

**SUBJECT: Draft Self-Assessment 2023/24**  
**MEETING: Governance and Audit Committee**  
**DATE: 5<sup>th</sup> September 2024**  
**DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All**

**1 PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To provide the committee with an opportunity to review the draft Monmouthshire County Council Self-Assessment Report, in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That the committee review the draft self-assessment report 2023/24 and makes any recommendations for changes to the conclusions or actions prior to the report being considered by Council.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 The Self-Assessment Report is a 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', that is the extent to which; it is exercising its functions effectively; it is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively and its governance is effective for securing these.
- 3.2 Under the Act, the mechanism for a council to keep its performance under review is self-assessment, with a duty to publish a report setting out the conclusions of the self-assessment once in respect of every financial year. Self-assessment is a way of evaluating, critically and honestly, the current position to make decisions on how to secure improvement for the future. It needs to be embedded across the organisation to help the council continually learn and achieve sustainable improvement and better outcomes for citizens, service users and its own workforce. The self-assessment process has been embedded as part of the council's performance management framework (appendix 1). It is important that the assessment dovetails with, but does not duplicate, the Annual Governance Statement.
- 3.3 The self-assessment report evaluates the council's performance under each of the six Well-being Objectives set out in the Community and Corporate Plan, and the programme of work that supports their delivery. The report focusses on the 'what we want to achieve' outcome statements that are each underpinned by specific actions for each objective. To support the delivery of the objectives, the council has to make sure that all of its areas are working efficiently and effectively. The report also assesses the effectiveness of the 'enabling functions' that support council services to meet changing demands and ensure their sustainability. These include corporate planning, performance and risk management, financial planning, workforce planning, procurement, asset management, digital and data.
- 3.4 Appendix 2 provides the committee with an overview of the process that was followed to complete the draft self-assessment report. This included desk-based evidence gathering to inform an initial evaluation, followed by workshops with each of the directorates and a session with Cabinet and the Strategic Leadership Team. The assessment has been facilitated through a focus on answering

three key questions about the effectiveness of the council's arrangements: how well are we doing? how do we know? And, what and how can we do better? These informed the draft report, which is constructed around:

- How well do we understand our local context and place and has this informed our purpose and priorities? (Understanding well-being in the county)
- How well are we achieving our agreed outcomes? (How well are we achieving the outcomes set in the Community and Corporate Plan)
- How do we know? (Evidence)
- How effectively are resources being used to deliver our priorities? (Enabling functions/services)
- How effectively does the council work with stakeholders and partners on agreed outcomes? (Partnership and collaborative working)
- What could we do better? (Actions)

3.5 The self-assessment report demonstrates the progress the council has made in achieving its intended outcomes and identifies any further areas for development to be addressed in 2024/25. These include:

- We have continued to support those on low-income and address inequality in the county through working with partners to provide cost-of-living support sessions across Monmouthshire and implement universal free school meals for all primary school pupils. We need to develop a joined-up whole-authority approach to sustain the impacts of our interventions.
- We have shown our commitment to reducing our impact on the planet through developing a refreshed Climate and Nature Emergency Strategy, underpinned by four delivery plans which set out the action we will take. However, we recognise these are complex challenges and unless there is an increase in the public finances available for this, the evidence that we are gathering suggests that reaching our net-zero ambitions will be extremely challenging.
- Through Rapid Rehousing we are preventing an increasing number of households from becoming homeless and are decreasing the number of homeless households in costly B&B accommodation. We've begun the process of acquiring properties to transform into temporary accommodation to address the issue of limited availability.
- We are focused on understanding barriers to learning, particularly for vulnerable pupils, and ensuring suitable wellbeing support is available. We are facing challenges in returning attendance figures to pre-pandemic levels, and are seeing an increase in behaviours that challenge.
- We are developing a Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The financial strategy is key to realising the aims and ambitions set out in the Community and Corporate plan. The strategy explains how the Council will respond to the challenges ahead, and the principles that will be adopted in managing and using financial resources.

3.6 Governance and Audit Committee has an important role in contributing to the self-assessment report. Committee findings have been used to inform our assessment of performance and formed a key part of our evidence base. Evidence presented to and scrutinised by the committee which informed the assessment includes, but is not limited to, the Annual Governance Statement; the Strategic Risk Register; self-assessment of performance management arrangements; 2023/24 Treasury outturn report; and the Governance & Audit Committee annual report 2023/24. The self-assessment report should be used to inform the committee's role of seeking assurance of the effectiveness of the council's governance and performance management arrangements. Scrutiny of the council's performance, which is contained in the report, is the remit of the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee, who received the report at their 16<sup>th</sup> July meeting.

3.7 Governance and Audit Committee are presented with the final draft of this report, as per the statutory guidance under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and can make any

recommendations for changes to the conclusions or actions the council intends to take. If the council does not make a change recommended by Governance and Audit Committee, it must set out the recommendation and the reasons why in the final report. The final assessment will be presented to Council on the 19<sup>th</sup> September.

- 3.8 The annual self-assessment report will be complemented by a panel performance assessment once in an electoral cycle, providing an opportunity to seek external insights (other than from auditors, regulators or inspectors) on how the council is meeting the performance requirements.

**4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

- 4.1 There are no additional resource implications as a result of this report. However, there may be resource implications in undertaking further actions identified in the self-assessment report. These would be subject to the usual council decision-making processes.

**5. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

Performance and governance of local authorities: statutory guidance

Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28

Self-assessment Report 2022/23

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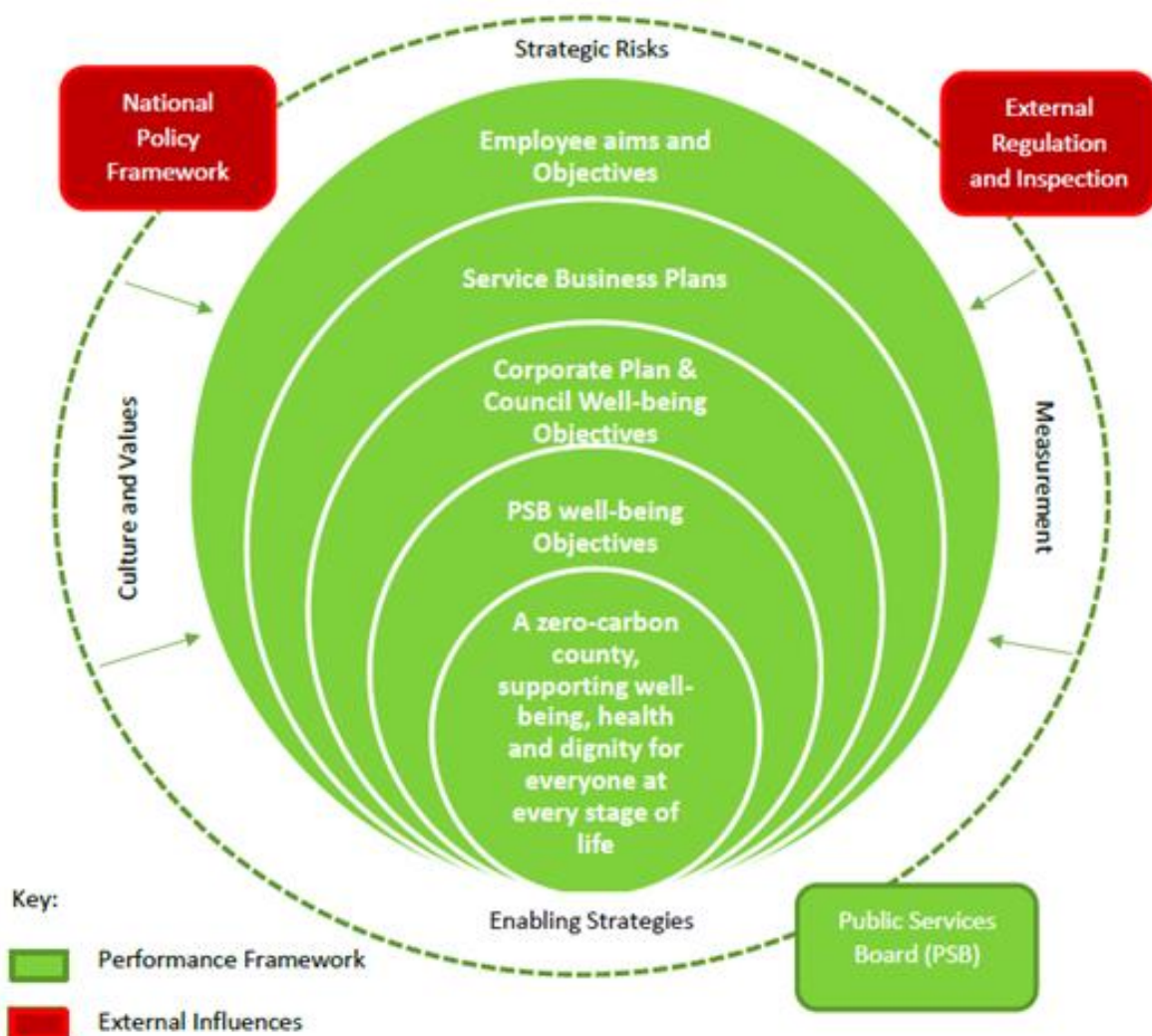
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## Appendix 1

### 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.



## Appendix 2 – Self-assessment process

### Legislation

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (“the Act”) provides for a new and reformed legislative framework for local government elections, democracy, governance and performance. The Act replaces the previous improvement duty for councils set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The Act requires each council in Wales to keep under review the extent to which it is meeting the ‘performance requirements’, that is the extent to which it is exercising its functions effectively; it is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; its governance is effective for securing these.

The performance and governance provisions in the Act are framed within the context of the well-being duty in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which sets out a legally binding common purpose for public bodies to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

The mechanism for a council to keep its performance under review is self-assessment, with a duty to publish a report setting out the conclusions of the self-assessment once in respect of every financial year. Self-assessment will be complemented by a panel performance assessment once in an electoral cycle, providing an opportunity to seek external insights (other than from auditors, regulators or inspectors) on how the council is meeting the performance requirements.

### Why

Self-assessment is a way of evaluating, critically and honestly, the current position in order to make decisions on how to secure improvement for the future. It is about the council being self-aware, understanding whether it is delivering the right outcomes, and challenging itself to continuously improve. It needs to be embedded as effective self-assessment helps the council to continually learn and achieve sustainable improvement and better outcomes for citizens, service users and its own workforce.

The WLGA have identified draft principles for self-assessment for councils to ensure that they have arrangements in place that:

- demonstrate self-awareness derived from evidence-based analysis that focuses on outcomes;
- are owned and led at a strategic level and are not an exercise in compliance;
- further develop a culture of challenge to facilitate improvement as part of an ongoing process;
- are integrated as part of the council’s corporate planning, performance and governance processes; and
- enable an organisation-wide assessment rather than an assessment of individual services.

Further developing this culture and embedding an evaluative mindset will be a key development point through the continued production of the self- assessment report.

### Process

The council has developed a process to undertake self-assessment under the Act, assessing performance in the 2023/24 financial year. The main component parts of the process and timeline are:

<b>April – May</b> Desk-based evidence gathering	<b>May – June</b> Directorate self- assessment Workshops	<b>June – July</b> Council self- assessment report drafted	<b>July - September</b> Draft report to Scrutiny and Governance & Audit Committee	<b>September</b> Self-assessment report agreed in line with council process
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This timeline ensures that the self-assessment can inform and be informed by the policy direction of the council and how it uses its resources efficiently and effectively, particularly the budget setting process.

Evaluative evidence to inform the assessment has been compiled at a directorate level. Most of the evidence has been collated by using intelligence already held corporately in an insightful way; this includes, for example, the Annual Governance Statement, audit and inspection reports, and service level business plans.



The evidence gathered has been explored further, and challenged where necessary, at directorate and enabling function based self-assessment workshops, to determine if the objectives (outcomes) of the council are being achieved.

### Self-assessment workshops

#### Directorate workshops

Children & Young People

Social Care & Health

Communities & Place

MonLife

#### Enabling functions workshops

People, Performance & Partnerships – Performance, Data, Scrutiny & Workforce planning

Resources – Financial planning, Assets & Digital

The workshops were facilitated through the following questions:

- How well are we achieving our agreed outcomes? (Community & Corporate Plan objectives)
- How do we know? (Evidence)
- How effectively are resources being used to deliver our priorities? (Enablers)
- How effectively does the council work with stakeholders and partners on agreed outcomes? (Partnership working)
- What could we do better? (Actions - including a review of actions from the previous report)

The full evidence and conclusions from workshops have been collated and will be used by directorates and enabling functions to inform their services business plans.

Following the workshops, the evidence has been reviewed, further challenged, and collated into a corporate level evaluative self-assessment. This has been integrated with the council's requirement to report on the progress it has made in meeting its well-being objectives for the preceding financial year (2023/24) under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. The report is structured under these headings:

- Understanding our local place
- Outcomes (progress against our objectives in the Community and Corporate Plan):
  - How well are we achieving our agreed outcomes?
  - How do we know?
  - Areas for development
- Enabling functions
  - Corporate planning, performance and risk management
  - Financial planning
  - Workforce planning
  - Procurement
  - Assets
  - Digital & Data
  - Democracy & Scrutiny
- Our work with partners
- Our Actions (including progress against previous actions)

The self-assessment report will be scrutinised by the council's Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee. A draft of the self-assessment report will be made available to Governance and Audit committee, who must review the draft report and make recommendations for changes to the conclusions or action the council intends to take. The self-assessment will be approved in accordance with the council's agreed processes at a meeting of full Council.

