

SUBJECT: Draft Monmouthshire County Council Self-Assessment 2021/22

MEETING: Governance and Audit Committee

DATE: 14th July 2022

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1 PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To provide the committee with a draft of the Monmouthshire County Council Self-Assessment report 2021/22 in line with requirements outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee review the draft self-assessment report 2021/22 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 new requirement for Welsh local authorities and comes at the start of a new Council term, allowing the incoming administration to evaluate our recent history and use this to inform the direction we will chart, and the way we will work over the next five years. The requirement is created as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. 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.
- 3.2 At the meeting on 20th June 2022 the committee was provided with an overview of the self-assessment process that has led to the production of this report. Governance and Audit Committee have an important role in contributing to the self-assessment report and a draft must be provided to the committee to review. The self-assessment should be used to inform the committee's role of seeking assurance of the effectiveness of the council's governance and performance management arrangements.
- 3.3 The past five years have been a challenging time for public services throughout the UK and Monmouthshire has been no exception. The self-assessment evaluates what we have done during this time and how we have done it. Our direction was set in 2017 by a five-year Corporate Plan, which identifies a clear purpose and a series of objectives to achieve it. These were underpinned by our core values of teamwork, openness, fairness and flexibility. We recently added a fifth value of kindness, which was central to how we, and the communities in our county, worked over recent years. During the past two and a half years, some of our plans had to take a back-seat while we adjusted to the challenges of the pandemic. This period was covered by five interim strategies, covering different phases from full lockdowns, through re-openings and finally learning to live with the virus.
- 3.4 The self-assessment report demonstrates the progress the council has made and further areas for development. These include:
- We have continued our path of collaborative working between health and social care. We've developed approaches which are focused on keeping people well in their communities, reducing the demand on costly one-size-fits-all statutory services and instead focused on the needs and

well-being of individuals. There remain challenges, such as an absence of private care providers, meaning some needs go unmet.

- We have continued to invest in new schools with the £40 million Monmouth Comprehensive opening in 2019. While we still need to focus on areas for development, including the attainment of pupils in receipt of free school meals, Estyn's most recent inspection concluded that the authority has a clear vision for education, strong standards of well-being and a good track record of improvement.
- During this time there have also been challenges. We've seen rising levels of homelessness, exacerbated by a shortage of affordable homes. We've made good progress reducing our carbon emissions by retrofitting our buildings with solar panels and introducing more electric vehicles but we still have some way to go before we can achieve our ambition of being a net zero organisation
- We have delivered financial savings and operated within the financial budget set by Council during each of the past five years.

3.5 During the past two and a half years we adjusted to the challenges of the pandemic. Arrangements we established, and support we provided, include:

- Our culture, values and use of digital technology meant we were able to transition rapidly to remote working when the country went into lockdown in March 2020 and were one of the first councils in the UK to introduce online Cabinet and Council meetings.
- We established clear interim objectives, communicated these to residents and partners and ensured that progress was evaluated and reported regularly
- Early in the pandemic, we set a goal of ensuring that every person or family in crisis that we were aware of received support. This meant redeploying staff into front-line roles and drawing on an army of volunteers, many of whom were already working with us as a result of many years developing the A County That Serves approach, to provide services such as shopping and prescription deliveries.
- We provided support to businesses throughout the year to help them through the challenges and uncertainty of the pandemic and issued over 6,500 payments of grants amounting to almost £40 million.
- We also worked with the NHS to deliver contact tracing, redeploying public health professionals to provide an efficient and cost-effective solution to slow the spread of the virus.

In the latter stages of the pandemic our purpose evolved as we began to focus on re-opening and learning to live with the virus and the next phase in the evolution of our council and our county.

3.6 Self-assessment is a way of evaluating, critically and honestly, our 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 council needs to have an evaluative culture and mindset embedded in all it does, rather than see the self-assessment as a standalone process to be completed once a year. The self-assessment process has been embedded as part of the council's performance management framework (appendix 1).

3.7 The self-assessment report evaluates progress under each of the five priority goals in the Corporate Plan, which also served as the council's well-being objectives, and the programmes of work, twenty-two in total, that supported their delivery over the past five years. It also evaluates the key activity delivered as part of the interim Coronavirus strategies. To support the delivery of the goals, the council has to make sure that all of its areas are working efficiently and effectively. The report assess 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 and data.

- 3.8 Governance and Audit Committee can also make any recommendations for changes to the conclusions or actions the council intends to take as set out in paragraph 2.40 of the statutory guidance. If the council does not make a change recommended by the Governance and Audit Committee, it must set out the recommendation and the reasons why.
- 3.9 The committee should focus its review of the report on the effectiveness of the council's governance and performance management arrangements. Scrutiny of the council's performance, which is contained in the report, is the remit of the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee, and the report will be presented to that committee on the 7th July to inform this role. The final assessment will be presented to Council on 22nd September.
- 3.10 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

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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 sustainable and resilient communities 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 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.

