

**SUBJECT: MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (2023/24)**

DIRECTORATE: Resources

MEETING: Governance & Audit Committee

DATE: 10th July 2024

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE

To receive a **draft** version of the Council's Annual Governance Statement [Appendix 1] prior to inclusion into the Statement of Accounts 2023/24.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. That the Governance & Audit Committee contribute to the appropriateness and content of the draft Annual Governance Statement (2023/24).
2. Considers the review of effectiveness and the assessment made against each of the governance principles.
3. The Committee endorses the Annual Governance Statement for inclusion within the Draft Statement of Accounts 2023/24.

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 Councils Code of Corporate Governance was presented to the Council's former Audit Committee in June 2020 and approved by Cabinet in September 2021.
- 3.2 The Annual Governance Statement demonstrates that Monmouthshire County Council has appropriate governance arrangements in place to meet the governance principles and that a review has been undertaken to assess the effectiveness of those arrangements.
- 3.3 Monmouthshire County 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 The Council is also required to self-assess its governance and performance as outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Any recommendations or actions from this Governance Statement for the Council will be integrated into the Council's Annual Wellbeing and Self-Assessment Report.

- 3.5 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.

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 or 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 2024 and will be in place up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.
- 4.4 The Annual Governance 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.

5 The Governance Framework

- 5.1 The Council's Code of Corporate Governance 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 required to self-assess its governance and performance as outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Statement details the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements as at the 31st March 2024.
- 6.2 The Annual Governance Statement confirms that Monmouthshire County Council has, for the financial year 2023/24, conducted a review of its governance arrangements which concluded that these arrangements accorded with the principles as set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance. Consequently, the Council's overall governance arrangements are assessed as being effective and provide a sound framework for delivering services to the citizens of Monmouthshire. This statement outlines the Council's responsibility for ensuring proper standards and the safeguarding of public money, as well as the arrangements for the management of risk.
- 6.3 The effective governance arrangements as set out in the body of the document have been operated continuously through the year and up until the date of the 2023/24 Report and approval of the Accounts. The remainder of this document sets out further detail of the review of the Council's governance arrangements. In undertaking its review of governance, the Council considered each of the principles set out within the Code of Corporate Governance and assessed what the Council has in place to support each of the Principles, its effectiveness and any areas for future improvement.
- 6.4 In summary the Council has concluded that 6 of the 7 governance principles have been operating with a 'Very Good' effectiveness rating. The further principle (E - Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it) was rated as Adequate as some actions were behind schedule and some measures were falling short of planned targets. This was an improvement on the previous year where only 5 principles were rated as 'Very Good'.
- 6.5 The Council also recognises that there are areas for improvement within its Governance processes. Ten areas have been identified within the Statement and an Action Plan has been included within the Statement. This will be monitored by the Strategic Leadership Team through the course of the 2024/25 financial year.
- 6.6 Overall, the governance arrangements in place at Monmouthshire County Council continue to be regarded as being fit for purpose.

7 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None.

8 CONSULTEES

Leader of the Council
Cabinet Member for Resources
Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee
Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive / Chief Officer – Resources (S151 Officer)
Chief Officer – Law & Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Strategic Leadership Team

Performance & Data Insight Manager

9 BACKGROUND PAPERS

[MCC Code of Corporate Governance](#)

10 AUTHOR AND CONTACT DETAILS

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ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

2023/24



Date of Report Issue

27th June 2024

Report Status

Draft v6

Report Author








Jan Furtek, Acting Chief Internal Auditor


Executive Summary

This Annual Governance Statement confirms that Monmouthshire County Council (the ‘Council’) has, for the financial year 2023/24, conducted a review of its governance arrangements which concluded that these arrangements accorded with the principles as set out in the Councils Code of Corporate Governance. Consequently, the Council’s overall governance arrangements are assessed as being **effective** and provide a sound framework for delivering services to the citizens of Monmouthshire. This statement outlines the Council’s responsibility for ensuring proper standards and the safeguarding of public money, as well as the arrangements for the management of risk.

There have been a small number of changes to the Senior Officers within the Council during the period, all of which have benefitted from robust succession planning with consequential amendments being made to the Strategic Leadership Team structure to strengthen executive oversight.

The effective governance arrangements as set out in the body of this document have been operated continuously through the year and up until the date of the 2023/24 Report and Accounts. The remainder of this document sets out further detail of the review of the Council’s governance arrangements. In undertaking its review of governance, the Council considered each of the principles set out within the Code of Corporate Governance and assessed what the Council has in place to support each of the Principles, its effectiveness and any areas for future improvement. In summary the Council has concluded as follows:

Principle	Rating	Movement from Previous Year	Number of Areas for Improvement
A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	Very Good		3
B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	Very Good		3
C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits	Very Good		1
D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	Very Good		-
E. Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it	Adequate		2
F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	Very Good	 (Previously Good)	2
G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability	Very Good		-

Principle	Rating	Movement from Previous Year	Number of Areas for Improvement
Overall	Very Good		11

Overall, the governance arrangements in place at Monmouthshire County Council continue to be regarded as being fit for purpose.

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- 1 This Statement has been prepared in accordance with guidance produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE), 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 2022/23 Action Plan is shown on page 31.

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, 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 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 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.
- 4 In discharging these responsibilities, 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 CIPFA / SOLACE 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 in 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 Council had planned to review the Code of Corporate Governance during the 2023/24 financial year, however, this was not completed. This will now be a priority for the 2024/25 year.

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 in the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have 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. Appropriate internal controls also ensure the Council's resources are utilised, and services are delivered efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 9 The governance framework has been in place at the Council for a number of years and continued to be in place for the year ended 31st March 2024 and up to the date of approval of the statement of accounts.

The Governance Framework

- 10** The Council's Code of Corporate Governance is in line with the CIPFA / SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' 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 complements 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

- 12** The key elements of the Council's governance arrangements are set out in its Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28. This was approved by the Council on the approved by Council on 20th April 2023.
- 13** Since the Local Government elections in May 2022, initially the administration had been working without a majority, however, in May 2023 a coalition agreement was reached.
- 14** 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.

Review of Effectiveness

- 15 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.
- 16 The review of effectiveness has been completed using a six point scale which is used within Monmouthshire County Council to assess the performance framework and progress with the Community and Corporate Plan.

Level	Definition	Description
6	Excellent	Excellent or outstanding – All performance measures have achieved the target set and all actions have been delivered.
5	Very Good	Major strengths – A significant majority of actions and measures are on track. No more than one or two falling short.
4	Good	Important strengths with some areas for improvement – The weight of evidence shows that the successes are greater than the areas that have not been achieved.
3	Adequate	Strengths just outweigh weaknesses – The evidence of success marginally outweighs areas that are not on track. Some actions are behind schedule and some measures are falling short of planned targets.
2	Weak	Important weaknesses – The majority of measures and actions have not been achieved.
1	Unsatisfactory	Major weakness – In most areas performance is assessed as moving in the wrong direction and the vast majority of actions have not been delivered

Chief Internal Auditor Statement and Annual Opinion

- 17 The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards require the Head of Internal Audit to provide an annual opinion based upon and limited to the work performed on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of Monmouthshire County Council’s framework of governance, risk management and internal control. This is achieved through a risk-based plan of work, agreed with management, which should provide a reasonable level of assurance.

The Internal Audit team has completed its internal audit work for the year based upon the Operational Audit Plan approved by the Governance & Audit Committee in July 2023. The Plan was designed to ensure adequate coverage over the Council’s financial and operational systems using a risk based assessment methodology.

The audit work included reviews, on a sample basis, of each of these systems/establishments sufficient to discharge the Authority’s responsibilities for Internal Audit under section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014. The opinion is based upon the work undertaken. Work was planned in order to provide sufficient evidence to give me reasonable assurance of the internal control environments tested.

The 2023/24 Audit opinion is partially reliant on previous work undertaken by the team where Reasonable Assurance opinions were issued; there have been no significant changes to the organisation’s systems or key personnel and no major frauds were identified.

Internal Audit opinions on the work undertaken at the Shared Resource Service by Torfaen Internal Audit team were also taken into consideration.

Based on the planned work undertaken during the year, in my view the internal controls in operation give **Reasonable Assurance**; *There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of the Councils strategic objectives.*

The opinion does not imply that Internal Audit has reviewed all risks relating to the organisation.

Jan Furtek
Acting Chief Internal Auditor
June 2024

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

6 Excellent	5 Very Good	4 Good	3 Adequate	2 Weak	1 Unsatisfactory
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The Council is accountable not only for how much it spends, but also for how we use the resources under our stewardship. This includes accountability for outputs, both positive and negative, and for the outcomes we have achieved. In addition, we have an overarching responsibility to serve the public interest in adhering to the requirements of legislation and government policies. It is essential that, as a whole, we can demonstrate the appropriateness of all our actions and have mechanisms in place to encourage and enforce adherence to ethical values and to respect the rule of law.

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement																
Behaving with integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members Code of Conduct in Constitution which reflects Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) (Wales) Order 2016 ▪ Officers Code of Conduct in Constitution ▪ Registers of interests / hospitality ▪ Induction training ▪ Member/Officer Protocol in Constitution ▪ Member led Authority principles/document ▪ Member training programme ▪ Council Values — Openness, Fairness, Flexibility, Teamwork, Kindness ▪ Whistleblowing Policy ▪ Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy ▪ Standards Committee ▪ Standards Committee Annual Report presented to Council ▪ Member Dispute Resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Code of Conduct for Members and the protocol on Member / Officer relationships are set out in the Constitution. ▪ 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 2023/24. ▪ Public Service Ombudsman Wales Annual Report (2022/23) was presented to Cabinet in November 2023. ▪ Conduct Complaints about MCC Members received by the Public Services Ombudsman: <table border="1" style="margin-left: 20px; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>2020/21</th> <th>2021/22</th> <th>2022/23</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Not upheld</td> <td>1</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Referred to Standards Committee</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Referred to Adjudication Panel</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> ▪ No judicial reviews were commenced or dealt with at the pre-action stage in the previous year. 		2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	Not upheld	1	2	1	Referred to Standards Committee	0	0	0	Referred to Adjudication Panel	0	0	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the Council’s Code of Corporate Governance. (Action 1) ▪ Review the Corporate Induction process to ensure the key messages are being delivered. (Action 2)
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23																
Not upheld	1	2	1																
Referred to Standards Committee	0	0	0																
Referred to Adjudication Panel	0	0	0																

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complaints procedure ▪ Decision 'Call In' process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Governance & Audit Committee met 7 times during 2023/24 and has the responsibility for ensuring that sufficient internal control mechanisms are in place to help identify any potential misconduct within the authority. 	
<p>Demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Council Values — Openness, Fairness, Flexibility, Teamwork, Kindness ▪ Contract procedure rules ▪ Financial procedure rules ▪ Codes of conduct for members and employees ▪ Whistleblowing Policy 	<p>The ethical governance framework includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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 learnt can be applied. ▪ All exemptions of the Contract Procedure Rules are reported through the Governance & Audit Committee periodically. The Internal Audit team co-ordinates the exemption process in conjunction with strategic procurement. ▪ The Governance & 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 2023/24. ▪ A Scrutiny and Executive Protocol is in place which is aligned to the updated constitution of May 2023 and provides parameters for effective executive and scrutiny relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review and update the Employee Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy. (Action 3)
<p>Respecting the rule of law</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Member and Officer Code of Conduct in Constitution ▪ Role of Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer established in Constitution ▪ CIPFA statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer ▪ Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy ▪ Governance & Audit Committee ▪ Internal Audit Section 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Constitution is updated periodically by the Monitoring Officer; the latest update approved by Council was in May 2023. It can be found on the Council's website. ▪ 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 (S151 Officer) attends SLT, Cabinet and Council meetings. ▪ In accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989, the Monitoring Officer ensures compliance with 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internal Audit Annual Report presented to Governance & Audit Committee ▪ External Auditors Annual Audit Letter ▪ Standards Committee ▪ Whistleblowing Policy ▪ Complaints procedure ▪ Decision 'Call In' process 	<p>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 2023/24, or in the previous year, 2022/23.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Councils Anti-Fraud, Corruption & Bribery Policy was reviewed over the course of the year, endorsed by the Governance & Audit Committee before being approved by Cabinet in January 2024. 	

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

6 Excellent	5 Very Good	4 Good	3 Adequate	2 Weak	1 Unsatisfactory
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Local government is run for the public good; organisations therefore should ensure openness in their activities. Clear, trusted channels of communication and consultation should be used to engage effectively with all groups of stakeholders, such as individual citizens and service users, as well as institutional stakeholders.

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
Openness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agendas published in advance of meetings ▪ Minutes published following meetings ▪ Democratic meetings live streaming on YouTube ▪ Decision making process described in Constitution ▪ Forward Plan published on internet showing key decisions to be made by Council and Cabinet ▪ Annual budget consultation ▪ Freedom of Information Scheme ▪ Public questions at Council, Cabinet and Select Committees ▪ Engagement with hard to reach groups, including those with the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act 2010. As well as engagement with children and young people to meet the requirement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agendas are published in advance of all meetings on the Council's website; corresponding minutes are published post meeting. ▪ Transparency and openness are important to Monmouthshire; the Annual Statement of Accounts was considered by the Governance & Audit Committee prior to their approval. 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. 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. ▪ A Forward Plan showing key decisions to be made by Council, Cabinet and Committees is published. ▪ The Council's website contains links to the following areas of open data in the interests of openness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ List of expenditure over £50 ○ Gender Pay Gap ○ Food Hygiene ratings ○ List of Primary Schools ○ List of Secondary Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the minute taking process to ensure accurate minutes are held of all meetings. (Action 4) ▪ To continue to increase the number of datasets published on the council's website. (Action 5)

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Publication of open data sets on the Council's website 	<p>Following a decision of the First Tier Information Rights Tribunal (EA/2018/0033) the Authority no longer publishes business rates data on its open data web page. It will no longer disclose information about business rate accounts in response to FOI requests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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: Four Scrutiny Committees (including the statutory Public Services Scrutiny Committee) and a separate Governance & 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. ▪ 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. ▪ Corporate risks are published. 	
<p>Engaging comprehensively with institutional stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Gwent Public Service Board Partnership arrangements and structure ▪ Gwent Public Service Board Well-Being Plan ▪ Public Services Scrutiny Committee ▪ Cardiff Capital Region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ During 2021/22 several local PSBs merged to form the Gwent Public Services Board. A Gwent wide well-being assessment has been produced, including an assessment of well-being in Monmouthshire and local communities within the county, March 2022. ▪ In June 2023 the Council considered and approved the Gwent Public Services Board Well-being Plan. The plan had been subject to scrutiny Monmouthshire's Public Services Scrutiny Committee in March 2023. ▪ The Monmouthshire Programme Board, chaired by a senior officer links directly to the Gwent PSB to ensure that local issues remain at the forefront of partnership delivery. There 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		<p>is a good alignment between the priorities of the PSB document and our own Community and Corporate Plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council is a member of the Cardiff Capital Region, a regional body made up of the 10 councils across South East Wales. 	
<p>Engaging stakeholders effectively, including individual citizens and service users</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ward role of Councillors ▪ Consultations on the council website and social media platforms ▪ Complaints Policy and Annual Report ▪ Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) ▪ Complaints procedure ▪ Integrated Impact Assessment including Future Generations evaluation and Equality Impact Assessment, on decision reports ▪ Strategic Equality Plan ▪ Communication via Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social media e.g. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, are used to engage local people and communicate the corporate message. Scrutiny Committees hold a Public Open Forum on each agenda and the public can attend meetings remotely or in person. They can also submit written, audio or video representations to Scrutiny Committees and submit suggested topics for the scrutiny forward work programme via the Scrutiny Website www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/scrutiny. Chief Officers, Members and the Communications team are very proactive in engaging with the public. ▪ Public engagement events and YouTube continued to be used 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. ▪ The Medium Term Financial Plan supports the vision for Monmouthshire and extensive public engagement continued in 2023/24 for the 2024/25 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. ▪ Audit Wales reviewed the council's use of performance information from the service users perspective and outcomes in 2023/24. The report found the Council provides some performance information to enable senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users, but information on outcomes is limited restricting their ability to manage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deliver the action plan to address the recommendations from the Audit Wales Use of Performance Information review. (Action 6)

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		performance effectively. An action plan to address the recommendations has been developed.	

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

6 Excellent	5 Very Good	4 Good	3 Adequate	2 Weak	1 Unsatisfactory
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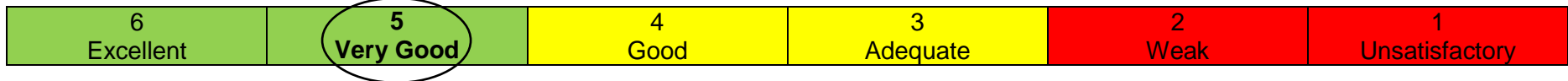
The long-term nature and impact of many of local government's responsibilities mean that it should define and plan outcomes and that these should be sustainable. Decisions should further the authority's purpose, contribute to intended benefits and outcomes, and remain within the limits of authority and resources. Input from all groups of stakeholders, including citizens, service users and institutional stakeholders, is vital to the success of this process and in balancing competing demands when determining priorities for the finite resources available

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
Defining Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community & Corporate Plan produced and reviewed annually in accordance with Local Government & Elections Act 2021 and 'Wellbeing Objectives' in Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ▪ Quarterly, six monthly & annual Performance Monitoring Reports ▪ Corporate Plan Annual Self-Assessment Report ▪ Public Service Board Well-being Plan annual report ▪ Service Business Plans produced annually and reviewed quarterly by each service area. ▪ Monthly Financial Monitoring meetings held for each service area ▪ Risk Management Policy and Guidance ▪ Whole Authority Strategic Risk Register ▪ Capital Review Programme ▪ Self-Assessment report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Community & Corporate Plan 2022-2028, "Taking Monmouthshire Forward" was approved by Full Council in April 2023 and sets a purpose 'To become a zero-carbon county, supporting well-being, health and dignity for everyone at every stage of life'. This is underpinned by the Council's 6 objectives (fair place, green place, thriving & ambitious place, safe place, connected place and learning place) and 5 values (teamwork, openness, fairness, flexibility and kindness). ▪ The Council's Annual Self-Assessment Report 2022/23 was presented to the Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee, Governance and Audit Committee and was agreed by Council. The report was published on the council's website in October 2023. ▪ The six-month performance report on the Community and Corporate Plan was presented to Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in January 2024. ▪ Monmouthshire County Council is a member of the 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. ▪ Regular budget monitoring reports for revenue and capital were presented to and approved by Cabinet during the year, in July 2023, November 2023, December 2023, February 2024, and at 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To ensure that the revised financial strategy is considered by scrutiny and approved by Cabinet. (Action 7)

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		<p>Outturn. The budget management actions of Cabinet and senior officers are scrutinized regularly by the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council has a Welsh Language Strategy for 2022 – 2027, which sets out a vision of how Welsh language will look in Monmouthshire until 2027. The Welsh Language Monitoring Report 2022/23 was presented to the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee in July 2023. ▪ Objectives 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. 	
<p>Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) covering 3 financial years approved annually by Council ▪ Corporate Plan ▪ Risk management Policy and Guidance ▪ Whole Authority Strategic Risk Register ▪ Monmouthshire Public Service Board Well-being Plan ▪ Future Generations Evaluation, including Equality Impact Assessment, on decision making reports ▪ Service Business Plans produced annually and reviewed quarterly by each service area. ▪ Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Budget Setting Process and Timetable for 2024/25 was reviewed and approved by Cabinet in November 2023 This provided a framework to underpin the 2024/25 budget and a set of principles were adopted. This report also highlighted an initial budget shortfall of £14.4 million taking into account the impact of economic situation, service demand pressures and the latest intelligence on likely funding levels. Budget recovery actions were undertaken to allow services to maintain delivery whilst addressing the in-year financial over spend that had been forecast. ▪ The Draft Capital Budget Proposals 2024/25 were taken to Cabinet in January 2024. Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2024/25 also went to Cabinet in January 2024. Final Proposals went to Cabinet before being approved by Council in February 2024. 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. ▪ In May 2019 Monmouthshire County Council declared a Climate Emergency. Plans are underway to meet our target to reduce council carbon emissions to zero by 2030. In November 2021, following wide community consultation, an updated and amended action plan was published. This was reviewed over 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		<p>the course of the 2023/24 financial year with a revised Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy due to be considered by Cabinet in May 2024.</p>	

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



Local government achieves its intended outcomes by providing a mixture of legal, regulatory and practical interventions. Determining the right mix of these courses of action is a critically important strategic choice that local government has to make to ensure intended outcomes are achieved. They need robust decision-making mechanisms to ensure that their defined outcomes can be achieved in a way that provides the best trade-off between the various types of resource input while still enabling effective and efficient operations. Decisions made need to be reviewed continually to ensure that achievement of outcomes is optimised

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
Determining interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corporate Plan ▪ Scrutiny / Select Committee function ▪ Risk management policy and guidance ▪ Whole Authority Strategic Risk Register ▪ Finance and Legal implications in all Council, Cabinet and Committee reports report writing template and guidance ▪ Future Generations Evaluation (including Equality Impact Assessment) ▪ Results of consultation exercises ▪ Reports to Government Agencies ▪ Enabling strategy framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monmouthshire 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 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 Guidance on Schools Causing Concern (September 2017). ▪ Regular reporting into Cabinet, Scrutiny and Governance & 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. ▪ 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. During 2023/24 there were; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stage 1 Complaints - 136 ○ Stage 2 Complaints - 2 ○ Comments - 399 ○ Compliments - 325 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Ombudsman draft annual statement for 2023/24 states they received 32 complaints which are all closed. None of the complaints were investigated, although, 3 of these were classed as ‘interventions’. This is where they may ask the Council to provide an early resolution to a particular matter. ▪ A separate report containing the Ombudsman’s findings in relation to complaints about Monmouthshire County Council was reported separately to both Cabinet and Governance & Audit Committee. In the previous year it showed that Monmouthshire has one of the lowest levels of complaints reported to the Ombudsman at 0.25 per 1,000 residents. ▪ Consultation on budget proposals is extensive. ▪ The Authority makes numerous annual returns to various external Governing Bodies, such as the Food Standards Agency, Drinking Water Inspectorate, Department for Levelling Up & Communities, Department for Transport, Home Office, Gambling Commission, DEFRA, Health & Safety Executive, General Registrar’s Office, National Fraud Initiative and other government departments’. These allow the Council to self-assess and determine if any intervention is required within the services provided. 	
<p>Planning Interventions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monthly Financial Monitoring meetings for each Directorate reviews progress and authorises corrective action where necessary ▪ Medium Term Financial Plan ▪ Annual budget setting process in place including consultation exercise ▪ Financial procedure rules ▪ Senior Management Structure ▪ Corporate Plan produced and reviewed annually in accordance with Local Government and Elections Act 2021 and 'Wellbeing Objectives' in Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council has established robust planning and control cycles covering strategic and operational plans, priorities and targets which is achieved through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A timetable for producing and reviewing plans on an annual basis. ○ Working with a consultation and engagement strategy. ○ Quarterly and annual performance monitoring including achievement of national and local performance indicators. ▪ There is robust Medium Term Financial Planning. ▪ There is an annual budget setting process in place including an extensive consultation exercise. ▪ Self-assessment report presented to Governance & Audit Committee and Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee to review, scrutinise and make any recommendations for changes. 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quarterly, six monthly & annual Performance Monitoring Reports ▪ Annual Self-Assessment Report ▪ Public Service Board Well-being Plan ▪ Public Service Board Well-being Plan annual report ▪ Service Business Plans produced annually and reviewed quarterly by each service area. ▪ Risk Management Policy and Guidance ▪ Whole Authority Strategic Risk Register ▪ Reports to Government Agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-assessment report agreed by Council and published in October 2023. The report provides an 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. 	
<p>Optimising achievement of intended outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quarterly Financial Monitoring reports to Cabinet and scrutiny ▪ Mid-Year Budget Statement to Cabinet ▪ Medium Term Financial Plan ▪ Budget consultation ▪ Community & Corporate Plan ▪ Annual Self-Assessment Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council ensures the Medium Term Financial Plan integrates and balances service priorities, affordability and other resource constraints by setting out any shortfall in resources and spending requirements in the context of service priorities. ▪ The achievement of the Community & Corporate Plan is reviewed at least annually. 	

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

6 Excellent	5 Very Good	4 Good	3 Adequate	2 Weak	1 Unsatisfactory
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Local government needs appropriate structures and leadership, as well as people with the right skills, appropriate qualifications and mindset, to operate efficiently and effectively and achieve their intended outcomes within the specified periods. A local government organisation must ensure that it has both the capacity to fulfil its own mandate and to make certain that there are policies in place to guarantee that its management has the operational capacity for the organisation as a whole. Because both individuals and the environment in which an authority operates will change over time, there will be a continuous need to develop its capacity as well as the skills and experience of the leadership of individual staff members. Leadership in local government entities is strengthened by the participation of people with many different types of backgrounds, reflecting the structure and diversity of communities

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
Developing the entity's capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance review for all staff where required by them or their line manager ▪ People Strategy ▪ Quarterly financial reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees ▪ Partnership & collaborative working arrangements ▪ Quarterly, six monthly & annual Performance Monitoring Reports ▪ Community & Corporate Plan Annual Self-Assessment Report ▪ Public Service Board Well-being Plan annual report ▪ Service Business Plans produced annually and reviewed quarterly by each service area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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. ▪ 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 Service Business Plan. The Council has both an Information Security and Technology Team and an Digital Design and Innovation Team to drive technology across the organisation. ▪ An Audit Wales review has identified 'The Council does not have a clearly articulated strategic approach to digital'. An action plan to address the recommendations in the report has been developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A learning management system to be implemented across the organisation to coordinate all training including for schools. (Action 8) ▪ Roll out of a new performance appraisal system across the organisation. (Action 9)

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There is continued support for Members’ development through briefing sessions and other learning opportunities. ▪ 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. ▪ Appropriate and relevant job descriptions were in place for the Chief Executive, Strategic Leadership Team (SLT), Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer. ▪ 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. ▪ A review of the Councils Senior Pay structure commended during the 2023/24 year and will be concluded within 2024/25. 	
<p>Developing the capability of the entity's leadership and other individuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Member/Officer Protocol in Constitution ▪ Scheme of Delegation published in Constitution ▪ Scrutiny member development programme ▪ Occupational Health and Wellbeing Policy exists with aim of promoting the health and wellbeing of all employees to enable them to achieve their full potential at work ▪ Internal and external audit reports and action plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monmouthshire Council takes an active part in the INFUSE programme which is designed to build skills and capacity for future public services across the Cardiff Capital Region. 9 associates from MCC took part in cohort 3 which commenced in January 2023. ▪ There has been member led training with both senior officers and cabinet members. ▪ There are regular 1-2-1 meetings with the Leader, Cabinet members, Chief Executive, SLT and Heads of Service. ▪ The Constitution sets out the Scheme of Delegation which is regularly reviewed. ▪ Annual appraisal and performance review 	

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

6 Excellent	5 Very Good	4 Good	3 Adequate	2 Weak	1 Unsatisfactory
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Local government needs to ensure that the organisations and governance structures that it oversees have implemented, and can sustain, an effective performance management system that facilitates effective and efficient delivery of planned services. Risk management and internal control are important and integral parts of a performance management system and crucial to the achievement of outcomes. Risk should be considered and addressed as part of all decision making activities. A strong system of financial management is essential for the implementation of policies and the achievement of intended outcomes, as it will ensure financial discipline, strategic allocation of resources, efficient service delivery and accountability. It is also essential that a culture and structure for scrutiny is in place as a key part of accountable decision making, policy making and review. A positive working culture that accepts, promotes and encourages constructive challenge is critical to successful scrutiny and successful delivery. Importantly, this culture does not happen automatically, it requires repeated public commitment from those in authority.

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
Managing Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk Management Policy and Guidance ▪ Whole Authority Strategic Risk Register ▪ Service Business Plans produced annually and reviewed quarterly by each service area, including service risk registers ▪ Strategic Risk Register reported to Governance & Audit Committee, Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council’s Strategic Risk Management Policy was updated and approved by Cabinet in March 2019; progress was reported into Governance & Audit Committee in December 2023. 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. ▪ The Strategic Risk Management Policy was reviewed during 2023/24. This review was due for completion and adoption in June 2024. ▪ Within the Council the purpose of risk management is to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ preserve and protect the Council’s assets, reputation and staff. ○ aid good management of risk and support whole authority governance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ For Cabinet to approve the Councils updated Strategic Risk Management Policy. (Action 10)

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strategic risks are identified and monitored by Monmouthshire. ○ Risk controls are appropriate and proportionate. ○ Senior managers and elected members systematically review the strategic risks facing the Council. ▪ 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 Scrutiny and Governance & 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. ▪ The strategic risk assessment was presented to Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee in November 2023. The Committee scrutinised the risk assessment and responsibility holders to ensure that strategic risks have been appropriately identified and risk is being appropriately managed. An overview of the strategic risk register was also presented to Governance and Audit Committee in December 2023 to fulfil the committee's role of assessing the effectiveness of the authority's risk management arrangements ▪ The Council's Strategic Risk Assessment for 2023/24 contained 15 risks. Following mitigation there were 6 medium risks and 9 high risks. 	
<p>Managing performance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community & Corporate Plan produced and reviewed annually ▪ Corporate Plan Annual Self-Assessment Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Audit Wales presented the Councils ISA260 report for 2022/23 to the Governance & Audit Committee in February 2024. ▪ The Councils Self-Assessment report 2022/23 was completed in line with requirements outlined in the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to ensure that members and the 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Service Business Plans produced annually and reviewed quarterly by each service area. ▪ Quarterly, six monthly & annual Performance Monitoring Reports ▪ Director of Social Services Annual report ▪ Chief Officer Children & Young People Annual Report ▪ Scrutiny function ▪ Bi-monthly Directorate and Financial monitoring meetings 	<p>public had a clear and transparent assessment of the Council's performance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Authority makes numerous annual returns to various external Governing Bodies and Government Agencies, such as the Food Standards Agency, Drinking Water Inspectorate, Department for Levelling Up & Communities, Department for Transport, Home Office, Gambling Commission, DEFRA, Health & Safety Executive, General Registrar's Office, National Fraud Initiative and other government departments'. 	
<p>Robust internal control</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Governance & Audit Committee provides assurance on effectiveness on internal control, risk management and governance ▪ Governance & Audit Committee Annual Report to Council ▪ Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy ▪ Role of Internal Audit Section ▪ Annual Plans approved by Governance & Audit Committee ▪ Annual Reports to Governance & Audit Committee ▪ Annual Governance Statement ▪ Governance Working Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Governance & Audit Committee considers the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for securing continuous improvement including risk management arrangements. The Governance & 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 & Audit Committee has an independent, non-political, Chairperson who prepares an annual report of the work of the Governance & Audit Committee. ▪ A Governance Working Group was established and met over the course of the year. The core purpose of the group was to be reviewed by SLT in May 2024. ▪ 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 & Audit Committee September 2021). The Chief Internal Auditor reports a summary of audit findings to the Governance & Audit Committee each quarter; he also reports annually an opinion 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement																												
		<p>on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment through his Internal Audit Annual Report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chief Internal Auditor continues to ensure Internal Audit complies with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. A self-assessment was undertaken during 2023/24 to assess compliance with the Standards which was validated as 'generally compliant' in March 2024 by an external assessor. 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. The Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Strategy was revised and updated during 2023/24. It was approved by Cabinet January 2024 and provides a deterrent, promotes detection, identifies a clear pathway for investigation and encourages prevention. The overall opinion on the adequacy of the internal control environment for 2023/24 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 2023/24 were; <table border="1" data-bbox="882 1007 1693 1286"> <thead> <tr> <th>Opinion</th> <th>2021-22</th> <th>2022-23</th> <th>2023-24</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Substantial Assurance</td> <td>5</td> <td>7</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Considerable Assurance</td> <td>6</td> <td>10</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Reasonable Assurance</td> <td>7</td> <td>4</td> <td>18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Limited Assurance</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> <td>8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No Assurance</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>20</td> <td>22</td> <td>34</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reasons why the outcome of an audit review was deemed to provide Limited Assurance was included within quarterly reports to the Governance & Audit Committee; assurances have been sought from respective operational managers that 	Opinion	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	Substantial Assurance	5	7	8	Considerable Assurance	6	10	-	Reasonable Assurance	7	4	18	Limited Assurance	2	1	8	No Assurance	-	-	0	Total	20	22	34	
Opinion	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24																												
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Total	20	22	34																												

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
		<p>action will be taken to make the necessary improvements in control.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Internal Audit team did not have a full complement of staff for the whole year. The Acting 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. The 2023/24 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. 	
<p>Managing data</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We have established an Information Security & Technology Team across the organisation, including education ▪ A cyber security team is in place to support, advise and train our workforce. The same team provides a cyber audit function of our ICT infrastructure and governance arrangements ▪ The Information Governance Group with participants from each directorate ▪ A Senior Information Risk Officer (SIRO) in place ▪ Mandatory training in GDPR and Cyber Security, alongside comprehensive guidance and policies for all aspects of data management ▪ Information Asset Register ▪ Information sharing & publication guidance in place ▪ A comprehensive EDRMS is in place ▪ Annual National and Local performance Indicator data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Our comprehensive governance and security arrangements for data and information have enabled us to gain accreditation in industry standards for cyber security. ▪ Cyber security arrangements cover cultural, physical and electronic barriers to data access and misuse. ▪ Information governance is maintained through policies, guidelines, and training that are reported and disseminated via the Information Governance Group, headed up by the SIRO and with departmental representatives. Performance is reported to the Governance & Audit Committee, and this year our performance targets have been exceeded. ▪ Privacy notices are published online and have been updated through the year. ▪ Schedules are maintained of all MCC information ‘line of business’ systems to ensure they are fit for purpose and upgraded/replaced as needed. ▪ A central EDRMS system is being rolled out to electronically manage, share and retain all data and information outside of line of business systems. ▪ Networks and forums are in place to work with the South East Wales Information Forum (SWIF) and WARP (Warning Advice and Security Point) and the NCSC (National Cyber Security Centre). ▪ Data arrangements are audited by Audit Wales and performance reported through the Governance & Audit Committee. 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
	<p>collection process and internal audit arrangements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The ICT service, the SRS, are audited by the host organisation Torfaen County Borough Council, and all audits are reported through the SRS governance structures. 	
<p>Strong public financial management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financial procedure rules in Constitution ▪ Contract procedure rules in Constitution ▪ Accounting Instructions on Intranet ▪ Spending Restrictions document on Intranet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council ensures both long term achievement of outcomes and short term performance through the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Plan. ▪ In June 2023, the Council’s Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy 2023-28 was approved by Cabinet. In July 2021 Cabinet approved the collaboration with Cardiff Council, for mutual benefit, the discharge and provision of the Council’s Strategic Procurement services. ▪ The Councils Contract Procedure Rules were updated in March 2021. ▪ Due to an anticipated budget overspend a Financial Management Board was established to ensure strong financial management and to consider any actions were required to address the shortfall. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deliver awareness raising training sessions on the importance of compliance with revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules. (Action 11)

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

6 Excellent	5 Very Good	4 Good	3 Adequate	2 Weak	1 Unsatisfactory
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Accountability is about ensuring that those making decisions and delivering services are answerable for them. Effective accountability is concerned not only with reporting on actions completed but also ensuring that stakeholders are able to understand and respond as the organisation plans and carries out its activities in a transparent manner. Both external and internal audit contribute to effective accountability.

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
Implementing good practice in transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Report writing template and guidance ▪ Integrated Impact Assessment including Future Generations evaluation and Equality Impact Assessment, on decision reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council aims to present understandable and transparent reports for both stakeholders and the public which is supported by:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A Report Authors Protocol which ensures consistency in reports. ▪ A Clear Writing guide for Officers. ▪ All reports are signed off by Chief Officers, S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer prior to publication. ▪ Where possible exempt reports are split so that the main report can be heard in public with confidential information being a separate exempt report. ▪ Publication of delegated decisions. ▪ Reports are published on the website 	
Implementing good practices in reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual Statement of Accounts audited by an external auditor and approved by Council ▪ Code of Corporate Governance based on CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 2016 ▪ Annual Governance Statement ▪ Corporate Plan Annual Self-Assessment Report ▪ Service Business Plans produced annually and reviewed quarterly by each service area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transparency and openness is important to Monmouthshire; the Annual Statement of Accounts was taken through the Governance & Audit Committee before being endorsed by Council. All public meetings of the Council, including Council, Cabinet, Select, Governance & 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. 	

Sub-Principles	What is in place to support this?	Effectiveness	Areas for Future Improvement
<p>Assurance and effective accountability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ External Audit provided by Audit Wales ▪ ESTYN reviews & reports ▪ Care Inspectorate Wales reviews & reports ▪ Performance of Internal Audit Section monitored by Governance & Audit Committee ▪ Implementation of Audit Wales and Internal Audit recommendations monitored by Governance & Audit Committee ▪ Peer Review, Corporate Assessment and Corporate Governance Review action plan monitored by SLT ▪ Annual Governance Statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Council's enabling strategies are being revised to align to the delivery of the Corporate Plan, these include the Digital and Data Strategy, People Strategy and Asset Management Strategy as well as linking in with Service Business Plans. ▪ The Governance & 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 & Audit Committee presents its Annual report to Council. ▪ The Whole Authority Report: Complaints, Comments and Compliments 2022/23 was presented to Governance & Audit Committee in February 2024 which identified the number and types of feedback, received and dealt with, from 1 April 2022 until 31 March 2023. ▪ Reports and plans to implement Audit Wales and Internal Audit recommendations are reported (as relevant) to Scrutiny and the Governance & Audit Committee. ▪ All agreed recommendation and actions from Internal Audit reviews are monitored. ▪ The Council takes note of all reports issued by External Regulators such as Audit Wales, ESTYN and Care Inspectorate Wales. Action plans are agreed and followed up. 	

Progress against the Action Plan (Previous Year 2022/23)

No	Area for Improvement	Current Status
1	Establish a 'Governance Working Group' to discuss and review the Governance arrangements across Monmouthshire Council to ensure they are fit for purpose. (Principle A)	<p>Implemented A Governance Working Group was established and met over the course of the year. The core purpose of the group is to be reviewed by SLT in May 2024.</p>
2	As part of the Governance Working Group, review the Council's Code of Corporate Governance. (Principle A)	<p>Not Implemented This remains outstanding and will be a priority for 2024/25.</p> <p>Outstanding Action: Review the Council's Code of Corporate Governance (Chief Officer – Law & Governance)</p>
3	Review the minute taking process and assess any opportunities to further digitise. (Principle B)	<p>Partially Implemented Changes were made to the minute taking process however it was determined by the Monitoring Officer that further changes are now required to be made to ensure accurate minutes are held.</p> <p>The Council will continue to explore the use of Artificial Intelligence systems such as Co-Pilot to help write consistent minutes.</p> <p>Outstanding Action: Review the minute taking process to ensure accurate minutes are held of all meetings. (Chief Officer – Law & Governance)</p>
4	Increase the number of datasets published on the council's website. (Principle B)	<p>Partially Implemented We have seen a small increase in the number of published datasets but not in the numbers anticipated as other work has needed to be prioritised.</p> <p>Outstanding Action: To continue to increase the number of datasets published on the council's website. (Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships)</p>
5	Review the revenue and capital budget process and the Councils financial strategy. (Principle C)	<p>Partially Implemented The Councils Financial Strategy has been reviewed and is due to be considered by the Governance & Audit Committee and the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee prior to approval by Cabinet in June 2024.</p> <p>Outstanding Action: To ensure that the revised financial strategy is considered by scrutiny and approved by Cabinet.</p>

		(Deputy Chief Executive / Chief Officer – Resources)
6	Ensure that a suite of enabling strategies and a framework is in place to identify and support any interventions needed. (Principle D)	<p>Implemented A suite of enabling strategies and a framework has been put in place to identify and support any interventions needed.</p> <p>Several key strategies have been approved over the course of the year: Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy – June 2023 Asset Management Strategy – January 2024 Anti Fraud, Corruption & Bribery Policy – January 2024 Economy, Employment and Skills Strategy – February 2024</p>
7	Review Service Business Plans to ensure they align to the new Community & Corporate Plan. (Principle D)	<p>Implemented A review of service plans has been undertaken and feedback provided to managers.</p>
8	A learning management system to be implemented across the organisation to coordinate all training including for schools. (Principle E)	<p>Partially Implemented The Learning Management System is in place in Social Care and Health. All development work has been undertaken, content created and historic training records migrated to the system where available. It will be launched organisation-wide by July 2024.</p> <p>Outstanding Action A learning management system to be implemented across the organisation to coordinate all training including for schools. (Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships)</p>
9	A full analysis to define and identify any training need(s). A focus will be to prioritise ensuring people are suitably qualified and experienced to fulfil roles, capable of leadership, future professional development, and staff are digitally enabled. (Principle E)	<p>Not Implemented A new approach for performance appraisal approach is being piloted ahead of an organisation-wide roll-out (excluding teaching staff). This will provide the basis for gathering the information needed for the training needs analysis.</p> <p>Outstanding Action Roll out of a new performance appraisal system across the organisation. (Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships)</p>
10	Review and update the Councils Strategic Risk Management Policy. Improve how reports are presented to Cabinet and the Governance & Audit Committee to provide the necessary assurance. (Principle F)	<p>Partially Implemented The Strategic Risk Management Policy has been revised following engagement with the Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee. The</p>

		<p>new approach has been positively received by the committee and due to be formally approved by Cabinet (June 2024). A revised approach for reporting risks is now embedded in the policy and will be rolled out as part of future reporting which takes place every 6 months.</p> <p>Outstanding Action For Cabinet to approve the Councils updated Strategic Risk Management Policy. (Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships)</p>
11	Review the governance arrangements for Corporate Health and Safety to ensure the Council is provided with an assurance that key health and safety risks are being effectively managed across the organisation. (Principle F)	<p>Implemented A revised terms of reference and a health and safety work plan have been agreed by the Corporate Health and Safety group.</p>
12 (c/f)	Update the Council's Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policy and raise awareness across the Council. (Principle F)	<p>Implemented The Anti-Fraud Bribery & Corruption policy was updated, endorsed by the Governance & Audit Committee (October 2023) and approved by Cabinet (January 2024).</p> <p>Following approval the new policy was emailed to all staff, elected and lay members across the organisation.</p>
13	Complete an External Quality Assessment of the Council's Internal Audit Service as required by the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. (Principle F)	<p>Implemented An External Quality Assessment was completed of the Internal Audit section. It was independently deemed that the Internal Audit Team 'generally complies' with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.</p>
14 (c/f)	Deliver awareness raising training sessions on the importance of compliance with revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules. (Principle F)	<p>Partially Implemented This is currently outstanding. The Acting Chief Internal Auditor has attended new staff induction sessions covering the importance of Financial Regulations and Controls. However, the delay in roll out of the Thinki system across the Council has impacted a wider roll out along with the need to ensure the Counter-Fraud Policy was updated to include within the training session. This will be actioned during 2024/25.</p> <p>Outstanding Action Deliver awareness raising training sessions on the importance of compliance with revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules. (Chief Officer – Communities & Place)</p>

15	To produce a new Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy. (Principle F)	Implemented In June 2023, the Council's Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy 2023-28 was approved by Cabinet.
16	Alignment of Council, Cabinet, ICMD and Scrutiny forward work planners. (Principle G)	Implemented A forward work plan for informal cabinet has been developed which brings together all work programmes.

Action Plan – 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement

No	Area for Improvement	By Who	By When
1	Review the Council's Code of Corporate Governance (Principle A)	Chief Officer – Law & Governance	December 2024
2	Review the Corporate Induction process to ensure the key messages are being delivered. (Principle A)	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	July 2024
3	Review and update the Employee Code of Conduct and Whistleblowing Policy. (Principle A)	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	December 2024
4	Review the minute taking process to ensure accurate minutes are held of all meetings. (Principle B)	Chief Officer – Law & Governance	May 2024
5	To continue to increase the number of datasets published on the council's website. (Principle B)	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	March 2025
6	Deliver the action plan to address the recommendations from the Audit Wales Use of Performance Information review. (Principle B)	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	March 2025
7	To ensure that the revised financial strategy is considered by scrutiny and approved by Council. (Principle C)	Deputy Chief Executive / Chief Officer - Resources	July 2024
8	A learning management system to be implemented across the organisation to coordinate all training including for schools. (Principle E)	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	July 2024
9	Roll out of a new performance appraisal system across the organisation. (Principle E)	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	July 2024
10	For Cabinet to approve the Council's updated Strategic Risk Management Policy. (Principle F)	Chief Officer – People, Performance and Partnerships	June 2024
11	Deliver awareness raising training sessions on the importance of compliance with revised Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules. (Principle F)	Chief Officer – Communities & Place	March 2025

Monitoring & Evaluation

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.

Certification by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive

Signed:

Date:

Councillor Mary Ann Brocklesby, Leader of Monmouthshire County Council

Signed:

Date:

Paul Matthews, Chief Executive



monmouthshire
sir fynwy

