

SUBJECT: Draft Self-Assessment 2022/23
MEETING: Governance and Audit Committee
DATE: 20th September 2023
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1 PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an opportunity to review the draft Monmouthshire County Council Self-Assessment Report, in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee review the draft self-assessment report 2022/23 and makes any recommendations for changes to the conclusions or actions prior to the report being considered by Council.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The Self-Assessment Report is a requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Act requires each local authority 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 and its governance is effective for securing these.
- 3.2 Under the Act, the mechanism for a council to keep its performance under review is self-assessment, with a duty to publish a report setting out the conclusions of the self-assessment once in respect of every financial year. Self-assessment is a way of evaluating, critically and honestly, the current position to make decisions on how to secure improvement for the future. It needs to be embedded across the organisation to help the council continually learn and achieve sustainable improvement and better outcomes for citizens, service users and its own workforce. The self-assessment process has been embedded as part of the council's performance management framework (appendix 1). It is important that the assessment dovetails with, but does not duplicate, the Annual Governance Statement.
- 3.3 The financial year 2022/23 was a time of transition for the organisation. Following the appointment of a new administration, a new Community and Corporate Plan was developed, having been informed by a wide range of evidence with a focus on improving the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of Monmouthshire in line with the Well-being of Future Generations Act. This plan was produced against a backdrop of economic uncertainty, with increasing financial pressures making it difficult to meet increasingly complex demand in many service areas.
- 3.4 Given the circumstances of the transitional period of 2022/23, with the final plan not being approved until April 2023, the assessment focuses on how well the council has met the areas for development identified in the 2021/22 self-assessment report. These are set under each of the six Well-being Objectives identified in the Community and Corporate Plan. To support the delivery of the objectives, the council has to make sure that all of its areas are working efficiently and effectively. The report also assesses the effectiveness of the 'enabling functions' that support council services to meet changing demands and ensure their sustainability. These include corporate planning,

performance and risk management; financial planning; workforce planning; procurement; assets; digital; data; and democracy and scrutiny. These enablers are also assessed against the areas for development identified in last year's assessment.

- 3.5 Appendix 2 provides the committee with an overview of the process that was followed to complete the draft self-assessment report. This included desk-based evidence gathering to inform an initial evaluation, followed by workshops with each of the directorates and a session with Cabinet and the Strategic Leadership Team. The assessment has been facilitated through a focus on answering three key questions about the effectiveness of the council's arrangements: how well are we doing? how do we know? And, what and how can we do better? These informed the draft report, which is constructed around:
- How well do we understand our local context and place and has this informed our purpose and priorities? (Understanding well-being in the county)
 - How well are we achieving our agreed outcomes? (Have we addressed the areas for development identified in the 21/22 self-assessment report, set under the six Well-being Objectives)
 - How do we know? (Evidence)
 - How effectively are resources being used to deliver our priorities? (Enabling functions/services)
 - How effectively does the council work with stakeholders and partners on agreed outcomes? (Partnership and collaborative working)
 - What could we do better? (Actions)
- 3.6 The self-assessment report demonstrates the progress the council has made in addressing its areas for development and identifies any further areas for development to be addressed in 2023/24. These include:
- We have continued to expand our education offer with the development of the new 3-19 all-through school in Abergavenny and the implementation of our 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, which aims to promote and expand Welsh medium-education provision in the county.
 - We have shown our commitment to reducing our impact on the planet exceeding recycling targets, and the production of our socially responsible procurement strategy. However, we will struggle to achieve our goal of net-zero by 2030 if work in this space continues at its current pace.
 - We have faced increased and more complex demand for homeless accommodation, with a heavier reliance on temporary accommodation. Finding suitable housing provision is likely to continue to be challenging as phosphates continue to restrict new developments in the county, including the development of affordable housing.
 - We have continued to support our communities and residents through investing in volunteering opportunities, increasing our sports development offer and involving residents in longer-term planning. We have provided both financial support and advice to residents on the cost-of-living crisis and can demonstrate an understating of where poverty interventions are needed, however we do not always have the resources to act upon this information.
 - Work is needed to ensure the financial viability of the council's services and to prevent further overspend in service areas such as social care and homelessness.
- 3.7 Governance and Audit Committee has an important role in contributing to the self-assessment report. Committee findings have been used to inform our assessment of performance and formed a key part of our evidence base. Evidence presented to and scrutinised by the committee which informed the assessment includes, but it not limited to, the Annual Governance Statement; the Strategic Risk Register; self-assessment of performance management arrangements; 22/23 Treasury outturn report; and the Governance & Audit Committee annual report 2022/23. The self-assessment report should be used to inform the committee's role of seeking assurance of the

effectiveness of the council's governance and performance management arrangements. Scrutiny of the council's performance, which will be contained in the report, is the remit of the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee, who are scheduled to receive the report on the morning of the 20th September.

- 3.8 Governance and Audit Committee are presented with the final draft of this report, as per the statutory guidance under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and can make any recommendations for changes to the conclusions or actions the council intends to take. If the council does not make a change recommended by Governance and Audit Committee, it must set out the recommendation and the reasons why in the final report. The final assessment will be presented to Council on 26th October.
- 3.9 The annual self-assessment report will be complemented by a panel performance assessment once in an electoral cycle, providing an opportunity to seek external insights (other than from auditors, regulators or inspectors) on how the council is meeting the performance requirements.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 4.1 There are no additional resource implications as a result of this report. However, there may be resource implications in undertaking further actions identified in the self-assessment report. These would be subject to the usual council decision-making processes.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

[Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#)

[Performance and governance of local authorities: statutory guidance](#)

[Corporate Plan 2017-22](#)

[Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28](#)

[Self-assessment Report 2021/22](#)

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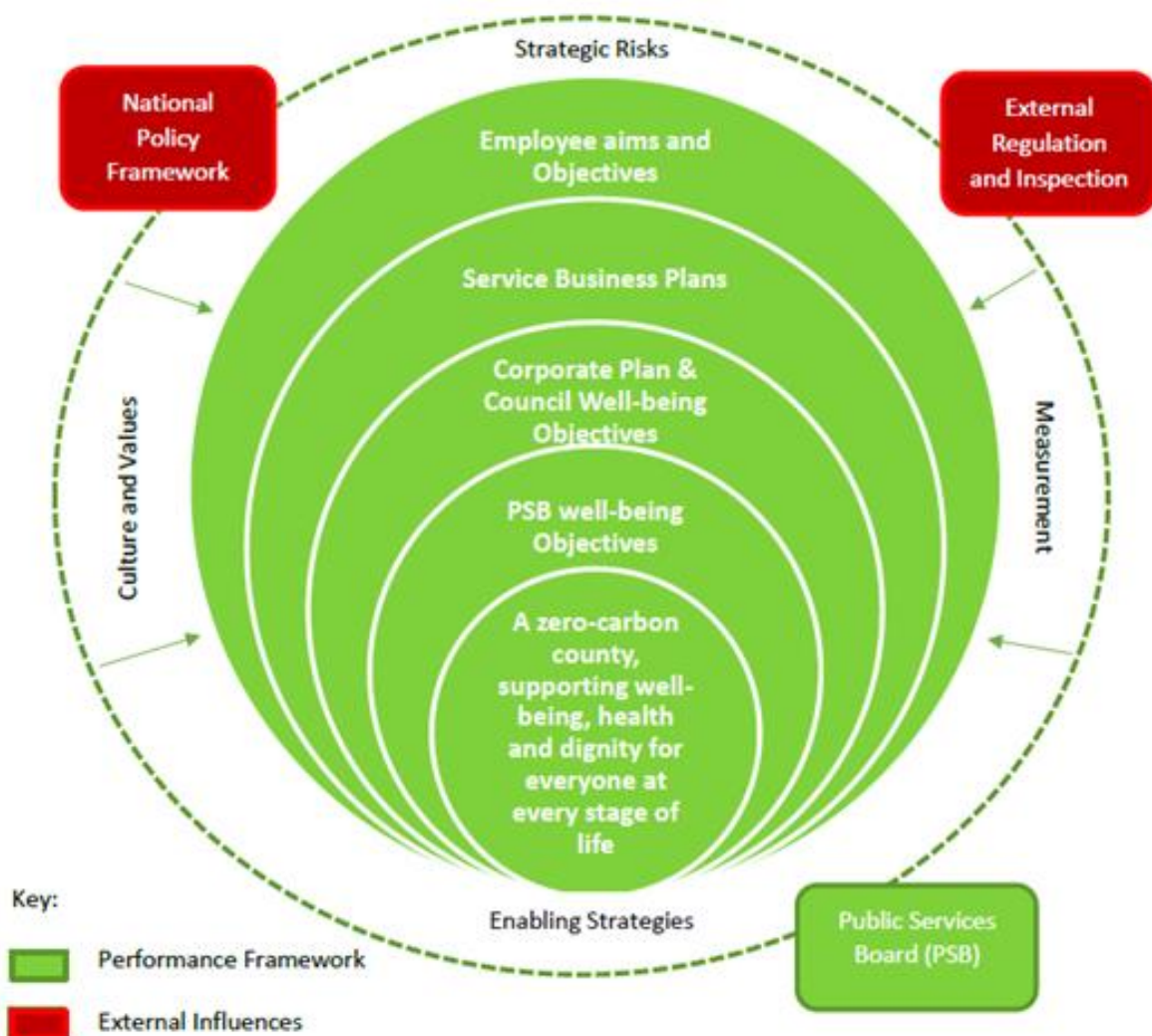
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Appendix 1

Performance Management Framework

Our performance management framework makes sure that everyone is pulling in the same direction to deliver real and tangible outcomes.

Building a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life is the unifying purpose of the diverse range of services for which we are responsible. We are a partner in the Public Service Board, which is responsible for setting well-being objectives for the county. The council's own well-being objectives are set by Council and form the backbone of our Community and Corporate Plan. Each of our teams has a service business plan that aligns to these objectives. We have a range of performance measures that we use to keep track of our progress. Our risk management policy enables us to manage strategic risks to our delivery. Our employee aims and objectives show the contributions that individual colleagues make to these objectives and delivering our vision in accordance with our values.



Appendix 2 – Self-assessment process

Legislation

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the Act”) provides for a new and reformed legislative framework for local government elections, democracy, governance and performance. The Act replaces the previous improvement duty for councils set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The Act requires 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 these.

The performance and governance provisions in the Act are framed within the context of the well-being duty in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which sets out a legally binding common purpose for public bodies to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

The mechanism for a council to keep its performance under review is self-assessment, with a duty to publish a report setting out the conclusions of the self-assessment once in respect of every financial year. Self-assessment will be complemented by a panel performance assessment once in an electoral cycle, providing an opportunity to seek external insights (other than from auditors, regulators or inspectors) on how the council is meeting the performance requirements.

Why

Self-assessment is a way of evaluating, critically and honestly, the current position in order to make decisions on how to secure improvement for the future. It is about the council being self-aware, understanding whether it is delivering the right outcomes, and challenging itself to continuously improve. It needs to be embedded as effective self-assessment helps the council to continually learn and achieve sustainable improvement and better outcomes for citizens, service users and its own workforce.

The WLGA have identified draft principles for self-assessment for councils to ensure that they have arrangements in place that:

- demonstrate self-awareness derived from evidence-based analysis that focuses on outcomes;
- are owned and led at a strategic level and are not an exercise in compliance;
- further develop a culture of challenge to facilitate improvement as part of an ongoing process;
- are integrated as part of the council’s corporate planning, performance and governance processes; and
- enable an organisation-wide assessment rather than an assessment of individual services.

Further developing this culture and embedding an evaluative mindset will be a key development point through the first few iterations of the self- assessment report.

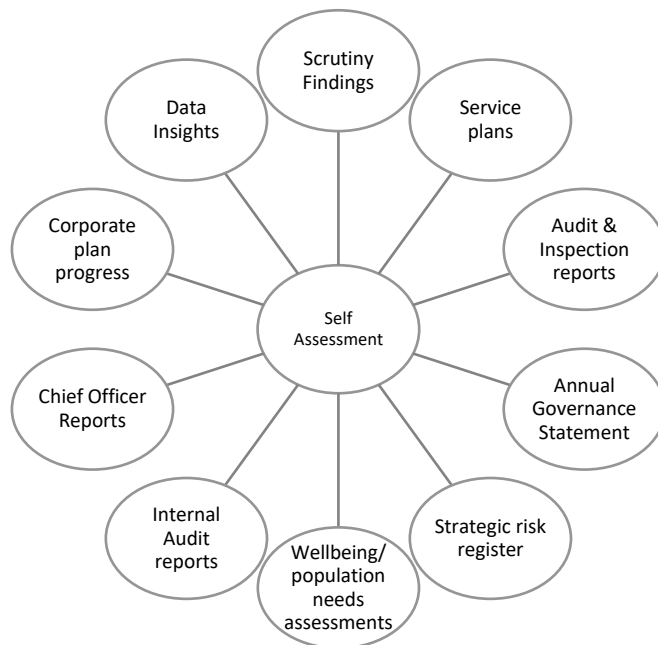
Process

The council has developed a process to undertake its first self-assessment under the Act, assessing performance in the 2022/23 financial year. The main component parts of the process and timeline are:

Feb – April Desk-based evidence gathering	April - May Directorate self- assessment Workshops	May – August Council self- assessment report drafted	September Draft report to Scrutiny and Governance & Audit Committee	October Self-assessment agreed in line with council process
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This timeline ensures that the self-assessment can inform and be informed by the policy direction of the council and how it uses its resources efficiently and effectively, particularly the budget setting process.

Evaluative evidence to inform the assessment has been compiled at a directorate level. Most of the evidence has been collated by using intelligence already held corporately in an insightful way; this includes, for example, the Annual Governance Statement, audit and inspection reports, and service level business plans.



The evidence gathered has been explored further, and challenged where necessary, at directorate and enabling function based self-assessment workshops, to determine if the objectives (outcomes) of the council are being achieved.

Self-assessment workshops

Directorate workshops	Enabling functions workshops
Children & Young People	Policy & Governance – Workforce planning
Social Care & Health	Resources – Financial planning, Assets & Digital
Communities & Place	Communities & Place – Procurement
MonLife	Policy Performance & Scrutiny – Performance, Data & Scrutiny

The workshops were facilitated through the following questions:

- How well are we achieving our agreed outcomes? (The self-assessment areas for development & Community & Corporate Plan objectives)
- How do we know? (Evidence)
- How effectively are resources being used to deliver our priorities? (Enablers)
- How effectively does the council work with stakeholders and partners on agreed outcomes? (Partnership working)
- What could we do better? (Actions - including a review of actions from the previous report)

The full evidence and conclusions from workshops have been collated and will be used by directorates and enabling functions to inform their services business plans.

Following the workshops, the evidence is being reviewed, further challenged, and collated into a corporate level evaluative self-assessment. This will be integrated with the council’s requirement to report on the

progress it has made in meeting its well-being objectives for the preceding financial year (2022/23) under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The report will be structured under these headings:

- Understanding our local place
- Outcomes (progress against objective areas for development):
 - How well are we achieving our agreed outcomes?
 - How do we know?
 - Areas for development
- Enabling functions
 - Corporate planning, performance and risk management
 - Financial planning
 - Workforce planning
 - Procurement
 - Assets
 - Digital
 - Data
 - Democracy & Scrutiny
- Our work with partners
- Our Actions (including progress against previous actions)

The self-assessment report will be scrutinised by the council's Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee. A draft of the self-assessment report will be made available to Governance and Audit committee, who must review the draft report and make recommendations for changes to the conclusions or action the council intends to take. The self-assessment will be approved in accordance with the council's agreed processes at Council.