

Monmouthshire CC

Annual Governance Statement 2017-18 - DRAFT

April 2018

Executive Summary

The Statement itself demonstrates that Monmouthshire has governance arrangements in place to meet the challenges of the governance principles and that a review has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of those arrangements. We have demonstrated that in most areas we have effective governance arrangements in place which are continually improving such as:

- a comprehensive Scrutiny Service Plan;
- evaluating the effectiveness of Safeguarding;
- calling managers into Audit Committee;
- MCC's model of engagement in understanding its communities' views.

It is also recognised that there is further work to do. Progress against the 2016/17 action plan is shown at Appendix 1. The main areas for improvement in 2017/18 identified by the Council are:

- continue to deliver awareness raising sessions on the importance of compliance with Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules;
- Improve the clarity of reports that members receive to ensure they have access to appropriate and timely information
- Adopt a more planned, risk-assessed approach to partnership and collaborative working to make better use of resources.

An action plan to address areas for improvement is shown at Appendix 2.

- 1 This Statement has been prepared in accordance with guidance produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (C.I.P.F.A.) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (S.O.L.A.C.E.), the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016' and Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Guidance Notes for Welsh Authorities 2016'. It embraces the elements of internal financial control required by the 'Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom'.
- 2 The Statement itself demonstrates that Monmouthshire has governance arrangements in place to meet the challenges of the governance principles and that a review has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of those arrangements. We have demonstrated that in most areas we have effective governance arrangements in place which are continually improving, but also recognise that there is further work to do. Progress against the 2016/17 action plan is shown at Appendix 1. The main areas for improvement in 2017/18 identified by the Council are shown at paragraph 81 and an action plan to address known gaps is shown at Appendix 2.

Scope of Responsibility

- 3 Monmouthshire County Council (the Council) (MCC) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This has been updated in recent years through the Wales Programme for Improvement 2005 and even more recently through the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to encompass responsibility for securing continuous improvement based on the needs of and in engagement with communities. Further changes to national frameworks are anticipated as a result of Welsh Government's White Paper which is consulting on proposals to repeal the 2009 Measure.
- 4 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 5 The Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the C.I.P.F.A. / S.O.L.A.C.E. Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government', was approved by Council in July 2011; the Code was revised and updated in May 2014. This will need to be revised in accordance with the 2016 Framework and Guidance. A copy of the previous code is available from the Chief Internal Auditor. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the revised Framework and Guidance (2016) and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 6 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its population outcomes, priorities and objectives and to consider whether those objectives have met the outcomes and led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.
- 7 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, outcomes and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

- 8** The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2018 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

The Governance Framework

- 9** The Council's Code of Corporate Governance will be revised in line with the following principles:

Overarching requirements for acting in the public interest:

- A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
- B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

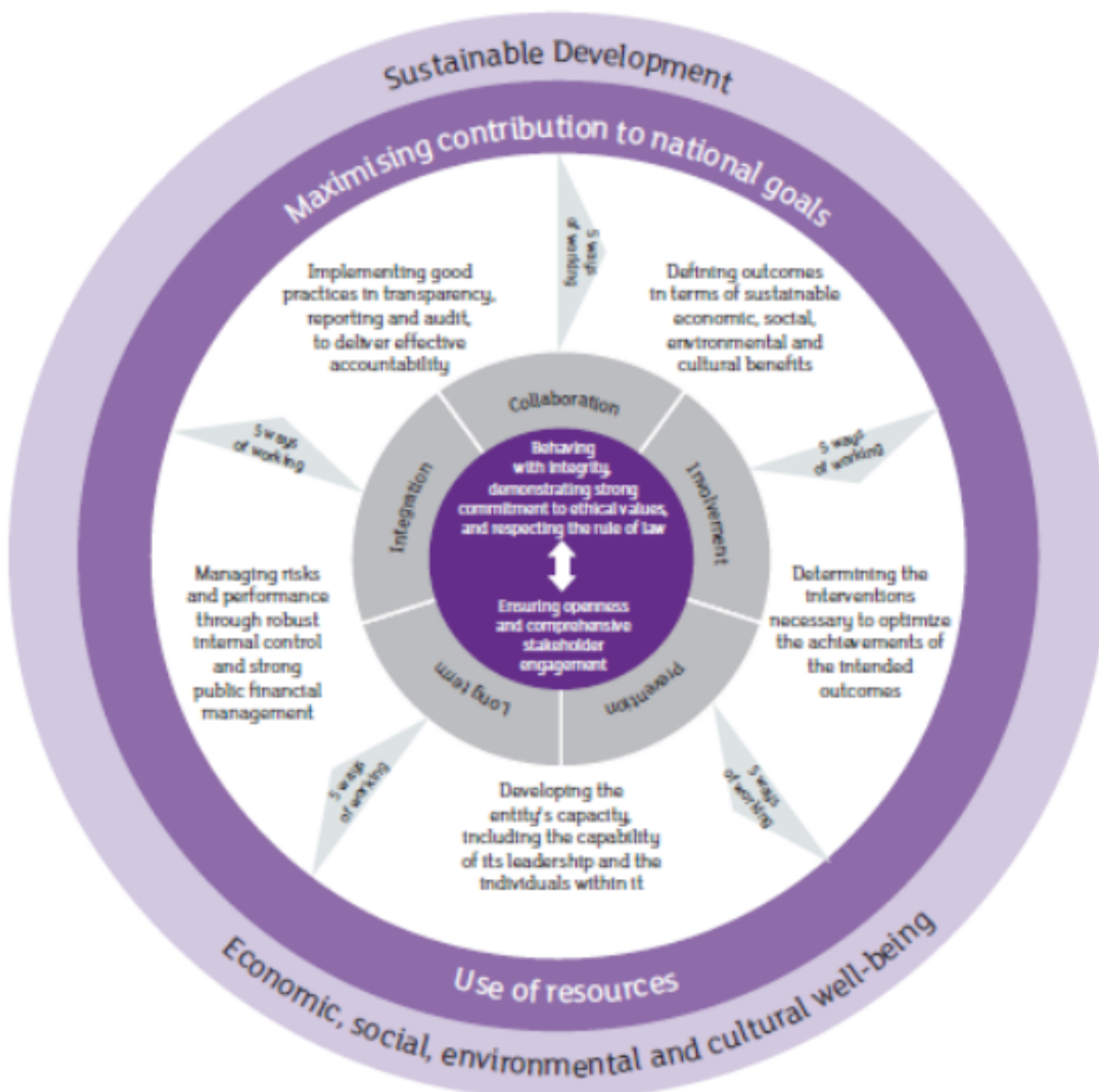
In addition achieving good governance in the Council requires effective arrangements for:

- C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits
- D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
- F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
- G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

- 10** The diagram below brings together the above principles of good governance with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It shows sustainable development as all-encompassing. The core behaviours of:

- behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law; and
- ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

need to be applied to the five ways of working outlined in the 2015 Act. These five ways of working have to permeate all segments of delivering outcomes which, in turn, should ensure effective use of resources as the Council maximises its contribution to the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Monmouthshire and Wales.



- 11 The Authority's financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010).
- 12 The key elements of the Council's governance arrangements are set out in The Improvement Plan; the latest version, Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities 2016-2017, was approved by Council in May 2016. Six monthly progress updates were presented to select committees during the year to enable scrutiny of progress and to allow Chief Officers and executive members to be held to account. The Council's four priorities up to May 2017 when the local authority elections took place were :

education of young people,
protecting the vulnerable,
supporting business and job creation,
maintaining locally accessible services.

- 13** The Council subscribes to a vision shared with other public service partners as part of the Public Service Board of working to deliver ‘*Sustainable resilient communities*’. This is the cornerstone of the County’s Single Integrated Plan 2013 -2017 where three themes have been adopted:

Nobody is Left Behind

People are Confident, Capable and Involved

Our County Thrives.

- 14** The Corporate Business Plan “22 for 22” approved by Council in January 2018 set out the Council’s new priorities to 2022, aligned with the well-being objectives of the PSB:

Best possible start in life

Thriving and connected communities

Natural and built environments

Lifelong wellbeing

Future focused council

- 15** In April 2016 the Local Service Board became the Public Service Board or PSB. As part of the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 the Public Service Board are focused on improving social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing, in accordance with the sustainable development principle. Public Service Boards have a planning responsibility to prepare and publish an assessment of local well-being, produce a local well-being plan by May 2018 and report annually on its progress

Review of Effectiveness

- 16** The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Senior Leadership Team within the Authority which has responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Chief Internal Auditor’s annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 17** The governance arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.
- 18** The processes that have been applied to maintain, review and improve the effectiveness of the governance framework include:
- i) The Monitoring Officer has reviewed the Council’s Constitution and ethical governance arrangements during the year. The constitution was revised and approved by Council in December 2017;
 - ii) periodic reviews of the financial controls including the financial procedure rules by the Chief Finance Officer (Head of Finance); financial procedure rules were approved by Council in September 2014;
 - iii) Revisions and updates to strengthen the strategic risk Management Policy were approved by Cabinet in March 2018;
 - iv) Formal risk management and regular ongoing review of the processes involved;
 - v) Scrutiny Service Plan 2016-2017; Scrutiny has conducted a Self-evaluation and Peer Review with several other councils during Spring 2017 as part of our ongoing commitment to continuous improvement;
 - vi) Scrutiny reports its annual appraisal and Scrutiny Service Plan to Audit Committee to satisfy them that the Council’s arrangements are working effectively;
 - vii) the Internal Audit function, whose work takes account of identified risks through regular audits of the major systems, establishments and major projects in accordance with the annual internal audit plan, and which includes ‘follow-up’ work to ensure that agreed recommendations are implemented;

- viii) the work of the Council's Select and other Committees, including its Audit and Standards committees;
- ix) the opinions and recommendations of the Council's external auditors, following both financial audit work and per the Local Government Measure in regard to matters, including governance issues, which are considered for action and implementation and reported to Council, Cabinet and Audit Committee, as appropriate;
- x) The opinions and recommendations of other inspection, regulation and review agencies which are reported to Council, Cabinet and Audit Committee as appropriate. Audit Committee receives a regular report on the progress made with recommendations and proposals issued by Wales Audit Office
- xi) regular monitoring of performance against the Improvement Plan and service plans and of key targets, and reporting of this to senior management and members;
- xii) Audit Committee annual report;
- xiii) Evaluating the effectiveness of Safeguarding in Monmouthshire was taken through Cabinet;
- xiv) Annual appraisal of the effectiveness of the authority's performance management arrangements reported annually to Audit Committee.

19 The following paragraphs review the effectiveness of the governance arrangements in Monmouthshire under the 7 principles.

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

- 20** The code of conduct for members and a protocol on member / officer relations are set out in the constitution. A new version of the code of conduct for members was adopted by Council in May 2016. The council also has a local protocol for the self-regulation of member conduct.
- 21** The Standards Committee, which includes a majority of independent representatives, advises on and monitors the Members' Code of Conduct, the Protocol for Member/Officer Relations, and any other Codes relating to the conduct of Members.
- 22** Agreed arrangements enable the Council to comply with statutory requirements in respect of child protection and the protection of vulnerable adults. Recruitment procedures help ensure that Council employees and Members working with children or vulnerable adults are checked for their suitability to do so.
- 23** In accordance with its statutory responsibilities, the Council has in place a Health and Safety Policy and related procedures.
- 24** There were no successful "call-in" challenges to decisions on procedural grounds and no judicial review challenges on grounds of legality during the year.
- 25** Policy and decision-making is facilitated through (i) the Cabinet, the meetings of which are open to the public and live streamed on YouTube except where exempt or confidential matters are being discussed, and (ii) a scheme of delegation to committees and officers as set out in the Constitution: Five select committees (including the statutory PSB Select Committee) and a separate audit committee review, scrutinise and hold to account the performance of the Cabinet, decision-making committees and officers. A Scrutiny "Call-In" process for decisions which have been made but not yet implemented is incorporated in the Constitution in order to consider their appropriateness.
- 26** A Scrutiny and Executive Protocol is in place which is aligned to the updated constitution of September 2014 and provides parameters for effective executive and scrutiny relationships.

- 27** The Constitution is updated periodically by the Monitoring Officer; it was reviewed and updated during 2017/18, and approved by Council in December 2017; it continues to be reviewed. It can be found on the Council's website and sets out:
- how the Council operates and makes decisions,
 - the procedures to ensure that decision-making is transparent and accountable to local people and other stakeholders,
 - the key roles of all members and chief officers, including the lead responsibilities for corporate governance of the Leader, the Chief Executive and other designated chief officers,
 - a scheme of delegated powers for decision-taking
 - responsibilities for reviewing and agreeing the Council's corporate governance arrangements,
 - arrangements for ensuring it is regularly reviewed and updated
 - its related codes and protocols.
- 28** To ensure agreed procedures and all applicable statutes are complied with the Monitoring Officer attends all Council meetings; to ensure sound financial management is a key factor in decisions, the Head of Finance attends Cabinet and Council meetings.
- 29** The ethical governance framework includes:
- codes of conduct for officers and members
 - a protocol governing Member/Officer relations,
 - a whistle-blowing policy widely communicated within the Council and which is regularly reviewed [reviewed and approved by Cabinet June 2017]
 - registers of personal and business interests for Members
 - an agreed policy and associated corporate procedures for ensuring that complaints about services can be properly made and investigated, and for ensuring that any lessons can be applied.
 - equalities awareness training
- 30** In accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989, the Monitoring Officer ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations. After appropriate consultation, this officer will report to the full Council in respect of any proposals, decisions or omissions which could be unlawful or which have been subject of an Ombudsman Investigation resulting in a finding of maladministration
- 31** All exemptions of the Contract Procedure Rules are reported through Audit Committee six monthly. The Internal Audit team continues to deliver awareness raising sessions on the importance of compliance with these Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules.
- 32** The Audit Committee called in several senior managers during the year and challenged them on why a procurement process went outside the Council's normal tendering processes.
- 33** 37 Internal Audit opinions were issued in 2017/18; 8 audit jobs resulted in **Limited** assurance.
- 34** The overall opinion on the adequacy of the internal control environment for 2017/18 was **REASONABLE**. Management agreed to implement the recommendations made in audit reports in order to address the weaknesses identified. The Internal Audit opinions issued in 2017/18 were revised during 2016/17 to reflect the level of assurance gained from the audit review and were as follows; more detail can be found in the Annual Internal Outturn Report for 2017/18, as reported to Audit Committee:

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	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Substantial Assurance (Very Good)	0	3	2
Considerable Assurance (Good)	9	10	11
Reasonable Assurance	14	7	16
Limited Assurance (Unsatisfactory)	3	7	8
Total	26	27	37

- 35** Reasons why the outcome of the audit reviews which were deemed to provide Limited assurance were presented in a separate report to Audit Committee which has sought assurances from respective operational managers that action will be taken to make the necessary improvements in control.
- 36** The Internal Audit team had a full complement of staff for the full year; 82% of the 2017/18 plan was achieved, which was an improvement on the previous year (75%). The Chief Internal Auditor's overall audit opinion is based on the number of audits undertaken and their individual opinions; he was able to give an overall opinion on the adequacy of the control environment.
- 37** The Internal Audit team undertook a self assessment during the year to assess its compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). This was further validated through a peer review process undertaken by the Chief Internal Auditor for Neath Port Talbot Council; the outcome of which was that the team are generally compliant, the highest level of compliance.
- 38** An Improvement Framework is in place to ensure the economic, effective and efficient use of resources and for securing continuous improvement. This is supported by a range of mechanisms including collaborative working initiatives and reviews undertaken both internally and by the external auditors and inspectors. This framework works in conjunction with the Local Government Wales Measure 2009.
- 39** Chief Officers and Heads of Service are accountable for ensuring that the Council Priorities are delivered, and performance against key targets is regularly monitored via the performance management framework and is regularly reported to members via Select Committees.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

- 40** The agendas are published in advance of all meetings on the Council's website.
- 41** The Scrutiny reports on recommendations/outcomes from scrutiny activity are presented to Cabinet quarterly. The scrutiny function has a 'Scrutiny Service Improvement Plan'. The plan is built into the Council's improvement framework. The plan is also scrutinised by the Council's Audit Committee annually to ensure they are satisfied that the Council has appropriate and effective scrutiny arrangements in place.
- 42** The Scheme of Delegation sets out responsibilities for decision making. The Council's website includes the Cabinet and Cabinet Member decisions / Member profiles. The Scrutiny Handbook provides a guide for Members, officers and the public on the role and value of scrutiny and the website displays the Scrutiny Forward Work Programme and invites public submissions. Development of Customer Insight to better understand our communities. Dissemination of ward meeting minutes.
- 43** Social media, Twitter and Facebook for example, is increasingly being used to engage local people and communicate the corporate message. The Council has partnered with an IT supplier to develop Monmouthshire Made Open – a digital engagement platform to enable local people to help shape ideas to the challenges facing their communities. Scrutiny now has a Twitter account to help engage more effectively with the public on democracy.

- 44** There were several public engagement events undertaken in 2016/17 and 2017/18 for the budget. MCC's model of engagement in understanding its communities' views and the way it now operates as an organisation was shared with many delegates at a Welsh sustainability conference as exemplar. The Council has encouraged the community within Monmouthshire to actively contribute to making stepped changes to improve the way in which services are provided and is a key workstream of the Future Monmouthshire programme established by the Council in May 2016; the intention is to transform public service delivery. This links back to the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act which sets out five ways of working including involvement.
- 45** Monmouthshire Public Service Board has produced its Well-being Assessment for the county in March 2017. This will help to shape the future of the area and its communities by informing the Public Service Board's Well-being plan which will be subject to a prolonged consultation period. The assessment draws together findings from data, academic research and policy papers and the views of local people. The views of local people were gathered as part of an extensive community engagement exercise to test whether the data reflected peoples' lived experiences – this was called Our Monmouthshire.
- 46** Transparency and openness is important to Monmouthshire; the Annual Statement of Accounts was taken through the Audit Committee process before being endorsed by Council. All Council decisions, reports and questions asked by Members are available on the website. Financial information, Improvement Plan progress, Council activities, achievements, developments, updates and events were included on the Council's intranet and website, with all Council, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees now live streamed on You Tube.
- 47** All public meetings of the Council are live streamed on YouTube and are available to view on the Council's YouTube channel at any time after the meeting, which provides greater transparency of the Council's business. The Council, Cabinet, Audit Committee, Select Committees and Planning / Licensing Committees are streamed live on the internet.
- 48** Individual Cabinet Members can make decisions under the scheme of delegation; agendas and decisions for all Cabinet Members are published on the Council's website.
- 49** The Council's website contains links to the following areas in the interests of openness.

- [Data Protection](#)
- [Freedom of Information \(Fol\)](#)
- [Equality and diversity and the Equality Act, 2010](#)
- [Monmouthshire and the Welsh Language](#)
- [Policies, Plans and Procedures](#)
- [Council Performance](#)
- [Budget and Spending](#)
- [Public Service Board \(PSB\)](#)
- [Cardiff Capital Region City Deal](#)
- [The Well-being of Future Generations Act](#)
- [Complaints, Comments, Feedback and Compliment](#)
- [Our Monmouthshire](#)

- 50** The Council has received a number of Freedom of Information Act requests during the year, with no complaints made to the Information Commission Officer. 97% of requests were responded to within the required 20 days:

	2015-16	2016-17	2017/18
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No' of FOI requests closed	1057	1055	
No' responded to within 20 days	1034	1022	
Percentage of FOIs responded to within 20 days	98%	97%	[Target of 90%]

- 51 The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) supports the vision for Monmouthshire and extensive public engagement continued in 2017/18 for the 2018/19 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan which engaged with the public in their own community; this included website, social media, drop in sessions and open meeting. The Chief Executive and Leader of the Council also held consultation roadshows across the whole County with staff. These were key to providing people with the opportunity to become informed.
- 52 The Improvement Plan, Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities, 2016-17 involved a public consultation which took place between 1st April – 22nd April 2016.
- 53 During 2017/18 the Public Service Board (PSB) agendas and minutes were published online on the MCC website to ensure transparency.
- 54 Public engagement and consultation is key to the WFG Act. One of the five ways of working is Involvement - *the importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves*. This along with the other ways of working is now considered in all relevant decision making reports for Cabinet and Council through a Future Generations Evaluation which includes Equalities and Sustainability Impact Assessments. The progress of implementing the WFG Act was reported through the Audit Committee in July 2017.
- 55 Implementing Open Government standards which enable us to effectively engage with our citizens and open up our data for anyone who needs to use it. Making the most of digitisation and digital inclusion to enable us to engage with people across our County.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits

- 56 The Council's Improvement Plan for 2016/17, Building Sustainable and Resilient Communities, was approved by Council in May 2016. This plan outlines the council's responsibility to publish its Improvement Objectives in line with the plans for the year ahead as outlined in section 15(7) of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and shows how the council is delivering the 7 aspects of improvement.
- 57 The Single Integrated Plan sets out the vision of the Public Service Board – a partnership of the key public service providers in Monmouthshire which includes the Council – it has three key themes; nobody is left behind, people are confident, capable and involved; and our County thrives. It is developed by and agreed by all our partner organisations who are members of the Board. The PSB is using the evidence in the well-being assessment to develop its well-being plan by March 2018. This plan will replace the Single Integrated Plan. Currently the partnerships are more focussed on emerging issues and key issues identified in the wellbeing assessment and responding to them collectively as a partnership, as well as fulfilling statutory duties.

- 58** The Council's strategic partners and wider stakeholders were fully engaged in the development of the Single Integrated Plan 2013-17 (SIP) incorporating key themes and outcomes to realise the shared vision. The organisation's Stage 1 Improvement Plan underpins the Council's contribution to the SIP by setting Annual Improvement Objectives for 2016/17. The Stage 2 Improvement Plan was presented to Council in September 2017 which reviewed Council performance in the previous financial (2016/17) and included an evaluation of how well it delivered against the objectives set by Council.
- 59** Under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Council has a responsibility to:
- Set and publish well-being objectives
 - Take all reasonable steps to meet those objectives
 - Publish a statement about well-being objectives
 - Detail arrangements to publish an annual report of progress
- 60** In March 2018 Council approved the Council's Well-being Plan and endorsed the Area plan.. The well-being objectives set bring together the latest evidence from the well-being assessment, policy and legislation and show how the council will strive to deliver a public service that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Council is also required under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to set annual Improvement Objectives and produce an Improvement Plan, the wellbeing objectives meet this duty. The Council's well-being objectives, as agreed in March 2017, are:
- Provide children and young people with the best possible start in life to help them achieve better outcomes
 - Maximise the potential in our communities to improve well-being for people throughout their life course
 - Maximise the benefits of the natural and built environment for the well-being of current and future generations
 - Develop opportunities for communities and businesses to ensure a well-connected and thriving county
- 61** The Annual Improvement Plan Objectives for 2016/17 are supported by service plans to operationally deliver these objectives. Planned improvements and targets are aligned to the Annual Improvement Objectives. Service plans were developed in 2017/18 covering all service areas and were updated quarterly and made available on the Council's Hub. These were quality assessed as part of the service planning process.
- 62** In July 2017 Wales Audit Office provided an update to Audit Committee on its Proposals for Improvement. The proposals came out of previous reports and were categorised across governance, performance management, HR, Finance and partnership / collaboration working. There were 18 open proposals and 6 closed proposals; the Council is working through the open proposals.
- 63** Reports were taken through the Scrutiny process during the year which linked service plans to the Council's policies, priorities and objectives. The agendas and minutes of which became public documents available through the Council's website.
- 64** In 2015/16 the Council was an early adopter of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act which came into effect in April 2016. Preparation included increased awareness raising with Council members and officers. Extensive work continued in 2016/17 to implement the act including training sessions and developing the Well-being assessment in partnership with PSB partners this was endorsed by Council and approved by the Public Service Board (PSB) in March 2017.
- 65** The Council is embracing the benefits of digital communications including social media use. It is also developing additional digital channels by introducing a Customer Services app, enabling people to interact and transact with the Council using mobile devices. We are also further developing the Council's website making it easier to navigate and including more transactional functions. Social media continues to thrive during 2017/18 through Twitter, Facebook and You Tube to raise awareness of forthcoming events, to provide live streaming of Cabinet, Council and other political meetings, to promote the activities and services provided and to show support and encouragement for community groups.

- 66** Enhancing the digital services with economic (effective and efficient processes aiding business interaction), environmental (less travel and print consumables) and social (digital customer centric services). Measured via the Digital Programme Office Service plan and performance planning process.
- 67** To ensure the best use is made of resources and that taxpayers and service users receive excellent value for money, there are a number of mechanisms within the Council to support this. The option appraisals for the 21st Century Schools considered cost and quality to determine the best outcome for the service; budget mandates were in place to monitor and capture the savings assessments; the IT Board reviewed business cases for future IT investment.
- 68** Regular budget / outturn reports for revenue and capital were presented to and approved by Cabinet during the year, and the budget management actions of Cabinet and senior officers are scrutinized by 4 of the Select committees quarterly. The budget monitoring reporting cycle periodically contains some output measures and unit cost data, so that economic comparison of costs with other Councils can be made. Previously the Council has compared very favourably to others. The updated MTFP was reviewed and approved by Cabinet over the course of the budget setting period (Sept 2016 to Jan 2017) in response to feedback from engagement and scrutiny sessions and the budget was set in January 2018 by Council for 2018/19. Ongoing scrutiny of the Council's budget position in line with the MTFP has provided members with a greater understanding of the budget setting process and the pressures within individual directorates.
- 69** An authority-wide performance measurement system for the Council, the "data hub", hosted on the Council's intranet site continues to be used and further developed. This is available within 3 clicks of the homepage that opens up on all laptops and enables members and officers to track and monitor key data at any point in time from key strategic plans to directorate level "dashboards". This also allows performance to be compared against other council areas, where applicable. A Cabinet level dashboard contains a number of key performance measures and is discussed quarterly by SLT and Cabinet.
- 70** Based on 2016/17 National Performance indicator data the council has seen service performance improve, or remain at the maximum level, in 45% of comparable indicators. When comparing against other local authorities Monmouthshire was ranked in the top or upper middle quartiles for 60% of its targets. Comparable National Performance indicator data for 2017/18 will be available in September 2018.
- 71** The Council utilises 'Buy For Wales' contracts to ensure value for money is obtained in procuring the many goods and services required to run the Council. A nationwide analysis found that MCC had the highest proportion of spend with SMEs of any local authority in the UK (Source:<http://www.spendsmall.org/>)
- 72** The Equality Impact Assessment and Sustainable Development checklist have been revised and combined to align with the Future Generations Act. The "Future Generations Evaluation " ensures the decisions the Council makes are carefully considered to take equality and sustainable development into account, this includes legislation that Monmouthshire County Council is subject to the Equality Act 2010, Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. A range of these were undertaken during 2016/17 which have been published on the website accompanying decision making reports.
- 73** The Wales Audit Office (WAO) presented its Annual Improvement Plan 2016/17 to Audit Committee in September 2017; the overall conclusion was that the Council is likely to meet its statutory requirements in relation to continuous improvement providing it responds constructively and in a timely way to WAO's statutory recommendations.
- 74** The WAO reported on their follow on review from the Governance Corporate Assessment made in 2015, through Audit Committee in July 2017. They concluded that the Council has a clear strategic approach for significant changes, although, better information would help Members when deciding the future shape of the Council.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

- 75 The Local Authority is a partner in the South East Wales Consortium Schools Causing Concern protocol. This Policy forms a part of, and is aligned with, the National Model for School Improvement in relation to the informal support and challenge provided by the Local Authority (LA) to a school prior to any issuing of a warning notice or invocation of formal powers of intervention based on the six grounds for intervention. It also aligns with the Welsh Government (WG) Guidance on Schools Causing Concern (March 2016).

- 76 Contract Procedure Rules exemptions are reported to the Audit Committee 6 monthly; managers have been challenged in year to justify their procurement outside the Council agreed procedures. Several managers were called in to Audit Committee to give an account of why accepted procedures were not followed.

- 77 Regular reporting into Cabinet, Scrutiny and Audit Committee enables the achievement of the Council's objectives to be challenged and appropriate action plans put in place to address any identified issues so that the intended outcomes can be achieved. The Improvement Objectives and Performance indicators - 2016/17 were taken through Select Committees six monthly. The Strategic Risk Assessment 2016 was also taken through Select Committee, Audit Committee and signed off by Cabinet during the year.

- 78 Dealing with customer complaints helps Monmouthshire to identify and deal with failures in service delivery. The Council's complaint / compliment procedure is available on the web site. Out of 87 complaints received in 2017/18, 74 were resolved informally although 1 complaint was referred to the Ombudsman, who decided not to investigate. 13 formal complaints were received, 2 of which were escalated. 123 comments were received along with 189 compliments.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

- 79 The Council's recruitment procedures provide equality of employment opportunities. The equality-assessed pay structure meets the requirements of the Single Status Agreement of 1997. The Single Status Collective Agreement was approved by Cabinet in September 2010.

- 80 Developing the digital capabilities of people and systems to enable effectiveness, efficiency and enhanced customer services (measured via the Digital Programme SIP)

- 81 There is continued support for Members' development through briefing sessions and other learning opportunities. A comprehensive training programme was developed for the intake of new members following Council elections in May 2017 including:

Council Induction	Licensing	Audit
Planning	Scrutiny	Children & Young People
Finance	Governance	Safeguarding
Security at Events	Equalities	

- 82 There is also ongoing training and development which meets the needs of officers and members through the corporate programme. Coaching and leadership skills training will be rolled out to all managers in due course. Check in, Check Out provides a value-based performance assessment

approach between staff and line managers and aims to ensure employees have clear and effective understanding of their contribution to the objectives of their teams and subsequently the Council.

- 83** Scrutiny Member Development programme is in place which provides ongoing specific skills based training for Members and includes scrutiny induction.
- 84** Appropriate and relevant job descriptions were in place for the Chief Executive, Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Monitoring Officer and Head of Finance.

Partnerships/collaboration working

- 85** There is Council policy on information sharing along with numerous information sharing protocols with our partners; this is included within the Data Protection Policy. Information sharing is key to joined-up service delivery. The Wales Accord on the Sharing of Personal Information (WASPI) was developed as a practical approach to multi agency sharing for the public sector in Wales, and Monmouthshire signed up to this in January 2011. The Authority is required to meet statutory obligations regarding the handling and sharing of data, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and more recently, the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. The Information Sharing protocol has been developed to ensure information is only shared appropriately, safely and compliantly.
- 86** The Council ensures that it has appropriate governance arrangements around its collaborations with other public agencies and other third parties. These can take a range of forms, from informal arrangements to those where governance arrangements are determined through legislation. The governance arrangements form a key part of the decision making processes that the Cabinet or Council follow when deciding to enter a collaborative arrangement, transparent local accountability is a key area of focus.
- 87** As a key example of our commitment to effective governance, arrangements have been developed for the PSB Select Committee.
- 88** An exercise was undertaken in 2013/14 to determine the full extent of the Council's collaboration and partnership arrangements and their respective governance arrangements. A Partnership Audit was undertaken and reported into the Audit Committee in May 2014; 100 partnership / collaboration arrangements were identified. Although the governance arrangements for the majority of partnerships identified have been captured, further work is on-going to clarify the governance arrangements for all of the partnerships; this was reported to Members through the Audit Committee. Governance arrangements have been put in place around all key partnerships the Council is involved with. Monmouthshire's Partnership Structure is now shown on The Hub and was reported through Strong Communities Select in April 2016.
- 89** Wales Audit Office made a proposal for improvement to the Council as part of their Annual Improvement Report 2014-15, published in November 2015, to "Adopt a more planned, risk-assessed approach to partnership and collaborative working to make better use of resources." The action the Council is taking in response to the proposal was reported to Cabinet in January 2016. A community governance review was undertaken to improve community engagement.
- 90** Their Corporate Assessment on the Council, reported through Audit Committee in January 2016, stated "The Council demonstrates ambition in its vision, enthusiasm to deliver and commitment to working collaboratively, but this needs to be supported by a clearly joined-up strategic approach and effective delivery mechanisms." In May 2016 Cabinet agreed to commission a strategic programme of whole-authority work called 'Future Monmouthshire'. Future Monmouthshire will identify shifts and changes needed in Monmouthshire and position the council as the key enabler in bringing them about. It will inform the development of a new business model for the council in order to equip it to meet its goals amidst increasing change and uncertainty. The new model will help inform planning for any further partnership and collaborative working.

- 91** There are robust arrangements for effective financial control through the Council's accounting procedures and financial regulations. These include established budget planning procedures, which are subject to risk assessment, and regular reports to members comparing actual revenue and capital expenditure to annual budgets. The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs, as required by Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. Procedures for tendering and contract letting are included in the Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations. The Council's Treasury Management arrangements follow professional practice, are subject to regular review and are contained in the Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council each year.
- 92** Wales Audit Office made a proposal for improvement to the Council as part of their Annual Improvement Report 2014-15, published in November 2015, to "Strengthen the governance and challenge arrangements by: ensuring that minutes of meetings are signed at the next suitable meeting in accordance with the Council's constitution to improve timeliness and transparency of public reporting; and reconsider the Council's policy of not formally minuting Cabinet meetings". All agendas are published in advance on the Council's website and the Cabinet meetings are live streamed.
- 93** In May 2016 Wales Audit Office published its review of the Council's progress to improve its governance arrangements by seeking to answer the following question: 'Is the Council effectively addressing issues raised in the 2015 Corporate Assessment and its own Scrutiny Action Plan to improve governance?' The report concluded that the Council has made progress in improving its governance arrangements although more work is needed to strengthen the transparency of decision making and recording. In July 2017 Wales Audit Office reported to Audit Committee that the "Council has a clear strategic approach for significant service changes, although better information would help Members when deciding the future shape of the Council".
- 94** The most recent update on the action the Council is taking in response to the proposal was reported to Audit Committee in July 2017. This identified progress made which the 'Modern Gov' system has been implemented and improved the documentation of minutes, agendas and reports for meetings on the Council's website, with further implementation of the system planned. Work is ongoing training report writers to implement improvements and senior officer accountability. A decision-log of Cabinet meetings is published on the website following each Cabinet meeting detailing the decisions that have been which include any amendments made to the proposed decision. Not publishing minutes for Cabinet has been a longstanding practice of the Council which has raised no issues of transparency and openness in the decision making process and the Council does not have any plans to change this process for recording decisions at Cabinet.
- 95** The anti-fraud, bribery and corruption strategy was revised and updated during 2017/18. It was approved by Cabinet July 2017 and provides a deterrent, promotes detection, identifies a clear pathway for investigation and encourages prevention. The Council's Council Tax Reduction Anti-Fraud Policy was approved by Cabinet in June 2015.
- 96** The Audit Committee considers the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for securing continuous improvement including risk management arrangements. The Audit Committee also considers corporate governance, monitors the work of auditors and inspectors, and monitors the relationships between auditors and staff and the responses to audit and inspection recommendations. It also has responsibility for reviewing the Annual Statement of Accounts and its associated reports (which include this statement) before approval by Council. The Audit Committee has an independent, non-political, Chairman who prepares an annual report of the work of the Audit Committee.
- 97** Internal Audit operate to the standards set out in the 'Public Sector Internal Auditing Standards' which have been developed from the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Internal Auditing Standards which came into effect in April 2013. The team's role and status is set out in the Council's Internal Audit Charter. The Chief Internal Auditor reports to the Audit Committee a summary of audit findings for each quarter, and also reports annually an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's control environment.
- 98** The Chief Internal Auditor will ensure Internal Audit complies with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. A self assessment was undertaken during 2017/18 to assess compliance with the

Standards which was validated in March 2018 by an external assessor, the Chief Internal Auditor of Neath Port Talbot Council. The outcome of which was that the Internal Audit team is generally complaint, the highest level of compliance.

- 99** The Council has an objective and professional relationship with its external auditors and statutory inspectors.
- 100** Managing our information resource through strategies and policies to enable effective decision making which is managed via the draft information strategy and action plan.

Risk management

101 The Council’s Strategic Risk Management Policy was updated and approved by Cabinet in March 2018. The revisions provide greater clarity on how the risk levels are to be assessed. The policy requires the proactive participation of all those responsible for planning and delivering services in identifying, evaluating and managing high level strategic risks to the Council’s priorities, services and major projects. The risk controls necessary to manage them are identified and monitored to ensure risk mitigation.

102 Within the Council the purpose of risk management is to:

- preserve and protect the Council’s assets, reputation and staff
- aid good management of risk and support whole authority governance
- aid delivery of it’s population outcomes internally and when working with partners
- improve business performance and anticipated risks in delivering improvements
- avoid unnecessary liabilities, costs and failures
- shape procedures and responsibilities for implementation.

The strategic risk assessment ensures that:

- Strategic risks are identified and monitored by the Authority
- Risk controls are appropriate and proportionate
- Senior managers and elected members systematically review the strategic risks facing the Authority.

The risk assessment is prepared by drawing on a wide range of evidence including service plans, performance measures, regulatory reports, progress on the previous risk assessment and the views of select committees. In order to mitigate the risks, proposed action was recorded and factored back into the respective service improvement plan. The risk assessment is a living document and is updated over the course of the year as new information comes to light. The Strategic Risk Assessment in 2016 was also taken through Select Committee, audit committee and signed off by Cabinet during the year.

103 The Council’s Strategic Risk Assessment for 2017/18 contains 16 distinct risks. Following the revised policy these were updated and reviewed throughout the year with the latest version being made available to members via The Hub.

Ref	Risk	Year	Risk Level (Pre – mitigation)	Risk Level (Post – mitigation)
1	The authority does not remain relevant and viable for future generations due to not having a sustainable delivery model.	2017/18	Medium	Low
		2018/19	Medium	Low
		2019/20	Medium	Low
2	Without appropriate and effective governance infrastructure the Council may not deliver its objectives.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Low
		2019/20	Medium	Low

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3	The Council and partners do not make sufficient progress to improve well-being through regional and partnership working.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Low
4	Some services may become financially unsustainable in the short to medium term	2017/18	Medium	Low
		2018/19	Medium	Low
		2019/20	Medium	Low
5	The authority is unable to deliver its political priorities due to insufficient capital funding availability which may also lead to risks of maintaining key infrastructure and other identified pressures.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	High	Medium
6	Our workforce is not sufficiently resourced and does not have the right mix of skills which impacts our ability to deliver change, improve performance and deliver our objectives.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Medium
7	Significant harm to vulnerable children or adults due to failure of safeguarding arrangements	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Medium
8	The robust delivery of the Council's corporate parenting responsibility and services related to safeguarding vulnerable children as a result of an increase in demand and complexity in cases in Children's services.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Low
9	Failure to meet the needs of vulnerable learners may result in them not achieving their full potential	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Low
10	Information security breaches due to mismanagement of information or external parties gaining access to the network could result in critical and sensitive data being lost, compromising the delivery or availability of Council services and the interaction with external agencies and partners.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Medium
11	Not adequately transitioning to the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation resulting in reputational damage and risk of fines to the Council	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Low
12	Major disruption to services due to the transfer of the Council's email and skype to Office 365.	2017/18	Medium	Low
		2018/19	Medium	Low
		2019/20	Low	Low
13	A lack of appropriate infrastructure in the County to meet future needs due to key Local Development Plan housing policy targets not being met, in conjunction with the County's changing demography and other external changes such as Severn Bridge tolls and this impact on the housing market. These factors can also impact on planning for other infrastructure such as transport and energy.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Low
14	Insufficient ICT infrastructure and skills in the county have the potential to lead to social and economic disadvantages	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Medium

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15	Political, legislative and financial uncertainty for council services and local businesses as a result of Britain leaving the European Union.	2017/18	High	High
		2018/19	High	High
		2019/20	High	High
16	The authority cannot deliver its services due to potential internal/external factors – resulting in service disruption due to lack of Business Continuity planning.	2017/18	Medium	Medium
		2018/19	Medium	Medium
		2019/20	Medium	Medium

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

104 The South East Wales Education Achievement Service (EAS) Business Plan 2018-2020 was presented to Cabinet in March 2018. The plan sets out the priorities, programmes and outcomes to be achieved by the EAS on behalf of the South East Wales Consortium.

105 An update of progress for 2015/16 and the plan for 2016-17 for the People and Organisational Development Strategy 2014-17 was presented to Cabinet in April 2016. This was approved by Council in April 2015 and remains true to its core purpose in meeting the rapidly changing demands placed on its workforce. The comprehensive progress report summarised the outcomes achieved in 2015/16 as well as the next steps in delivering a coherent and cohesive People Services offer to the organisation.

106 The iCounty Strategy Business Plan for 2016/19, along with a report on MCC’s Digital and Technology service and how it aligns with MCC’s iCounty, People and Place strategies was also presented to Cabinet in April 2016. The plan supports the 3 pillars of iCounty:

- a) Improving internal services, data delivery and infrastructure
- b) Digitally enabled, inclusive and connected communities
- c) Creating products and commercial assets

107 The Business Plan also aligns with the People, Asset Management, MTFP and SRS strategies as well as linking in with MCC’s Business and Service Improvement Plans.

108 Cabinet were presented with an overview of the performance of the whole authority safeguarding 2015/16 in July 2016 along with the proposed changes to the whole authority safeguarding approach.

109 The Audit Committee continues to support the Internal Audit team and endorses its annual report and plan. The plan details the work and service areas the team will cover based on a risk assessment in order to provide assurance on the adequacy of the internal controls, governance arrangements and risk management process.

110 The Whole Authority Report complaints, comments and compliments 2016/17 was presented to Audit Committee in January 2018 which identified the number and types of feedback received and dealt with from 1 April 2016 until 31 March 2017. The report also provided a summary of the number of Freedom of Information Act (FOI) requests received and dealt with by the Council during this period.

Information Governance

111 Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) has been working through a “Dripping tap campaign” to raise awareness of and comply with the General Data Protection Regulation 25th May 2018- specifically following the “12 Steps to Compliance” as recommended by the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). SLT has been kept abreast with key risks and updates on behalf of the Information Governance Group chaired by Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) who meet regularly to ensure that MCC is on

track. GDPR Operational Leads have been established, along with Digital Champions linking in with teams, individuals and volunteers to ensure compliance and messages are communicated. Elected Members are data controllers in their own right and must register with the ICO.

- 112** Activity undertaken to date includes: workshops, conference, focus groups, drop-in sessions including legal and procurement advice, HUB articles, online Quiz (186+ participated) all staff emails and face to face training (450+staff to date). MCC has also produced a short video introducing the key principles of GDPR A-F (200+ views), signposting where to find further information about compliance, all staff are to watch before 25th May 2018. GDPR is now introduced at Corporate and local inductions, to become embedded as a culture.
- 113** To provide tools to do the job, MCC have a dedicated GDPR website (over 2k visits to date) with templates (e.g. for privacy notices), charts (e.g. for establishing individual rights) and general advice/updates on the regulation. There are 24 open and transparent service plans published internally on specific work stream actions being undertaken in following the brackets: Data collection and use, retention and disposal, systems and technology, security, governance, training/ awareness and staff data.
- 114** To keep the public informed, MCC looks to launch its online privacy notice library, which will host a comprehensive list of privacy notices that sit across the directorates/ teams. Services will also where appropriate pro-actively promote notices by way of email, newsletter, app notification, letter, printed display or web link. Privacy notices are to be reviewed by Services on a regular basis for accuracy along with other GDPR related documents (Such as Information Audit- "Systems List" and Data Protection Impact Assessments).
- 115** The Corporate GDPR Policy will be included on the public website for clarity. Related policies will be updated accordingly by relevant lead officers, so that they satisfy GDPR requirement. Links are in place to work with the South East Wales Information Forum (SWIF) on a regular basis to share best practice. Good housekeeping is encouraged as is continuous improvement to mitigating against the risk of harm to individuals, although it is recognised further work is required to back date data cleansing tasks which require considerable capacity.

Main areas for Improvement

- 116** The Council will continue to monitor and review its governance arrangements and identify any gaps. These will be addressed during the year to further strengthen governance in Monmouthshire County Council:
- improve performance management arrangements and improve strategic planning;
 - continue to deliver awareness raising sessions on the importance of compliance with Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules;
 - Improve oversight and ongoing implementation of the staff appraisal process 'Check In Check Out'
 - Improve the clarity of reports that members receive to ensure they have access to appropriate and timely information
 - Adopt a more planned, risk-assessed approach to partnership and collaborative working to make better use of resources.

Action Plan 2016/17

- 117** Appendix 1 shows how the 2016/17 Action plan areas for improvement have been addressed during 2017/18.
- 118** An Action Plan for 2017/18 has been developed to capture known gaps in the Council's governance arrangements; the areas for improvement will be reviewed and considered during 2018/19 to further enhance the Council's governance arrangements. This is shown at Appendix 2.

Monitoring & Evaluation

119 We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed:**2018**
Leader

Signed:**2018**
Chief Executive

Appendix 1

Main areas of improvement for 2016/17 addressed

The following Table outlines where the Council has addressed gaps previously identified in its governance arrangements:

Governance Principle	Area for Improvement	Progress
Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	Improve performance management arrangements and improve strategic planning	The Corporate Plan sets out a clear direction for the Council up to 2022; the objectives of which will be measured over time using process, output and satisfaction measures. Target setting has been developed and incorporated within the business planning process. Further training will be delivered via The Talent Lab.
Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	Continue to deliver awareness raising sessions on the importance of compliance with Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules;	Training sessions have been provided for schools and school governors. This programme needs to be expanded to cover all staff.
Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	Improve oversight and ongoing implementation of the staff appraisal process 'Check In Check Out'	Process has been reviewed and rolled out with more robust guidance, video tutorials and supportive training. A more effective recording module has been developed to enable information to be recorded directly into MYVIEW system.
Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	Improve the clarity of reports that Members receive to ensure they have access to appropriate and timely information	An evaluation assessment, option appraisal, consultation section have now been included within the decision making report template. Greater accountability on senior officers for ensuring reports meet the required standard.
Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity,	Adopt a more planned, risk-assessed approach to partnership and collaborative working to make better use	A community governance review has been completed, with new arrangements being piloted in one Area

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<p>including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it</p>	<p>of resources.</p>	<p>Committee. The Whole Place and Strategic Partnership Teams have subsequently been merged into a single Partnership and Community Development Team in order to better align strategic intent and focus on building sustainable and resilient communities.</p>

Action Plan 2017/18

The following areas will be reviewed and considered during 2018/19 to further enhance the Council's governance arrangements:

Governance Principle	Area for Improvement	Progress
Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		
Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		
Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it		