

SUBJECT: Self-Assessment 2022/23

MEETING: County Council

DATE: 26th October 2023

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1 PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek Council approval of the self-assessment report 2022/23 to ensure that members have a clear and transparent assessment of the authority's performance during the year ending 31 March 2023 in line with requirements outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the self-assessment for 2022/23 be approved.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Self-assessment is a vital part of our performance management arrangements. It's a way of evaluating, critically and honestly how well the authority is doing. The production of a self-assessment report is also a requirement under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Act requires each local authority in Wales to keep under review the extent to which it is meeting the 'performance requirements' defined in the Act. This means the extent to which: it is exercising its functions effectively; is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively and its governance is effective for securing these.
- 3.2 The Act creates a duty to publish a report setting out the conclusions of the self-assessment once in respect of every financial year. This informs decisions on how to secure improvement for the future. The self-assessment process has been embedded as part of the council's performance management framework (appendix 1). This ensures it can help the council continually learn and achieve sustainable improvement and better outcomes for citizens, service users and its own workforce. Our self-assessment began with a desk-based evaluation of the available evidence. The initial findings were tested refined through a series of workshops before being subject to challenge by SLT and Cabinet and then presented to Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee and Governance and Audit Committee.
- 3.3 The financial year 2022/23 was a time of transition for the organisation. Following the appointment of a new administration, workshops were convened, involving members from all parties, to convert high political ambition into clear and measurable objectives and a plan for delivery. Cabinet subsequently endorsed six objectives which set the strategic direction for the organisation for 22/23 onwards. The self-assessment is structured under these objectives with each one being scored using a six-point scale ranging from 1 (unsatisfactory) through to 6 (excellent).
- 3.4 The full Community and Corporate Plan was approved by Council in April 2023, after the self-assessment period ended. As a result, it would not be appropriate to evaluate progress against the specific actions in the plan. Instead, the assessment focuses on how well the council has met the areas for development identified in the 2021/22 self-assessment report and structures the analysis under the new objectives.

- 3.5 The evaluation shows targets for each of the key measures in the performance framework. These are for the year 2026-27 which is the final year of the plan and highlights what the council expects to be achieving by the end of the current term. It would not be expected for these ambitious targets to be met in the first year of the plan. Work to develop profiled targets for the intervening years is currently underway but has been delayed by capacity constraints. These will be considered by Cabinet in December alongside a progress update for 2023/24. Many of the measures in the framework reflect the outputs of our work. These are the things we have direct control over. We are also tracking progress against outcomes. These will take longer to achieve, often we one of many partners working on priorities such as reducing health inequalities. We use these measures to track progress but will not be setting specific targets against them as it is not possible for one single organisation to be held solely accountable for progress.
- 3.6 To support the delivery of the objectives, it's important that all teams are working efficiently and effectively. The report assesses the effectiveness of the enabling functions that support front line delivery to meet changing demands and ensure their sustainability. These include corporate planning, performance and risk management; financial planning; workforce planning; procurement; assets; digital; data; and democracy and scrutiny. These enablers are also assessed against the areas for development identified in last year's assessment.
- 3.7 The self-assessment report demonstrates the progress the council has made over the past year and highlights areas where improvement is needed. For example:
- We have continued to expand our education offer with the development of the new 3-19 all-through school in Abergavenny and the implementation of our 10-year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, which aims to promote and expand Welsh medium education provision in the county.
 - We have shown our commitment to reducing our impact on the planet exceeding recycling targets, shifting more of our fleet to low emission vehicles and producing a new socially responsible procurement strategy. However, this is a complex challenge and we will not be alone in struggling to achieve our goal of decarbonising our operations by 2030.
 - There simply aren't enough homes in our county to meet demand and this has been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. We've faced increased and more complex demand for homeless accommodation, with a heavier reliance on temporary accommodation. We've had some success, however finding suitable housing provision is likely to continue to be challenging as phosphates have limited new developments in the county, including the development of affordable housing.
 - We have continued to support our communities and residents through investing in volunteering opportunities, increasing our sports development offer and involving residents in longer-term planning. We have provided both financial support and advice to residents on the cost-of-living crisis and can demonstrate an understating of where poverty interventions are needed, however we do not always have the resources to act upon this information.
 - Work is needed to ensure the financial viability of the council's services, in particular adult social care, homelessness and home to school transport which are facing increasing demand and cost pressures which are beyond the authority's control.
- 3.8 This report is primarily an evaluation of what did in 2022/23. It informs our future work. but it does not purport to set out detailed action or deliver plans. That work sits elsewhere, including in the service business plans that are produced annually by teams across the authority. Nor does not cover the authority's 23-24 budget position which is considered in more detail in the annual monitoring reports for the current financial year.
- 3.9 A draft of the self-assessment report was provided to Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee, who used the report to scrutinise the council's performance during 2022/23. The committee provided helpful feedback, emphasising the importance of assessing the tangible impact of our actions within our communities. Next year's assessment will be able to assess progress

against the specific actions set out in the Community and Corporate Plan and will have a greater focus on outcomes rather than outputs. The committee also stressed the importance of ensuring the report is digestible for our residents. The summary contained in the self-assessment has been revised to make it more accessible and this will be published as a stand-alone document to ensure the findings are accessible for residents. A number of other areas for improvement were identified such as the inclusion of more performance comparisons. Feedback has been used to refine the current assessment where feasible with other comments being used to improve the process for future years. There was also discussion about the authority's finances. The committee was reminded that the in-year financial position was not covered in the 2022-23 self-assessment and would be addressed as part of budget monitoring reports received by Cabinet and Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee.

- 3.10 The draft self-assessment report was also presented to Governance and Audit Committee, which has a statutory role to review the final draft of the assessment. The report was used by the committee to seek assurance on the effectiveness of the council's governance and assurance arrangements. Governance and Audit Committee are also able to make 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 concluded that it was well-produced and meaningful. The committee did not make any specific recommendations for change ahead of its consideration by Council. Some minor amendments to drafting have been made to improve clarity and readability.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 The annual self-assessment report is, by its very nature, carried out by local authority officers drawing on a range of evidence including reports produced by external organisations like regulators. Once every five years, the Local Government and Elections Act requires us to conduct a panel performance assessment which will be chaired and conducted by external peers including an independently appointed chair. Our improvement work is also evaluated by Audit Wales who undertake audits of our performance management work and attend Governance and Audit Committee to report their findings. The committee use them to seek assurance about the effectiveness of our arrangements.

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 2022/23. 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 2022/23 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 2022/23. This report does not commit the council to any explicit actions which result in additional resource commitments. Any resource implications of action the Council takes in future in response to the assessment will be dealt with in accordance with the usual decision-making rules.

9. CONSULTEES:

Strategic Leadership Team
Cabinet
Governance and Assurance group

The draft self-assessment report has been scrutinised by Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee and reviewed by Governance & Audit Committee. Their high-level conclusions are reflected in paragraphs 3.9 and 3.10. Neither committee recommended changes to evaluation scores, headline conclusions or areas for development in the report.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

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

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

[Corporate Plan 2017-22](#)

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

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

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Appendix 1

Performance Management Framework

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

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



