

**SUBJECT: MONMOUTHSHIRE CC
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT, 2021/22**

**DIRECTORATE: Resources
MEETING: Governance and Audit Committee
DATE: 20th June 2022
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All**

1. PURPOSE

To receive a **draft** version of the Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) prior to inclusion into the Statement of Accounts 2021/22.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Governance and Audit Committee contribute to the appropriateness and content of the draft AGS 2021/22 and subsequently endorse it.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Corporate Governance is about doing the right thing at the right time for the right people in an open and transparent way. The AGS sets out how Monmouthshire demonstrates it has appropriate governance arrangements in place and how they are continually reviewed to strengthen them moving forward.
- 3.2 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'.
- 3.3 Monmouthshire County Council (the Council) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and to 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.
- 3.4 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.
- 3.5 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 and more recently in 2020. A copy of the Code is available from the Chief Internal Auditor. This Annual

Governance Statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code, the updated 2016 guidance and also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014, the Local Government Measure and the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The recommendations and actions from this Statement for the Council to improve will be integrated into the Council's Annual Wellbeing and Self-Assessment Report.

4 The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 4.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost effective services.
- 4.2 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, aims 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.
- 4.3 The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.
- 4.4 The Statement itself [Appendix 1] demonstrates that Monmouthshire has appropriate 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 the majority of areas we have effective governance arrangements in place which are continually improving, but also recognise that there is always further work to do.
- 4.5 Despite the pandemic Monmouthshire CC has managed to maintain the majority of its governance arrangements this year and has demonstrated it has sound and effective arrangements in place in the services it delivers and the crisis it had to deal with. The majority of improvements noted in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 Action Plans have been addressed during the year. The Code of Corporate Governance was presented to the Council's former Audit Committee in June 2020 and presented to Cabinet in September 2021 for formal approval.

5 The Governance Framework

- 5.1 The Council's AGS has been developed 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

6 REASONS

- 6.1 In accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 an annual governance statement must be prepared and included within the Council's year end financial statements. The Council is now required to self-assess its governance and performance as outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None.

8 CONSULTEES

Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer Resources
Chief Officer People and Governance
SLT
Head of Policy & Governance (Performance)
Head of Digital & Information Governance

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

MCC Code of Corporate Governance
CIPFA Delivering Good Governance

10 AUTHOR AND CONTACT DETAILS

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Monmouthshire CC

Annual Governance Statement 2021/22

Draft 0.1

May 2022

Executive Summary

The Statement itself demonstrates that Monmouthshire has appropriate 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 the majority of areas we have effective governance arrangements in place which are continually improving, but also recognise that there is always further work to do.

Despite the recent pandemic the Council has managed to maintain the majority of its governance arrangements this year and has demonstrated it has sound and effective arrangements in place in the services it delivers and the crisis it had to deal with. The majority of improvements noted in the 2019/20 & 2020/21 Action Plans have been addressed during the year (Appendix 1); the 2021/22 Action Plan is shown at Appendix 2. The Code of Corporate Governance was presented to the Council's former Audit Committee in June 2020 and presented to, and approved by Cabinet September 2021.

Audit Wales's review of Good Governance 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.

The Council is now required to self-assess its governance and performance as outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The recommendations and actions from this Statement for the Council to improve will be integrated into the Council's Annual Wellbeing and Self-Assessment Report.

- 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 2019/20 and 2020/21 Action Plans are shown at Appendix 1.

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 (Wales) Measure 2011 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation. The Council is now required to self-assess its governance and performance as outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 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 Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the 'CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010)'.
- 6 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 initially approved by Council in July 2011; the Code was revised and updated again in June 2020, approved by Cabinet September 2021. A copy of the 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 revised Code sets out what governance arrangements are in place within Monmouthshire CC for each of the Governance Principles.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 7 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.
- 8 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.

- 9 The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

The Governance Framework

- 10 The Council's Corporate Governance is 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

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

- 11 Monmouthshire has to demonstrate it is compliant with the Well-being of Future Generations (WFG)(Wales) Act 2015 and this compliments the way it functions in line with the above principles of good governance; the core behaviours being:
- behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law; and
 - ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

This needs 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.

- Long Term
- Prevention
- Integration
- Collaboration
- Involvement

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

| Monmouthshire Council priority goal (Well-being Objectives) | Contribution of Well-being Objectives to Well-being Goals | | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| | Prosperous Wales | Resilient Wales | Healthier Wales | More equal Wales | Wales of cohesive communities | vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language | Globally responsible Wales |
| The best possible start in life | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Lifelong well-being | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Maximise the Potential of the natural and built environment | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Thriving and well-connected county | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Future-focused Council | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ |

- 12 The key elements of the Council’s governance arrangements are set out in its Corporate Plan 2017-2022, “A Monmouthshire that works for everyone” which was approved by Council in February 2018. A mid-term refresh was presented to Council in September 2021.
- 13 As part of the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 the Public Service Board (PSB) is 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 and report annually on its progress.
- 14 The Public Service Board has approved four well-being objectives that underpin a clear purpose of “building sustainable and resilient communities”.
- 15 An update on the emerging actions being developed to deliver the objectives contained in Monmouthshire’s Well-being Plan was signed off by the PSB in April 2018. The Public Services Board Committee was renamed the Public Services Committee in March 2020 in order to scrutinise wider public service provision and where powers allow, to provide greater accountability of services delivered in collaboration or by external partners.
- 16 The PSB presented its annual report 2020/21, in July 2021 to the Public Services Scrutiny Committee. During 2021/22 Monmouthshire PSB merged with other local PSBs to form the Gwent PSB.

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Pandemic

- 17 The Coronavirus pandemic (WEF March 2020) had initially caused significant organisational disruption including new emergency responsibilities, increased staff absence and a requirement for staff to work from home (where possible) while continuing to ensure statutory services were maintained as expected. For the most part of 2021/22 the majority of office based staff continued to work from home. This statement assesses the governance in place during 2021/22.

- 18 In accordance with the Council's Corporate Emergency Management Plan (revised March 2019) an Emergency Response Team (ERT) was established along with a regional multi-agency Strategic Co-ordination Group (SCG) to deal with this pandemic. These groups started to meet on a daily basis during March 2020 and continued throughout 2020/21 and into 2021/22.
- 19 Once enacted, the Corporate Emergency Management Plan allowed for an emergency management structure and delegation of emergency powers to the ERT Gold Duty Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council.
- 20 The pandemic has impacted on the Council's delivery of services as some staff were diverted to front line duties to ensure that critical services were prioritised. There have also been new areas of activity as part of the national response to Coronavirus for example providing emergency assistance to businesses in Monmouthshire.
- 21 There has been funding and logistical consequences of delivering the local government response. To ensure appropriate governance and accountability, these costs have been identified by staff and appropriately coded on the Council's Main Accounting System and reclaimed from Welsh Government.
- 22 In line with public health measures to mitigate the spread of Coronavirus and to enable the Council to focus on the delivery of critical services, all public meetings were initially suspended. This included Council meetings, meetings of full Cabinet and all committee and sub-committee meetings, including Select, Planning and Licensing. The Council felt it was important to re-instate public meetings as soon as it was safe to do so. Using appropriate technology, key meetings were held remotely which could be viewed by the public through live streaming or through You Tube channels later. MCC was the first Council in Wales to get its meetings back up and running.
- 23 Urgent decisions initially were made in accordance with the officer and Members' schemes of delegation as detailed in the Council's Constitution and urgent decision-making procedures.
- 24 As the use of technology came into operation, minimal Council meetings were cancelled; they were held remotely through live video links.
- 25 Moving into 2021/22 Welsh Government restrictions eased. Covid 19 Recovery updates and Response and Progress continued to be reported through Cabinet.
- 26 An evaluation of the Council's progress against its Coronavirus Strategic Aims was taken through Cabinet in June 2021 and December 2021.
- 27 As much as possible, the systems of internal control have continued to operate during the pandemic and subsequently into 2021/22. The Council's implementation of Office365 (Teams) has allowed the majority of employees to successfully work from home without major disruption.
- 28 In the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion, adequate assurance was obtained over the course of 2021/22 to result in an overall '**Reasonable**' audit opinion to be issued for the Council's activities, although this was based on the limited work undertaken by the team due to reduced resources. One member of the team was seconded to support the administration of the Welsh Government business grants. Reliance on previous year's audit work has also been taken into consideration in arriving at this year's opinion in that there have been no significant systems or staff changes. 64% of the approved revised audit plan was completed against the target of 82%; 20 audit opinions were issued; with 2 *Limited Assurance* audit opinions issued. Further detail regarding the Internal Audit team's performance is included within the Internal Audit Annual Report 2021/22.
- 29 In conclusion, during 2021/22 the Coronavirus pandemic did not lead to significant internal control or governance issues which impacted on the overall review of effectiveness. This will be monitored during 2022/23 and reviewed as part of future Annual Governance Statements.

Review of Effectiveness

- 30** 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 Strategic 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.
- 31** The governance arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.
- 32** The processes that have been applied to maintain, review and improve the effectiveness of the governance framework include:
- i) The Monitoring Officer presented the revised and updated Council Constitution to the Democratic Services Committee in January 2021 and to full Council in March 2021 with a further update May 2022;
 - 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; Contract Procedure Rules were reviewed and updated during 2020/21 and approved by full Council within the Constitution in March 2021;
 - iii) Whole Authority Strategic Risk Management Assessment and amendments to the Policy were approved by Cabinet in April 2021;
 - iv) Formal risk management and ongoing review of the processes involved reported through Governance and Audit Committee November 2021
 - v) The Governance and Audit Committee undertook a self-evaluation exercise towards the end of 2019/20; summary reported to Governance and Audit Committee June 2020;
 - vi) Annual Governance and Audit Committee report to Governance and Audit Committee July 2021 and Council September 2021;
 - vii) Code of Corporate Governance to Cabinet September 2021;
 - viii) 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; reported through Governance and Audit Committee
 - ix) the work of the Council's Select and other Committees, including its Governance & Audit and Standards committees;
 - x) 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 Governance and Audit Committee, as appropriate;
 - xi) The opinions and recommendations of other inspection, regulation and review agencies which are reported to Council, Cabinet, Select Committees and Governance and Audit Committee as appropriate. Governance and Audit Committee receives a regular report on the progress made with recommendations and proposals issued by Audit Wales.
 - xii) regular monitoring of performance against the Corporate Plan and service plans and of key targets, and reporting of this to senior management and members;
 - xiii) Corporate Plan update 2020/21 – Council September 2021;
 - xiv) Through the coronavirus pandemic establishing a series of interim strategies to provide clarity in direction and ensure accountability – to Cabinet June 2021 & December 2021
 - xv) Annual Safeguarding Evaluation Report– Council November 2021;
 - xvi) Estyn's report into Local Government Education Services in Monmouthshire County Council – Cabinet May 2020;
 - xvii) Annual appraisal of the effectiveness of the authority's performance management arrangements reported annually to Governance and Audit Committee.

- xviii) Chief Officer for Children and Young People’s Annual Report presented to Council June 2021; Chief Officer for Social Care, Safeguarding & Health’s Annual Report presented to Council September 2021; Annual Statutory Report on Performance 2020/21 from the Director of Social Care, Safeguarding and Health – Council September 2021;
- xix) Updated policies and strategies reported through Cabinet and Council

33 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

34 The Code of Conduct for Members and a protocol on Member / Officer relationships are set out in the Constitution, updated March 2021 & May 2022. The Council also has a local protocol for the self-regulation of Member conduct.

35 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. The Standards Committee met 3 times during 2021/22.

36 Public Service Ombudsman Wales Annual Report (2020/21) was presented to Cabinet in November 2021.

Conduct Complaints about MCC Members received by the Public Services Ombudsman:

| | 2018/19 | 2019/20 | 2020/21 |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Not upheld | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Referred to Standards Committee | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Referred to Adjudication Panel | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL COMPLAINTS CLOSED | 1 | 2 | 1 |

37 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 through independent DBS checks.

38 In accordance with its statutory responsibilities, the Council has in place a Health and Safety Policy and related procedures.

39 There were no successful “call-in” challenges to decisions on procedural grounds.

40 Policy and decision-making is facilitated through (i) Council and Cabinet; the meetings of which are open to the public and live streamed online 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 Public Services Scrutiny Committee) and a separate Governance and 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.

- 41 A Scrutiny and Executive Protocol is in place which is aligned to the updated constitution of March 2021/ May 2022 and provides parameters for effective executive and scrutiny relationships.
- 42 The Constitution is updated periodically by the Monitoring Officer; the latest update approved by Council was in May 2022. It can be found on the Council's website.
- 43 To ensure agreed procedures and all applicable statutes are complied with, the Monitoring Officer attends full Council meetings, Cabinet and SLT. To ensure sound financial management is a key factor in decisions, the Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer Resources (Interim Head of Finance) attends SLT, Cabinet and Council meetings.
- 44 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
 - registers of personal and business interests for Members
 - declarations of interests for Chief Officers
 - 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.
- 45 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. The Monitoring Officer has not issued a Section 5 report in 2021/22 or in the previous year, 2020/21.
- 46 All exemptions of the Contract Procedure Rules are reported through Governance and Audit Committee periodically. The Internal Audit team co-ordinates the exemption process in conjunction with strategic procurement.
- 47 The Governance and Audit Committee has the opportunity to call in senior managers during the year and challenge them on why a procurement process went outside the Council's normal tendering processes. There were no call-ins during 2021/22.
- 48 As a result of Covid-19 the Internal Audit Team was repurposed during most of 2020/21 to undertake extensive counter fraud activities on Welsh Government business grants and support TTP; a report was taken to Governance and Audit Committee explaining the situation, January 2021. The team managed to work through the audit plan for 2021/22 with 20 Internal Audit opinions being issued in the year; 2 audit jobs resulted in **Limited** assurance.
- 49 The overall opinion on the adequacy of the internal control environment for 2021/22 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 2021/22 were as follows:

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2022

| | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|------------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Substantial Assurance (Very Good) | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Considerable Assurance (Good) | 11 | 6 | 6 |
| Reasonable Assurance | 7 | 1 | 7 |
| Limited Assurance (Unsatisfactory) | 9 | 0 | 2 |
| | | | |
| Total | 29 | 9 | 20 |

- 50** Reasons why the outcome of the audit reviews which were deemed to provide Limited assurance have been, or will be, presented in a separate report to Governance and Audit Committee; assurances have been sought from respective operational managers that action will be taken to make the necessary improvements in control.
- 51** The Internal Audit team did not have a full complement of staff for the full year; the Auditor was seconded out of the team and was then successful with an internal promotion and the Audit Manager left the organisation in February 2022. Despite reduced resources, 64% of the 2021/22 audit plan was achieved, which was better than the previous year (57%). 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 but this was based on a limited number of opinions issued. The 2021/22 audit opinion was supported by the knowledge that there were appropriate governance, risk management and internal control assurances in place in previous years, with no significant changes. The Assistant Head of Finance continued to be covered by the Central Accountancy Finance Manager and Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer Resources.
- 52** The Internal Audit team continued to ensure its compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). This was validated through a peer review process at the end of 2017/18; the outcome of which was that the team are compliant.
- 53** 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 & 2011. Performance and Improvement Objectives reported to Council in September 2021 through the Corporate Plan Annual Update 2020/21. Work is ongoing with the Council's improvement framework to reflect new performance arrangements and duty established by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 54** The strategies which support this Framework include the Asset Management Plan, People Strategy, Local Development Plan, Financial Plan, Digital Strategy, Economy & Enterprise Strategy which are delivered through service business plans and employee aims & objectives, evaluated and risk assessed.
- 55** 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

- 56** The agendas are published in advance of all meetings on the Council's website; corresponding minutes are published post meeting.
- 57** The scrutiny /select reports on recommendations/outcomes from scrutiny activity are presented to Cabinet quarterly. The scrutiny function has a 'Scrutiny Service Business Plan'. The plan is built into the Council's improvement framework. At Monmouthshire, scrutiny is undertaken by 5 select committees.

- Children and Young People's Select Committee
- Adults Select Committee
- Economy and Development Select Committee
- Strong Communities Select Committee
- Public Service Select Committee

- 58** 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 and a Scrutiny and Executive Protocol have been developed to support Members to carry out their responsibilities effectively 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.
- 59** Social media, Twitter, Facebook and You Tube for example, is used to engage local people and communicate the corporate message. Scrutiny has a Twitter account to help engage more effectively with the public on democracy. Chief Officers, Members and the Communications team are very proactive in engaging with the public.
- 60** Public engagement events and You Tube continued to be used in 2021/22 for the budget proposals. The Council has encouraged the community within Monmouthshire to actively contribute to making stepped changes to improve the way in which services are provided. This links back to the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act which sets out five ways of working including involvement.
- 61** In addition to regular internal communications, throughout the pandemic, and subsequently, the Chief Executive has extensively engaged with the public providing updates on essential Covid-19 related statistics and Council service provision.
- 62** In May 2018, Monmouthshire Public Services Board (PSB), adopted their Well-being Plan in line with the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The plan was informed by the Monmouthshire Well-being Assessment which sought the views of Monmouthshire residents and draws together findings from data, academic research and policy papers and the views of local people. This Plan is challenged publicly through Public Services Select Committee, July 2021. During 2021/22 several local PSBs merged to form the Gwent Public Services Board.
- 63** The "Our Monmouthshire" approach, which was essential to the Well-being Assessment is about all of us addressing the needs of the future as well as current generations. People in Monmouthshire were asked "*what's good about your community and what would make it better, now and in the future*". The well-being assessment was also used as evidence to inform the Council's Corporate Plan, making sure it addresses some of the really big challenges that Monmouthshire faces in coming years.
- 64** Transparency and openness is important to Monmouthshire; the Annual Statement of Accounts was taken through the Governance and Audit Committee process before being endorsed by Cabinet and Council. All Council decisions, reports and questions asked by Members are available on the website. Financial information, Corporate Plan progress, Council activities, achievements, developments, updates and events were included on the Council's intranet and website, with all Council, Cabinet, Governance and Audit Committee and Select Committees live streamed. All public meetings of the Council are live streamed 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.
- 65** 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.
- 66** The Council's website contains links to the following areas of open data in the interests of openness:

Data published by Monmouthshire County Council:

- List of expenditure over £500
- Our spend data as a useful dashboard
- Food Hygiene ratings
- Business property data set
- List of Primary Schools
- List of Secondary Schools

- 67 The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) supports the vision for Monmouthshire and extensive public engagement continued in 2021/22 for the 2022/23 budget and Medium Term Financial Plan which engaged with the public in their own community; this included website, social media, drop in sessions, Cabinet Member YouTube video and open meetings. These were key to providing people with the opportunity to become informed; Cabinet January 2022.
- 68 Public engagement and consultation is key to the WFG Act; one of the five ways of working is Involvement. 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 PSB in 2021/22, July 2021.
- 69 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

- 70 The Council's five priority goals, which are also the Council's well-being objectives, are set out in its Corporate Plan 2017-2022, "A Monmouthshire that works for everyone" which was approved by Council in February 2018. The 2020/21 Corporate Plan annual report was presented to Council in September 2021. Building sustainable and resilient communities is the unifying purpose of the diverse range of services the Council delivers. This is shared with our partners on the PSB, which is responsible for setting well-being objectives for the County.
- 71 Monmouthshire County Council is a member of the Monmouthshire PSB (became Gwent PSB July 2021), where we work with other public services and the voluntary sector on the delivery of the local well-being plan. This includes countywide well-being objectives that are a focus for public services that are part of the PSB. Combining the ingenuity and initiative of all partners is key to finding new solutions to pressing, social, economic and environmental problems. This sense of 'power of the collective' is central to its core purpose, reflected in its values and embodied in its culture.
- 72 The Well-being Plan sets out the vision of the PSB. The four identified objectives are to:
- Provide children and young people with the best possible start in life
 - Respond to the challenges associated with demographic change
 - Protect and enhance the resilience of our natural environment whilst mitigating and adapting to the impact of climate change
 - Develop opportunities for communities and business to be part of an economically thriving and well connected county.
- 73 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

- 74** In March 2018 Council approved the Council's Corporate Plan 2017-2022, which incorporated the Council's well-being objectives, and endorsed the Area Plan. The well-being objectives 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 Well-being Objectives are now incorporated within the Corporate Plan; the 2020/21 update was presented to Council September 2021.
- 75** The Corporate Plan Objectives for 2017 to 2022 are supported by service business plans to operationally deliver these objectives. Service plans are made available on the Council's Hub intranet site. These are quality assessed as part of the service planning process. All service plans were developed to align the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan. Through the pandemic in 2020/21 the Council's established performance framework had been adjusted and prioritised in its application, where necessary, to reflect the Council's response and this continued into 2021/22. Through the coronavirus pandemic a series of interim strategies to provide clarity in direction and ensure accountability have been established– Cabinet June 2021 & December 2021. To support this, structures and mechanisms were put in place to track and evaluate progress.
- 76** Audit Wales presented its Certificate of Compliance for the audit of Monmouthshire's 2020/21 Improvement Plan to the Governance and Audit Committee in November 2021. It has carried out work with all councils on improvement assessment, the WFG Act, the service user perspective and scrutiny as well as some local work. It concluded that the Council meets its statutory requirements for continuous improvement and there are no formal recommendations.
- 77** Reports were taken through the select / scrutiny process during the year which included links to the Council's policies, priorities and objectives. The agendas and minutes of which became public documents are available through the Council's website.
- 78** WFG Act continued to be a key theme and foundation through the reporting processes in 2021/22.
- 79** The Council is embracing the benefits of digital communications including social media use, for example "My Monmouthshire", which enables people to interact and transact with the Council using mobile devices. The Council's website includes more transactional functions. In 2018-19 the Council also launched a "chatbot" to further broaden the channels people can use to interact with their local authority. During 2021/22 there was extensive use of Twitter, Facebook and You Tube to raise awareness of forthcoming events, to provide live streaming of Cabinet, Council, scrutiny and other political meetings, to promote the activities and services provided and to show support and encouragement for community groups.
- 80** 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) continued to be a key aspect of improving services throughout 2021/22. Outcomes are measured via the Digital Programme Office Service plan and performance planning process.
- 81** 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 now form part of the Cabinet report template. All IT investments are considered through SLT and then Cabinet before decisions are taken as required via Cabinet or Council.
- 82** Regular budget / outturn reports for revenue and capital were presented to and approved by Cabinet during the year; June 2021, July 2021, December 2021, & March 2022. 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.

- 83** The MTFP process for 2022/23 to 2025/26 was reviewed and approved by Cabinet in December 2021. The Draft Capital Budget Proposals 2022/23 to 2025/26 were taken to Cabinet in January 2022. Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2022/23 also went to Cabinet in January 2022. Final Proposals went to Cabinet before being approved by Council in March 2022. 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.
- 84** An authority-wide performance measurement system for the Council, the "data hub", hosted on the Council's intranet site continues to be updated. This enables Members and officers to track and monitor data in key strategic plans through "dashboards". This also allows performance to be compared against other council areas, where applicable. The "data hub" has been reviewed and streamlined to ensure information is up to date and focussed on the most pertinent performance data.
- 85** Audit Wales presented the Audit Wales Certificate of Compliance for the audit Monmouthshire County Council's assessment of performance for 2020/21 to Governance and Audit Committee in November 2021. This was an update on the current effectiveness of the Authority's performance management arrangements. Audit Wales concluded that the Council has discharged its duties under sections 15(2), (3), (8) and (9) of the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance sufficiently to discharge its duties.
- 86** The Equality Impact Assessment and Sustainable Development checklists were 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, WFG Act and Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. A range of these were undertaken during 2021/22 which have been published on the website accompanying decision making reports. The integrated checklist has been updated to ensure that new policy decisions are considered against the socio-economic duty which came into effect on 31 March 2021.
- 87** The Council has a long-standing commitment to equality and diversity and under the Equality Act 2010, has to produce a Strategic Equality Plan. The Council's third Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 sets the Council's objectives to ensure it delivers better outcomes for people with protected characteristics. An annual monitoring report for 2020/21 was produced and scrutinised by Strong Communities Select Committee in November 2021.
- 88** The Council has a Welsh Language Strategy for 2017 – 2022, which sets out a vision of how Welsh language will look in Monmouthshire in 5 years, and is accompanied by targets to help achieve that vision. Also the Welsh Language Monitoring Report 2020/21 was presented to Strong Communities Select in June 2021 to note compliance and progress made with the Welsh Language Standards allocated to Monmouthshire County Council.

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

- 89** 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).
- 90** Contract Procedure Rules exemptions are normally reported to the Governance and Audit Committee every six months; July 2021. Managers are challenged in year to justify their procurement outside the Council agreed procedures.
- 91** Regular reporting into Cabinet, Scrutiny and Governance and Audit Committee enables the achievement of the Council's objectives to be challenged and appropriate actions put in place to address

any identified issues so that the intended outcomes can be achieved. The Strategic Risk Register was reviewed by Governance and Audit Committee in November 2021. The Whole Authority Strategic Risk Assessment 2020/21 was also reported to Governance and Audit Committee (March 2021) and signed off by Cabinet April 2021.

- 92** 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 158 complaints received in 2020/21, 150 were resolved informally with 7 being formally investigated, 2 of which were referred the Ombudsman, with none formally investigated. 379 comments were received along with 204 compliments; (Governance and Audit Committee February 2022).

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

- 93** 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. This is complemented by the People Strategy. The Pay Policy is approved annually by Council and is available on the MCC website.
- 94** Developing the digital capabilities of people and systems to enable effectiveness, efficiency and enhanced customer services is important within Monmouthshire and is measured via the Digital Programme Service Business Plan. To further enhance service delivery and better deal with cyber security / information risks the Digital Programme Office has been split into the Information Security and Technology Team and the Digital Design and Innovation Team.
- 95** 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. This will be reviewed and updated following the May 2022 elections.
- 96** 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.
- 97** A Scrutiny Member Development Training Programme is in place which provides ongoing specific skills based training for Members and includes scrutiny induction; this is agreed by the Scrutiny Chairs' Group. The training programme forms part of the Scrutiny Service Plan.
- 98** Appropriate and relevant job descriptions were in place for the Chief Executive, Strategic Leadership Team (SLT), Monitoring Officer and Head of Finance.

Partnerships/collaboration working

- 99** 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. The Authority is required to meet statutory obligations regarding the handling and sharing of data, in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018. The Information Sharing protocol has been developed to ensure information is only shared appropriately, safely and compliantly.
- 100** 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.

- 101** As a key example of our commitment to effective governance, arrangements have been developed for the PSB Select Committee; the Public Services Scrutiny Committee from March 2020.
- 102** The Community & Partnership Development Team was developed in order to help build sustainable and resilient communities that support the wellbeing of current and future generations in Monmouthshire which is a shared purpose with the public service board partners. The Team work with communities and partners to help bring about social change and improve the quality of life in the county. The team act as enablers, unlocking potential and supporting sustainability through collective impact; providing a resource and tangible link between local communities and a wide range of partners; enabling the delivery of measureable and sustainable programme of activities that will constantly look to the future. The team will ensure MCCs statutory duties are fulfilled across the partnerships landscape.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

- 103** There are robust arrangements for effective internal 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 Procedure Rules. 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.
- 104** In July 2017 Audit Wales reported to Governance and 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" (Good Governance when Determining Significant Service Changes report, March 2017).
- 105** Audit Wales presented its Certificate of Compliance for the audit of Monmouthshire's 2020/21 Improvement Plan to the Governance and Audit Committee in November 2021 and concluded that the Council is meeting its statutory requirements.
- 106** 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. An Annual risk assessment on fraud and corruption is presented to Governance and Audit Committee. The Council's Council Tax Reduction Anti-Fraud Policy was approved by Cabinet in June 2015. A training package has been developed and was previously presented to Governance and Audit Committee (January 2020). This needs to be further rolled out across the Council.
- 107** The Governance and Audit Committee considers the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for securing continuous improvement including risk management arrangements. The Governance and 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 Governance and Audit Committee has an independent, non-political, Chairman who prepares an annual report of the work of the Governance and Audit Committee.
- 108** 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 (revised and updated approved by Governance and Audit Committee September 2021). The Chief Internal Auditor reports a summary of audit findings to the Governance and Audit Committee each quarter; he also reports annually an opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment through his Internal Audit Annual Report.

- 109** The Chief Internal Auditor continues to 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 as compliant in March 2018 by an external assessor, the Chief Internal Auditor of Neath Port Talbot Council.
- 110** The Council has an objective and professional relationship with its external auditors and statutory inspectors. It manages its information resource through strategies and policies to enable effective decision making which is managed via the Information Strategy and action plan.

Risk management

- 111** The Council's Strategic Risk Management Policy was updated and approved by Cabinet in April 2021; progress was reported into Governance and Audit Committee in November 2021. 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.
- 112** 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 its 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 and Governance and Audit Committees. In order to mitigate the risks, proposed actions are recorded and also aligned back into the respective service business plan. The risk assessment is a living document and is updated over the course of the year as new information comes to light.

- 113** The Council's Strategic Risk Assessment for 2021/22 contains 16 risks. These were reviewed throughout the year with the latest version was presented to Governance and Audit Committee in November 2021. The majority were rated initially as medium risks. Following mitigation there was 1 low risk, 8 medium risks and 7 high risks.

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

- 114** The South East Wales Education Achievement Service (EAS) Business Plan 2022-25 was presented to Cabinet in March 2022. The plan sets out the priorities, programmes and outcomes to be achieved by the EAS on behalf of the South East Wales Consortium.
- 115** The updated People Strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in July 2018; this is the overarching framework for People and Organisational Development which supports its role in ensuring the organisation is equipped with the collective capacity, capability and mindset to meet financial and improvement challenges and respond to opportunities that present
- 116** The Council's first Commercial Strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in July 2018; the purpose of this report was to present for approval the Council's first Commercial Strategy and accompanying action plan. The strategy builds upon aspects of the Procurement, Digital and Asset Management Strategies and is a key means through which the Council can play a role in the self-determination of its future viability and sustainability.
- 117** In September 2019, the updated Digital Infrastructure Action Plan was approved by Cabinet. In June 2021 Cabinet approved the creation of a new Digital Design and Innovation Team to strengthen information governance arrangements and include data analytics.
- 118** There have been significant developments in technology in the last 4 years, and the experience, data and evidence we have collected from our customers about the way they wish to engage and transact with us has informed this new strategy. Our workforce needs to have the digital knowledge and skills to build in end-to-end automated customer services and business processes. We need to reduce demand through self-service facilities and provision of accurate, relevant data and information that people can use with confidence to make decisions.
- 119** Continued improvements have been made to cyber security arrangements since the onset of Covid-19 which has increased digital working methods.
- 120** In July 2018, the Council's latest iteration of its Procurement Strategy was approved by Cabinet. The Strategy builds upon workshop sessions undertaken with the Economy and Development Select Committee and the aims, aspirations and priorities for procurement, identified throughout the participative process. In July 2021 Cabinet approved the collaboration with Cardiff Council, for mutual benefit, the discharge and provision of the Council's Strategic Procurement services.
- 121** Transparency and openness is important to Monmouthshire; the Annual Statement of Accounts was taken through the Governance and Audit Committee process before being endorsed by Council. All public meetings of the Council, including Council, Cabinet, Select, Governance and Audit Committee, Planning Committee 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.
- 122** The Council's enabling strategies have been revised to align to the delivery of the corporate plan, these include the Digital Strategy, People Strategy and Asset Management Strategy as well as linking in with MCC's Service Business Plans.
- 123** The Governance and 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. The Governance and Audit Committee presents its Annual report to Council.
- 124** The Whole Authority Report complaints, comments and compliments 2020/21 was presented to Governance and Audit Committee in February 2022 which identified the number and types of feedback received and dealt with from 1 April 2020 until 31 March 2021.

Information Governance

- 125** Monmouthshire County Council (MCC) has restructured its Information Security and Governance offering from June 2021 in response to an increase in digital working and to maintain cyber resilience to protect our information. MCC continues to ensure training and awareness of governance issues is focussed on high risk service departments as well as through continuous updates and Information Security training events. This is to ensure compliance 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). A structured approach to information security and governance is operated internally via the Information Governance Group chaired by Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) as well as through collaboration with the wider SRS partners providing our technology infrastructure. GDPR Operational Leads have been established, along with Digital Champions linking in with teams, individuals and volunteers to ensure compliance and messages are communicated.
- 126** MCC have a dedicated intranet site for general advice as well as assistance with GDPR legislative requirements, including templates for privacy notices, records of processing activities (ROPA’s) and Data Processing Impact Assessments (DPIA’s).
- 127** To keep the public informed, MCC has now published its online privacy notices for relevant service areas. Significant work is underway through 2021/22 to consolidate and update all privacy notices to make them more transparent and sustainable to maintain. A comprehensive list of all data systems is maintained centrally along with information audits for every service area, linking into the ROPA’s.
- 128** The Corporate GDPR Policy is 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) and WARP (Warning Advice and Security Point) 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

- 129** 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:
- Deliver awareness raising training sessions on the importance of compliance with new and revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules;
 - Raise awareness across the Council on Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption.
 -

Action Plan 2020/21 & 2021/22

- 130** Appendix 1 shows how the 2020/21 Action plan areas for improvement have been addressed during 2021/22.
- 131** The Action Plan for 2021/22 is shown at Appendix 2.

Monitoring & Evaluation

132 We propose over the coming year to continually review our governance arrangements to ensure they remain effective and appropriate. Steps will be taken, where appropriate, to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address any need for improvements identified in the review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed:**2022**

Councillor Mary Ann Brocklesby Leader

Signed:**2022**

Paul Matthews Chief Executive

Progress against the Action Plan 2020/21

| Governance Principle | Area for Improvement | Progress |
|--|--|---|
| Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law | Continue to deliver training sessions on the importance of compliance with the new and revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules; | Internal Audit have continued to deliver training sessions within schools and on the manager's induction programme. Internal Audit will work with the new procurement partnership to ensure the revised and updated CPRs are rolled out across MCC. |
| Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law | The Code of Corporate Governance was last approved by Council in July 2011. This will need to be updated and approved in line with Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016' | Outstanding. The Code of Corporate Governance has been updated and was presented to Governance and Audit Committee in June 2020. This now needs formal Cabinet approval. Update: Approved by Cabinet September 2021. |
| Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management | The Council will work through the Audit Wales proposals for improvement in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scrutiny: Fit for the Future? ▪ Review of Asset Management ▪ Information Management ▪ Whole Authority review of children's safeguarding | A corporate plan has been developed that sets out a clear direction for the Council up to 2022. The role and purpose of service planning has been reviewed and a revised process established aligned to the corporate plan. Council's enabling strategies have been revised to align to the delivery of the corporate plan, these include the Digital Strategy, People Strategy and Asset Management Strategy The Council's Strategic Risk Management Policy was updated April 2021. |
| | | |

Action Plan 2021/22

| Governance Principle | Area for Improvement | Progress |
|----------------------|---|----------|
| | | |
| | Deliver awareness raising training sessions on the importance of compliance with revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules | |
| | Raise awareness across the Council on Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption | |
| | | |