Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

CORPORATE SELF-ASSESSMENT 2023/2024

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

This document is also available in Welsh

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Introduction

From the Neath Port Talbot Council Leader, Councillor Steve Hunt and Chief Executive, Frances O'Brien

This report sets out Neath Port Talbot Council's Self-Assessment for 2023/2024. This reflective report allows us to critically assess performance, to allow us to achieve our longer-term ambitions, as set out in the Corporate Plan 2024/2027.

All local authorities across Wales are required to undertake a corporate assessment, as part of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, to look at the extent to which it is meeting its performance requirements.

As part of the self-assessment, we are required to consider the extent to which the council is:

- exercising its functions effectively *(how well are we doing?)*

- using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively *(how do we know?)*

- ensuring its governance is effective for securing the above *(what and how can we do better?)*

This self-assessment provides an honest evaluation of the key governance arrangements we have in place to underpin service delivery, to ensure we do the above well and also taking into consideration recommendations made by regulators. We have also considered how effective those arrangements are, consider lessons learned and identify how we can improve.

Councillor Steve Hunt – Leader

Frances O'Brien – Chief Executive

Our approach to self-assessment

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 sets out the requirements for all councils in Wales to undertake a self-assessment. This assessment looks at corporate, financial, governance and service performance against strategic, and operational objectives. The assessment also allows us to identify improvements and risks to allow for effective service management, corporate strategic planning and performance management.

From undertaking previous corporate self-assessments, it is clear that a critical and honest approach enables both officers and members to build on, and further support, a culture in which the council can continuously challenge the current ways of working, and ask questions about how the council is operating and how to learn from best practice.

Through the process of self-assessment officers have been able to reach a transparent score, taking into account the internal and external factors affecting local government and their services - from continued budget pressures and demand on resources, to the continued inequalities faced by those who are in or are facing poverty. The cost of living crisis continues with many of our residents and local businesses experiencing financial hardship.

These changes have a significant impact on whether the council exercises its functions effectively and utilises its resources economically, efficiently and effectively.

We have continued to use our initial approach, using elements of the Local Government Assessment's (LGA) Efficiency Monitoring Self-Assessment Toolkit. The toolkit, which is structured around 7 key activities and broadly takes into account the core activities common to the governance of public bodies set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Structuring the self-assessment around these core activities enabled us to develop a baseline in 2021/2022 and we have subsequently tracked year on year improvements.

To ensure our effective governance arrangements were integral to our future planning we included a supplementary core activity of 'leadership and management' and 'physical assets' to the key activities:

1. Role of the council (Well-being of Future Generation (Wales) Act 2015 (WBFGA) - Corporate Planning)
2. Getting the best from the workforce (WBFGA - Workforce Planning)
3. Procurement and commissioning (WBFGA – Procurement)
4. Digital, Data and technology (WBFGA – Assets)
5. Managing income and expenditure (WBFGA – Financial Planning)
6. Effective risk management (WBFGA – Risk Management)
7. Leadership and management (introduced by NPT Council)
8. Physical assets and facilities (introduced by NPT Council)

Whilst continuing to develop our approach to self-assessment we have continued to take into account the following key principles:

○ Self-assessment is not a fixed judgement. To be truly effective, embedding self-assessment throughout the council should be an ongoing process, addressing issues as they are identified, responding in real time and effectively to challenges and opportunities.

○ The self-assessment process should encourage honesty, objectivity and transparency about the council's performance and governance.

○ The self-assessment should be focused on outcomes, and what has been achieved, rather than the process.

○ The self-assessment is an evidence-based analysis, understanding what both quantitative and qualitative information reveals about how the council is exercising its functions, using its resources and governing itself.

○ The self-assessment should be owned and led at a strategic level, whilst involving members and officers at all levels of the organisation and a range of people across communities and partners.

○ The self-assessment is not to be a standalone process, but integrated as part of the council's corporate planning, performance and governance processes.

At its simplest level, the self-assessment is about asking the following questions:

Self - Assessment

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- What and how can we do better?
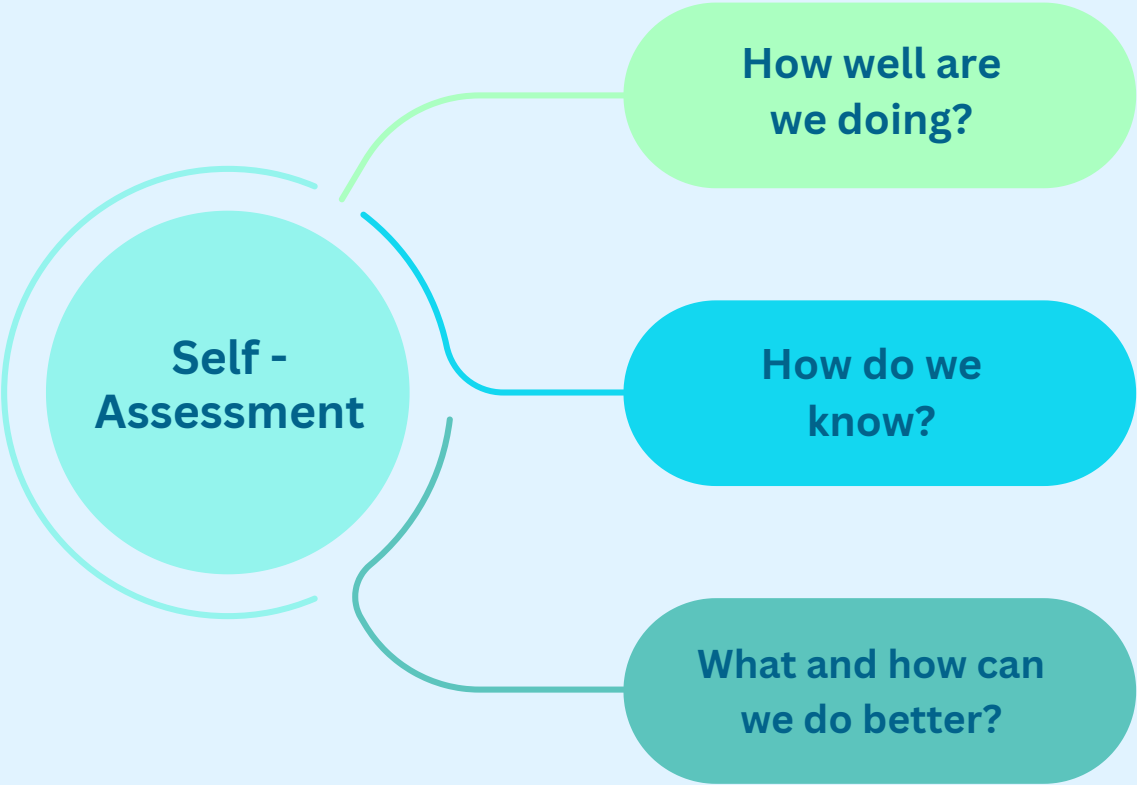
SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORING

DEVELOPING:	A new priority, change in direction or we have faced challenges / barriers in this area. There are still some weakness which need to be improved.
DEVELOPING MOVING TORWARDS MATURE:	Changes have been easily implemented and/or there have been lessons learnt, but there is still more to do to progress.
MATURE:	The council has implemented change, there is evidence of stability and success, but there is still room for improvement.
MATURE MOVING TORWARDS LEADING:	Consistently good performance has been demonstrated, with strengths outweighing challenges.
LEADING	The council has strong evidence of success, can demonstrate evidence of better outcomes and value

Our approach to self-assessment

STEP 1
Senior Managers were asked to revisit the initial self-assessment high level critiques for 2022/2023 and reflect on what has changed during 2023/2024, what improvements have been made and what areas still need to be progressed. Following this reflection, they were asked to re-assess where each core activity stood in relation to **developing, developing moving into mature, mature, mature moving into leading and leading.**

STEP 2
The critiques were used as a starting point for discussion with Corporate Directors and Heads of Service. During the sessions, senior officers were asked to comment honestly and openly on these critiques and whether they thought the assessment was a true reflection of the position in 2023/2024. We also reviewed recommendations made by regulators during the year.

STEP 3
From the completed high level critiques and the feedback obtained, opportunities for improvement (to increase the extent to which the council will meet their performance requirements in 2024/2025 onwards) were identified and are contained in the Action Plan in Appendix 1. This is in addition to a selection of improvements identified in previous years which are still ongoing due to the nature/scale of the work.

STEP 4
The draft self-assessment was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on 14th January 2025. The Committee has a role to review the draft self-assessment and may make recommendations for changes to the conclusions. No recommendation were made, but continued support was offered by Governance & Audit Committee for future self-assessments.

Citizens Panel

Staff Surveys

Let's Talk Engagement & Events

Community of Practice

Youth Council

How consultation and engagement informed the council's 2023/2024 priorities

During 2023/2024, the council's 'Let's Keep Talking' campaign asked residents, employees, elected members, community organisations, businesses and other partners - what matters to them now and what matters to them in the future. The campaign ran from 29 June to 8 October 2023 and went on to inform the priorities that are set out in the revised Corporate Plan for the period 2024/2027.

We undertook our 'Let's Keep Talking' public engagement exercise during the summer and autumn of 2023 to ensure we had a good understanding of what matters to people now and to have clear insight about what has changed in people's lives since we did the original 'Let's Talk' exercise back in 2021-2022.

Corporately, these included 18 events in the summer and autumn of 2023 as part of the 'Let's Keep Talking' community engagement campaign and four pre-consultation roadshows in December 2023 as part of the budget setting process for 2024-25.

Feedback on two of the main corporate consultation and engagement campaigns (consultation on budget setting for 2024-25 and 'Let's Keep Talking' public engagement exercise) was published on the council's website (see: www.npt.gov.uk/lkt).

During the initial 'Let's Talk' campaign it was clear that the main focus for our residents, community organisations and businesses was to keep friends, family and customers safe whilst continuing to ease restrictions and return to day to day living. Whilst these were still important to people, when asked 'what matters to you for the future' in the 2023 'Let's Keep Talking' campaign the responses included protecting our local economy, our environment and health and well-being.

We have used the feedback we gathered through this latest exercise in developing the priorities set out in our Corporate Plan 2024-2027. The number of hits on the Let's Keep Talking page more than doubled from quarter 1 and 2 (n=1,885) to, 3 and 4 (n=3,889) in 2023/24.

Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027

The Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027 was developed in accordance with The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and was adopted by Council in April 2023.

The Strategy sets out a number of requirements to promote local democracy and encourage and enable local people to participate in our decision making.

Key Development achieved during 2023/2024:

- **16-17 years olds** - general outreach activity took place utilising Electoral Commission democratic resources to engage with young people including better understanding of voting and voter registration for 16-17 years olds at Senedd and local elections.

- **Voter ID** - The 2024 UK Parliamentary general election was held on Thursday 4 July. This was the first time that all voters across the UK were required to show an accepted form of photographic identification at polling stations for a general election.

The overall intention has been to focus on the need to encourage under registered groups to register to vote and explain the voting process - in undertaking this type of work it is important to understand that there are no quick fix solutions and relies more on a willingness to maintain a steady consistent approach over the longer term to aid gradual robust improvement.

- **Changes to the Scrutiny Process** - Following a review of the Council's scrutiny arrangements by Audit Wales in 2023 a new scrutiny model was approved by Council in its Annual General Meeting in May 2024, and implemented following the summer recess. The new model includes four scrutiny committees:

;

  - Community, Finance, and Strategic Leadership;
  - Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene;
  - Education, Skills and Wellbeing; and
  - Social Services, Housing and Community Safety.

Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny undertake a detailed training programme, as do the Committees themselves. This includes Scrutiny Procedure Rules, Scrutiny powers and involving the community in their work. Social Media Training is included as a core element of the Member Induction Programme. Refresher training is available throughout their term of office.

- **Meetings of Council** are webcast as specified under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and all meetings of Council operate on a hybrid basis as per the Council's Hybrid Meeting policy.

- **Recruitment activity for the Citizens' Panel**, at the end of September 2023 membership of the panel stood at 832 (compared with 500 when the Public Participation Strategy was first published). Work is ongoing to compare the Citizens' Panel membership with the data for NPT from the 2021 Census. Work will then be undertaken to target any under-represented groups or geographical locations.

Evidence Base 2023/2024

In addition to the completion of the high level critiques which assessed how the council performed during 2023/2024 across the 9 core activities, we have also considered a wide variety of evidence in assessing our performance during the year. Some of the evidence has been used to inform other annual reports, including the Corporate Plan Annual Report 2023/2024 and the Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024. The evidence is set out across three categories which has supplemented the conclusions drawn for the high level critiques.

Category 1 - Internal Evidence

The evidence in this category provides an internal view of how the council performed during 2023/2024:

- Corporate Plan Annual Report
- Public Service Board Wellbeing Plan - Annual Report
- Statement of Accounts
- Annual Governance Statement
- Director of Social Services Annual Report
- Quarterly Performance Cabinet Reports
- Strategic/Directorate/Service Risk Registers
- Compliments, Comments and Complaints
- Service Recovery Plans
- Quarterly Budget Monitoring Reports
- Internal Audit Reports
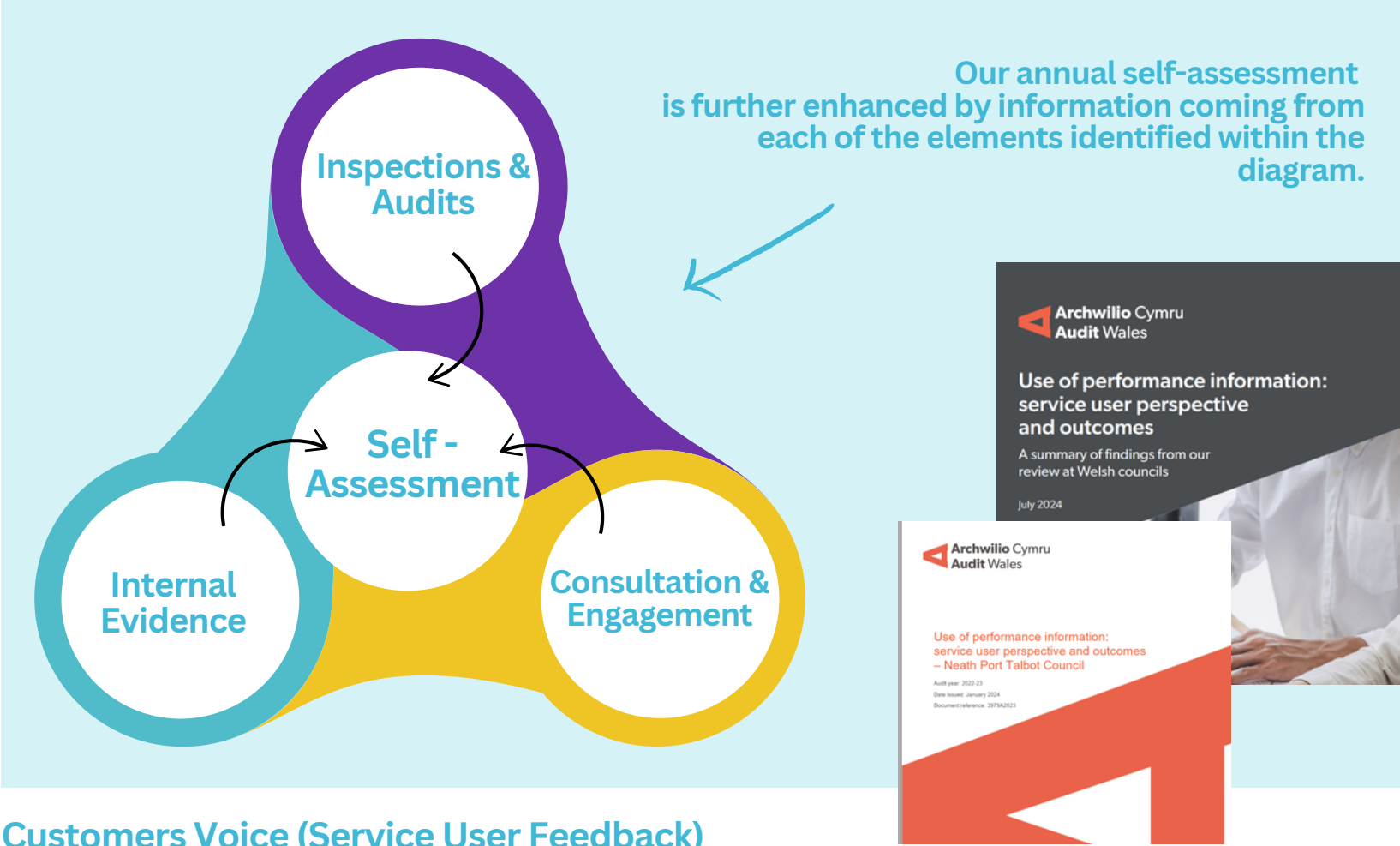
Category 2 - Regulatory / Inspection Reports

The evidence in this category provides the regulatory or external view of performance from independent bodies.

- Audit Wales Annual Improvement Report
- Audit Wales Reports
- Care Inspectorate Wales Reports
- Estyn Inspection Reports
- Public Service Ombudsman Wales
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation

Category 3 - Consultation & Engagement

Engagement has developed significantly and continues to evolve. The evidence in this category is via listening to staff, residents and businesses talk about their experiences of services and working within the authority. This engagement is paramount in how the council improves and effectively and efficiently delivers services. The council's Let's Talk campaign, Youth Council, Citizen's Panel and Community of Practice re-enforce the commitment to listen and to be accountable to act on feedback. Some examples of consultation and engagement undertaken in 2023/2024 include:

- Let's Keep Talking campaign
- Budget consultation 2023/2024
- Trade Union meetings
- Youth Council
- Citizen's Panel
- Community of Practice (Involvement & Engagement)
- Public lighting consultation
- Housing and homelessness plan 2023/2026
- Adult Services Strategy 2023/2026
- Active Travel
- Draft Heritage Strategy consultation
- Children's Services Strategic Plan 2023/2026
- Draft Welsh Language Promotion Strategy
- Senior Manager Workshops
- Accountable Manager Workshops
- Employee engagement survey

Our annual self-assessment is further enhanced by information coming from each of the elements identified within the diagram.

Inspections & Audits

Self - Assessment

Internal Evidence

Consultation & Engagement

Customers Voice (Service User Feedback)

Engagement from stakeholders is an integral part of how we operate on an ongoing basis - enabling the delivery of good quality services and supporting improvement. During 2023/2024, Audit Wales undertook a thematic review of 'Service User Perspective' across all 22 councils in Wales. Each council has received an individual report with recommendations, with an overall report being published from an all Wales perspective. In the overall report, Audit Wales state that:

Our findings are not very positive. Except for a few councils, we found that councils provide limited information to help senior leaders understand service users' views and outcomes. So, its difficult to see how councils really know if they are meeting the needs of local communities and providing value for money.

For Neath Port Talbot Council, **three recommendations were made, which were all accepted**:

Information on the perspective of the service user: R1 - The council should ensure that the information provided to its senior leaders enable them to understand the service user perspective on a broader range of services and policies. The council should ensure this information is drawn from the diversity of service users.

Outcomes information: R2 - The council should strengthen the information provided to senior leaders to help them evaluate whether the council is delivering its objectives and intended outcomes

Quality and accuracy of data: R3 - The council needs to assure itself that it has robust arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of the information it provides to senior leaders relating to service user perspective and outcomes.

There are pockets of strong service user feedback collected across the council. As an improvement area for 2024/2025 we will look to collect more of our customers feedback to inform planning and decision making.

Self-Assessment Overview

To undertake the self-assessment for 2023/2024, the council has worked across 8 core activity areas to assess whether it is exercising its functions effectively and using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively. In addition, an assessment has been made to reflect the overall position of the council.

There is acknowledgment by members and senior leaders that whilst remaining at '**mature moving into leading**', there has been significant progress made across the core activity areas and in time this will allow the council to sit firmly in 'Leading'.

With regard to assessing if the council has effective governance in place for securing functions and resources - 3 additional improvements were identified following the self-assessment on the effectiveness of the council's system of internal control in place for the year ending 31st March 2024 as part of the development of the council's Annual Governance Statement for 2023/2024.

The self-assessment has not identified any additional governance areas for improvement. The action plan contained in Appendix 1 contains actions to address the improvement areas referred to above. The action plan will be monitored by the council's Corporate Governance Group (a group of senior officers from across the council who have governance related responsibilities). In conjunction with the Corporate Plan, it is imperative the council's approach to future self-assessments continues to evolve by taking into consideration on-going learning from within the council, partners, stakeholders and best practice from other local authorities across Wales.

Following completion of this self-assessment, work is needed to broaden the approach and develop an assessment process around the effectiveness of the relationship between the political leadership and senior officers in the council for the inclusion in the 2024/2025. This will ensure the ongoing development of a culture in which the council can continuously challenge current ways of working and to challenge how the council is operating to secure improvement for the future.

To meet our statutory duty the Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024 has been developed using the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework' developed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA), which we as a council adopted in 2016. The Annual Governance Statement explains the processes and procedures in place to enable the council to carry out its functions effectively. The governance framework comprises the systems, processes, cultures and values by which the council is directed and controlled. The framework brings together an underlying set of legal requirements, good practice and management processes.

The completion of the AGS is an important component of the council's corporate governance arrangements, ensuring the council is run properly, does the right things at the right time, in the right way, and:
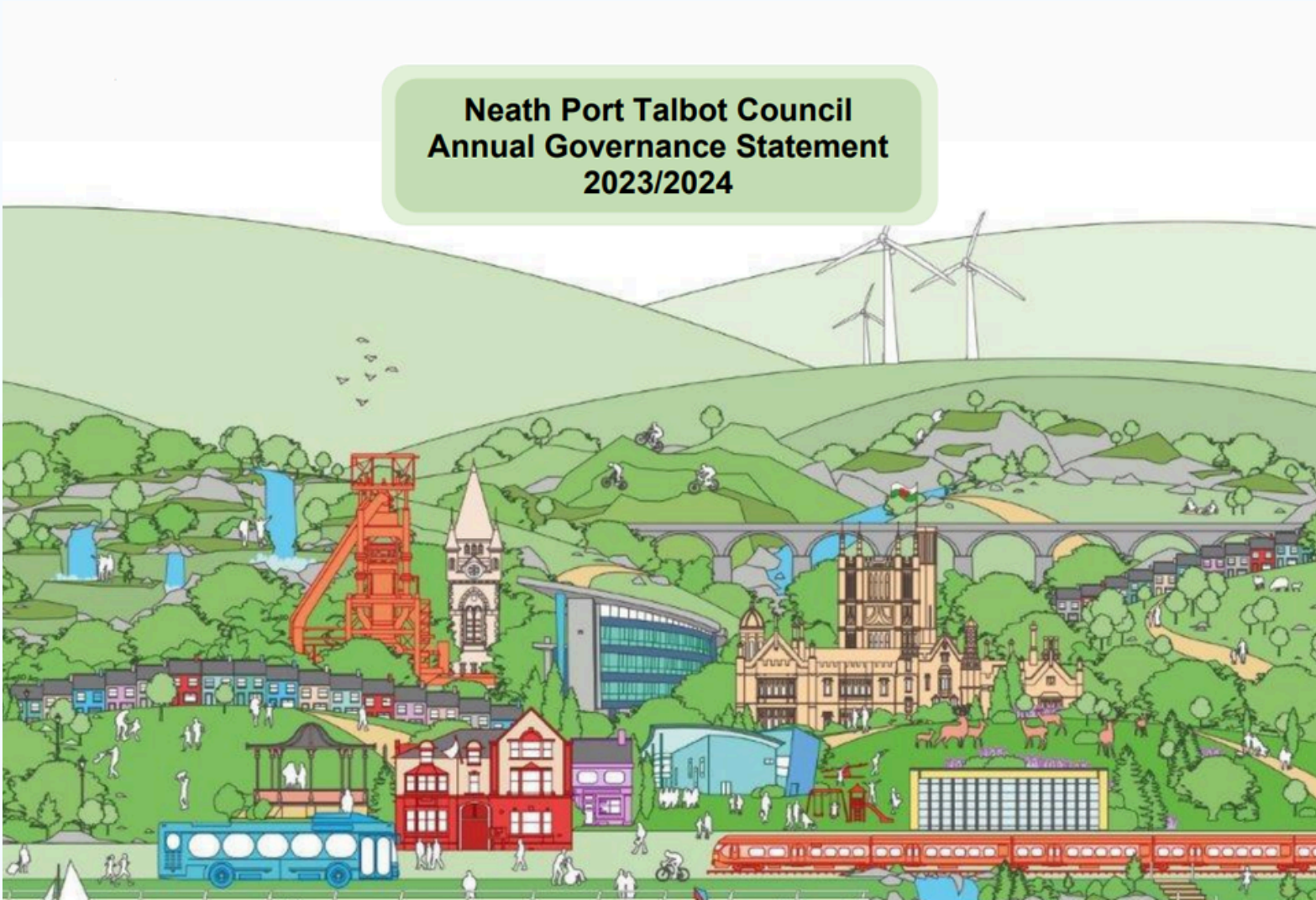
**Neath Port Talbot Council
Annual Governance Statement
2023/2024**

→ Its business is conducted in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations;

→ Public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for;

→ There is sound and inclusive decision making;

→ Resources are used economically, efficiently and effectively; and

→ There is clear accountability for the use of resources to achieve priorities which benefit local people and communities.

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE 2023/2024

The following pages provide a summary of our service performance to deliver our Corporate Plan and the internal, external and consultation/engagement which have been used to support the self-assessment.

Corporate Well-being Objectives

The well-being objectives, introduced during 2022/2023, were considered as part of the Annual Report and were deemed to still be relevant as a result of feedback from engagement campaigns:

» All children get the best start in life;
» All communities are thriving and sustainable;
   Our local environment, culture and heritage can
» be enjoyed by future generations; and
   Local people are skilled and access high
» quality, green jobs.

To allow us to monitor progress against the well-being objectives, the medium term aims were considered. A complete review of the progress made against achieving the aims can be found in the Corporate Plan Annual Report 2023/2024. For 2023/2024, there was a total of 63 aims reported on to deliver against the above well-being objectives.

Of those 63 aims, 40 (63%) were on track and 3 were off-track (5%), there is more work to do for 20 (32%) to the aims to progress to 'on-track'.

Performance Measures

To assess our performance in meeting our well-being objectives during 2023/2024, alongside the progress on actions, we used 48 performance measures, again further detail can be found in the Corporate Plan Annual Report 2023/2024. Of those 48 measures, 29 (60%) were on track and 4 were off track (8%). For the remaining measure there is more work to do or the data is not collected/not available.

Key Achievements

- 2393 full day childcare places provided and 1463 children ages 3 and 4 accessed part-time childcare via the Childcare Offer.

- Launch of 'Miss School, Miss Out' campaign to support the improvement of attendance. From work already undertaken during the 2022/2023 academic year, attendance figures have improved for both primary and secondary schools on 2021/2022 figures.

- Continued to significantly support residents and organisations struggling with the cost of living.

- Launched the Housing and Homelessness Strategic Plan 2024/2027: A Place To Call Home; in recognition of rising homelessness and lack of affordable housing.

- Established the Decarbonisation Energy and Climate Change (DECC) team within the Environment and Regeneration.

- Launched both the Culture and Heritage Strategies along with the Destination Management Plan, identifying priorities for long-term investment in Neath Port Talbot and managing sustainable conservation of our historic and natural environment.

- As a result of UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, launched the Business Growth and Innovation Fund and Local Business Priority Fund, with over £6 million of grants being offered to businesses. In addition, delivered 52 'Let's Talk Business' engagement events, to hear from and work with our local businesses to continue to drive forward the local economy.

Compliments & Complaints

- 209 Stage 1 complaints were received in 2023/2024. This was an increase of 44 in the number received across the council from 165 received in 2022/2023.

- There was an increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints received from 22 in 2022/2023 to 39 in 2023/2024. 38% (15 of 39) Stage 2 complaints were upheld /partially upheld in 2023/2024, an increase on the figure of 3 upheld/partially upheld in 2022/2023.

- 303 compliments were received during the year, a decrease of 23 in the number received during 2022/2023.

Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

CORPORATE PLAN ANNUAL REPORT 2023/2024

RECOVER, RESET, RENEW

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg
This document is also available in Welsh

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1 — Well-being Objective 1
All children have the best in life

Total Number of Strategic Priorities: 20
- 13 on-track
- 7 more work to do
- 0 off-track

Total Number of Performance Measures: 9
- 4 on-track
- 2 more work to do
- 2 off-track

1 data not collected / not available

2 — Well-being Objective 2
All communities are thriving and sustainable

Total Number of Strategic Priorities: 9
- 7 on-track
- 2 more work to do
- 0 off-track

Total Number of Performance Measures: 13
- 9 on-track
- 2 more work to do
- 0 off-track

2 data not collected / not available

3 — Well-being Objective 3
Our local environment, culture and heritage can be enjoyed by future generations

Total Number of Strategic Priorities: 14
- 9 on-track
- 5 more work to do
- 0 off-track

Total Number of Performance Measures: 16
- 9 on-track
- 3 more work to do
- 0 off-track

4 data not collected / not available

4 — Well-being Objective 4
Local people are skilled and access, high quality, green jobs

Total Number of Strategic Priorities: 20
- 11 on-track
- 6 more work to do
- 3 off-track

Total Number of Performance Measures: 10
- 7 on-track
- 0 more work to do
- 2 off-track

1 data not collected / not available

CORPORATE ASSESSMENT 2023/2024

To be able to honestly, and transparently, score our self-assessment we have used the scoring matrix set out on page 4. Based on the high level assessments undertaken the overall rating for the council as a whole stands at 'mature moving into leading'. This has been the outcome for all three self-assessments undertaken since 2021/2022. Whilst a significant amount has been achieved over the last 12 months, there is still more to do and we need to demonstrate that our performance requirements are robust before it is justified to move into 'leading'. The gauges provide an indication on current self-assessment scoring (green) and previous self-assessment scorings (grey).
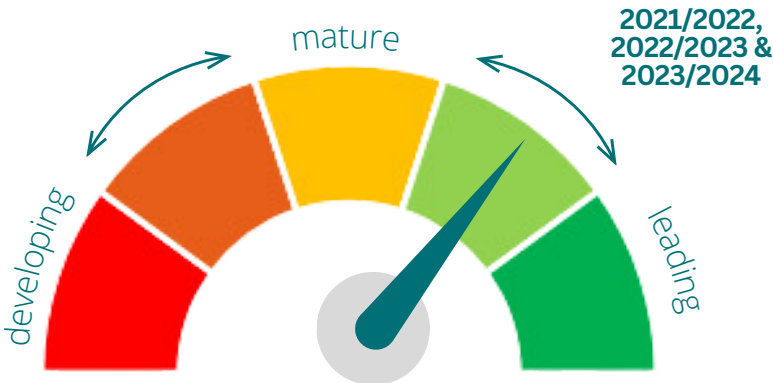

2023/2024

2021/2022

2022/2023 & 2023/2024
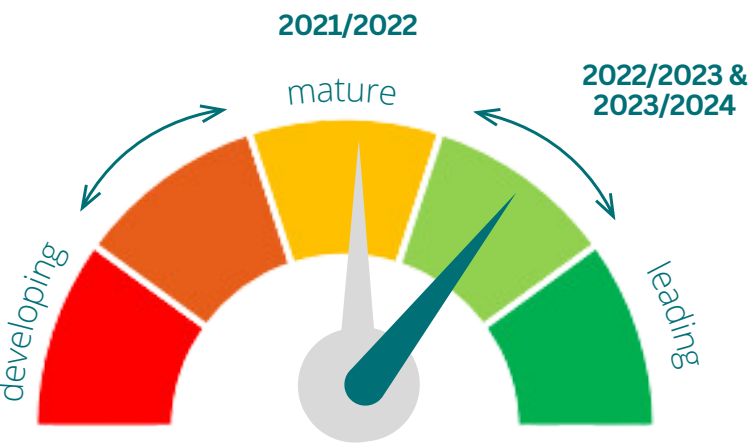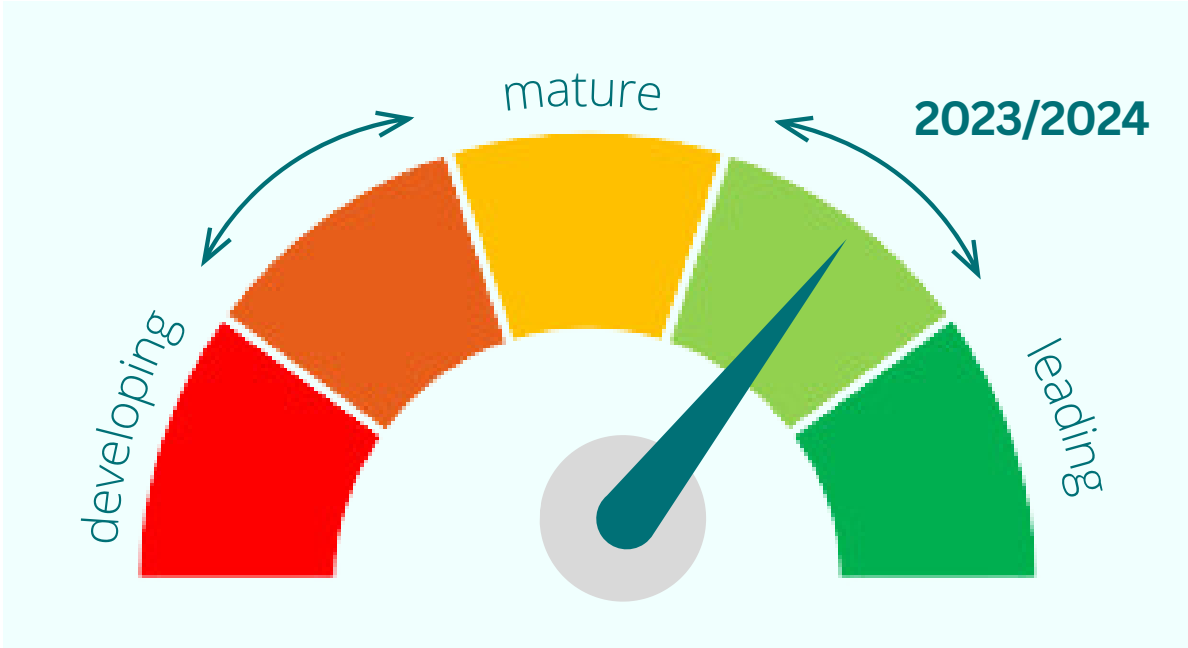
**Corporate Planning -
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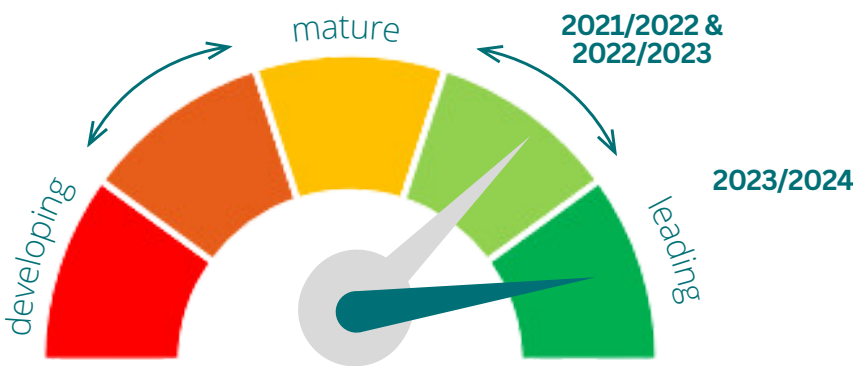
**Workforce planning -
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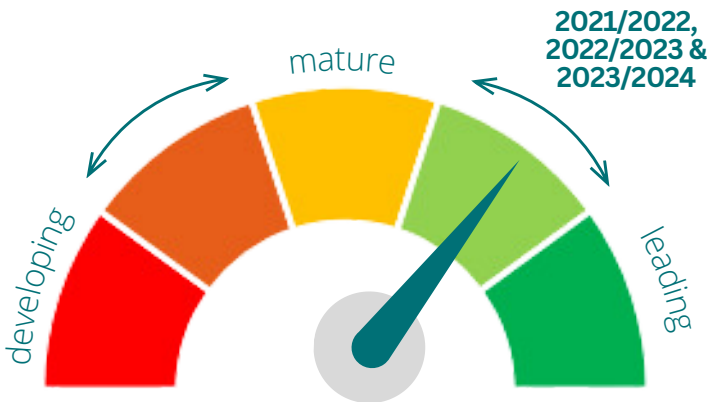
**Leadership and Management
Summary - Pages 15 - 17**

2021/2022, 2022/2023 & 2023/2024

**Procurement & Commissioning
Summary - Pages 18 - 19**

2023/2024

2021/2022 & 2022/2023
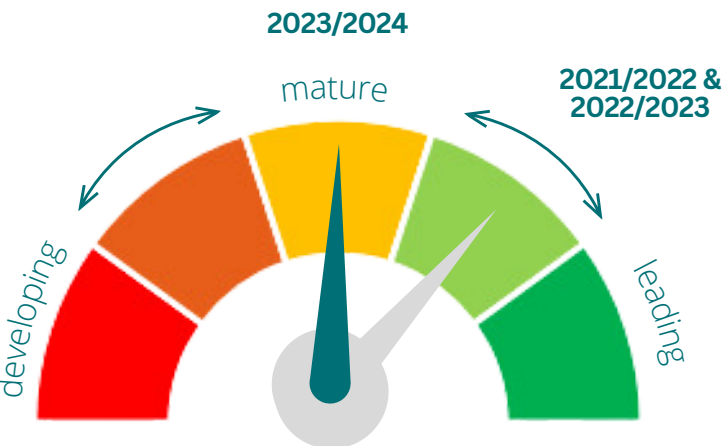
**Risk Management -
Effective Risk Management
Summary - Page 20**

2022/2023 & 2023/2024

2021/2022

**Data, Digital & Technology / Digital Assets
Summary - Pages 21-22**

2021/2022 & 2022/2023

2023/2024
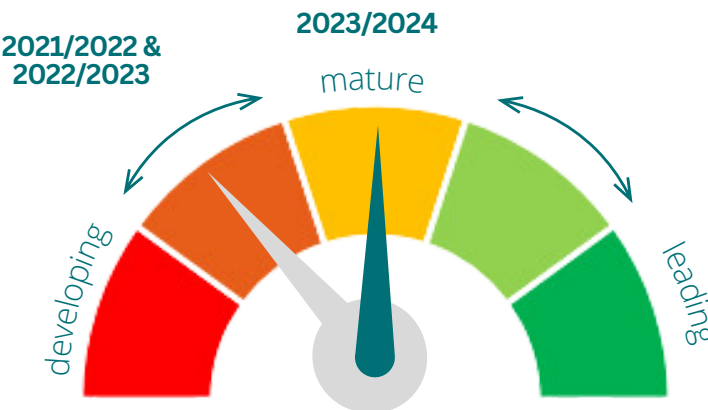
**Financial Planning -
Managing Expenditure / Managing Income
Summary - Page 23**

2022/2023 & 2023/2024

**Physical Assets & Facilities-
Summary - Page 24
(Please note this section was added to
self-assessment in 2022/2023)**

Corporate Planning 'The Role of the Council'

The council's previous Corporate Plan – "Recover, Reset, Renew", published in 2022, drew on extensive engagement (Let's Talk) with residents, businesses, the workforce and partners, as well as other insights and intelligence. It provided a clear framework for the council to recover from the disruption that had occurred during the pandemic. However, during 2023/2024, the council acknowledged a lot had changed since that Plan was published, in terms of the challenging / turbulent environment we found ourselves in and a reset of the council's priorities was needed due to the following events.

Soon after "Recover, Reset, Renew" was published, we experienced the impacts of the war in Ukraine and the more recent conflict in the Middle East. These world events drove very high levels of inflation / energy prices and compounded the cost of living crisis that has pushed many of our residents and businesses into financial hardship. In addition, supply chain disruptions arising from BREXIT have affected contract prices and delivery timescales, and structural changes in the labour market, making it more difficult to attract and retain a sufficient workforce. In addition, we face uncertainty of funding for future years and indications that Welsh Government will be freezing or potentially reducing funding for local government in the financial year 2025/2026 at a time when there are more people needing help and support.

However, on a more positive note, we have welcomed unprecedented levels of investor interest which has the potential to transform the local economy over the medium to long term. The priorities set out in the updated Plan have been informed by the above, other insights and intelligence and a 2nd extensive engagement campaign (Let's Keep Talking) with residents, businesses, our workforce and partners. During the initial Let's Talk campaign in 2021/2022 it was clear that the main focus for our residents, community organisations and businesses was to keep friends, family and customers safe. Whilst these are still important to people, when asked in 2023 "what matters to you in the future", the responses included protecting our local economy, our environment and health and well-being.

The revised Corporate Plan incorporates 9 corporate transformational programmes, which will support the delivery of our four well-being objectives (which remain unchanged) and where we will be expecting to make a step change in our approach over the next 3 years. Many of the actions within the programmes are essential to service and financial sustainability, whilst in a number of areas we will be focussing on themes derived from the 2023 engagement campaign.

Our cross-cutting plans, service delivery and other partnership plans will also support the delivery of our well-being objectives. The service delivery plans are a new requirement for 2024/2025 and are completed at the Head of Service level. Services can choose to continue to complete Service Plans at the Accountable Manager level, if they wish (referred to as "Service Recovery Plans" in the interim Framework).

In addition to the above, the council has moved to a new model of scrutiny which places performance as a standing agenda item at every meeting.

The council understands the need to, and how to, review the performance of services. In terms of 'the need' the council recognises the importance of having a fit for purpose Corporate Performance Management Framework (CPMF) in place. A CPMF sets a clear direction for the council that links/joins up all council business from employee level up to council level and where everybody is clear how they contribute to achieving the council's vision, values and priorities.

It is imperative that our planning (including financial and workforce planning), performance and risk processes are robust and interwoven into our decision making at every level of the organisation.

It is important that we have mechanisms in place to manage and monitor performance and everyone in the council has a role to play and everyone understands their responsibilities regarding performance management.

These processes enable the council to achieve its vision and values and deliver the council's well-being objectives so that we can improve outcomes for our residents and businesses, whilst achieving value for money and contributing to the national 7 well- being goals.
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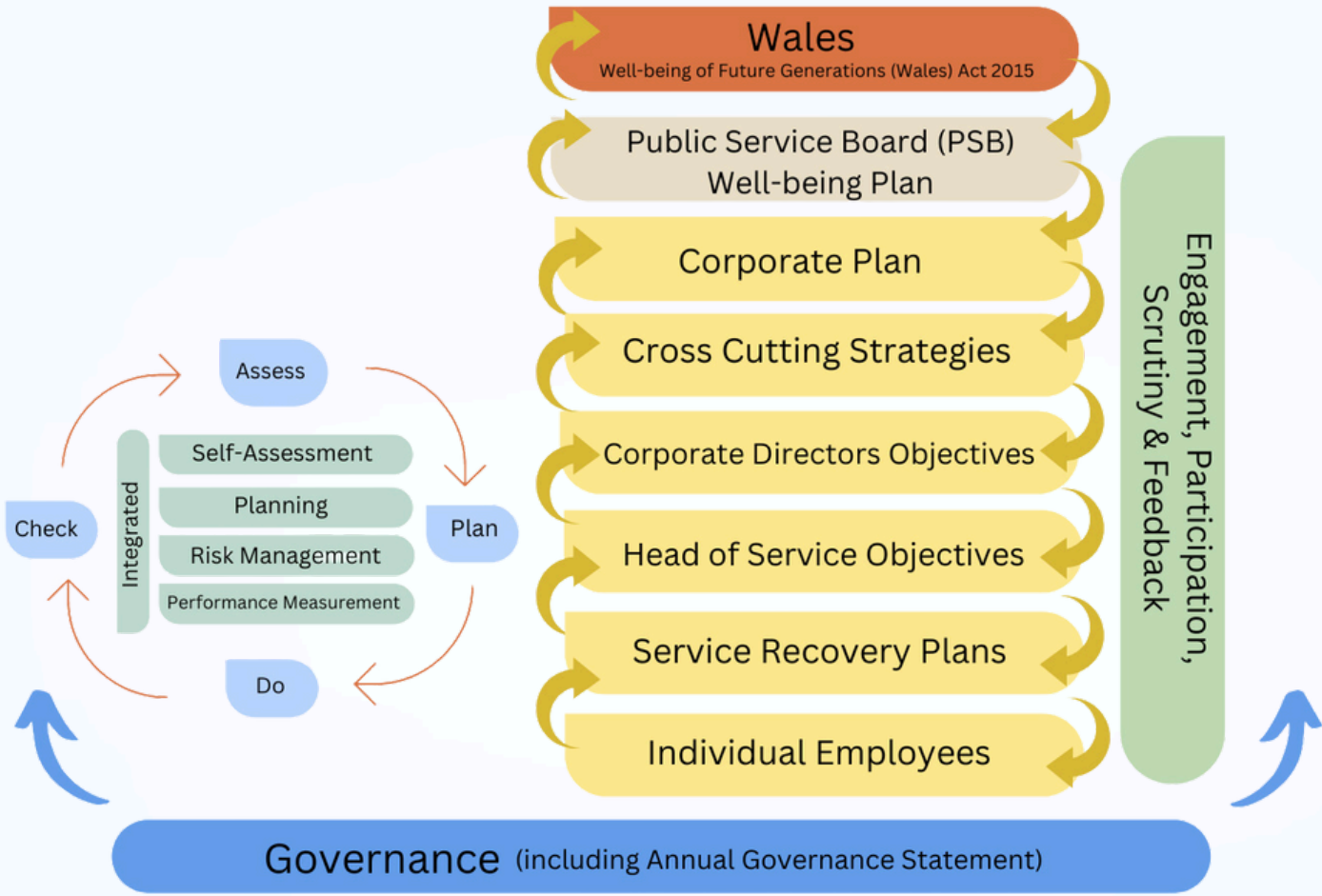
During 2023/2024 the council's "interim" Corporate Performance Management Framework, which was developed during 2022/2023, remained in place. It was planned to review the Framework during 2023/2024, as it was acknowledged performance management arrangements required strengthening across the council at the strategic, service and individual levels (re-setting the link between actions, performance and risk).
However, this review has been delayed due to the resetting of the council's Corporate Plan for the period of 2024/2027.

Due to the resetting of the Corporate Plan, the introduction of the 9 transformation programmes, service delivery plans and the new model of scrutiny, it was deemed timely to commence the review in early 2024 to ensure the Framework reflected the above changes.

The review will also take account of the different performance management requirements across the council, ensuring a streamlined approach and improved visibility of performance management at all levels.

Workforce Planning -
'Getting the best from the workforce'

The council continues to invest in its workforce and through the Strategic Workforce Plan: The Future of Work Strategy 2022 – 2027, which was approved by the council's Personnel Committee in October 2022 the council sets out the following vision and key objectives:

CLEAR VISION

We want to have the right number of people with the right skills and attitudes in place at the right time to deliver council services and functions.

KEY OBJECTIVES

- Delivering the workforce actions needed in the short, medium and long term to implement the Corporate Plan whilst ensuring the health, safety and well-being of our people.
- Embedding the Corporate Priorities, Vision and Values.

Throughout 2021 and 2022 preparatory work took place to develop the draft Strategic Workforce Plan, aligning to the Corporate Plan and the Strategic Change Programme. This included:

- Engagement with key stakeholders to understand what was important to employees at every level and our trade union partners. We used surveys, workshops, drop-in sessions and focus groups.
- We worked with Heads of Service and Accountable Managers to understand what matters to them and their priorities for their teams and the services they deliver. This was used to develop and determine our workforce priorities for the next 5 year period.
- We worked with our trade union partners to ensure the workforce plan is underpinned by fairness and transparency.
- We informed our approach with the outcome of an Audit Wales review of workforce planning across the council.
- We worked with the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) via their People Development Partner (PDP) Scheme which seeks to recognise organisations that are demonstrating a real commitment to better work and working lives. As part of the scheme, the CIPD carried out a People Impact Survey to determine how the council's current people capability aligns to CIPD standards. This provided us with feedback on our strengths and key areas for improvement, feeding in to the priorities set out in the draft plan.

The plan sets out key workforce priorities and a 12-month delivery plan.

At a corporate level, the Strategic Workforce Plan: The Future of Work Strategy 2022–2027 aims to ensure the right resources, skills and capabilities are in place to deliver the priorities of the council in the short, medium and long term.

At operational service level, a comprehensive Succession Planning Toolkit was developed to assist managers to prepare a service level Succession Plan in order to identify and develop the potential future leaders and individuals required to fill other business-critical positions within the council to ensure we continue to provide high quality services to our citizens.

In 2023 the plan was reviewed to ensure that the priorities remain fit for purpose and a further 12 month delivery plan developed. This of course was carried out with input from the Corporate Management Group and all of our stakeholders, including managers, employees, trade unions and external partners and regulators.

Resources to deliver the Strategic Workforce Plan

The delivery of the plan will be via a partnership between the council and its employees at all levels.

The plan will be monitored and reviewed at regular intervals, to ensure it remains fit for purpose, relevant and that planned deliverables are having the intended impact.

The council has allocated resources to the delivery of the Strategic Workforce Plan for 2022 – 2027: The Future of Work Strategy.

The council has established a Future of Work Team to supplement the resources of the People & Organisational Development Service.

This team includes HR, Organisational Development and Engagement professionals, as well as a seconded trade union officer in line with the council's commitment to working in social partnership with recognised trade unions.

The resources are time limited, with the core team to disband in March 2025. We plan to move activity into the 'business as usual' of the HR team, and as such future delivery plans will reflect this.

Workforce Planning 'Getting the best from the workforce' continued...

How do we know if we are getting it right?

Review of the Year 1 Delivery Plan and development of Year 2 Delivery Plan - A review took place towards the end of 2023 to assess whether we delivered what we said we would deliver, what impact has the delivery of these actions had to date, whether the 7 workforce priorities set out in the strategy remain relevant, and finally what actions do we intend to take in 2024 / 2025 to deliver the ambitions of the plan.

The outcome of the review was reported to Personnel Committee on 11th March 2024, and members approved the recommendations that the 7 workforce priorities remain fit for purpose and the draft delivery plan for 2024/2025.

Did we carry out the actions we committed to undertake in 2022 / 2023 (the outputs)?

The additional resources that have been made available to the People & Organisational Development Service, supplementing the resources available to drive forward the Strategy, have meant that activity has taken place against every delivery action over the course of the past year. Because of the ambitious nature of the strategy, the majority of actions are not yet complete, and will require further delivery into 2024/2025 and beyond:

Resourcing Team NPT: Significant recruitment activity has led to positive impacts on our ability to successfully appoint to our vacant posts (see section in relation to the impacts of our work below); however because of national skills shortages some posts remain difficult to recruit to and the need remains to continue to focus on both recruitment and developing our internal workforce to match critical skills sets now and in the future.

Developing and Retaining Talent:
- We made good progress in relation to embedding Succession Planning this year, developing the skill sets of our accountable managers in this area, and to date, approximately 75% of our services now have a succession plan in place.
- We have delivered phase 1 of the Organisational Review, developed competencies for our 3 senior leadership levels, and developed a leadership development pathway. Engagement with the recently launched leadership development programmes is already high.

Employee Experience and Engagement: We have made good progress in developing our employment offer, developing a number of initiatives to improve employee well-being, motivation and engagement and help us to attract and retain the best employees. Some of these initiatives have already been implemented, such as the Car Salary Finance Scheme and some will be launched later this year such as the Financial Well-being Platform and the Salary Finance Scheme.

Developing the Future of Work:
- We have reviewed our Hybrid Working Framework and delivered a range of training to support our managers develop their skills sets. A range of resources has been developed to help managers in this new world, and we will continue to review and develop this, as the world of work, new technology and working arrangements continue to evolve.
- We did want to develop some work around introducing more flexibility and choice for those jobs that do not naturally lend themselves to flexibility or home working, and this is one area that we were not able to progress in 2023 / 2024.

Knowledge and skills development: Activity ranged from launching the very popular face to face Induction day, the implementation of an 8 week 'manager induction' programme, the delivery of Leadership Development programmes at levels 3, 4, 5 and 7, the establishment of the NPT Ment2Be Mentoring network, a coaching network and a Viva Engage Community, to the delivery of 185 apprenticeships and 22,339 training days.

A safe workplace: A number of initiatives have been delivered, supporting the health and well-being of our employees, for example supporting carers in our workforce through the Employers for Carers initiative, the Menopause Action Plan to support women experiencing the menopause, and the implementation of an Employee Assistance Programme delivering a range of benefits including access to 24/7 counselling services.

An inclusive workplace where all employees can be themselves: We delivered a number of initiatives to improve equality and diversity in our workplaces and increase inclusion, focussing on a number of protected characteristics; of course this is not a 'job and finish' piece of work and next year we will expand our reach.

AWARDS

In October 2023, the council was delighted to be awarded the 'Womenspire Fair Play Employer Award' by Chwarae Teg at their final ever awards ceremony in Cardiff.

This award recognised our progress towards achieving gender equality within the workplace.

CYFLOGWR CHWARAE TEG ROWND DERFYNOL FAIRPLAY EMPLOYER FINALISTS GWOBRAU WOMENSPIRE AWARDS

In March 2024, the council was further delighted to be finalists in the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's Awards Cymru, nominated at 'Best In-House HR Team'.

CIPD

Workforce Planning 'Getting the best from the workforce' continued...

Can we measure the impact of our actions (yet)?

There are some actions where we have been able to show a quantifiable and measurable impact. This is particularly in relation to recruitment where we can now evidence that the significant activity to support recruitment is having a positive impact on the council's ability to attract candidates and successfully appoint to vacant posts:

Our small HR Employment Support Team now supports an increase in recruitment workloads of c.40% when compared with 2021/2022.

Recruitment is outstripping resignations, and that in turn means we have a positive rather than negative retention rate.

We can evidence that our successful appointment rates have increased proportionately more than this significant increase in recruitment activity – *so we are doing more, but what we are doing is also more successful.* Our overall successful appointment rate in the current year, 1st April 2023 – 31st January 2024 is currently 93%, compared with 82% in 2021/2022 and 91% last year.

For many actions, it is too early to be able to measure impact just yet, either because actions have only recently been implemented (for example the Employee Assistance Programme launched in January 2024) or because the actions in 2023 have been laying the foundations for 2024 (for example aspects of the Leadership and Management Development Pathway will launch later this year).

We can show activity rates, for example the numbers of managers engaging with opportunities to improve their skills to help them manage remote and or hybrid teams, or the number of employees who are starting to actively use the Viva Engage Platform to update themselves on news and developments across the council – as we continue to monitor activity, we will be able to begin to measure the value and impact of increasing / decreasing activity.

Where we can, we have provided feedback from other sources where this is available. For example ratings on external job recruitment sites (resourcing NPT) show a positive view of the council as an employer of choice when compared with local government competitors, and the Gender Equality Award (an Inclusive Workplace) provides external assessment of the council's commitment to creating a fair and inclusive workplace.

We have also provided anecdotal feedback from participants at events, providing employee voice and the impact of actions on individuals in our workforce.

We recognise that measuring impact is important as we move through the delivery of this 5-year strategic plan, and understanding whether our outputs and efforts are making positive returns to the council. In March 2023, we established a new team in the HR Service, the People Analytics and Systems Team. We are developing the data analytics capability of this team, and we are in the process of establishing the necessary data analytics tools (PowerBi), working in partnership with the Digital Services Team. This will enable this team to analyse workforce trends and predict future trends in a way that we have never been able to do before and develop robust metrics to help us measure the effectiveness of our People Services.

A key action underpinning the 2024 / 2025 Delivery Plan is to develop metrics that will help us measure delivery against our stated aims and ambitions.

We also plan to continue our partnership working with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, as a People Development Partner, and revisit the People Impact Survey, originally carried out in February 2022, repeating this exercise in February 2025 – this will give us a crucial external assessment in relation to our people practices, the impact of them, and how that has evolved in the 3 year period.

A link to the full report can be found here.

Audit Wales Feedback (November 2023)

The Audit Wales Report: "Springing Forward – Strategic Workforce Management – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council" published in November 2023 concluded:

"Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's strategic approach to workforce strengthening its ability to transform adapt and maintain the delivery of its services in the short and longer term?

Overall, we found that: *The council has a clear vision for its workforce, strengthened by its work with partners.* We reached this conclusion because:

- the council has a clear vision for its workforce which continues to be a strategic priority for delivering its Well-being Objectives;
- the council has a clear workforce planning approach, strengthened by its work with partners. However, it does not have succession plans or identified business-critical roles for all service areas;
- the council has proactively learnt from others and is developing a broader range of workforce measures"

Recommendations

R1 – Workforce planning and delivery

- to ensure there are progression pathways for staff and there is resilience around its business-critical roles, the Council should ensure all services have succession plans and have identified their business-critical roles.

R2 – Workforce governance and monitoring

- to have a better understanding of the impact of its workforce strategy the Council should develop measures that focus on outcomes and impacts in addition to inputs.
- the Council should build on its benchmarking with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and consider where there may be opportunities to benchmark its measures and metrics with its peers to ensure it can identify areas of good practice and potential areas for improvement.
- to enable the Council to have a clearer understanding of the progress it is making towards meeting its workforce ambitions the Council should assure itself that the Organisational Delivery Board is providing effective oversight and driving integration across related programmes of work.

The council has accepted the recommendations and has plans in place to address each recommendation.

Leadership & Management

Leadership and management across the council has continued to strengthen. We have been faced with many challenges adapting to a number of new working practices and evolving landscapes. Many services are still feeling the impact of the pandemic legacy and like all other authorities across the UK, the demand for support and services continues to be heightened, needing strong leaders.

Developing our Leaders

The Corporate Plan 2022/2027 sets out the council's vision, values and priorities and in relation to leadership states that:

"Our leaders and managers have a tremendous impact on the council's culture and through our leaders we want to provide a sense of vision, purpose and inspiration to our employees. Creating Team NPT will enable us to learn from one another, build organisational confidence, lead to innovation and improve outcomes for the people who live and work in Neath Port Talbot".

The starting point when considering the development of managers and leaders in the council is to understand what it is we want our managers and leaders to be – what are the things we want them to do and what do we expect of them in terms of behaviours and values; taking into account of course the council's Corporate Plan.

Every Corporate Director, Head of Service and Accountable Manager currently has a job description in place which articulates the expectations of their role, and particularly for employees in roles that require professional membership and / or registration, these job descriptions will refer to leadership expectations of professional and regulatory bodies. We reviewed these arrangements in 2023/2024, and this has led to the development and agreement of a Leadership Competency Framework. This framework outlines the knowledge, skills, values and behaviours associations with an effective, 21st Century Public Leader. The Framework is encompassed in new template job descriptions and person specifications for the following levels:

- Head of Service
- Strategic Manager
- Accountable Manager

The council has a range of policies and procedures in place which set out the expectations of our leaders and managers in relation to a range of employment and corporate processes (e.g. financial and governance requirements).

The annual performance appraisal scheme requires every manager, from the Chief Executive downwards, to have regular performance discussions with direct reports, confirming objectives and monitoring progress towards them.

Leadership & Management

Leadership and Management development has been provided over the past 10 years through accessing apprenticeship levy funded programmes such as ILM (levels 5 – 7), and through ad hoc activities provided by Academi Wales and other delivery partners, including, for example:

- Mentoring support for Chief Officers
- Aspiring Corporate Directors (SOLACE)
- Aspiring Heads of Service (SOLACE)
- Digital Leadership Events
- Managing and Leading Hybrid Teams workshops
- Senior Leadership Experience with Academi Wales
- A comprehensive programme of in-house training and development activity has been delivered by the Learning, Training & Development Team

In January 2022, the council confirmed its commitment to the development of its workforce by approving the creation of a significant reserve budget to fund organisational development activity and supporting the development of our whole workforce, including leadership and management development.

The Strategic Workforce Plan The Future of Work Strategy 2022/2027 sets out the following priority action "The development of well-resourced corporate programmes providing comprehensive development at every level of leadership will help ensure that the leaders of today and tomorrow are capable, confident, competent and compassionate".

In 2023, a Leadership Development Pathway was agreed by the Corporate Directors Group. This outlines opportunities for development from the point of induction. The comprehensive programme draws on ILM qualifications – considered the de facto standard in terms of leadership and management qualifications, designed in line with National Occupational Standards. In completing any of the qualifications listed from Levels 2 to 5, participants will also achieve a NVQ qualifications at the same level.

Level 2 Diploma in Team Leading Aimed at first time supervisors/ managers. Limited to those who have been in post less than 12 months (unless the candidate is under the age of 25, or discloses a disability).

Level 3 Diploma in Leadership & Management: Also aimed at first time managers or those with limited experience. A more comprehensive qualification compared with Level 2.

Level 4 Diploma in Leadership & Management: Aimed at those in positions who might be removed from the day to day line management duties and who play an integral role in developing and supporting organisational objectives (e.g. planning and managing projects, managing budgets, identifying personal and professional development requirements, developing and implementing operational plans and developing working relationships with stakeholders, managing team dynamics, delegation and capability building).

Level 5 Diploma in Leadership & Management: Aimed at Middle and Senior Managers supporting organisational objectives through a wide range of functions, such as: informing strategic decision making, managing budgets, planning and implementing change, leading teams and managing delivery of complimentary projects.

Level 7 Diploma in Leadership & Management: Aimed at those with strategic responsibility (or those aspiring to move into more strategic roles). Other actions to develop our Leaders include:

- **Managers' Induction Programme**: Following feedback at manager focus groups and training events, we have developed what was originally intended as a New Manager's Induction Programme. However, further feedback suggests existing managers may benefit from the same activity. The new Development Programme went live on 19th January 2024 and will run over 10 workshops.
- **Cranfield Management School:** Cranfield Management School delivered bespoke training to both Accountable Managers and the Senior Leadership Team on the theme of Leading through Disruptive Times.
- **Internal Coaching Network**: 4 employees start the Level 5 Coaching qualification in February 2024. Another employee has already completed a Level 7 qualification and together, they will form an internal coaching network to support managers at all levels. We will continue to source external coaching where conflicts of interest occur etc.
- **Manager's Peer Network: T**hose working through ILM qualifications have been invited to an event on 1st March with a view to supporting each other through the programme and forming professional networks.

Leadership & Management

Job Design

As well as being able to articulate our expectations, we need to ensure our jobs are designed effectively – that jobs are 'right- sized' and activities organised to create efficiencies.

In March 2022, the Chief Executive initiated a review of the council's organisational design focusing on the senior management leadership level, aiming to "increase capacity at head of service level and also to provide an opportunity to make portfolios more coherent".

The covering paper to the consultation proposals sets out "An opportunity to undertake an organisation design process to design and implement an organisation structure with appropriately designed jobs that measurably enables efficient and effective delivery of the Corporate Plan (ensuring we have the right people in the right place to deliver the Plan)".

The initial actions focussed on where activity sits across the organisation and resulted in some changes in Head of Service portfolios.

Additional capacity has been created through the establishment of an additional Corporate Director (Strategy and Corporate Services) and two Heads of Service (Head of Leisure, Tourism, Culture and Heritage and Head of Housing and Communities).

Additionally, in October 2022, Elected Members approved a proposal to create a Strategic Manager pay grade, to sit in between NPT Grade 13 and the NPT Head of Service Grade. This will not only support the recruitment and retention of senior people, but also support succession planning, providing a bridge post between Accountable Manager level and Head of Service; the learning curve for newly appointed Heads of Service will be significantly reduced. It will increase strategic capacity at the top of the organisation and support the delivery of the council's corporate plan priorities.

Resources to deliver the Leadership and Management Development Framework

The council has allocated resources to delivery of the Strategic Workforce Plan for 2022/2027: The Future of Work Strategy.

The council has established a Future of Work Team to supplement the resources of the People & Organisational Development Service.

This team includes an Organisational Development professional, and the additional capacity has enabled the service to support the review of leadership and management development arrangements.

The reserve funding allocated for Organisational Development will also support the funding of leadership and management development programmes over the next 2–3 years.

Once the leadership and management development programme has been established, it will be necessary to identify resources to ensure its sustainability in the longer term.

"We developed **online courses delivered via a range of platforms**, and this enabled thousands of employees to **continue with their professional development and essential skill learning**."

How do we know if we are getting it right?

In 2023, we developed and agreed an Annual Employee Engagement Survey, ready for launching in April 2024.

Two versions of the survey have been developed; one for schools employees and one for all other employees, but both surveys ask the same questions (terminology used is appropriate to each group of employees).

In 2024 this will give us a base line assessment of employee engagement, and enable us to develop our employee engagement strategy further.

Leadership is one of the key drivers of employee engagement.

Procurement - 'Procurement & commissioning'

Sustainable procurement is the central theme of our procurement work. Sustainable Procurement is defined as:

"The whole process of acquisition, covering goods, services, works and/or capital projects. The process spans the entire life-cycle from the initial concept through to the end of the useful life of the asset (including disposal) or the end of a service contract or a works/capital project".

The council applies many different service delivery models across its procurement operations, using a 'right model for the right service' approach. This includes single/multiple provider frameworks and contracts, use of small Lots, local, regional and pan-regional frameworks, joint ventures and many partnership operations.

With an annual spend on bought in goods, services and works of £264,000,000 in the financial year 2022/2023, the council must manage this spend responsibly.

The procurement landscape in the public sector has changed dramatically over the last 3 years and will continue to change over the next 2 years with the coming into force of the Procurement Bill and Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill and UK procurement reform following the departure from the European Union.

We are faced with the challenge of ever increasing demands and expectations for services at a time when our resources have reduced in real terms.

The current operating context sees increased pressures on councils facing further restrictions on revenue and capital finances. In addition, increased volume and complexity of demand and market pressures on services, particularly social care, creates further challenges. Increased costs due to high inflation, exponentially higher energy costs, the climate change emergency, disruptions in the supply chains and suppliers unable to meet contractual requirements, and the war in Ukraine are all material to the way in which councils approach procurement.

Under the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act, the council is required to prepare a procurement strategy setting out how the council intends to carry out public procurement. The strategy must state how the Council intends to ensure that it will carry out public procurement in a socially responsible way; meet its socially responsible procurement objectives; and state how the council intends to make payments promptly.

The Procurement Strategy is to be reviewed each financial year and revised as appropriate. The council's Procurement Strategy incorporates these legislative requirements and provides an overarching framework for lawful procurement activities, as detailed further below, going forward. The council's vision for procurement is to demonstrate the achievement of value for money through the responsible procurement of its current and future requirements.

There is an aim to operate a mixed economy of service provision, using a diverse range of suppliers, (including small firms, social enterprises and voluntary and community groups), and in-house resources, to ensure high quality services. The council has already demonstrated a clear commitment to this agenda.

Our Procurement Strategy will look to build upon and consolidate the progress that has been made by drawing together a number of different legislative requirements, policy initiatives and aspirations into a single coherent framework.

A Procurement Strategy, approved by members in summer 2024, has been developed with a full appreciation of the complex regulatory framework within which procurement operates, and incorporates the future legislative reforms. It also recognises that it is an area with high risks – with potentially significant impacts on service delivery, financial management and legal compliance, as well as the overall reputation of the council. The specific aims of the Procurement Strategy are:

- To ensure that our procurement activity is undertaken by professionally qualified staff with the aim of compliant, effective procurement. Recruiting, developing and retaining professionally qualified staff will underpin the Councils' ability to address issues and particularly issues of value.
- To ensure that our procurement activity supports the aims and aspirations of the Council, as reflected in our Corporate Plan "Recover, Reset, Renew" 2022 – 2027.
- To ensure all procurement activity is conducted in a fair, open and transparent manner, allowing all potential suppliers to compete for business.
- To ensure that the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 are appropriately promoted in all procurement activities.
- To ensure that principles of the Wales Procurement Strategy Statement are given due regard in all Procurement activities.
- Embracing public procurement transformation and innovation including making procurement accessible for bidders.
- State how the authority intends to ensure that it will carry out public procurement in a socially responsible way.

Procurement - 'Procurement & commissioning' continued...

The council has clear policies in place to increase value through the procurement process via its contract procedure rules and various policies and protocols.

As part of its tender strategy work, it considers ways to meet continuous improvement in its procured services, and ensures obligations within the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 are embedded in procurement processes.

Commissioning officers have detailed expertise and understanding of their expenditure and supplier base, and are able to use this knowledge to commission services which are required by the council. Work however is in isolation from commercial and procurement advisers in some areas but there is an acknowledgement that a cross-council approach to design and implementation is needed to improve procurement functions.

Change Control policy is implemented across the board for all contract changes and variations to enable continued enhancement (where legislation allows). Standard documentation is available and used in all circumstances across all departments and senior managers are engaged in procurement and commercial issues routinely taking advice at key decision points, it is positive to note officers are engaging in procurement processes at an early stage.

Training packages for officers in respect of procurement processes have been developed to ensure procurement knowledge is embedded into service delivery. Systems are in place to allow data and intelligence to be collected on costs incurred, in addition access to tangible data has been obtained to identify themes and areas of expenditure. Toolkits have been developed to address this and ensure the provision of accurate data as we undertake strategic work programmes.

It is acknowledged that focus is still on compliance and standard cost/quality ratios but innovation is considered. Tenders are mainly viewed as legal documents but written in plain language and the procurement team is often invited to contribute to the planning phase but increased visibility of the service throughout 2023/2024 has led to Corporate Procurement having a greater input into commissioning activities, with regular information on expenditure and contractual processes reported to management teams.

Arrangements are in place to address supplier performance and contract and relationship management is recognised by the organisation as being essential to its overall performance.
Well defined systems are in place to target both financial loss and fraud with a proactive approach to issues, such as irregular transaction, duplicate payments and fake creditors and invoices throughout the supply chain.

Post contract reviews are undertaken by most departments on identified categories of expenditure. Potential collusion and market distortion is actively investigated with contract conditions in place to ensure maximum legal protection to the council.

High value and or high profile acquisitions are examined for creating commercial opportunities with a forward work programme of commissioning activities prepared.

It was identified that a number of contract registers are held but in a variety of service areas with no one central or public access to ensure future planning of services and how best organisational spend can be addressed. An all council Contract Register has now been established and went live on our website in Summer 2024.

Officers are working on early engagement with the market when it comes to forthcoming tenders and work has taken place to develop an online contract and procurement register. Future needs are being signalled to the market using a variety of channels including publication of pipeline information and engagement events.

The council is exploring the best approach to Councillor Engagement in procurement and commercial matters to ensure the views of residents and elected representatives filters through to procurement processes. The proposed Procurement Strategy will place members as the leaders in respect of setting goals and strategies for the council.

Performance reporting is undertaken and social benefits achieved as well as savings but restricted to specific procurement exercises and some departments to ensure an accurate representation of benefits realised are identified.
Officers work on early engagement with the market when it comes to forthcoming tenders and work has taken place to develop an online contract and procurement register.

Future needs are being signalled to the market using a variety of channels including publication of pipeline information and engagement events.

Performance reporting is undertaken and social benefits achieved as well as savings but restricted to specific procurement exercises and some departments to ensure that tangible benefits can be identified and communicated to stakeholders.
Social value is embedded into corporate strategy and service delivery and there is a consistent framework for management and delivery. This demonstrates behaviours for collaboration and partnership building with communities and potential suppliers.

There is a proactive approach to integrated small and medium enterprises (SMEs) into procurement and commissioning with an acknowledgement of a convening role that commissioners can have and what the benefit of facilitated relationships between SME's and other providers can bring.

Commissioners communicate with the market the local need and the desired market outcomes.

Risk Management – 'Effective risk management'
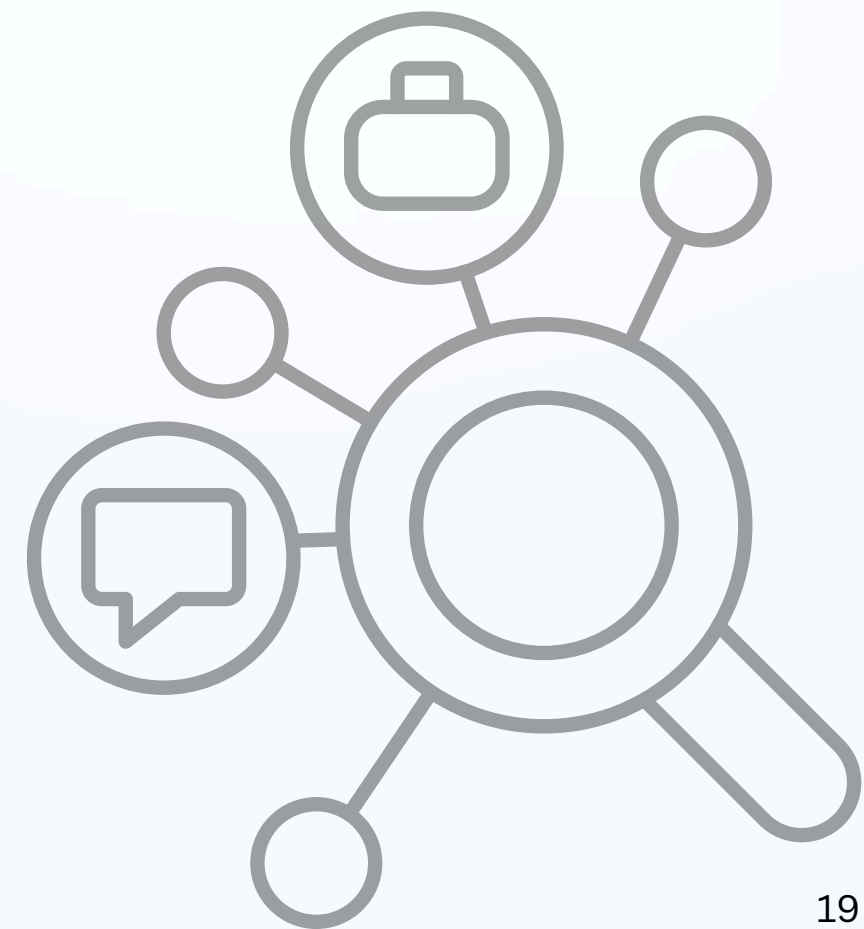
Corporate Risk Management Policy

The Policy demonstrates the council's commitment to the management of risk in order to:

- Support the delivery of the council's vision, purpose and priorities;
- Ensure statutory obligations are met;
- Ensure effective stewardship of public funds, efficient deployment and use of resources and securing value for money for the public purse; Safeguard all stakeholders to whom the council has a duty of care;
- Protect physical and information assets and identify and manage potential liabilities;
- Learn from previous threats, opportunities, successes and failures;
- Preserve, promote and protect the reputation of the council; and
- Build a workforce where improvement, innovation and a responsible approach to risk taking is part of the culture.

The council's management of risk continues to be developed - recognising areas which need to be improved upon to control the level of risk in decision making, functions and service activities which could impact on the achievement of the council's priorities.

Arrangements currently in place are an effective part of the council's corporate governance framework leading to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public funds, good public engagement and is ultimately essential for the council to demonstrate that it is acting in the best interests of the community it serves.

Corporate Risk Management Arrangements 2023/2024

- At a strategic level, the council's strategic risk register was reported to Cabinet on 8th November 2023 and Governance and Audit on 13th November 2023.
- At a directorate level, the four directorate risk registers were presented to Corporate Directors Group in February 2024 for review. Following this initial review they will be monitoring within the directorate's own Senior Management Team
- At a service level – risks were identified via the service plan process (introduced from 2022-2023). Service plans are completed by accountable managers who are required, at an operational level to identify and manage risks associated with service delivery.

Reflecting on the content of the risk registers, there is a clear need for more support for senior managers on the identification, scoring and mitigation of risks.

During 2023/2024, feedback was received from our Governance and Audit Committee on the layout of our strategic risk register. Generally, it was viewed as cumbersome, difficult to read and monitor risks.
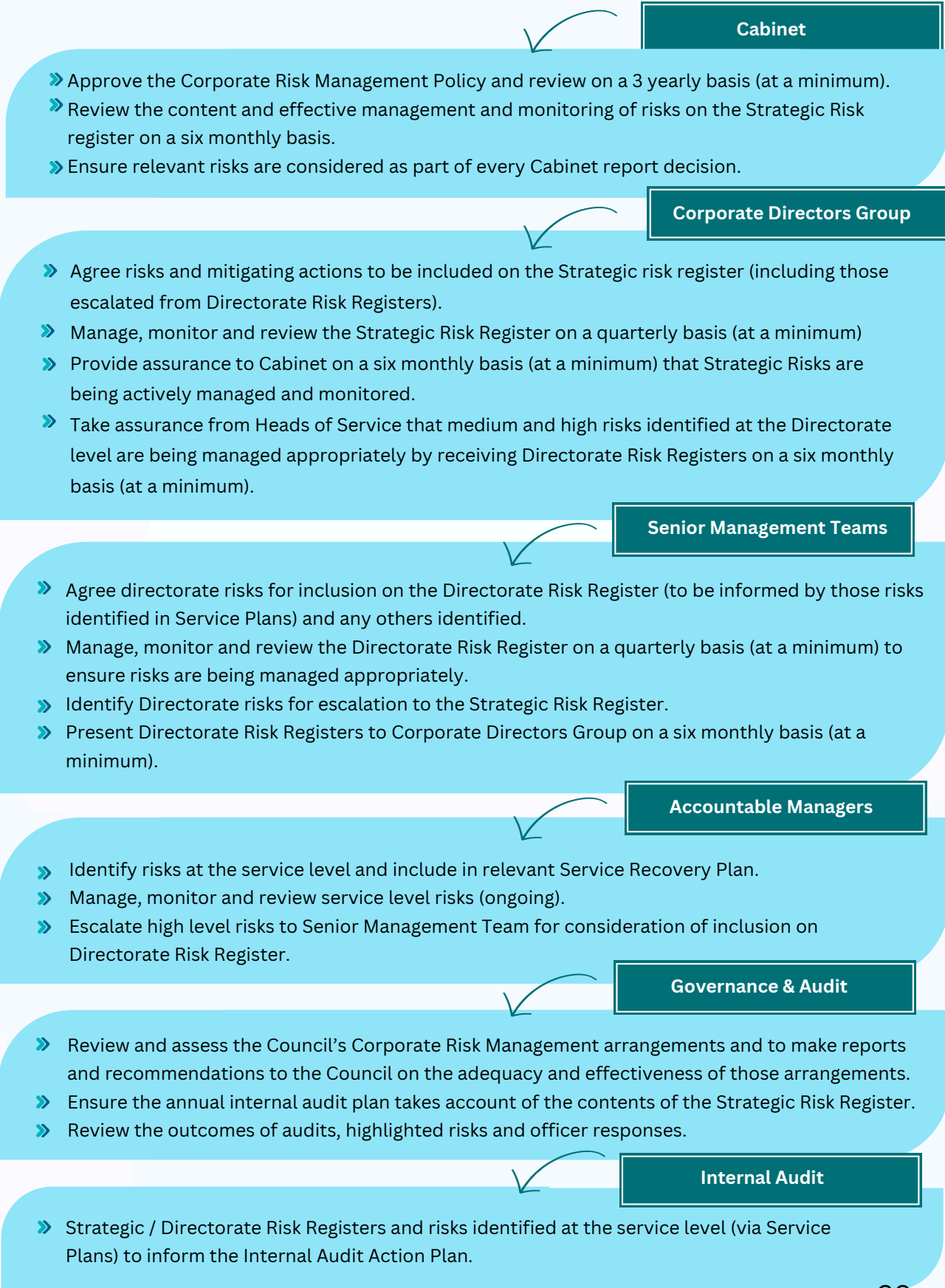
As a result of this feedback initial research was undertaken by officers as to ways in which the layout could be improved and become more user-friendly.

Conversations have taken place with other councils in Wales to look at best practice and a template has been prepared in readiness for 2024/2025.

Further feedback was provided by senior officers on scoring mechanisms and strengthening the escalation/de-escalation process. This work will also be added to our self-assessment improvement action plan as part of the risk management process.

By strengthening our framework, we provide a broad and high level approach of good practice and ensure the management of risk is structured and comprehensive.

As part of our drive to not only improve process, but also encourage personal development, we will be looking to deliver further training for both Governance and Audit Committee members and officers to ensure there is sufficient scrutiny and challenge.

Cabinet

- » Approve the Corporate Risk Management Policy and review on a 3 yearly basis (at a minimum).
- » Review the content and effective management and monitoring of risks on the Strategic Risk register on a six monthly basis.
- » Ensure relevant risks are considered as part of every Cabinet report decision.

Corporate Directors Group

- » Agree risks and mitigating actions to be included on the Strategic risk register (including those escalated from Directorate Risk Registers).
- » Manage, monitor and review the Strategic Risk Register on a quarterly basis (at a minimum)
- » Provide assurance to Cabinet on a six monthly basis (at a minimum) that Strategic Risks are being actively managed and monitored.
- » Take assurance from Heads of Service that medium and high risks identified at the Directorate level are being managed appropriately by receiving Directorate Risk Registers on a six monthly basis (at a minimum).

Senior Management Teams

- » Agree directorate risks for inclusion on the Directorate Risk Register (to be informed by those risks identified in Service Plans) and any others identified.
- » Manage, monitor and review the Directorate Risk Register on a quarterly basis (at a minimum) to ensure risks are being managed appropriately.
- » Identify Directorate risks for escalation to the Strategic Risk Register.
- » Present Directorate Risk Registers to Corporate Directors Group on a six monthly basis (at a minimum).

Accountable Managers

- » Identify risks at the service level and include in relevant Service Recovery Plan.
- » Manage, monitor and review service level risks (ongoing).
- » Escalate high level risks to Senior Management Team for consideration of inclusion on Directorate Risk Register.

Governance & Audit

- » Review and assess the Council's Corporate Risk Management arrangements and to make reports and recommendations to the Council on the adequacy and effectiveness of those arrangements.
- » Ensure the annual internal audit plan takes account of the contents of the Strategic Risk Register.
- » Review the outcomes of audits, highlighted risks and officer responses.

Internal Audit

- » Strategic / Directorate Risk Registers and risks identified at the service level (via Service Plans) to inform the Internal Audit Action Plan.

Digital, Data & Technology

The Neath Port Talbot Digital, Data and Technology Strategy was approved by full Council on the 12 July 2023, and sets out our strategic vision, aims and delivery themes, demonstrating how the council will embrace new approaches and emerging technologies to provide our users with the best value, user-centred products and services.

Through the development of the Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy, many of the key components for improvement have been drawn together into a cohesive structure and have supported delivery plans across a range of service areas.

All staff across the Digital Services Division have been engaged in the development and ongoing evolution of the DDaT strategy through their 1:1 appraisal, team meetings and annual staff surveys. This is helping individuals understand how the roles they play are contributing to the wider divisional and corporate objectives.

Over 2023/2024, the Digital Services team has continued to deliver extensive reactive support across the council's service areas. Through the introduction of a service delivery pipeline and supporting Digital Transformation Board, we have demonstrated how we have prioritised and approved planned developments, moving towards a more proactive approach for workload management. Full engagement with all directorates and service area senior management teams have taken place and will continue quarterly or as needed basis.

We have seen improvements through our formal succession planning, by developing career paths for hard to recruit roles, and the delivery of an improved training plan which has begun to reduce some pressure and alleviate some of the backlog. However, there remains a significant volume of work to be completed and recruitment and retention remain a concern.

The new Data team is now established and consists of a Head of Data, a Senior Data Analyst and a Data Analyst. The team has started making good progress in a number of areas including developing governance frameworks to oversee data management and research activities (data management board, research board); promoting the use of accepted data standards across the council; engaging with partners and stakeholders to build strong relationships, share data and plan for future research collaborations; identifying, developing and implementing data platforms that will enable transformative use and visualisation of data; and promoting training opportunities in basic and advanced data analytics across the council.

This work is feeding into the development of a data strategy which will be aligned to the council's objectives and the DDaT strategy and will be informed by insights from a data maturity assessment completed in late 2023.

The data team have begun engaging with service areas to understand the data they hold, its purpose and the process by which it is collected; they assess the data quality of several datasets and look at linking data across directorates. The team are supporting management by providing new visualisations and analysis to help achieve our strategic theme 'Data and research led decision making.'

During 2023/2024, there has been several independent scrutiny exercises undertaken on the DDat Strategy, including the Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review exercise undertaken between July and October 2023. The findings of the report were very positive, with only one recommendation identified which has since been addressed.

Digital, Data and Technology Strategy

Our Vision

Neath Port Talbot Council will adopt the best Digital, Data and Technology to transform the services we deliver to residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitors.

Our Strategic Aims

- We will continue to put all our residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitors at the centre of what we do.
- We will fully capitalise on the transformational benefits that Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) offers, by ensuring it becomes fully embedded in how council operates – across people, process and technology - aligned to the Corporate Plan.
- We will ensure all DDaT services are robust, responsive, inclusive, ethical, scalable and secure. This will enable the council to undertake its day-to-day business, meet its statutory obligations and support business transformation through the innovative application of DDaT across service areas.
- We will become smart and connected as a council and as a place, joining up and using the data we hold to improve our understanding of what matters to our residents.

Our Strategic Delivery Themes

Digital by design

We will design and develop digital services based on our residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitor needs.

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Officers engaged with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to undertake their Digital Self-Assessment review. Feedback on the council's position was extremely positive, scoring 65 out of 65 on the topics covered, with WLGA commenting:

"The council's strategic approach to digital is well aligned with its other key plans and strategies and those of its partners and it has strong arrangements to communicate its strategic digital approach"

Digital, Data & Technology

continued...

As part of the development of the new Digital Services Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy, we reviewed the previous strategy 'Smart and Connected' and the Corporate Plan, ensuring we are building on the foundations previously laid down. Within the new strategy, one of our strategic aims is to 'continue to put all our residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitors at the centre of what we do'.

Our products and services build upon our digital service standards and code of practice which works toward delivering on our strategic themes. This provides the Digital Service teams with a framework to fully understand user needs and outcomes requirements through service mapping, user research and data for the strategic themes 'Data and research led decision making' and 'Using the right technology.' All this forms a clear roadmap for us to deliver products and services which will provide continuous iterative improvement to service delivery and aid service areas and the council to meet its objectives.

As part of the roadmap to delivering on our strategy, we have plans underway that will provide an infrastructure that is flexible enough to support the needs of the council for the foreseeable future. This will also become a significant asset for the council, providing a safe and secure foundation for innovative products and services, data storage and information exploitation.

With a willingness for service areas to exploit technology to help achieve their objectives, we have seen a rise in interest for the provision of digital solutions. Recently, we have introduced Business Relationship Officers to liaise with service areas and gain understanding of their strategic aims and objectives and marshal digital services resources to work with them to deliver. We have also developed and deployed multi-disciplinary teams to aid in rapid, agile iterative delivery for service areas.

To ensure that there is sufficient governance for the demand in digital solutions, we have introduced a Digital Transformation Board to prioritise and approve planned developments. The board will provide authorisation and oversight for objectives delivered, resources deployed and cost budget control.

Financial Planning

'Managing expenditure'

The council understands the resources required to deliver effective and efficient services at cost centre/activity level. This then aggregates up to the level of resources required to deliver the overall council budget.

Through the development of a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), which is updated annually, a number of strategic interventions to redesign the way in which some of its services are delivered have been detailed. These include increased use of automation and robotics, and a number of service reviews in relation to accommodation and transport. The council has an established process to monitor variations on a monthly basis through its budget monitoring process. These variations do not only focus on financial variances but seek to understand the activity which drives any variances.

The council is aware that to understand and influence costs, it is imperative to understand the activity which drives that cost. Our governance arrangements are such that Corporate Directors are responsible for delivering their services within an overall financial envelope referred to as their 'cash limit'. Where possible, Directors will take action to contain the causes of any variations, if not possible they will look to take action elsewhere to contain overall expenditure within the cash limit.

Moving forward, and taking into account global financial pressures, there is a balance required of delivering statutory services and planning for the longer-term, alongside being innovative and trying new things to make improvements. Finance officers and senior management have good understanding and a pragmatic approach to Directorate needs and are required to deliver a holistic approach to budget setting and recognising challenges. The council has quantified inflationary, demand and demographic pressures which are reviewed on an annual basis, accepting that this cannot and will not be an exact science.

These approaches will include increased use of automation and robotics and a number of service reviews in relation to accommodation and transport. The medium term financial plan will be essential in determining what and where improvements can be made, this will underpin all other choices. Individual service managers are aware of the demands within their own areas and work to ensure that the service meets the customers' needs in the most efficient way.

Performance is currently not compared with other councils, and various bench-marking measures have come and gone over the years. Historically, it has proven to be exceptionally difficult to compare costs with other council's on a like-for-like basis. Differences in accounting arrangements has meant that previous exercises have ended up focussing on issues such as apportionment of overheads as opposed to any meaningful comparisons.

'Managing income'

Income generation remains an area where there is still work to be done, and this is accepted across senior management and continues to need significant attention in the foreseeable future.

Reflecting on the current budget, rising costs and future Welsh Government budget settlements, maximising income generation for the benefit of the council, residents, businesses and the environment was seen as an area that could yield results in the medium-term. It was felt that this should be a specific role and not an add-on to a current role. More emphasis will be focused on commercial strategy, prioritising services where there are established market opportunities.

Investment in capacity to maximise external grant income is key. In addition, there is work ongoing to review fees and charges and determining whether they are proportionate to the cost of services and regulatory activity. This work is linked to the strategic outcomes the council wishes to achieve.
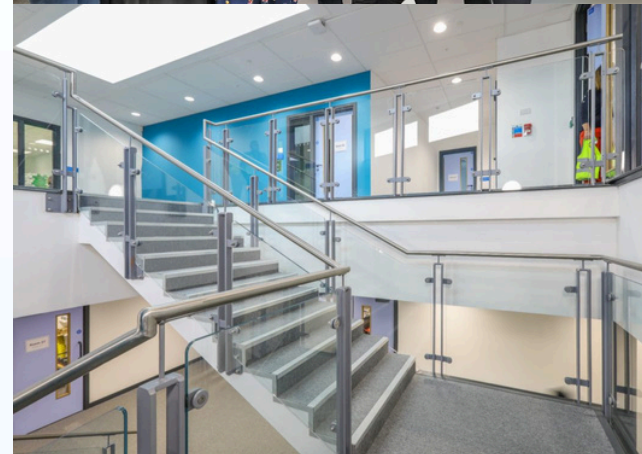
Physical Assets & Facilities

The council has an existing Asset Management Strategy in place to manage its land and property portfolio. The strategy has recently been updated and forms part of the council's Corporate Asset Management Framework.

The Corporate Asset Management Strategy, as part of the new framework, also ensures that progress is being made on setting the council's strategic objectives for asset management whilst also being aligned with the Corporate Plan.

Over a number of years significant progress has been made rationalising the council's property portfolio by utilising fewer buildings more efficiently. This has been done whilst front-line services and maintaining service delivery have also been protected. However, continued financial constraints has meant that innovation and the efficient use of its remaining resources remain at the forefront of the council's priorities moving into 2024/2025.

The information accumulated as part of the revised Asset Management Plan will, together with other supporting information, enable the council to make evidence based decisions when identifying the type and location of buildings that are required to accommodate council activities in the future.

The current landscape provides both opportunities and challenges that require the council to review the basis for holding assets, whilst also seeking new opportunities such as collaborating with other public sector organisations to deliver services now and in the future.

The council's Corporate Asset Management Framework will provide an overview of our land and property portfolio, together with our main priorities for managing and developing the portfolio over the next five years.

Currently, property asset needs within the council are not fully understood by all sections. Moreover, the capacity and capability of the existing professionals that work within property services is not always recognised or fully utilised by other sections within the council. This is addressed in the new Property Asset Management Plan.

The retention of a professional property team recognises the importance of 'inbuilt intelligence' in key property-related service areas. The strategy endorses the continuation of a coordinated property related service, whilst drawing in private sector support when needed to drive innovation/change and major asset related project delivery.

Whilst a Corporate Landlord model operates within the council, it has only been implemented in part, and the strategy will ensure that over the life of Corporate Asset Management Framework, it is fully implemented to enable all strategic property and property compliance matters to be managed corporately across the Council's various service areas.

The Corporate Landlord model needs to be fully endorsed, supported and resourced to ensure that all property decisions are taken with the full benefit of professional property advice, and that they align with the Corporate Plan.

Maintenance and statutory compliance for our buildings is a significant financial commitment for the council. The council currently has challenges relating to the age, condition and suitability of its portfolio. It is vitally important that assets that are retained in the longer term are maintained to ensure a safe and appropriate environment to deliver services, whilst also supporting customer/service users and the workforce. It is also important that both revenue and capital funding is prioritised to the areas of most need. There is a balance between needing to maintain the existing council assets, alongside achieving its aims and objectives.

To ensure that the council secures value for money for externally procured work, it maintains an intelligent client capability. It is through strong planning of future revenue and capital planned maintenance works, together with the maintenance of an intelligent client capability, that budgets will be spent more efficiently with emergency or reactive maintenance being reduced.

It is appropriate that the council regularly reviews the assets within its portfolio to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and aligned with its corporate priorities and objectives. To do this, we will implement an asset challenge process.

The performance of each asset against strategic and policy objectives will feed into the asset challenge process. This means that each asset should be subject to regular scrutiny to assess whether they are delivering or remain capable of delivering their objectives. This will enable the council to make informed choices about the future of its assets in a structured and objective fashion. The Strategic Asset Management Group will provide oversight of the asset challenge process, with relevant decisions referred on to Cabinet/Council.

The council works closely with other public sector organisations across Neath Port Talbot to explore opportunities to reduce the cost of premises and make assets work better for its communities and customers. Through these and other partnerships, the council will continue to explore, develop and exploit opportunities for collaborative working with public and quasi-public bodies by amalgamating asset knowledge to help promote economies of scale, sustainable levels of occupation and better working practices.

Decarbonisation and biodiversity are key elements that can be delivered through the management of our property portfolio. The Welsh Government has declared a climate emergency and has set the ambitious aspirational target of a net-zero carbon public sector by 2030. If the council is to meet this climate target, it must act to tackle climate change by prioritising carbon reduction and zero emissions through more responsible and sustainable asset management.

The council also declared a climate emergency in September 2022, and has a Decarbonisation and renewable Energy Strategy in place and currently developing a Net Zero costed delivery plan across the council's operational service delivery, with support from external consultants to identify the actions and improvement programmes required to transition and achieve Net Zero.

CONTACT US

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APPENDIX 1 - IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN 2023/2024

Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

Improvement Action Plan

As a result of this self-assessment 3 actions have been identified to be added to the council's improvement action plan. In addition, the improvement actions noted in the self-assessments undertaken for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 are also reflected in the table below, with progress to date highlighted in amber. Whilst these actions are ongoing there has been a significant amount of work undertaken to move work forward, alongside balancing service delivery and managing a range of external challenges.

Q1 & Q2 - EXERCISING FUNCTIONS EFFECTIVELY AND USING RESOURCES ECONOMICALLY, EFFICIENTLY & EFFECTIVELY (*How well are we doing and how do we know?*)

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Workforce Planning & Leadership and Management				
SA5	Development of a strategic approach to how we develop Chief Officers and senior leaders that enables them to demonstrate the key competencies required of them in their role.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing -** Work on what we expect from our leaders and managers in Neath Port Talbot is in place - Job Description template and competencies for Head of Service/ Strategic Manager / Accountable Manager. A Leadership and Management Development framework was approved by Corporate Directors Group in September 2023 and led to the launching of the New and Curious Manager programme, first cohort was delivered by March 2024. Coaching and Mentoring qualification being made available to managers with initial internal coaches now qualified and establishing a Coaching Network across the council. In 2023 we launched the Ment2Be NPT Mentoring Scheme which is ongoing, matching mentors and mentees, with the aim of supporting career development across the council.
SA25	Review succession planning toolkit.	2021/2023 Self-Assessment	January 2025	**Ongoing** - Review and improve succession planning process, continue with officer engagement and training. A new interation of the toolkit will be launched in January 2025
SA35	Progress recommendations made by Audit Wales as a result of the Springing Forward: Strategic Workforce report.	2023/2024 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**New improvement action -** Two recommendations made by Audit Wales on workforce planning and delivery, and workforce governance monitoring.

Improvement Action Plan

Q1 & Q2 - EXERCISING FUNCTIONS EFFECTIVELY AND USING RESOURCES ECONOMICALLY, EFFICIENTLY & EFFECTIVELY (*How well are we doing and how do we know?*)				
No.	**ACTION DESCRIPTION**	**IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED**	**ACHIEVE BY**	**PROGRESS TO DATE**
Procurement				
SA7	Restructure Procurement Team.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	May 2025	**Ongoing -** Whilst all vacancies have now been filled to ensure the team is best placed to meet the challenges of implementation of the Procurement Act 2023 further reviews are ongoing to ensure all obligations can be met.
SA9	Category spend review.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	Ongoing	**Ongoing -** We need to be able to understand what we are spending our money on and where the opportunities may be to drive improvement. For example, there is need to deliver on net zero carbon targets and also remove the risk to the council's financial stability that is now being challenged by the hike in energy costs and wider inflation. A strategic analysis is being undertaken to challenge why we are spending this money in the first place as well as focusing on how we can drive better value for money and contribute to the delivery of our corporate plan. The work has moved towards a more strategic approach to the council's procurement, underpinned by spend data analysis and policy. In the meantime some immediate consideration has been given to steps that could be taken to ensure appropriate decision making is being embedded throughout the Council now, with the aim of reducing expenditure and improving efficiencies in commissioning and procurement activities.
SA36	The Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders will be updated to take into account the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023.	2023/2024 Self-Assessment	February 2025	**New improvement action -** Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders will be agreed by Cabinet in January 2025 and full Council in February 2025.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Digital, Data & Technology (DDAT)				
SA10	Digital Governance – Developing a robust framework for establishing clear accountability; roles; decision making; and risk and change management authority for all our digital decisions. We will ensure there is appropriate governance arrangements so that decisions are taken by the right people, at the right time, based on the best information available.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing -** Actions within the Cyber Security Strategy - Security and compliance. **Ongoing -** Data classification and retention review. **Ongoing -** Review of Information Asset Owners / Information Asset Management arrangements – linked to updating Information Asset Register.
SA11	Digital Workforce – Developing and growing the digital skills both within Digital Services and across the wider council to deliver services that are citizen and business focused.	2021/2022 Self-assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing -** Embed new Intelligent Client Function across directorates. **Ongoing -** Embedding standards based delivery including IT Infrastructure Library standards, progressing with industry leader to design processes. **Ongoing -** Drive a cultural shift around 'digital transformation' with strong leadership across all management layers. **Ongoing -** Demonstrate the value of DDaT to service design – e.g. the benefits of User Centred Design, how data should inform service design principles. **Ongoing -** Ensure Senior Leaders understand what is required to support the digital agenda. **Ongoing -** Identify next steps to support service transformation – e.g. Social Care / Flare replacement programmes.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Digital, Data & Technology (DDAT)				
SA12	Data - Using and sharing data and evidence to provide the best possible services for citizens and businesses.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing** - Identify, develop and implement data platforms that will enable transformative use of data including Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI), opening up deeper predictive analytics.
				Ongoing - Track key management information and data-driven KPIs in accordance to business objectives and priorities.
				Ongoing - Ensure that data is a core part of strategic decision making for new programmes of work.
				Ongoing - Ensure that complex data modelling (conceptual, logical, physical) is to a high standard and can be used to identify potential opportunities, enabling and facilitating decision making processes.
				Ongoing - Arrange training and input across teams to assist managers in analysing data within their own areas and use analytics to monitor report usage across the council.
				Ongoing - Workstreams with Microsoft to explore developing a 'dataverse' with condensed CRM application stack to improve join up and user experience.
				Ongoing - Develop a data working group to steer priorities across the council for data cleansing and ongoing data management and usage.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Digital, Data & Technology (DDAT)				
SA26	Operational Environment providing resilient and fit for purpose technical architecture aligned to our technical code of practice.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing** - Full review of the technical operating environment, in conjunction with specialist partners. **Ongoing - Full review of the technical operating environment, in conjunction with specialist partners.** **Ongoing** - Develop full service catalogue for operations. **Ongoing** - Review of software and hardware contracts linked to forward payment profile.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Communications / Consultation / Engagement				
SA13	Develop a Strategic Framework for Communications and Marketing. This framework will provide a revision of tone, channels and forms of communication to reinforce the council's vision, values and priorities. The framework will also include principles of good communications and marketing practice.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing -** Work to develop a 'One Council Strategy' to deliver a joined up approach to Communications and Marketing has commenced. A key deliverable of the strategy is the Strategic Framework for Communications and Marketing. A cross directorate working group will support the development of the Framework together with other deliverables of the One Council Strategy.
SA14	Develop a robust and effective Engagement Strategy (both internal and external).	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing -** A review of the existing engagement strategy is currently underway ensuring that it reflects and compliments both the new Strategic Framework for Communications and Marketing and the Public Participation Strategy. A Community of Practice involvement and engagement workshop was held in February 2024. Workshop identified potential themes for strategy and accompanying toolkit.
SA16	Develop a new Internal/Employee Communications and Engagement Strategy.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing -** The Internal/Employee Communications and Engagement Strategy is being developed in tandem with and in a way that reflects and compliments both the Strategic Framework for Communications and Marketing and the Public Participation Strategy. An employee engagement statement was launched in March 2024, and ran for three months. The results of which will be presented to Personnel Committee in 2025 and will inform the baseline information for the strategy.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Communications / Consultation / Engagement				
SA37	Further progress improvement actions set out in the Public Participation Strategy.	2023/2024 Self-Assessment	March 2026	**New improvement action** - Further develop and promote public involvement in the council's Overview and Scrutiny Process.
				New improvement action - Undertaking a programme of work with the council's Democratic Services Committee to consider and enhance diversity in democracy and looking at barriers that could prevent members of the community standing for council.
				New improvement action - Undertaking a detailed programme of work to understand and address concerns relating to harassment, alarm and distress for elected members and how this can sometimes be a barrier for those wishing to participate in the democratic services process.
				New improvement action - Build the capacity of children and young people to participate, sharing knowledge and power with them so that they can shape decision making. Ensure wider representation of seldom heard children and young people, and those with protected characteristics, particularly Additional Learning Needs, in participation activities and work towards embedding children's rights into decision-making, policy and practice within Education Leisure and Lifelong Learning by rolling out training to staff.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Corporate Planning				
SA23	Undertake a review of the council's Corporate Performance Management Framework (CPMF).	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing** - Work is underway to strengthen our performance management arrangements. This will be further underpinned by the all Wales report prepared by Audit Wales on Performance Data.
Q3 - ENSURING GOVERNANCE IS EFFECTIVE FOR SECURING FUNCTIONS AND RESOURCES (what and how can we do better?)				
SA20	Develop a Medium Term Financial Strategy.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing** - Work has progress on development of a Medium Term Financial Strategy however further work is required to develop proposals to ensure the council has a sustainable financial footing.
SA22	Refine the council's approach to the annual self-assessment process.	2021/2022 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing** - Due to other priorities and capacity this improvement work will now be undertaken during 2024/2025.
SA27	Continue with future training of officer groups in the significance of the member and officer relations protocol.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	May 2025	**Ongoing -** Training has been rolled out throughout the council and four sessions were held for officers in 2023/2024. The training has also now been incorporated into the corporate training programme for new Accountable Managers and sessions provided as part of training provided in that forum.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
SA28	All Group Leaders make Standards and Ethics a standing item on their political group meeting agendas; Group Leaders consider bi-annual meetings with the Monitoring Officer to discuss standards and ethics and how they can work together to promote standards within their political groups; Steps be taken to promote the Member Officer Protocol to all elected members and officers of the council, with training provided as appropriate; A series of guidance documents to be circulated to all members in respect of key conduct matters such as declarations of interest, predetermination, conduct case studies and key information for members.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	May 2025	**Ongoing** - All 60 members of Council have received code of conduct training on commencement of their role in 2022. Two refresher sessions were held in 2023/2024, with approximately 72% of members attending the refresher session provided. Further refresher sessions will continue to be provided. As per a request of the Standards Committee, all Group Leaders have been requested to make standards a standard item on their agenda and confirmation has been received that this is the case. Meetings are held on a regular basis with Group Leaders, over and above the target of bi-annual meetings. The Member/Officer Protocol has been considered by the Standards Committee and copies provided to elected members. Key principles associated with the protocol are now incorporated as standard in code of conduct training. Guidance documents in respect of declaration of interests, predetermination, social media and other matters have been forwarded to elected members when created.
SA30	Corporate Procurement to monitor and evaluate compliance looking at what approach sections adopt. Head of Legal & Democratic Services to report annually to the Corporate Governance Group.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing -** A detailed review of procurement practices has been undertaken throughout 2023/2024 to help frame the preparation of the Neath Port Talbot Procurement Strategy. As part of this an analysis of strengths and weaknesses and corporate priorities have been undertaken to help identify strategic objectives and the development of a delivery plan to achieve the same.
SA31	Commence the review of the Partnership Agreement (Compact) between the council and the voluntary sector.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	Sept 2025	**Ongoing -** The review of the Partnership Agreement commenced in 2023/2024 and will be concluded in the spring 2025. The review has been undertaken jointly between the council and the community and voluntary sector which has included workshops and a consultation exercise to inform the final document.

Improvement Action Plan

No.	ACTION DESCRIPTION	IMPROVEMENT ACTION ADDED	ACHIEVE BY	PROGRESS TO DATE
Q3 - ENSURING GOVERNANCE IS EFFECTIVE FOR SECURING FUNCTIONS AND RESOURCES (what and how can we do better?)			
SA32	Commence the review of the Charter between the council and Town and Community Councils.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	Sept 2025	**Ongoing** - At the meeting of the Town & Community Council Liaison Forum on 4th December 2023 it was agreed for volunteers to join a working group to tease out common areas of interest for the Forum to focus on going forward. Two representatives came forward to take part in a discussion on 29th January 2024. The output of that discussion was to be presented to the meeting of the Forum on 27th February but was unfortunately cancelled. For the 2024/2025 Civic year, two meetings of the Liaison Forum have been scheduled.
SA33	Ensure all strategic risks are embedded and further refine Directorate (operational) Risk Registers.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing** - The Strategic Risk Register has been reviewed by Corporate Directors Group and presented to both Cabinet and Governance & Audit Committee. The Directorate Registers have been further refined and are being monitored by Senior Management Teams.
SA34	A review of Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing work to be undertaken by the Information Governance team.	2022/2023 Self-Assessment	March 2025	**Ongoing** - The audit of council information assets and handling is continuing as planned, with higher risk items identified and addressed. Upon completion of the Information Asset Audit, there will be an ongoing review of these information assets and council processing activities as 'Business as Usual' to provide adequate assurance of compliance Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing.