

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE 19 December 2023	The Council's Annual Self- Assessment 2022/23 incorporating the Council's Corporate Performance Report
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE	

AUTHOR: Lesley Lawson, Performance Manager

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is for Members to consider the Council's Self Assessment for 2022/23 in advance of consideration by Council in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Governance and Audit Committee:

- 2.1 Review the draft Self-Assessment at Appendix 1 and considers 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 Notes the progress made in respect of the improvement themes identified in 2021/22 Self-Assessment.
- 2.3 Provides observations or recommendations, as deemed appropriate, to the Chief Executive for the Committee's feedback to be included in the report to Council in January 2024.
- 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 so that we continue to strive for excellence.
- 3.2 To evidence how the Council is meeting the 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 prepared an annual Corporate Performance Report in order to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. This Measure was disapplied in 2021. The 'freedom' from the Measure, 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 as far as possible.
- 4.2 The Council is now required to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and in respect of performance, meet the requirements of Part 6 Chapter 1 of the Act ['Performance and Governance'](#).
- 4.3 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'*.
- 4.4 This is the second year we have undertaken the Statutory Assessment which includes our corporate Performance Report and which signposts

to the new and existing information we have used to keep our performance under review. Our first statutory Self-Assessment, which reflected work during 2021/22, provided our baseline as we emerged from the Covid pandemic and was considered by [Governance and Audit Committee](#) in December 2022. Our annual Self-Assessment for 2022/23 comprises information about:

- 1 **The progress we have made against the nine themes for improvement which were identified in the 2021/22 Self-Assessment.**
 - 2 **How we have delivered our Corporate Plan since its implementation in 2020 and as we prepare our new Corporate Plan from 2024.**
 - 3 **How we have delivered on our Corporate Plan for a single year in 2022/23** reporting progress and plans through the wide range of information already available to residents, communities and stakeholders about how we are delivering our Priorities i.e. our Well-being Objectives, through formal quarterly [Performance and Resources reports](#) to Cabinet and Council Committees and the Council's various Social Media channels.
 - 4 **Our assessment of our corporate functions.**
 - 5 **The Self Evaluation of our services.**
 - 6 **Our application of the Sustainable Development Principle** and information that shows how we are implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 4.5 All organisations, whatever their size, the product or service they offer, public or private sector, need to know themselves well. They should also 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.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 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.

- 4.8 The Council introduced its annual self-assessment processes in 2016 and has a good track record of open and honest self-assessment at corporate and service levels, and we continually seek to strengthen these arrangements. This is evidenced by the Audit Wales latest [Assurance Risk Assessment Report](#) November 2022 which among other things recognised *‘The Council is building on and strengthening its existing self-evaluation arrangements to meet the self-assessment requirements. The Council’s self evaluation arrangements are well-embedded in the organisation and supported by robust corporate challenge. The Council intends to strengthen its data and evidence to underpin its self-assessment.....’*
- 4.9 The self-assessments, at both service and corporate levels, encourage and enable self-awareness across the Council. They are also crucial to informing, supporting and challenging services and the corporate support to continually improve and giving assurance that we are delivering our priorities.
- 4.10 These processes use different sources of evidence, give assurance, provide information about where we are doing well and how we can do better to improve outcomes for the customer/resident/service users etc.
- 4.11 Over the past few months, elected Members, together with officers from across the Council, have contributed to the corporate and service self-assessments and continued the robust challenge of performance in the many and varied reports to Cabinet, Scrutiny and Governance and Audit Committees.
- 4.12 There is no single formula or approach for self-assessment. The Council’s 2022/23 Self-Assessment builds on the ‘stock take’ of the service and corporate functions reported in the [2021/22 Self Assessment](#) considered by Council in January 2023. The 2022/23 Self-Assessment focuses on our progress in responding to the Improvement Themes emerging from the stock take in 2021/22 as well as consideration of the robustness of the management and monitoring arrangements in place that evidence that we are delivering our priorities that 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 2022/23 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, who is seeking more detail, with access to the information they need.
- 5.3 The Council's Self-Assessment is integrated with our annual Corporate Performance Report in Appendix 1, and comprises six sections, as set out at paragraph 4.4 above, with an overview set out below.
- 5.3.1 **The progress we have made against the nine themes for improvement which were identified in the 2021/2022 Self-Assessment.**

The Council committed to tackling the nine clear themes which emerged as areas for improvement from the 2021/22 Self-Assessment. These areas for improvement are historically complex, connected and the 'wicked' issues that have been largely worsened by circumstances outside our control or influence and all appear in the Council's Strategic Risk Register. Our work to tackle these issues is monitored through the [Council's Strategic Risk Register](#) and embedded within the work plans either within the Council or with our partners. A brief update of the progress across the nine areas, can be found in Section 1 of the Self-Assessment.

In summary

1. Financial Planning and Resilience.
2. Workforce Planning.
3. Cost of Living Crisis.
4. Making RCT Resilient to the challenges of Climate Change.
5. Narrowing the Attainment gap for pupils living in poverty.
6. School Attendance.
7. Modernising and integrating health and social care services.

- 8 Continuing to regenerate the town centres and supporting local businesses.
- 9 Supporting those in housing need.

5.3.2 **How we have delivered on our Corporate Plan since 2020 as we prepare our new Plan from 2024.**

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](#)' which 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, i.e. People, Places and Prosperity;
- allocates resources to the priority areas; and
- puts in place plans to deliver the agreed priorities.

The Corporate Plan also serves as the Council's Well-being Plan for the purposes of the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

The Plan sets out how the Priorities contribute to the seven national Well-being Goals as required by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. 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.

Section 2 of the Self-Assessment contains our progress across the life of the Corporate Plan since 2020. This period coincided with unprecedented events; local events from Storms, Dennis, Ciara and Jorge and the local response to the global Covid 19 pandemic. Despite the significant challenges arising from the response and recovery to these events and latterly the support for people fleeing Ukraine and the Cost of Living Crisis, we have made good progress in delivering what we set out to achieve and have also invested over £450M to deliver improvements across our three priorities areas.

5.3.3 **How we have delivered the priorities of our Corporate Plan in 2022/23**

We manage the delivery of our Corporate Plan and its priorities through annual Priority Plans for each of the three Priorities: People, Places and

Prosperity. Our Priority Plans are reported to Cabinet and relevant Scrutiny Committees, and are available on the Council's Website. 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 for each of our priorities demonstrating the progress made and where we need to improve.

5.3.4 **Assessment of our corporate functions**

To provide a clearer focus for elected Members' consideration of Corporate functions, Section 4 of the Self-Assessment contains an update of those corporate/cross cutting areas of work that also comprise the seven core activities '*that are common to the corporate governance of public bodies.....likely to most effectively secure the type of change required*' as set out in the [Core guidance](#) of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. i.e.

1. Corporate planning
2. Financial planning
3. Performance Management
4. Risk management
5. Workforce planning
6. Assets
7. Procurement

Section 4 also contains hyperlinks to the summaries of the complete set of cross cutting areas of work. This year, we considered fourteen corporate/cross cutting areas which support the delivery of services and our Priorities. Where possible we 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. Corporate Safeguarding NEW

Improvement Actions arising from the assessment of these corporate areas are incorporated within the Delivery Plans of individual services or in discrete action plans.

5.3.5 The Self Evaluation (SSE) of our services

Self Evaluations (SSE) were completed by twenty-five areas of service in November 2022. In completing the SSEs, Service Managers sought to answer three questions:

- a) how are they performing?
- b) how do they know? and
- c) what can they do to improve?

The SSEs also continued to include the extent to which services implement key corporate and cross cutting areas work and elements of the Sustainable Development principle i.e. thinking about the long-term impact of decisions, engaging and working better with people, communities and partners and preventing problems from happening or getting worse.

The completed SSEs were reviewed by the respective Cabinet Member, signed off by the 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 2023/24;
- Set of performance measures and targets through which elected Members and/or officers can assess the performance of the service; and
- Set of strengths and key themes which further increase our levels of organisational self awareness and understanding.

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 Self-Assessment.

The key actions emerging from the SSEs informed Service Delivery plans in 2023/24. 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, as set out in 5.3.3 above.

5.3.6 **Well-being of Future Generations - Sustainable Development principle**

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 its work would contribute to the seven national Well-being Goals. Section 5.3.2 above refers.

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.

Early feedback from Regulators in respect of our approach to implementing the Act was generally positive. With a recent strengthening of the national approach by Audit Wales to test how all Public Bodies are applying the Sustainable Development principle in all its reviews, inevitably gaps in approaches, including the support provided by the Commissioner, were highlighted.

Our Assessment of progress in respect of the Well-being of Future Generations Act has been set out in the Assessment of Corporate functions, see 5.3.4 above. This Assessment provides an appraisal of progress and plans to continue to strengthen our approach particularly in the light of the new Well-being Commissioner's Strategy, '[Cymru Can](#)', containing five mission areas, which include increasing advice and assistance for public bodies.

Like all public bodies, we know we have more to do to embed the requirement of the Act and have well developed and constructive relationships with the Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner's support team. We welcome the increased advice and assistance described in 'Cymru Can'.

6. HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THINGS FURTHER?

- 6.1 The nine themes identified in 2021/22 remain relevant. In addition, we need to continue to strengthen our arrangements for service user

engagement and participation, particularly the evaluation of outcomes. We also need to further strengthen and articulate our organisational culture and values on equality and diversity and, in doing so, support our on-going arrangements in setting out clear expectations for staff and services.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC 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. 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 in 2024.

9. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no Welsh language implications aligned to this report. However, Welsh Language is integral to both the service and corporate sections contained in the Self-Assessment.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

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

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The report aims to ensure that the Council complies with its legal duties of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

12. LINKS TO 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 Rhondda Cynon Taf, and the seven 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 within all services across 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 limited by the lack of robust national data. Within 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

19 DECEMBER 2023

**THE COUNCIL'S DRAFT ANNUAL SELF ASSESSMENT 2022/23
INCORPORATING THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PERFORMANCE
REPORT**

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Author: Lesley Lawson, Performance Manager

Background Papers

- [18th January 2023 full Council meeting](#)

Officer to contact: Lesley Lawson, Performance Manager