

SUBJECT: Monmouthshire County Council Self-Assessment 2021/22

MEETING: County Council

DATE: 22nd September 2022

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek Council approval of the Self-Assessment report 2021/22 in line with requirements outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and to ensure that members have a clear and transparent assessment of the Council's performance in 2021/22.

2. RECOMMENDATION:

- 2.1 That the Monmouthshire County Council Self-Assessment 2021/22 be approved.

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 members 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 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 identified a clear purpose and a series of objectives to achieve it. These were underpinned by our core values of teamwork, openness, fairness and flexibility and kindness. 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.
- 3.3 The self-assessment report demonstrates the progress the council has made and further areas for development. These include:
- Continuation of strong 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.
 - Substantial investment in new schools with the £40 million Monmouth Comprehensive opening in 2019. While we still have some 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.
 - Rising levels of homelessness, exacerbated by a shortage of affordable homes.
 - Good progress has been made 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.

3.4 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.
- 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 issuing over 6,500 grant payments 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.

3.5 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).

3.6 The self-assessment report evaluates progress under each of the five priority goals in the Corporate Plan, which also serve as the council's well-being objectives, and the programmes of work, twenty-two in total, that support their delivery. It also evaluates the key activity delivered as part of the interim Coronavirus strategies. To support the delivery of the goals, the council must ensure all of its areas are working efficiently and effectively. The report assesses the effectiveness of the 'enabling functions' that support front-line 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. The report also provides an evaluation of the council's arrangements over this period in line with requirements under the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

3.7 A draft of the self-assessment report was provided to Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee which used the report to scrutinise the council's performance during 2021/22. The report provided valuable context for new members and assisting the committee in the development of its forward work programme.

3.8 The draft self-assessment report was also presented to Governance and Audit Committee, which has a statutory role reviewing the self-assessment, and was used by the Committee to seek assurance on the effectiveness of the council's governance and performance management arrangements. 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. The Committee reviewed the report and did not make any recommendations for change and the committee was broadly comfortable with its findings and conclusions and recommended its consideration by Council.

- 3.9 The self-assessment is a public document and should be accessible to a wide audience. Once approved the assessment will be published on the council's website and shared with key partners in accordance with paragraph 2.42 of the statutory guidance.
- 3.10 The areas for development identified through the assessment will be used to inform the Community and Corporate Plan being developed by Cabinet. This plan will also form the basis of the assessment of performance against the Council's outcomes in the next self-assessment report.
- 3.11 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. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1 This report is an evaluation of previous commitments and is not seeking a decision that would have an impact on these areas. The progress the council has made on the Well-being of Future Generations Act, equalities and safeguarding is set out in the report. Any action the Council takes that requires further decision will be evaluated in line with the decision-making process.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 The self-assessment report is an evaluation of previous commitments and is not seeking a decision on a future policy direction. The report provides an analysis, using a range of information, on the council's performance in 2021/22. The structure of the report has been informed by the legislation it is required to meet.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 The report provides a comprehensive evaluation of the performance of the council in 2021/22 using a range of performance information and evidence.

7. REASONS:

- 7.1 To ensure that the council can be held to account for performance and can demonstrate progress towards delivering better outcomes for citizens.
- 7.2 To comply with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 This report is a review of performance in 2021/22. Any resource implications of action the Council takes in response to the assessment will be assessed in line with processes in place.

9. CONSULTEES:

Strategic Leadership Team
Cabinet

The draft self-assessment report has been scrutinised by Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee and reviewed by Governance & Audit Committee. Neither committee recommended changes to the report.

10. 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.

