been publicly available for up to eighteen months. For this reason, it is not timely, nor is it of significant added value to the reader to reproduce the detail in the Self-Assessment. However, by providing high level summaries and signposts, we can demonstrate our open and transparent approach and provide the reader seeking more detail, with access to the information they need.
- 5.3 The Council's Self-Assessment is summarised in the Corporate Performance Report in Appendix 1 and comprises four sections
1. How we have delivered our Priorities
 - People;
 - Places; and
 - Prosperity.
 2. Our assessment of our corporate functions.
 3. The Self Evaluation of our services.
 4. Our application of the Sustainable Development Principle.

How we have delivered our priorities

- 5.4 The Council's key strategic priorities for the period 2020-2024 were agreed by Council [on 4 March 2020](#) and are set out in its Corporate Plan '[Making a Difference](#)'. 'Making a Difference' continues the positive work started in 2016 as part of the previous Corporate Plan, 'The Way Ahead', and is a key element of the Council's strategic and financial management arrangements to ensure it:

- is well placed to meet future ambitions, particularly in the context of challenging funding levels, changes in the demand for services, including the on-going impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and legislation changes;
- sets a clear strategy and set of priorities for future years;
- allocates resources to priority areas; and
- puts in place plans to deliver the agreed priorities.

5.5 The Corporate Plan sets a clear direction for the Council, which all staff and Managers can see, understand and work toward through their Service Delivery Plans. There are transparent, robust and regular reporting and scrutiny arrangements in place which also ensure that residents and external stakeholders are able to hold the Council to account.

The Self-Assessment sets out our arrangements for monitoring and managing our priorities and associated budgets in our quarterly performance reports and sets out end of year summaries of each of our priorities demonstrating the progress made and where we need to improve.

Assessment of our corporate functions

5.6 This sets out a 'stock take' of fourteen corporate functions and arrangements which support the delivery of services and our Priorities. In preparing the Assessment across the corporate functions, where possible, the Assessment has referred to existing processes, policies, reports etc., ensuring that no additional process is created in this work. The corporate functions considered are:

- 1 Strategic planning and Approach*
- 2 Governance and Scrutiny
- 3 Performance Management*/Finance* and Risk Management
- 4 HR*
- 5 Asset Management*
- 6 IT/Information Management
- 7 Procurement* and Commissioning
- 8 Partnerships
- 9 Involvement, Engagement and Customer Feedback
- 10 Welsh Language
- 11 Equalities and Socio-economic Duty
- 12 Regulators' Feedback
- 13 Net Zero
- 14 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act

- 5.7 A summary of each of the fourteen completed assessment sections is set out in the Self-Assessment. The detailed assessments are available for further scrutiny/examination if required. Improvement Actions arising from the assessment of corporate actions are incorporated within the Delivery Plans of individual services.
- 5.8 Seven of these functions* are described in [the Well-being of Future Generations Act Core Guidance](#) *as the core activities common to the corporate governance of public bodies... the application of which is likely to secure the change required by the Act.* An update of the Council's previous progress in the core activities was included in the [Council's Corporate Performance Report 2020/21 \(p 78-81\)](#).

The Self Evaluation (SSE) of our services

- 5.9 Self Evaluations were completed by twenty-one areas of service. In completing the SSEs, Service Managers provide the evidence that enables them to answer three questions:
- a) how are they performing?
 - b) how do they know? and
 - c) what can they do to improve?
- 5.10 This also included the extent to which services implement key corporate and cross cutting functions. A copy of the SSE template can be seen [here](#) and is also contained within the Annual Self-Assessment.
- 5.11 The completed Service Self Evaluations were challenged and reviewed by the respective Cabinet Member, signed off by the Group Director and were subject to challenge by the Chief Executive in meetings with service managers.

The outcome of the Service Self Evaluation is a

- Set of key priority actions the service will deliver in 2022/23.
 - Set of performance measures and targets through which elected Members and officers can assess the performance of the service.
- 5.12 All completed SSEs are made available on the Council's Intranet site for internal reference/use. A list of the service areas that completed a Service Self Evaluation is can be found [here](#) and within the Annual Self-Assessment.
- 5.13 The key actions emerging from the SSEs informed Service Delivery Plans in 2022/23. Relevant key actions also informed the detailed plans that deliver the Corporate Priorities which are also our Well-being

Objectives. The Corporate Priorities are monitored in [Performance Reports to Cabinet](#) and thereafter to Scrutiny Committees each quarter.

Well-being of Future Generations - Sustainable Development principle

- 5.14 The Council's Improvement Priorities are our Well-being Objectives and discharge the requirements under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This approach was supported by Council in endorsing the Corporate Plan 'Making a Difference' on [4 March 2020](#) when it agreed that the Council's Corporate Priorities would also serve as the Council's Well-being Objectives and set out how it work would contribute to the seven national Well-being Goals.
- 5.15 The Council's approach to the Well-being Future Generations Act was set in [November 2016](#) when Cabinet agreed a Policy Statement to apply the spirit of the Act, embedding processes into the work of the Council and avoiding any additional burden to the leadership, management and governance of the Council. The Act has been acknowledged by the Commissioner as the 'common sense Act'.
- 5.16 Our Assessment of progress in respect of the Well-being of Future Generations Act has been set out in the Corporate Assessment, see 5.8 above. This Assessment provides an appraisal of progress and plans to strengthen our approach following a refocus of priorities arising from the pandemic.
- 5.17 As indicated in the Self-Assessment, early feedback from Regulators in respect of our approach to implementing the Act was generally positive but we know there is more to do. With the recent new national approach by Audit Wales to test how all Public Bodies are applying the Sustainable Development principle in all its reviews, inevitably gaps in all Public Bodies approaches, including the support provided by the Commissioner, are being identified.

6. HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THINGS FURTHER?

- 6.1 Of the areas for improvement that emerge from the different elements across the Self-Assessment, there are nine clear themes that the Council must tackle:
 - 1. **Financial Planning and Resilience** – managing our way through the current and future significant financial challenges as a result

- of the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine. This will require the Council and its partners to prioritise services and make some difficult decisions on which services are reduced or stopped;
2. **Workforce Planning** - Recruiting and retaining the best staff and ensuring key services such as social care have the staffing flexibility to respond to increasing demand for services;
 3. **Cost of Living Crisis** – working with partners, the Council provides a wide range of services and targeted support to children and their families as well as individuals living in poverty. However, in the aftermath of the pandemic we need to improve the way in which we engage with families to make them aware of the breadth of services available and how they can access them;
 4. **Making RCT Resilient to the challenges of Climate Change** – working with Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales and local businesses and communities, we need to continue to mitigate, wherever possible, the impact of climate change. This includes continuing to replace / repair the infrastructure damaged by Storm Dennis, tackling tip safety, upgrading the flood water infrastructure and supporting residents and businesses to put in place their mitigation and adaptation measures. The Council will also be seeking to reduce its own carbon footprint and become carbon neutral by 2030;
 5. **Narrowing the Attainment gap for pupils living in poverty** - improving pupils' achievement and narrowing the attainment gap, which has widened during the course of the pandemic.
 6. **School Attendance** – improving pupil attendance to at least the level pre-the pandemic, and in particular those children living in poverty where the levels of attendance are lowest;
 7. **Modernising and integrating health and social care services and transforming the Council's residential services for children** – to ensure that vulnerable people who require care receive it promptly and within their own communities, with the minimum of time spent in acute hospital settings. To increase capacity and transform our services to move the Council to a not-for-profit model of provision of residential care that is close to home;
 8. **Continuing to regenerate the town centres and supporting local businesses** – we have ambitious plans for our town centres and despite the difficult financial circumstances we need to ensure we maximise UK and Welsh Government funding to create thriving town centres and be able to offer a range of quality commercial accommodation to local businesses to start up and become successful organisations employing local people; and
 9. **Supporting those in housing need** - continuing to focus on preventing homelessness and working with Welsh Government, private and registered social landlords to ensure we have the right accommodation, in the most appropriate location, and with

suitable support to meet an individual's and a family's need when they are at risk of being homeless.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS AND SOCIOECONOMIC DUTY

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is not required with regard to the annual Self-Assessment. However, the Self-Assessment contains an evaluation of how we are delivering Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Council's services, our progress in integrating the Socio economic duty into the work of the Council and where we need to do better.

8. CONSULTATION, ENGAGEMENT AND INVOLVEMENT

8.1 One of the key areas of challenge in the Self-Assessment is seeking and using residents/customers/service users and staff views on the services provided or ideas for improvement. This feedback can emerge through engagement, social media and other customer feedback channels. We have used the feedback we have in all parts of the Self-Assessment and the Corporate element of the Self-Assessment, in particular, explains how we are seeking to expand this work and ensure all feedback is being used across the Council to inform our planning and service delivery. This continues to be an area for improvement and will be developed further in 2023.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no Welsh language implications aligned to this report. However, Welsh Language is integral to the Service Self Evaluation and Corporate Assessments and are contained within the relevant sections.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

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

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The report aims to ensure that the Council complies with its legal duties in respect of Part 6, Chapter 1 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

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

- 12.1 This report seeks to identify how well the Council is performing and what needs to improve in accordance with the aspirations set out within 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 and the six core activities identified in the Act as being '*common to the corporate governance of public bodies*'.

13. STRATEGIC OR RELEVANT TO ELECTORAL WARDS

- 13.1 The Self- Assessment and the processes it comprises, identify strengths and opportunities for improvement across all services within the County Borough.

14. CONCLUSION

- 14.1 Each of the elements of the Self-Assessment seek 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 which are developed in the relevant Delivery and Priority Plans.

- 14.2 The Council has in place comprehensive and well embedded assessment processes and robust monitoring, governance and scrutiny of its priorities. We are clear about our strengths and honest about where we need to do better. Our ability to compare with other Welsh Councils, continues to be hampered by the lack of robust national data. Within the Council the culture of constructive challenge, self awareness and pursuit of excellence, supports and challenges our arrangements and ensures we take all steps to deliver services efficiently and effectively. For these reasons, supported by the evidence throughout the Self Assessment, the Council can demonstrate it

- *is exercising its functions effectively;*
- *is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and*
- *governance is effective for securing the above.'*

and in doing so it is meeting the requirements of [Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

7 DECEMBER 2022

**THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT ANNUAL SELF ASSESSMENT 2021/22
INCORPORATING THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PERFORMANCE
REPORT**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

ITEM: 7

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Background Papers:

None.

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