



CABINET - 6TH MARCH 2024

SUBJECT: ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT (INCLUDING WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES) 2022/23

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To present Cabinet with the Annual Self-Assessment Report for 2022/23. The report also includes an update of the Well-being Objectives for 2022/23.
- 1.2 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires a draft of the self-assessment to be reviewed by Governance and Audit Committee prior to coming to Cabinet. Governance and Audit Committee approved by unanimous vote the attached draft (Part 1 of Appendix 1) on 15 February 2024.
- 1.3 The report was also presented to Joint Scrutiny on 26 February for their scrutiny and challenge.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Self-Assessment Report is a statutory requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Act replaces the improvement duty for principal councils set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. Self-assessment is an important part of the Council's performance framework. This is the second time the Council has produced a Self-Assessment Report which replaces the former Annual Performance Report.
- 2.2 The Council is required to assess its own performance and provide the public with an accurate picture of that performance and identify areas for improvement.
- 2.3 The Council must also report progress against the six Well-being Objectives set out within the Corporate Plan 2018-2023. This report includes an update on the last year of the Corporate Plan.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet vote to approve the Self-assessment Report (including Well-being Objectives) 2022/23 (Appendix 1 to this report) as a final position on organisational performance for the year 2022/2023. Sections of the report were scrutinised by Governance and Audit and Joint Scrutiny Committee. Their feedback is noted in the consultation section 10.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Council has a statutory duty to publish a self-assessment report and make it available as soon as reasonably practicable after the financial year to which it relates.
- 4.2 Under the Act there is a duty to keep performance under review, the extent to which we are fulfilling the 'performance requirements' which is to:
- Exercise our functions effectively.
 - use our resources economically, efficiently, and effectively.
 - Have effective governance in place for securing the above
- 4.3 Members engage in the 'self-assessment' process by scrutinising the information within the report. This supports the principles within Part 6, Chapter 1 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 statutory guidance.
- 4.4 The guidance says that "council executives should welcome and encourage scrutiny inquiries to make recommendations for system improvements. The aim is to support councils to build on existing strengths and to support them to achieve a more innovative, open, honest, transparent, and ambitious sector, challenging itself and collectively driving up service delivery outcomes and standards."
- 4.5 "Member committees are a key part of offering constructive challenge to how a council is performing and how it organises itself in the delivery of sustainable services and are a key part of a council's self-assessment". The council is demonstrating this by the route the 'self-assessment' has taken through Governance and Audit and Joint Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.6 2022/2023 was the final year of the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2023 and the summary report in progress against the chosen well-being objectives is part of this report.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 This report introduces the Annual Self-assessment Report (including Well-being Objectives) 2022/23 (Appendix 1 to this report).
- 5.2 The intention of self-assessment is to show how a council acts on organisational learning and makes it part of an ongoing process of review. The key principle is to have an 'evidenced based' approach to know how good organisational performance is and where it could improve. From this learning we have produced a Self-Assessment Report.
- 5.3 The approach as set out in the Act is designed to be a more streamlined, flexible,

sector-led approach to performance, good governance, and improvement. The intention is for councils to keep their performance under review and be proactive in identifying how our organisational internal processes can become more effective to drive better outcomes.

- 5.4 The statutory guidance says that self-assessment can be achieved by using intelligence already held corporately in an insightful way and reflecting at a strategic level on how the council is operating, and to identify what action is needed to ensure it can continue to provide effective services now and for the long term.
- 5.5 The Council's Performance Framework has been developed to meet several strategic and operational needs as well as meeting the legislation, and further the Council's desire to be a high performing learning organisation focused on meeting the needs of its residents.
- 5.6 Much of the information contained within the report is sourced from the Directorate Performance Assessments, the Corporate Performance Assessment in addition to other council sources of information such as the Annual Governance Statement, Financial Reports and Equalities Reports.
- 5.7 The self-assessment process will produce a summary of the learning which has emerged from the self-assessment process. We have chosen a range of information to use that will be reviewed to reach our conclusions under the following headings:
 - Corporate Planning
 - Financial Planning
 - Workforce Planning
 - Procurement and Information Technology
 - Assets
 - Risk Management
 - Performance Management
 - Other Key Council Health Checks
- 5.8 The headings above are from the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) guidance and are used to frame the organisational learning.
- 5.9 The report also includes the last year's progress update on the six Well-being Objectives within the Council's Corporate Plan (2018-2023). This has now expired, and the new Corporate Plan 2023-2028 which was endorsed by Council on 29 November 2023 has now been launched. Each of the six Well-being Objectives had a series of outcomes which sets out what the Council hoped to achieve on behalf of citizens. This report sets out the progress made against those six objectives during 2022/23.
- 5.10 This is the second year of 'self-assessment'. In the first year we reviewed the process following feedback from our committees and have made the following improvements.
 - Greater use of data and trends
 - More context
 - An outward facing view of the year summary
 - Expanded information on other health checks such as Decarbonisation and Welsh Language for a more rounded view
 - A new section on Governance.

5.11 In addition to the recommendations that committee have made to improve, asked for in the new self-assessment as noted in the consultation section, improvements that we will introduce to the process for 2023/2024 are -

- Develop an evaluative judgement statement such as 'good or in need of improvement'
- Strengthen the 'involvement' process with the statutory list in the guidance which are, local people; other persons carrying on a business in the council's area; the staff of the council; and every recognised trade union.
- Stronger emphasis on outcomes connected to learning from the evidence
- Review the overall framework to check if it is still fit for purpose.

5.12 **Conclusion**

The Council's Performance Framework has been developed to meet several strategic and operational needs, as well as to meet the legislation. It is an ongoing process that allows the Council to act on organisational learning, review its performance and recognise where it could improve.

The self-assessment provides a platform to celebrate the activity that has gone well, reflect on the areas that need to be improved and to identify new approaches and interventions to support future progress.

The Self-Assessment Report 22/23 summarises learning on the Council's organisational effectiveness, using the Well-being of Future Generations framework. The Self-Assessment also identifies actions to improve our organisational effectiveness, and this will be monitored throughout the year.

The report also includes a summary of progress against the Council's well-being objectives for the 22/23 financial year.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 No assumptions have been made or were thought necessary, for this report that are not already contained within the report.

7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 No Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed for this report although individual assessments may have been made to support activity within the Well-being Objectives. Page 36 of the Self-assessment Report provides a brief update on our Welsh Language and equalities work. Delivery of the Well-being Objectives maximises our contribution to all the national well-being goals including 'A More Equal Wales'

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Page 14 in the Self-assessment Report provides information on Financial Planning.

9. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no personal implications arising from this Report.

10. CONSULTATIONS

The “Annual Self-Assessment Report 2022/23” went to **Governance and Audit** Committee 15 February 2024 who provided the following feedback.

- 10.1 One member queried the use of the word citizens as opposed to the use of the word resident and would prefer the usage ‘resident’ – this will be looked at for future reporting. However, our stakeholders also include visitors and businesses in the county borough.

Workforce Planning, the action was for an annual recruitment cycle, but the intake has moved to two yearly cycles. An explanation has been added to show that the annual recruitment cycle is in relation to the budget and the recruitment campaigns is moving to two yearly cycles. It was explained that this will give apprentices better opportunities, by expanding the training, learning and to give the skills, knowledge, and experience to help gain employment with the Council at the end of this time and a 2-year period was better to do this. The ‘frequency’ of the action will be amended for the next Self-Assessment

A member asked about the inclusion of the vacancy rate or numbers to provide the wider context to the risk that we are trying to manage. It was explained that we do not currently have the vacancy rates as our HR payroll system does not have the capability to hold it, but we have just upgraded our system so it will be available and included for the next Self-Assessment.

A query was raised on the evaluation costs of properties and assets and whether the data includes an uprating. It was noted that as the data table contains actual costs that are taken from the condition survey, no uplift has been added. The next round of building surveys will pick up on current costs when the next surveys take place. This started January 2024 and is on a 3-year rolling programme.

There was a query on the 104 properties brought back into use and what this meant. It was confirmed that it meant the houses were now being rented out and we will clarify that on the next publication.

Members asked for the number of invoice payments that we make within 30 days to include percentages as well as numbers to add context. This will be updated for the 23/24 report.

Members asked about homeworking and in particular how homeworking was affecting the well-being of employees. It was explained that the results of a staff survey were positive. It is supported by the Well-being Strategy and another survey is due to take place soon.

It was requested in future that we could include hyperlinks that explains the role of Governance and Audit, and this will be added.

A progress update was asked for on the actions marked as having slippage in relation to strengthening the links between the emerging Corporate Plan, the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan, and the TeamCaerphilly Transformation Programme. The MTFP has been refreshed, and we are now facing a potential savings requirement of £46/£47 million. In the coming months, we are aligning the MTFP with the projects coming out of the Mobilising Team Caerphilly Transformation programme to ensure that they are joined up. A report on the updating the Council Reserves Strategy has been to Joint Scrutiny and we are undertaking a review of the Financial Regulations that will be linked in with the Review of the Reserves Strategy. Once this is completed, we will refresh the Reserves Strategy to reflect what is in the revised Financial Regulations. This will be completed by the next self-assessment.

10.2 The **Joint Scrutiny** Committee meeting held on 26 February 2024 looked at both the self- assessment and the well-being objective progress report for 22/23, scrutiny provided the following comments, as summarised below.

A member commented on the interaction between the health service and social services, and that the wording could be more tactful about the impact of the delays and backlogs within the health service and how it was impacting our communities. There was recognition for the new recruitment service in prioritising home care staff, but a perception that prioritising of vulnerable patients should have started earlier. The Director was and asked for their comments. It was explained how lack of prevention in primary care was leading to greater need in A&E which did in turn impact communities. There was more information given about impacts.

A member talked about the issues around paramedics taking people into hospital when sometimes there may be no need. An update was given that a couple of initiatives are beginning with the aim to mitigate this and will be starting soon, called an 'alternative pathway' and further updates will be provided.

A member questioned the incomplete action of the Council Reserves within the Self-Assessment and thought we already had this strategy. It was explained that we have a reserve strategy, but it was approved by cabinet in 2016 and requires an update. First, we must refresh our financial regulations and once this has been taken to the AGM in May 2024, we will update the Reserve Strategy.

A member raised a concerned about the sickness figure of 14 days FTE and hoped to see a reduction following the introduction of agile (homeworking). The member suggested a project team should be set up to tackle it. It was explained there was a considerable amount of long-term sickness where many staff are waiting for operations due to the backlog after Covid. There has been an investment in short term staffing to review managing attendance. It was noted this is a national issue.

There was a question on the list of top ten risks for 22/23 and if the risks were rated on strategic impact, and to understand how the risk were rated one to ten.

There was questions and discussion on Well-being Objective 1 – Improve Education for all and the Council Strategy to get our children back into school because while attendance is improving it is not back to pre-covid levels. Data was provided on the improving picture and discussion on a range of initiatives including a new campaign called 'Attend to Achieve.'

A question was asked about the uptake of free school meals in primary schools. An Officer explained that take up is mixed across the borough with an average of 65% and other ways are being looked at to encourage take up, such as sample days. The data is in line with other authorities in Wales, but work is ongoing to increase this as 35% of the school population are not taking up a free meal every day.

A member asked about portion sizes (being the same for 4-year-olds and 10-year-olds) and was advised that this is being challenged across Wales. As such Welsh Government are reviewing the guidance and legislation on the appetite for life, which include portion size differentials between infant and junior children.

There was a question around NEET learners as data in 2019/20 went down to 1.7%. But has since increased to 2.8% (higher is worse). A member was encouraged by the initiatives and asked how we were monitoring the progress of the initiatives to ensure they are making the improvements that are needed. It was explained that we are continually aiming to improve this figure and have an excellent track record of finding pupils that are hard to reach and gave some examples of projects. Recent data is looking more encouraging, though it is not formally published till April 2024.

There was a question on how much a 1% increase in attendance equated to, the exact number was not available so the officer will find out and report back.

A member asked about persistent absenteeism and to know what the most common reasons were. It was explained that post COVID appeared to be the main reason for persistent absenteeism, and this linked to emotional based school avoidance. The Service is taking a multi-agency approach to tackle this with Education Welfare, Healthy school's team and the Educational psychology service, working closely together to support schools with a mix of approaches that support learners with emotional based school avoidance, anxiety or other issues around well-being and mental health.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and associated statutory guidance

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Consultees on Part 2 – Well-being Objectives 22/23

Keri Cole, Chief Education Officer

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Nick Taylor-Williams, Head of Housing

Marcus Lloyd, Head of Infrastructure

Clive Campbell, Transportation Engineering Manager

Rob Hartshorn, Head of Public Protection, Community and Leisure Services

Jeff Reynolds, Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager

Gareth Jenkins, Interim Director for Social Services

Jo Williams, Assistant Director – Adult Services

Background Papers:

[Corporate Plan 2018-2023](#)

[Statutory guidance on Part 6, Chapter 1, of the Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 Annual Self-assessment Report – (including Well-being Objectives) 2022/23