



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

2025/2026

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg

This document is also available in Welsh

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The Purpose of the Annual Governance Statement

The council must publish an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) explaining the governance arrangements that support effective decision-making, accountability, risk management and continuous improvement. It also provides assurance on whether those arrangements are fit for purpose and reflects the outcome of the annual review of effectiveness.

In preparing the Neath Port Talbot Council Annual Governance Statement, the CIPFA/SOLACE *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework* (2016) has been applied, together with the May 2025 addendum.

The AGS forms part of the council's wider corporate governance framework, which also includes a local Code of Corporate Governance and the corporate self-assessment. The council is now in its fifth year of conducting a self-assessment in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

The corporate self-assessment helps evaluate the effectiveness of the council's system of internal control for the year ending 31st March 2026. This Annual Governance Statement contributes to that assessment by demonstrating:

- The council's 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;
- There is clear accountability for the use of those resources to achieve agreed priorities which benefit local people and communities to ensure value for money and long term-sustainability;
- A commitment to innovation and continuous improvement.

The council's system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore provide reasonable, but not absolute, assurance of effectiveness.

Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016) and the 2025 Addendum

The Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework comprises two core principles and five supporting principles, as illustrated in the diagram.

Principles A and B underpin Principles C to G. Together; the seven principles provide the basis for reviewing governance arrangements and supporting continuous improvement.

The next section, *Putting the Principles into Practice*, provides examples of how the Neath Port Talbot Council applies these seven principles in practice. In addition, the council uses a range of mechanisms to review and assess the effectiveness of its governance arrangements.

Table 1 on page 45 highlights the improvements made during 2025/2026 that were identified through the 2024/2025 AGS.

In preparing this AGS, the council has reflected on the governance improvements that need to be reviewed, progressed or further developed during 2026/2027. These are set out in the action plan in **Table 2 on page 63**. The Corporate Governance Group oversee delivery of the action plan, with progress reported to the Strategic Leadership Team throughout the financial year and to the Governance & Audit Committee on a six-monthly basis.



Putting the Principles into Practice

PRINCIPLE A: BEHAVING WITH INTEGRITY. DEMONSTRATING STRONG COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL VALUES, AND RESPECTING THE RULE OF THE LAW	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	1.1 Ensuring members and officers behave with integrity and lead a culture where acting in the public interest is visibly and consistently demonstrated thereby protecting the reputation of the organisation.
1.1.1 Corporate Induction	The Corporate Induction Programme ensures that participants benefit from consistent, council-wide information – gaining an appreciation of our purpose and values, prompting them to consider how they can embody these on a day-to-day basis. There are contributions from HR colleagues, Health & Safety, Learning & Development and more, as well as a “welcome” from a Strategic Director. New starters still receive a “local induction” from their line managers – addressing departmental matters. The Corporate Induction Programme is delivered on a quarterly basis.
1.1.2 Employee Code of Conduct	The Employee Code of Conduct , updated in September 2023, sets out the principles by which all employees should act. This includes the need to make the necessary declarations regarding interests, gifts and hospitality accepted/rejected. The Code of Conduct sets out how all council employees are obliged to ensure that their private interests do not conflict with their public duties and comply with the council’s rules on the registration and declaration of financial and non-financial interests.
1.1.3 Member Code of Conduct	All members and officers are required to comply fully with Codes of Conduct as set out in the Constitution, which sets out the particular roles and responsibilities and provides clarity on the interfaces between these roles. This includes: • Functions and subsections delegated to officers • Members’ Code of Conduct (including social media principles) • Employees’ Code of Conduct • Protocol on Member/Officer Relations Members and Co-opted Members are required to register their personal interests in any business of the council, and to comply with the rules on personal interests set out in the Members’ Code of Conduct. All personal interests disclosed by Members are published on the council’s website within the Member’s profile information. The Monitoring Officer (the Chief Legal Officer) has the specific duty to ensure that the council, its officers, and its elected councillors maintain the highest standards of conduct in all they do., This is based on Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, as amended by Schedule 5, paragraph 24 of the Local Government Act 2000.

	The Standards Committee has a responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the ethical standards of the council, its members, employees and any associated providers of council services, and to report to the council on any matters of concern. The committee is chaired by an independent person, and its role includes determining the outcome of complaints against councillors and co-opted members. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provided an additional duty on group leaders to ensure members within their political group also comply with the Members Code of Conduct and ongoing support will be provided on this function via the Standards Committee. Throughout the year, support has been provided to help Members and Officers understand and comply with the above requirements. Training sessions on the Code of Conduct and related responsibilities have been delivered, and guidance remains available to reinforce the importance of respectful behaviour, appropriate use of resources, and the need to protect confidentiality. Officers continue to follow the Employees' Code of Conduct, including the requirement to declare any conflicts of interest or gifts and hospitality. The Monitoring Officer has continued to carry out the statutory duty to ensure that the council, its officers and its members maintain the highest standards of conduct. This includes providing advice, supporting investigations where required and ensuring that any issues of concern are dealt with appropriately. The Standards Committee has also continued to oversee ethical standards across the organisation, reviewing any complaints, identifying themes and advising on areas where further support or training would be helpful. During the reporting period, there were six complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales concerning county borough Councillors. The Ombudsman did not investigate any of these matters, either because there was no evidence of a breach of the Code of Conduct or because it was not considered to be in the public interest to take them forward. This provides assurance that no issues requiring formal action were identified. Political Group Leaders have also continued to meet their duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to promote good standards of behaviour within their groups, and this will remain an area of ongoing support and engagement through the Standards Committee. Overall, the arrangements in place during 2025/2026 demonstrate that the council continues to take its ethical governance responsibilities seriously and that clear systems, training and oversight structures are in place to support high standards of conduct at all levels.
1.1.4 Members: An induction programme for Members	The induction programme forms part of the council's Strategy and Charter for Member Development (updated 2023) and is structured for both new and returning members. The aim is to provide a supportive and structured development framework to enable members perform their duties. Members elected through by-elections receive a tailored induction. Training takes place following local government elections and continues to be embedded in member training. An annual survey takes place of members to identify any training and development needs.

1.1.5 Staff: New Starter Induction Checklist	New starter induction checklist contains information about the expected standards of behaviour and must be signed by managers and their employees.	
1.1.6 Performance Appraisal Process	All employees within the council should have regular 1:1s or supervision sessions with their manager to address their performance and to discuss training and development needs. Performance appraisal forms have been developed following feedback from managers and employees. The forms focus on: • Discussions between managers and employees • Previous year's achievements • Recording of future objectives, goal outcomes, and • Development needs, including any personal career plans. The HR Team will progress the development of the iTrent HR/Payroll Database. The launch of the Development module will facilitate more effective recording of the appraisal process, provide greater assurance, and allow for reporting on the number of appraisals carried out. Prior to this, the team are carrying out a comprehensive review of our performance appraisal arrangements, with managers, employees and trade unions contributing via focus groups and consultation arrangements.	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	1.2 Ensuring members take the lead in establishing specific standard operating principles or values for the organisation and its staff and that they are communicated and understood. These should build on the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles)	
1.2.1 Corporate vision and values	The council's vision and values are published in the council's Corporate Strategy 2025/2028 . They are also incorporated into our recruitment processes and written into all new and revised job descriptions and person specifications.	

1.2.2 The vision and priorities for staff are contained within the council's Strategic Workforce Plan	The Strategic Workforce Plan: The Future of Work Strategy 2022/2027 was agreed by the council's Personnel Committee in October 2022. During 2023/2024 Audit Wales published their Springing Forward: Strategic Workforce report. The content of the report concluded that the council has a clear vision for its workforce, strengthened by its work with partners, which continues to be a strategic priority for delivering its well-being objectives. Two overall recommendations were made by Audit Wales, and accepted by the council, which are being progressed as improvements. Annual reviews of the Strategy were previously considered by Personnel Committee in 2024 and 2025 where the strategic priorities were confirmed as remaining fit for purpose. The Delivery Plan for 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 were approved for implementation. A review of the Strategy was considered by the Strategic Leadership Team in April 2026 and by CMB in May 2026.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	1.3 Leading by example and using these standard operating principles or values as a framework for decision making and other actions
1.3.1 Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)	The IIA tool, guidance and associated forms were updated in autumn 2023 to comply with the enforcement actions as contained in the Welsh Language Commissioner's decision notice in relation to complaint CS 114 (for further details see the Complaints section page 14). The tool assesses the impact of proposed initiatives relating to key legislation. It is applied to decisions making to consider whether initiatives will have a positive, negative or neutral impact on the community. During 2025/2026 the council's IIA templates (Screening Assessment and Full Assessment) were updated to include impacts that were previously part of the covering reports. These were Crime and Disorder; Counter Terrorism; and Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV). The updated templates were circulated via email to Chief Officers and Accountable Managers and made available on NPT Connect (the intranet).
1.3.2 Declarations of Interest	These are made by members at the beginning of committee meetings and recorded in the meeting minutes, with guidance and training and provided by the Monitoring Officer. The Standards Committee reviews declarations of interest and the granting of dispensations to ensure ethical decision making.

1.3.3 Member and Officer Relations Protocol	A protocol is in place as part of the council's Constitution and Employee Code of Conduct. A review of the protocol was undertaken at the early stages of the member induction programme, as part of the wider review of the council's Constitution. Copies of which have been distributed to officers. The council delivers a structured induction programme for both new and returning Members as part of its Strategy and Charter for Member Development. The programme, which was updated in 2023, provides a supportive framework to help Members carry out their duties effectively, with tailored induction provided to those elected through by-elections. Training is offered immediately following local government elections and remains embedded throughout the civic year, supported by an annual Member survey to identify ongoing training and development needs. As part of the wider constitutional review, the Member and Officer Relations Protocol was examined early in the induction process, and updated copies were issued to officers. The induction programme includes detailed training on the Members' Code of Conduct, social media responsibilities, gifts and hospitality, and the Member/Officer Protocol. Training is delivered to officer groups to support understanding of the respective roles and expectations, and this work will continue in future years. The Standards Committee monitors the Protocol and has recommended minor amendments, which will be incorporated into the Constitution and circulated to Members and officers. The Council's Modernisation Group has considered an update to the Member/Officer Protocol which was reported to Full Council for final approval in May 2026. During the year, Member engagement with ethical governance training remained strong, with 38 of the 60 elected Members attending a follow-up Code of Conduct session, supplemented by two refresher sessions held in September 2025 and February 2026. See section: 1.1.2 Employees Code of Conduct 1.1.3 Members Code of Conduct
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	1.4 Demonstrating, communicating and embedding the standard operating principles or values through appropriate policies and processes which are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are operating effectively
1.4.1 The Anti-fraud, Corruption and Malpractice Strategy	The council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy 2023/2025 was approved by Cabinet on 25th April 2023 and is accessible on the council's intranet and internet websites. In addition, an Anti-Money Laundering Policy is in place and was last updated in September 2025. Audit Wales review of the council's Counter Fraud Arrangements was completed in 2025/2026 and is due to be reported in Quarter 1 2026/27. Update of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy has been deferred to 2026/2027 to ensure appropriate consideration and action of the Audit Wales report outcomes.

1.4.2 Member Interests	Declarations of Interest for Members continue to be a standing item on all Council, Cabinet and Committee agendas. These declarations are formally recorded in the minutes of each meeting, and individual Members' interests are also displayed on the council's website to support transparency and public accountability. The Standards Committee continues to oversee this area and reviews both the declarations made and any dispensations granted to ensure ethical and lawful decision-making. During the year, the Standards Committee has strengthened its support for Members by preparing updated guidance on declarations of interest, accompanied by practical case studies to help Members understand the distinction between personal and prejudicial interests and how these should be managed in practice. This updated guidance is intended to support Members in applying the rules confidently and consistently. The Committee will continue to develop and refine these resources as part of its ongoing commitment to ethical governance. Targeted training has also been provided to Members, including tailored advice on declarations of interest relating to specific decisions where additional clarity was required. This support forms part of the broader programme of ethical governance training delivered throughout the year, ensuring Members understand their obligations and are equipped to apply them correctly in the course of their duties.
1.4.3 Staff Interests	An up-to-date register is held by each directorate and is subject to Internal Audit review annually.
1.4.4 Neath Port Talbot Constitution	The Constitution sets out how the council operates and the process for policy and decision-making. Within this framework all the decisions are taken by Council and Cabinet. The decisions are presented in a comprehensive written format in a standard template. A record of decision-making and supporting materials are published (publicly accessible reports only) on the council's website via Modern.gov. In accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act, 1989, the Monitoring Officer ensures compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations. After appropriate consultation, this officer will report to the full Council in respect of any proposals, decisions or omissions which could be unlawful, or which have been subject of an Ombudsman Investigation resulting in a finding of maladministration. The Monitoring Officer oversees the council's Constitution and ensures it is kept up to date. The Council's Modernisation Group continues to review constitutional provisions on a regular basis to ensure the Constitution is kept up to date. The Constitution is regularly updated and available for public inspection either on the website or in person. The Monitoring Officer has not issued a Section 5 report in 2025/2026. During 2025/2026, the council's Modernisation Group continued its programme of reviewing and updating constitutional provisions to ensure the Constitution remains current, legally compliant and reflective of best practice. In addition to its routine oversight work, the Group has considered revisions to a range of key governance documents, including updates to the Planning Protocol and wider regulatory decision-making arrangements to support clarity, transparency and consistency in how such decisions are taken. The Group has also reviewed and refined several protocols within the Constitution, including the MP/MS Protocol, to ensure that roles, expectations and

	engagement mechanisms with external elected representatives remain clearly defined. This ongoing work demonstrates the council's continued commitment to maintaining a modern, accessible and effective constitutional framework.
1.4.5 Staff Gifts & Hospitality	An up-to-date register is held by each directorate and is subject to Internal Audit review annually.
1.4.6 Whistle-blowing Policy	The council's Whistleblowing Policy encourages workers to disclose any malpractice or misconduct of which they become aware and importantly to provide protection for workers who report allegations of such malpractice or misconduct. Any whistleblowing worker is protected against adverse employment actions (discharge, demotion, suspension, harassment, or other forms of discrimination) for raising allegations of business misconduct. The policy was most recently updated and approved in February 2025 and is accessible on the council's intranet and internet websites.
1.4.7 Corporate Complaints & Compliments	The Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report is presented to the Governance & Audit Committee to support the Committee in discharging its functions under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, namely, to review and assess the council's ability to handle complaints effectively and to make reports and recommendations in relation to those arrangements. The Annual Report was presented to the Committee on 28th October 2025. Operational oversight is supported through the Corporate Complaints Group, which comprises officers with responsibility for dealing with complaints and meets quarterly to share good practice and identify and implement improvement actions. During 2025/2026, an Internal Audit Review of Corporate Complaints was undertaken. The review examined the processes and controls in place for corporate complaints and was limited to corporate complaints only; it did not include compliments, comments or specialised complaints processes, such as Social Services complaints. In response, a detailed action plan has been developed to address the eight recommendations arising from the review. This included the development of a revised Corporate Complaints and Compliments Policy, which was approved by Cabinet on 12th March 2026. The revised Corporate Complaints and Compliments Policy meets the requirements of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Model Complaints Policy.
1.4.8 Social Services Compliments & Complaints	Legislation requires social services authorities to maintain a procedure for considering complaints and representations and the purpose of this report is to provide a review and statistical analysis of the complaints, comments and compliments received by Social Services during the reporting period. The Social Services Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2024/2025 was prepared and reported to Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny Committee on 19th March 2026 . No systemic issues were identified.

1.4.9 Contract Procedure Rules	The council's Contract Procedure Rules, Employee Code of Conduct and the Procurement Act 2023 require officers and members not to have any involvement in a tender process where they have a potential conflict of interest. They should have no role whatsoever that should negate the need for any declarations of interest to be made. The Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders were updated and approved by Full Council in February 2025 to reflect the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023. Following approval, a structured training programme for officers commenced to ensure consistent understanding and implementation of the updated procurement framework. Throughout 2025/2026, the council has continued to deliver targeted procurement training to officers across all service areas. To date, 226 members of staff have completed this training, strengthening organisational compliance with procurement legislation and improving assurance around purchasing activity, contract management and decision-making. The programme will continue into the next year to ensure all relevant staff receive the necessary training and support.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	2.1 Seeking to establish, monitor and maintain the organisation's ethical standards and performance
2.1.1 Corporate Procurement Team	Ethical standards are acknowledged by the team when undertaking tender work for other sections and when developing and evaluating procurement processes and have been enshrined in all tendering activities. The team also monitor and evaluate compliance looking at what approach sections adopt. The Procurement Strategy issued to all sections sets out processes that should be valued.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	2.2 Underpinning personal behaviour with ethical values and ensuring they permeate all aspects of the organisation's culture and operation
2.2.1 Member training	The induction programme forms part of the council's Strategy and Charter for Member Development and is structured for both new and returning members. The aim is to provide a supportive and structured development framework to enable members to perform their duties. Members elected through by-elections receive a tailored induction. This training programme took place following local government elections in May 2022 and continues to be embedded in member training. An annual survey takes place of members to identify any training and development needs. Annual reports are presented to Standards Committee. Members Declaration of Acceptance of Office – undertaken to abide by the Members' Code of Conduct. See section 1.1.3 - Member Code of Conduct
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	2.3 Developing and maintaining robust policies and procedures which place emphasis on agreed ethical values

2.3.1 Recruitment and Selection Policy 2018	The Recruitment Policy has been reviewed and was approved by Personnel Committee in September 2024. Training is provided to recruiting managers, and courses are undertaken in relation to Recruitment and Selection, Safe Recruitment and other Employment Policies and Procedures. A range of training in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion is available.	
2.3.2 Pay Policy Statement	The 2026/2027 review has taken place, and the revised Pay Policy Statement was presented to Council on 5th March 2026. The Pay Policy Statement provides the framework for decision making on pay, and in particular, decision making on senior pay. Preparing and publishing this statement is a requirement under the Localism Act 2011. The provisions in the Act do not apply to the staff of local authority schools and therefore teaching staff are not included in the scope of this document.	
2.3.3 Contract Procedure Rules	Training is available to staff and advice booklets are provided. Ongoing support is provided to sections in complying with procurement rules and processes. A structured training programme for officers is in place to ensure consistent understanding and implementation of the updated procurement framework. The council's Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders were updated and approved by Full Council in February 2025 to reflect the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023. Throughout 2025/2026, the Council has continued to deliver targeted procurement training to officers across all service areas. To date, 226 members of staff have completed this training, strengthening organisational compliance with procurement legislation and improving assurance around purchasing activity, contract management and decision-making. The programme will continue into the next year to ensure all relevant staff receive the necessary training and support.	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	2.4 Ensuring that external providers of services on behalf of the organisation are required to act with integrity and in compliance with high ethical standards expected by the organisation	
2.4.1 Ethical Employment in Supply Chain Policy 2019	Policy introduced in 2019 and annual reports brought to Cabinet and Scrutiny setting out how the council complies with the arrangements set out in the policy. A copy of all partnership agreements are logged centrally with the Chief Legal Officer. This work was completed in 2023/2024 and updated in 2025/2026 with a report to full Council on all Joint Committees the council participated in. The focus of this work was reviewed in 2025/2026 as part of the council's Corporate Strategy review.	

2.4.2 Continue to participate in a number of partnerships.	Governance arrangements are in place for each partnership which: • Clarify the roles of members both individually and collectively in relation to the partnership, and to the council; • Clearly set out the legal status of the partnership; • Make clear the extent to which representatives or organisations both understand and make clear to all other partners the extent of their council to bind their organisation to partner decisions. Given the importance of collaboration to this council, Scrutiny committees review existing collaborations to make sure they were all on a strong footing and are productive to enable the council's Cabinet to be confident that those arrangements are working in the best interest of citizens. It is also ensuring that there is clear and effective democratic oversight of those arrangements. The council plays an active role in collaborative arrangements to ensure the best return for our citizens and other stakeholders. These arrangements are reviewed regularly to ensure they meet the required needs of the council. In areas where they do not meet them, reports are brought to members highlighting various risks and concerns for the decisions to be made on future actions. To ensure that a copy of all partnership agreements are logged centrally with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services. This work was completed in 2023/2024 and updated in 2024/2025 with a report to full Council on all Joint Committees the council participated in. The focus of this work was reviewed as part of the council's Corporate Strategy work.
2.4.3 Procurement Strategy	The purpose of the Procurement Strategy is to set out how we are changing procurement within the council, to enhance our contract management arrangements and set out the vision and strategic direction necessary to deliver better outcomes for our communities. The Strategy also sets out how the council intends to carry out procurement in a socially responsible way, and how to meet the objectives it has set. The strategy has been developed with a full appreciation of the complex regulatory framework within which procurement operates. 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 strategy attempts to meet the requirements of different procurement objectives such as obtaining value for money, procuring responsibly and supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and the Voluntary and Community sector (VCS). It recognises that these objectives can sometimes be in conflict with one another, and that achieving the best outcome will often depend on the circumstances surrounding a particular procurement exercise. SMEs play a major role in Neath Port Talbot in creating jobs and generating income and can deliver real social and economic benefits. Engagement with this sector is a core operational way of doing business, integrated into all directorates and departments and activities with regular reporting against targets. VCSs can help play a significant role in delivering social value.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	3.1 Ensuring members and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the rule of the law as well as adhering to relevant laws and regulations

3.1.1 Cabinet and Committee reports contain a section entitled “Legal Impacts” so that legal obligations are placed at the forefront of decision making.	‘Safe and Legal Decision-Making Training’ is available for relevant officers and is provided on an annual basis by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to council officers. Democratic Services Officers and Legal Services monitor reports to ensure legal compliance.	
	See section 1.4.4. The Constitution	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:		3.2 Creating the conditions to ensure that statutory officers, other key post holders and members are able to fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements
3.2.1 Financial management arrangements	We have a range of policies and procedures (such as financial regulations, financial procedures, contract standing orders, accounting instructions and officer delegations) that conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement of the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010). A review of Accounting Instructions was completed during 2022/2023.	
3.2.2 Democratic Services - support function.	The Head of Democratic Services presents an annual report to Democratic Services Committee and Council, outlining the resource requirements to enable the Council, Cabinet and Committee to receive high level support and discharge of its democratic functions. The Chair of the Democratic Services Committee presents an Annual Report of the Democratic Services Committee to full Council updating Members on the work that has been undertaken by the Committee during the previous civic year.	
	See section 1.4.4 - The Constitution	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:		3.3 Striving to optimise the use of the full powers available for the benefit of citizens, communities and other stakeholders

3.3.1 Cabinet and Committee Reports contain a section entitled “Legal Impacts” so that legal obligations are placed at the forefront of decision making.	Legal Enterprise Case Management Software provide audit trails of legal advice given and time spent providing legal advice on all matters. Transaction documentation and hard copies of legal advice provided are stored by the council. Legal training is provided to officers on a regular basis to ensure they are up to date with recent legal developments and powers available.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	3.4 Dealing with breaches of legal and regulatory provisions effectively
3.4.1 Data Protection Breaches Panel review cases.	Chief Legal Officer and Information Risk Officers report annually to the Corporate Governance Group to give an assurance that the current system for dealing with data protection breaches is fit for purpose. The council retains a central breach register is maintained and presented to the Corporate Governance Group on a quarterly basis to support oversight, monitoring and organisational learning. The number of recorded breaches has reduced, and there have been no emerging systemic issues requiring intervention or changes to existing processes. During the year, three matters were reported to the Information Commissioner’s Office. In each case, the ICO determined that no further action or penalties were required, providing additional assurance that the council’s internal handling, assessment and reporting of data protection incidents remain appropriate and compliant with regulatory expectations. =These outcomes collectively demonstrate that the Council’s data protection governance arrangements continue to operate effectively, with strong monitoring, timely reporting and clear lines of accountability embedded across services.
3.4.2 Internal Audit Special Investigations /Disciplinary Cases	Internal Audit special investigations are led by the Audit Manager or Senior Auditor. With outcomes reported to senior management and Governance and Audit Committee. Disciplinary investigations are completed in line with the Council’s Disciplinary Procedure and Disciplinary Investigations – Managers Guide. The council requires that all officers who carry out disciplinary investigations have undertaken the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) Investigation Officers training. In addition, Heads of Service who are the decision makers in disciplinary investigations must have attended the ACAS Decision Maker training.

	See section 3.3.1 - Cabinet and Committee Reports
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	3.5 Ensuring corruption and misuse of power are dealt with effectively
3.5.1 Standards Committee	The Monitoring Officer carries out the statutory duty to ensure that the council, its officers and its Members maintain the highest standards of conduct. This includes providing advice, supporting investigations where required and ensuring that any issues of concern are dealt with appropriately. The Standards Committee has also continued to oversee ethical standards across the organisation, reviewing any complaints, identifying themes and advising on areas where further support or training would be helpful (but only considers specific details of individual cases if a complaint is formally referred to the Standards Committee by the Monitoring Officer or the Ombudsman for Wales). There were six complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales concerning county borough Councillors. The Ombudsman did not investigate any of these matters, either because there was no evidence of a breach of the Code of Conduct or because it was not considered to be in the public interest to take them forward. This provides assurance that no issues requiring formal action were identified. Political Group Leaders have also continued to meet their duties under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to promote good standards of behaviour within their groups, and this will remain an area of ongoing support and engagement through the Standards Committee. Overall, the arrangements in place during 2025/2026 demonstrate that the Council continues to take its ethical governance responsibilities seriously and that clear systems, training and oversight structures are in place to support high standards of conduct at all levels. Also see: Section 1.4.1 - Anti-fraud, Corruption and Malpractice Strategy Section 1.4.6 - Whistleblowing Policy

PRINCIPLE B: ENSURING OPENNESS AND COMPREHENSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT		
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:		4.1 Ensuring an open culture through demonstrating, documenting and communicating the organisation's commitment to openness
4.1.1 Corporate Governance Group	The Corporate Governance Group oversee any risks identified to governance arrangements, arising from annual reports. The following reports are available to the public. 1. Corporate Strategy Annual Report 2. Corporate Self-Assessment 3. Strategic Equalities Plan Annual Report 4. PSB Well-being Plan Annual Report 5. Welsh Language Standards Annual Report 6. Welsh Language Promotion Strategy Annual Report 7. Internal Audit Report 8. Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 9. Social Services Complaints Annual Report 10. Ombudsman Annual Report 11. Pay Policy Statement 12. Annual Equalities in Employment Report 13. Gender Pay Gap Report 14. Social Partnership Annual Report 15. Director of Social Services Annual Report	
4.1.2 FOI Policy/FOI Publication Scheme	Freedom of Information (FOI) Policy was published in March 2014. A review of the Publication Scheme took place in 2020, to consider updated advice from the Information Commissioner's Office and found only minor changes were required to consider updated legislative requirements. This was then considered and the Publication Scheme updated in Autumn 2023. Some updated amendments were made to reflect legislative changes in September 2024. This will be continually monitored to ensure legislative compliance. Work is ongoing to look at ways to further promote and publish other information held by the council such as Freedom of Information Act responses with officers undertaking a programme of work to look at publication of FOI responses which will continue in 2026/2027.	
4.1.3 The council's	The council's strategic purpose, vision and values are set out in the Corporate Strategy 2025/2028. Following feedback from all scrutiny committees during 2024/2025, it was felt that we needed to review and strengthen the way we articulated how we were delivering our	

strategic purpose, vision and values are set out in the Corporate Strategy	four Well Being Objectives. It was felt that much of the content contained within the Corporate Plan 2024/2027 needed to be streamlined to ensure the document was clear and concise, simplifying the way we present our key priorities to ensure greater accountability and clarity of purpose. The revised Corporate Strategy for 2025/2028 was approved by Cabinet on 26th June 2025 and adopted by Council on 9th July 2025 .	
4.1.4 Council Meeting Cycle	The council agrees its meeting cycle at its Annual Meeting, and this is published on the council's website. Meetings are supported with Forward Work Programmes detailing items for future consideration.	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	4.2 Making decisions that are open about actions, plans, resource use, forecasts, outputs and outcomes. The presumption is for openness. If that is not the case the justification for the reasoning for keeping a decision confidential should be provided	
4.2.1 Executive, non-executive and regulatory report guidance and report templates	Guidance was developed and circulated to reporting officers in September 2025. As and when changes arise the guidance is updated and circulated to report authors/officers. Report templates ensure the relevant information and advice is presented to substantiate recommendations. Guidance has been presented to officers throughout the year on matters such as Welsh Language considerations and other legislative updates.	
4.2.2 Safe and Legal Decision Making	Training is available for relevant officers and takes place at regular intervals, delivered by the Chief Legal Officer following a revised reporting template in place.	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	4.3 Providing clear reasoning and evidence for decisions in both public records and explanations to stakeholders and being explicit about the criteria, rationale and considerations used. In due course, ensuring that the impact and consequences of those decisions are clear.	
4.3.1 Modern.gov system	All publicly accessible reports are published on the council website via Modern.gov system , showing the decisions taken at each meeting.	
	Also see section 1.3.1 Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA).	

Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	4.4 Using formal and informal consultation and engagement to determine the most appropriate and effective interventions/courses of action
4.4.1 Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement	The NPT Community of Practice on Involvement and Engagement, launched in 2019, has membership of 60+ council officers and representatives from partner organisations. Members regularly engage with a range of specific stakeholder groups as part of their work, and the Community of Practice provides a forum for members to work more smartly and in a more collaborative way to ensure that everyone in our communities can have the opportunity to have their say on the decisions that affect them. It is intended to provide a professional and respectful forum for members to share experiences and knowledge on involvement and engagement issues in a spirit of mutual learning and peer support. The Community of Practice undertook a key role in supporting the consultation on the 2025/2026 budget and contributed to the development of the council's draft Involvement, Engagement & Consultation Toolkit which will be approved early 2026/2027.
4.4.2 Citizens' Panel	Launched in January 2020, the NPT Citizens' Panel is made up of residents from across the county borough and actively involves them in decision making at a very early stage, so they help shape proposals before these go out to wider public consultation. This will strengthen the council's approach to consultation and engagement and also help us to meet our obligations under the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021. There are currently 800 members on the Panel. Officers are currently working on bringing the management of the Panel back in-house and part of that process will involve asking existing members if they wish to remain on the panel (a requirement for GDPR purposes). During 2025/2026, the Panel were invited to complete the National Resident Survey and were involved in focus groups organised as part of the review of the council's Communications, Marketing and Customer Services functions.
4.4.3 Public Participation Strategy	The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 ("the Act") requires local authorities to consult on, publish and regularly review a public participation strategy to encourage local people to participate in their decision making. This includes where councils make decisions in partnership with another council or in conjunction with another individual or body such as a local health board. The council's Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027 was approved on 26th April 2023 by Cabinet. It outlines the council's objectives, approach and mechanisms for encouraging and enabling public participation, together with information on how local people can influence decision-making. It also supports the priorities in the council's Corporate Strategy and reflects our values by setting out how we will encourage and enable local people and communities in Neath Port Talbot to be actively involved in decisions that affect them.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	4.5 Effectively engaging to ensure that the purpose, objectives and intended outcomes for each stakeholder relationship are clear so that outcomes are achieved successfully and sustainably

4.5.1 Key Stakeholder List	We have a list of key stakeholders that we engage with on major policies and plans. These include Youth Council, Black Minority Ethnic Community Association, and consultee database for the Local Development Plan. We have established 3 Employee Forums, the Ethnic Employee Forum, the Disability Network and the LGBTQ+ Network. As well as building employee confidence and ensuring lived experience in Employee Voice, these networks act as key stakeholders in relation to our evolving employment framework.	
4.5.2 Youth Mayor	This was first established in September 2019 and elected by the young people of the borough. The role involves representing the voice of all children and young people across the borough at a number of pre-determined civic duties.	
4.5.3 Partnership working with our trade unions and teaching associations	This is a major feature of the council's culture in relation to workforce engagement. It involves elected members, managers, employees and trade unions developing and implementing a way of working based on mutual respect and trust, shared objectives and joint ownership of problem solving. We have worked together with trade unions to implement the Social Partnership Duty and submitted jointly agreed annual reports to the Social Partnership Forum in 2024/2025 and 2025/2026.	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:		4.6 Developing formal and informal partnerships to allow for resources to be used more efficiently and outcomes achieved more effectively
4.6.1 Third Sector Partnerships	The council has a long and productive relationship with community and voluntary sector organisations, and awards grant funding to organisations so they can support our communities in a wide range of ways. The Partnership Agreement (Compact), between the council and the community and voluntary sector in Neath Port Talbot, formally recognises and values the contribution of voluntary work to local people, communities and supports us to deliver on some of our services. It provides a framework for further developing the many years of partnership working in the county borough, in pursuit of our shared interest to build strong communities where everyone has an equal chance to lead a fulfilled life. It also sets out the partnership responsibilities and expectations on both the council and the voluntary sector. During 2025/2026 the review of the Partnership Agreement was completed, and the revised Neath Port Talbot Council and Third Sector Compact was approved by Cabinet on 29th October 2025.	
4.6.2 Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum	The Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum supports partnership working between the council and the voluntary sector. During 2025/2026, a review of the Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum was undertaken as part of the review of the Compact. To support the effective delivery of the Compact, the Council and the Third Sector will jointly deliver and participate in biannual partnership events. These sessions will provide a shared space to review progress against our agreed objectives and exchange learning.	

4.6.3 County Borough Council /Community Councils Liaison Forum	The County Borough Council/Community Councils Liaison Forum works together for the benefit of local communities whilst recognising our respective responsibilities as autonomous, democratically elected statutory bodies. During 2025/2026, the County Borough Council/Community Councils Liaison Forum met twice to discuss issues of concern to the Town and Community Councils and the Forum was consulted on the 2025/2026 budget. Ongoing training was also provided to Town and Community Councils by the Monitoring Officer on the Member's Code of Conduct.
4.6.4 Informal partnerships	There are a number of informal partnerships in place, which are made up of both officers from across the council and representatives of external organisations.
4.6.5 Public Services Board (PSB)	Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board members work together to deliver the objectives set out in the PSB Well-being Plan and monitor progress on delivery of the work. In June 2025, the PSB published its Annual Report setting out the progress made in delivering the priorities of the PSB to improve the well-being of Neath Port Talbot as contained in the PSB's Well-being Plan for the period 2023/2028.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	4.7 Ensuring that partnerships are based on: • Trust • A shared commitment to change • A culture that promotes and accepts challenge among partners; and • that the added value of partnership working is explicit
4.7.1 Staff Council	Staff Council (LGS Green Book Negotiating Forum, LSPG (Schools trade union partnership forum), Service Joint Consultative Groups, and the Corporate Health & Safety Trade Union Forum) groups meet regularly and are an opportunity for two-way information sharing, consultation and where necessary, negotiation. As part of our approach to partnership working, trade unions have representation in other forums; so for example, trade unions sit as an integral part of the Future of Work Team. We are working together with trade unions to implement the new Social Partnership Duty. Also see: Section 2.4.2 - Continue to participate in a number of partnerships Section 4.5.4 - Youth Mayor
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	4.8 Taking account of the interests of future generations of taxpayers and service users

4.8.1 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.	The council's Corporate Strategy 2025/2028 demonstrates how the council contributes to the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Neath Port Talbot and to the seven national wellbeing goals contained in the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Our strategic aims set out under each well-being objective, detail how we focus our efforts in the short, medium and longer term. The contribution to the seven well-being goals is made through the way in which we work, in accordance with the sustainable development principle contained within the Act.
4.8.2 The council's Well-being Objectives are published in the Corporate Strategy.	The council's revised Corporate Strategy 2025/2028 sets out an overarching 20-year vision for Neath Port Talbot and under each well-being objectives the aims we plan to achieve in the next three years.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	4.9 Ensuring that communication methods are effective and that members and officers are clear about their roles with regard to community engagement Section 1.1.2 - Employee Code of Conduct Section 1.1.3 - Member Code of Conduct - monitored by the Standards Committee
	4.10 Encouraging, collecting and evaluating the views and experiences of communities, citizens, service users and organisations of different backgrounds including reference to future needs Section 4.4.1 – Community of Practice – Involvement and Engagement Section 4.4.2 – Citizens Panel Section 4.4.3 – Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027
	4.11 Implementing effective feedback mechanisms in order to demonstrate how their views have been taken into account - Section 4.4.3 – Citizens Panel
	4.12 Balancing feedback from more active stakeholder groups with other stakeholder groups to ensure inclusivity

	4.12.1 Council has a number of duties through the following legislation to ensure inclusivity of feedback from all stakeholder groups: • Equality Act 2010 • Welsh Language Standards (No.1) Regulations 2015 • Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 • Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 • Environment (Wales) Act 2016 • Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023 See section 1.3.1 – Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)
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PRINCIPLE C: DEFINING OUTCOMES IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	5.1 Having a clear vision which is an agreed formal statement of the organisation's purpose and intended outcomes containing appropriate performance indicators, which provides the basis for the organisation's overall strategy, planning and other decisions
5.1.1 Corporate Strategy 2025/2028	The council's vision is set out in the Corporate Strategy 2025/2028: To give every child the best start in life; that every community is thriving and sustainable; that our environment, heritage and culture can be enjoyed by future generations; and that local people have the skills to access well paid, sustainable jobs in the local green economy. Under each well-being objective there is a set of aims for the three-year period along with performance measures (including service user perspective measures) to demonstrate progress. During 2025, further work was undertaken to implement the council's Corporate Planning, Service Planning and Performance Management Framework. This has included moving towards a more holistic performance management approach to monitoring the delivery of the Corporate Strategy 2025/2028, integrating data from performance measures, risk, budget, workforce analytics, and service user feedback. This will enable a more transparent and comprehensive view of progress, support effective resource allocation, and foster proactive responses to emerging issues.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	5.2 Specifying the intended impact on, or changes for, stakeholders including citizens and service users. It could be immediately or over the course of a year or longer.

5.2.1 Commissioning	The council delivers or commissions an enormous range of services and functions that affect the day-to-day life of everyone who lives in the county borough. Service user questionnaires are undertaken as part of contract monitoring; contracts require processes to be in place to ensure providers actively engage with service users, informing service and feedback on proposed changes. Contract Monitoring Officers review practice, including interviewing service users.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	5.3 Delivering defined outcomes on a sustainable basis within the resources that will be available <i>Section 4.8.1 – Well-being of Future Generations Act</i> <i>Section 4.1.1– Corporate Strategy Annual Report</i>
	5.4 Identifying and managing risks to the achievement of outcomes
5.4.1 Corporate Risk Management Policy	The council's Risk Management Policy sets the approach to risk management and recognises risk management is an essential part of delivering good governance, and reduces the uncertainty of achieving the council's vision, purpose and priorities, as set out in the Corporate Strategy 2025/2028. The Strategic Risk Register is reviewed at Strategic Leadership Team quarterly and presented to Cabinet and Governance & Audit Committee every six months. In September 2025, Audit Wales published the Review of Corporate Risk Management Arrangements in Neath Port Talbot. The review found the council is taking steps to strengthen its culture around risk management and is reviewing its arrangements. However, the review did find a number of areas where the council could further strengthen its arrangements. These included ensuring alignment between the corporate risk register and the strategic objectives, clearly articulating risks, and the comprehensiveness of reporting. Audit Wales made four recommendations aimed at improving the council's risk management arrangements. These covered risk identification, management, monitoring and reporting and evaluation of our arrangements. During 2025/2026, a number of improvements were made to strengthen our corporate risk management arrangements including risk and target scoring. Coupled with the planned actions to address the recommendations following the review the work will contribute to placing the council's risk management arrangements on a stronger footing.
5.4.2 Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)	The Strategic Director for Strategy and Corporate Services acts as the interim Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) for the council, with overall responsibility for managing information risk, ensuring that information risks are treated as a priority across all service areas. They support the engagement with teams from across the council, fostering strong working relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, supporting them with the critical consideration of Risk and Information Governance in all aspects of their work. The SIRO reports directly to the Strategic Leadership Team and Corporate Governance Group on information security matters.

Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	5.5 Managing service users' expectations effectively with regard to determining priorities and making the best use of the resources available
5.5.1 Heads of Service Business Plans	In line with the council's Corporate Planning, Service Planning and Performance Management Framework, annual Heads of Service Business Plans are developed to demonstrate the contribution services are making to the delivery of the Corporate Strategy 2025/2028.
	See 4.1.3 – Corporate Strategy 2025/2028
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	5.6 Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits - considering and balancing the combined economic, social and environmental impact of policies, plans and decisions when taking decisions about service provision <i>Section 1.3.1 - Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)</i> <i>Section 4.1.3 - Corporate Strategy 2025/2028</i>
	5.7 Taking a longer-term view with regard to decision making, taking account of risk and acting transparently where there are potential conflicts between the organisation's intended outcomes and short-term factors such as the political cycle or financial constraints.
5.7.1 Welsh Government Procurement Policy and Procurement Strategy 2024/2028	Complying with the policy, by ensuring that contracts over the value of £1,000,000 include community benefits, clauses and contracts split into "Lots" or smaller arrangements – allowing smaller organisations to bid for elements of contracts if they are unable to bid for larger packages. The council has made a commitment to actively examine where it sources its goods and services to ensure those arrangements are ethical.
	See section 2.4.1 - Ethical Employment in Supply Chain Policy 2019
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	5.8 Determining the wider public interest associated with balancing conflicting interests between achieving the various economic, social, and environmental benefits, through consultation where possible, in order to ensure appropriate trade-offs <i>See section 4.1.3 – Corporate Strategy 2025/2028</i> <i>See section 4.4.3 – Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027</i> <i>See section 4.8.1 – Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015</i>

Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	5.9 Ensuring fair access to services
5.9.1 Strategic Equality Plan (SEP)	Councils in Wales have a legal duty to develop equality objectives and produce a strategic equalities plan. The council's Strategic Equality Plan "Let's Be Fair" 2024/2028 has been produced to meet this requirement, but more importantly to reflect and deliver on our determination to promote genuine equality of opportunity, tackle discrimination and create a fairer and more equitable Neath Port Talbot. On 17th September 2025, Council agreed to establish a Member Equality Panel, with members drawn from each political group, to monitor the implementation of the Strategic Equality Plan, championing and raising the profile of equality, diversity and inclusion as key priorities across the council's workforce in service delivery across Neath Port Talbot.

PRINCIPLE D: DETERMINING THE INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY TO OPTIMISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE INTENDED OUTCOMES	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	6.1 Ensuring decision makers receive objective and rigorous analysis of a variety of options indicating how intended outcomes would be achieved and including the risks associated with those options. Therefore, ensuring best value is achieved however services are provided
6.1.1 Corporate Self-Assessment	The requirement to publish an annual corporate self-assessment is contained within the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and is a corporate, organisational assessment rather than an assessment of individual services. As part of the self-assessment, the council is required to consider the extent to which it 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?) During 2025/2026, consideration was given to how the process to develop the self-assessment could be further refined. The improvements that were identified have been implemented to develop the 2025/2026 assessment including the extension of the completion of a short survey to the council's Service Leaders Network (80+ Accountable Managers) to inform the content and scoring contained in the assessment. See section 1.4.4 - The Constitution

Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	6.2 Considering feedback from citizens and service users when making decisions about service improvements or where services are no longer required in order to prioritise competing demands within limited resources available including people, skills, land and assets and bearing in mind future impacts See section 1.3.1. – Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) See section 1.4.4 - The Constitution See section 4.4.1 – Community of Practice – Involvement and Engagement See section 4.4.2 – Citizens Panel See section 4.4.3 – Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027
	6.3 Planning Interventions - establishing and implementing robust planning and control cycles that cover strategic and operational plans, priorities and targets - <i>See section 5.1.1 Corporate Strategy 2025/2028</i>
	6.4 Engaging with internal and external stakeholders in determining how services and other courses of action should be planned and delivered See section 1.3.1. – Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) See section 4.4.4 – Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027 See section 4.4.2 – Community of Practice – Involvement and Engagement See section 4.4.3 – Citizens Panel
	6.5 Considering and monitoring risks facing each partner when working collaboratively including shared risks See section 2.4.2 - Continue to participate in a number of partnerships See section 5.4.1 - Corporate Risk Management Policy
	6.6 Ensuring arrangements are flexible and agile so that the mechanisms for delivering outputs can be adapted to changing circumstances - <i>See section 4.8.1 - Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015</i>
	6.7 Establishing appropriate local performance indicators (as well as relevant statutory or other national performance indicators) as part of the planning process in order to identify how the performance of services and projects is to be measured - <i>See section 5.1.1 Corporate Strategy 2025/2028</i>
	6.8 Ensuring capacity exists to generate the information required to review service quality regularly - <i>See section 5.1.1 Corporate Strategy 2025/2028</i>
	6.9 Preparing budgets in accordance with organisational objectives, strategies and the medium-term financial plan

6.9.1 Budget setting process	On 5th March 2025 , Council approved the 2025/2026 budget following stakeholder consultation. The requirement to set a balanced budget was met.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	6.10 Informing medium and long-term planning by drawing up realistic estimates of revenue and capital expenditure aimed at developing a sustainable funding strategy - <i>See section 6.9.1 Budget setting process</i>
	6.11 Optimising achievement of intended outcomes - ensuring the medium-term financial strategy integrates and balances service priorities, affordability and other resource constraints - <i>See section 6.9.1 Budget setting process</i>
	6.12 Ensuring the budgeting process is all-inclusive, taking into account the full cost of operations over the medium and longer term - <i>See section 6.9.1 Budget setting process</i>
	6.13 Ensuring the medium-term financial strategy sets the context for ongoing decisions on significant delivery issues or responses to changes in the external environment that may arise during the budgetary period in order for outcomes to be achieved while optimising resource usage - <i>See section 6.9.1 Budget setting process</i>
	6.14 Ensuring the achievement of 'social value' through service planning and commissioning. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 states that this is "the additional benefit to the community.... over and above the direct purchasing of goods, services and outcomes". - <i>See 2.4.3 – Procurement Strategy</i>

PRINCIPLE E: DEVELOPING THE ENTITY'S CAPACITY, INCLUDING THE CAPABILITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.1 Developing the entity's capacity - reviewing operations, performance and use of assets on a regular basis to ensure their continuing effectiveness - <i>See section 1.2.2 – Vision and values of Strategic Workforce Plan</i>
7.1.1 Recruitment and Retention	During 2025/2026, Audit Wales undertook a review of the recruitment and retention challenges the council is facing , including how well the council understands its challenges, what it is doing in response and how it reviews the value for money of it approaches. Audit Wales made two recommendations; these focus on the council making the most of the information it gathers from staff surveys and developing a formal approach to assess the value for money of it approaches to recruitment and retention.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.2 Improving resource use through appropriate application of techniques such as benchmarking and other options in order to determine how the council's resources are allocated so that outcomes are achieved effectively and efficiently

7.2.1 There are a number of examples of research and benchmarking exercises undertaken across the council	The Corporate Policy, Governance and Performance Team are members of All Wales Corporate Performance Data network (CPDn). Its purpose is to inform and support the development of the self-assessment performance dataset (SAPD). The current SAPD holds data across a range of services/themes and can be used to compare against other authorities. The link to this data has been shared with strategic officers, all service managers and performance leads. Benchmarking for a number of services is completed via APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence). A number of service areas also benchmark data with other services from other local authorities via benchmarking groups/networks/data platforms, some of which are provided by Data Cymru, Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). Examples of benchmarking groups include: • The council's Electoral Services officers participate in the Association of Electoral Administrators network to benchmark electoral administration. • Participation by officers and members in networks facilitated by the WLGA to benchmark and research out best practice across Democratic Services functions in other councils • Wales waste data flow for fly tipping • County Surveyor Society Wales benchmarking • Road Safety Benchmarking • Workforce planning benchmarking Services also use other platforms for benchmarking data, such as the Welsh Government STATS Wales website and other platforms. Benchmarking data (where available) is included in the performance reports that are provided to members as part of our performance arrangements. See section 6.1.1 - Corporate Self-Assessment
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.3 Recognising the benefits of partnerships and collaborative working where added value can be achieved - <i>See section 2.4.2 - Continue to participate in a number of partnerships</i>
	7.4 Developing and maintaining an effective workforce plan to enhance the strategic allocation of resources
7.4.1 Social Care Wales Workforce Development Partnership (SCWWDP)	The broad aim of the SCWWDP is to ensure partnership working to support social care staff across all organisations, support the ambition of the health and social care workforce strategy and to build a digitally ready workforce. It also aims to deliver excellent education and learning, provide qualifying and post-qualifying social work training, and to shape and supply the workforce. See section 7.1 Future of Work Strategy 2022/2027

Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.5 Publishing a statement that specifies the types of decisions that are delegated and those reserved for the collective decision making of the governing body
7.5.1 List of officer delegation	The Constitution requires the Chief Legal Officer to keep a list of all officer delegations made in accordance with the Constitution. The work to review all proposals and to keep a central electronic list of delegations is ongoing. Work with individual directorates to gather evidence of delegations is continuing, with the aim of a report to Corporate Governance Group on methods of record keeping.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.6 Ensuring the leader and the chief executive have clearly defined and distinctive leadership roles within a structure, whereby the chief executive leads the council in implementing strategy and managing the delivery of services and other outputs set by members and each provides a check and a balance for each other's council.
7.6.1 Cross party panel	The panel which is made up of elected Members (and chaired by the Leader) undertakes the Chief Executive's appraisal and agrees the objectives for year ahead and personal learning. See 1.4.4 - The Constitution
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.7 Developing the capabilities of members and senior management to achieve effective shared leadership and to enable the organisation to respond successfully to changing legal policy demands as well as economic, political and environmental changes and risks by: • Ensuring members and staff have access to appropriate induction tailored to their role and that ongoing training and development matching individual and organisational requirements is available and encouraged • Ensuring members and officers have the appropriate skills, knowledge, resources and support to fulfil their roles and responsibilities and ensuring that they are able to update their knowledge on a continuing basis • Ensuring personal, organisation and system-wide development through shared learning, including lessons learnt from both internal and external governance weaknesses
7.7.1 Member support and development.	The Local Government Elections took place in May 2022, with the main focus of the first two years being their induction. Members were invited to undertake the following sessions as part of their induction: • Introduction to the Council, its role, Corporate Governance and the Corporate Strategy • Code of Conduct and Ethics (including civility and respect) • Health and Safety • Replacement Local Development Plan • Service Area Introductions

- Community Leadership and Casework
- Budget and Financial Management
- Treasury Management
- Committee Procedures and the role of Scrutiny and how to be an effective Scrutiny Member
- Equalities, Diversity and the Socio-Economic Duty
- Safe Data Management and GDPR
- Freedom of Information (FOIs)
- Welsh Language
- Corporate Parenting
- Social Media
- Safeguarding
- Housing
- Violence against Women, Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)
- Member Officer Relations
- Women's Rights/Gender Equality
- Public Speaking and Working with the Media (Cabinet Members only)
- The role of members in relation to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. To include sustainable development
- The role of members in relation to the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act
- Climate Change, mitigation and decarbonisation

Members undertook committee specific training during 2025/2026 depending on their committee allocations, with particular mandatory training for members of the Licensing, Planning, Governance and Audit, Standards and other regulatory committees. Chairs and Members of Scrutiny also undertook targeted training by external providers.

Member Seminars were also presented on the following topics during 2025/2026:

10 th April 2025	Early Years and Childcare in Neath Port Talbot
15 th May 2025	Active Travel
19 th May 2025	Community Safety Members Seminar – In Person Workshop
22 nd May 2025	Substance Use Transformation

	26 th June 2025	Bus Franchising
	31 st July 2025	Scrutiny Procedure Rules
	11 th September 2025	Members Introduction to the Online Training Platform Thinqi
	25 th September 2025	Council Procedure Rules
	9 th October 2025	LGBTQ+
	23 rd October 2025	The Crown Estate in Wales
	30 th October 2025	UKSPF Members Briefing
	6 th November 2025	Property Purchase Process
	10 th November 2025	Q2 Corporate Plan Performance Monitoring
	4 th December 2025	Elected Home Education
	18 th December 2025	Stop Loan Sharks Wales
	8 th January 2026	SAS Panel Access
	22 nd January 2026	Decarbonisation Delivery Plan for Operational Services 2025/2030
	27 th January 2026	Corporate Strategy 2025/2028 – Performance Monitoring
	5 th February 2026	Visitor Economy Briefing
	10 th February 2026	Pride in Place Impact Fund
	19 th February 2026	Code of Conduct

7.7.2 Reviewing individual member performance	This is done on a regular basis taking, account of their attendance and considering any training or development needs. Members are encouraged annually to undertake self-appraisals and reviews.	
7.7.3 Officer support and development	The training available for officers is reviewed and updated on an ongoing basis to ensure they can fulfil their roles and responsibilities.	
7.7.4 Reviewing individual officer performance:	See 1.1.4 - An induction programme for Members See 1.1.5 – Staff Induction Checklist, (which contains information about the expected standards) See 1.1.6 - Performance Appraisal Process See 1.2.2 - The vision and priorities for staff	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.8 Taking steps to consider the leadership’s own effectiveness and ensuring leaders are open to constructive feedback from peer review and inspections	
7.8.1 External regulator inspections	National and local reports are undertaken by Audit Wales. A programme of work is noted in the Annual Summary. Both Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales have a programme of inspections based on their annual performance evaluation. The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 also contains a requirement for Panel Assessments (Peer reviews) to be undertaken once every electoral (ordinary) cycle. Ombudsman for Wales undertakes regular ‘own initiative’ pieces of work which investigate service provision linked to particular areas across the public sector. A Regulators Recommendation Tracker has been developed, providing a mechanism for capturing and monitoring recommendations arising from external inspections and reviews. The Tracker evidences the council’s response to external scrutiny, reports on progress and fosters continuous improvement. During 2025/2026 preparation commenced for the council’s first Panel Performance Assessment, which commenced in May 2026. This included developing and collating a comprehensive evidence base, working with the WLGA to agree the approach and logistical arrangements	
7.8.2 Internal Process	The Strategic Workforce Plan, The Future of Work Strategy 2022/2027 sets out actions for the development of leadership and management across the council.	
	See section 6.1.1 - Self-Assessment	

Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	7.9 Ensuring that there are structures in place to encourage public participation – <i>See section 4.4.3 – Public Participation Strategy 2023/2027</i>
	7.10 Holding staff to account through regular performance reviews which take account of training or development needs - <i>See section 1.1.6 - Performance Appraisal Process</i>
	7.11 Ensuring arrangements are in place to maintain the health and wellbeing of the workforce and support individuals in maintaining their own physical and mental wellbeing - <i>See section 1.2.2 - Strategic Work Force Plan: The Future of Work Strategy</i>
7.11.1 Maximising Attendance at Work Procedure / Health and Safety	The council has a number of policies and procedures to support the health and well-being of employees, including the Maximising Attendance at Work Procedure and the Rehabilitation Procedure, as well as a suite of Health and Safety procedures all aiming to protect the health and safety of people in our workplaces. In 2024, the council adopted an Employee Assistance Programme delivered by Vivup, which offers a financial well-being platform accessible to all employees, further supporting employee mental health and well-being. We have a mental health action plan in place which contains initiatives to support employees across the council with mental ill health. Progress on the action plan is reported to and monitored by the Head of People & Organisational Development. As part of the Future of Work Strategy, we deliver a range of actions to support employee health and well-being in the workplace. The council has a dedicated Occupational Health & Safety & Well-being Team, providing advice, support and expertise in relation to the health, safety and well-being of our employees.

PRINCIPLE F: MANAGING RISKS AND PERFORMANCE THROUGH ROBUST INTERNAL CONTROL AND STRONG PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	8.1 Managing risk - recognising that risk management is an integral part of all activities and must be considered in all aspects of decision making
	8.2 Implementing robust and integrated risk management arrangements and ensuring that they are working effectively
	8.3 Ensuring that responsibilities for managing individual risks are clearly allocated - <i>See section 5.4.1 – Corporate Risk Management Policy and Section 5.4.2 – Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)</i>

		8.4 Managing Performance - monitoring service delivery effectively, including planning, specification, execution and independent post-implementation review
8.4.1 Corporate Planning, Service Planning and Performance Management Framework	The purpose of the Framework is to ensure we have effective corporate governance within the council. It builds on existing operational risk management practices and complements other systems of governance to form the council's internal systems of control. The framework aims to promote good management, performance, stewardship of public funds, and public engagement, ultimately demonstrating that the council is "Working Towards a More Prosperous, Fairer and Greener NPT". It is important that we have a fit for purpose Corporate Planning, Service Planning and Performance Management Framework in place that joins up council business from employee level up to council level, and where everybody is clear where they fit, and how they contribute to achieving the council's vision, purpose, well-being objectives and strategic priorities contained in the Corporate Strategy 2025/2028. It is important that our planning, performance and governance related processes are fit for purpose. This includes corporate, strategy and policy, service, financial and workforce planning. It also involves ensuring benchmarking, associated policy and performance research are robust and interwoven into our decision making, reporting and monitoring processes. This includes risk management, self-assessment, complaints handling, engagement and scrutiny processes. This will enable a holistic view of performance, providing a different insight to the overall performance of the council. To support the delivery of the framework, a Strategic Planning & Performance Group has been established. The role of the Group is to foster an effective corporate planning and performance management culture across the council and to ensure Directorate Management Teams and Accountable Managers are fully informed and engaged on the corporate planning and performance management requirements and timescales. To support the above, two digital systems have been developed. iCo Risk will enable all corporate and directorate risks to be maintained and updated electronically. iCo View will enable the detail contained within the Corporate Strategy and Heads of Service Business Plans to be maintained and updated electronically. Together, the two systems will support a more integrated and consistent approach to planning, performance and risk management across the council. They will improve the quality, accessibility and timeliness of information available for monitoring and reporting, strengthen oversight of progress against priorities, and support more informed decision making at both service and corporate level. Over time, this will help embed a more joined-up and transparent approach to assurance, enabling the council to better understand delivery, identify emerging issues and take timely corrective action where required.	
	See section 1.4.4 - The Constitution	
	Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	8.5 Making decisions based on relevant, clear, objective analysis and advice pointing out the implications and risks inherent in the organisation's financial, social and environmental position and outlook

8.5.1 Scrutiny Committees	The role and responsibility for scrutiny has been established and is clear. Annual forward work programme sessions are arranged to identify items for the committees to focus on in the new civic year. Throughout the year, scrutiny Members also undertake specific training to enhance their skills (e.g. Chair and Vice Chair training). Several themes were identified by the Task & Finish group, which they considered important and were keen to see reflected in any amended model of scrutiny that they were going to bring forward. These themes included: • Cabinet Members to be held to account • Public engagement being very important • Members need to have option to be involved in decisions at an earlier stage; • There process needs to be more accessible and transparent, so it is clear to the public what is going to be scrutinised • The council need to consider a system which operates consistently both pre and post decision scrutiny Ongoing performance monitoring is very important. During 2025/2026, the council's scrutiny arrangements have continued to operate within a clear and established framework, with defined roles and responsibilities understood across the organisation. Annual forward-work-programme sessions were again undertaken to identify key areas for scrutiny focus in the new civic year, ensuring that committees plan their work in a structured and transparent way. Throughout the year, scrutiny Members also received ongoing development support, including specific Chair and Vice-Chair training, to strengthen their ability to provide effective challenge and oversight. Scrutiny remains a continually evolving and improving function. Following the review of the scrutiny model introduced in 2024, a number of minor amendments were approved by Full Council in May 2025. These changes were designed to refine processes, improve clarity and support more consistent operation across all scrutiny committees. The effectiveness of these improvements continues to be monitored throughout 2025/2026 to ensure that scrutiny arrangements remain fit for purpose and responsive to organisational needs. The work of the Task & Finish Group has continued to inform the direction of scrutiny development. The themes identified by the group remain central to shaping future enhancements, including the need for Cabinet Members to be held to account; the importance of strong public engagement; giving Members opportunities to be involved earlier in the decision-making process; ensuring the scrutiny process is accessible and transparent to the public; establishing consistent approaches to both pre-decision and post-decision scrutiny; and maintaining regular and meaningful performance monitoring. These principles have reinforced the importance of scrutiny as a mechanism for accountability, transparency and continuous improvement. Overall, scrutiny in 2025/2026 continues to demonstrate maturity, adaptability and a strong commitment to ongoing development, ensuring it remains an effective and valued part of the Council's governance framework.
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Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	8.6 Ensuring an effective scrutiny or oversight function is in place which encourages constructive challenge and debate on policies and objectives before, during and after decisions are made, thereby enhancing the organisation's performance and that of any organisation for which it is responsible. - <i>See section 8.5.1 - Scrutiny Committees</i>	
	8.7 Providing members and senior management with regular reports on service delivery plans and on progress towards outcome achievement - <i>See section 4.1.4 Council Meeting Cycle</i>	
	8.8 Ensuring there is consistency between specification stages (such as budgets) and post-implementation reporting (e.g. financial statements)	
8.8.1 Financial standards, guidance and regulations	The Director of Finance is responsible for ensuring there are proper arrangements in place for the administration of the financial affairs of the council. Strategic Directors are responsible for the financial management of their respective services, and are supported by regular financial management information, which includes monthly financial monitoring reports.	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	8.9 Robust internal control - aligning the risk management strategy and policies on internal control with achieving objectives - <i>See section 5.4.1 - Corporate Risk Management Policy</i>	
	8.10 Evaluating and monitoring risk management and internal control on a regular basis - <i>See section 5.4.1 - Corporate Risk Management Policy</i>	
	8.11 Ensuring effective counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are in place - <i>See section 1.4.1 - The Anti-fraud, Corruption and Malpractice Strategy</i>	
	8.12 Ensuring additional assurance on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control is provided by the internal auditor	
8.12.1 Annual Governance Statement	The Annual Governance Statement reports on the extent of the council's compliance with its principles and practices of good governance, including how the council has monitored the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in the year. The Annual Governance Statement is reviewed every year and updated to reflect the improvement work undertaken during the year.	

8.12.2 – Internal Audit	Internal Audit worked towards compliance with the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector in 2025/2026. The Internal Audit Plan, Charter and Strategy 2025/2026 were approved by Governance and Audit Committee on 20th May 2025. The Governance and Audit Committee have received regular updates within 2025/2026 of progress against the risk-based Internal Audit Plan and the outcomes of completed audit activities. The update reports highlight Internal Audit Plan changes for Committee awareness and agreement; and include an assurance rating and summary of findings for each completed activity. All recommendations made by Internal Audit were accepted by management. Recommendation implementation is reviewed / confirmed through the post audit review process. Post audit review outcomes are reported to Governance and Audit Committee.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	8.13 Ensuring an audit committee or equivalent group or function which is independent of the executive and accountable to the governing body: provides a further source of effective assurance regarding arrangements for managing risk and maintaining an effective control environment and that its recommendations are listened to and acted upon
8.13.1 Governance and Audit Committee (Terms of reference, Membership and Training)	Governance and Audit Committee complies with best practice (including, but not exclusive to, Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (CIPFA 2022)) and work towards the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector (new from 2025/26 onwards).
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	8.14 Managing Data - ensuring effective arrangements are in place for the safe collection, storage, use and sharing of data, including processes to safeguard personal data

8.14.1: Data management framework and procedures / data protection officer / policies and procedures	The Information Governance (IG) Team provide support to the Information Asset Owners who have local responsibility for Information Management in their area. The team develop, implement and maintain information management and information security policies and guidance. Providing operational support, training, expert advice, guidance on these areas. The Information Governance team provide additional assurance through the undertaking of information governance and information security audits and information risk assessments with Information Asset Managers and key stakeholders. A number of actions have been completed as part of the information governance work including registers of the relevant agreements and assessments, with procedures to identify new processing and sharing best practice. Assurance is in place through information audits and the Information Asset Audit for the Information Asset Register. The Information Governance Strategy Group provides overview and scrutiny of IG arrangements. Making recommendations to both the Chief Legal Officer as the council's Data Protection Officer (DPO) with responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Chief Digital Officer as the council's Senior Information Risk Owner with responsibility for information risk and security. The DPO and SIRO report directly to the Corporate Governance Group on information governance and security matters.
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	8.15 Ensuring effective arrangements are in place and operating effectively when sharing data with other bodies <i>- See section 8.14.1 - Data management framework and procedures / data protection officer / policies and procedures</i>
	8.16 Reviewing and auditing regularly the quality and accuracy of data used in decision making and performance monitoring <i>- See section 8.12.2 Internal Audit</i>
	8.17 Strong public financial management - ensuring financial management supports both long-term achievement of outcomes and short-term financial and operational performance. <i>See section 3.2.1 – Financial Management Arrangements</i>
	8.18 Ensuring well-developed financial management is integrated at all levels of planning and control, including management of financial risks and controls. <i>See section 3.2.1 - Financial Management Arrangements</i>

PRINCIPLE G: IMPLEMENTING GOOD PRACTICES IN TRANSPARENCY, REPORTING, AND AUDIT TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY	
Behaviours & actions that demonstrate good governance in practice:	9.1 Implementing good practice in transparency - writing and communicating reports for the public and other stakeholders in an understandable style appropriate to the intended audience and ensuring that they are easy to access and interrogate - <i>See section 4.3.1 - Modern.gov system</i>
	9.2 Striking a balance between providing the right amount of information to satisfy transparency demands and enhance public scrutiny while not being too onerous to provide and for users to understand. <i>See section 4.1.1 - The council produces a number of annual reports throughout the year to give assurances to our governance arrangements.</i>
	9.3 Implementing good practices in reporting - reporting at least annually on performance, value for money and the stewardship of its resources. <i>See section 4.1.1 - The council produces a number of annual reports throughout the year to give assurances to our governance arrangements.</i>
	9.4 Ensuring members and senior management own the results - <i>See section 1.4.4 - The Constitution</i>
	9.5 Ensuring robust arrangements for assessing the extent to which the principles contained in the framework have been applied and publishing the results on this assessment including an action plan for improvement and evidence to demonstrate good governance (annual governance statement) - <i>See section 9.5.1 Corporate Governance Group</i>
	9.6 Ensuring that the Framework is applied to jointly managed or shared service organisations as appropriate - <i>See section 8.12.1 - Annual Governance Statement</i>
	9.7 Ensuring the performance information that accompanies the financial statement is prepared on a consistent and timely basis and the statements allow for comparison with other similar organisations – <i>See section 8.12.1 - Annual Governance Statement</i>
	9.8 Assurance and effective accountability - ensuring that recommendations for corrective action made by external audit are acted upon – <i>See section 7.8.1 - External audit/regulatory reports</i>
	9.9 Ensuring an effective internal audit service with direct access to members is in place which provides assurance with regard to governance arrangements and recommendations are acted upon - <i>See section 8.12.2 Internal Audit</i>

	9.10 Welcoming peer challenge, reviews and inspections from regulatory bodies and implementing recommendations - <i>See section 9.8.1 – External and regulatory reports</i>
	9.11 Gaining assurance on risks associated with delivering services through third parties and that this is evidenced in the annual governance statement - <i>See section 8.12.1 - Annual Governance Statement</i>
	9.12 Ensuring that when working in partnership, arrangements for accountability are clear and that the need for wider public accountability has been recognised and met - <i>See section 2.4.2 - Governance arrangements are in place for each partnership we are involved in</i>

Review of Effectiveness

The council has a responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the chief officers and the Internal Audit Service who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

A Corporate Governance Group, reporting to the Strategic Leadership Team, ensures that improvement work is scheduled, resourced and monitored. The council uses a number of ways to review and assess the effectiveness of its governance arrangements; the table below highlights the different mechanisms during 2025/2026:

Governance Arrangements	Update for 2025/2026
Constitution Review & Monitoring	The Constitution is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure it is up to date and that amendments are taken through the decision-making process as and when required. Reports are taken when necessary to ensure the Constitution is up to date, and when Democratic Services Committee have been tasked to work with the Monitoring Officer to review arrangements as and when necessary. Formal reports by Section 151 or Monitoring Officer: no reports were issued by the s151 or Monitoring Officer in 2025/2026 During 2025/2026, the council further utilised its Modernisation Group to review and enhance decision-making processes. The aim is to ensure that procedures are efficient, transparent, and aligned with best practices. It comprises of elected members to review the council's constitution, processes, and decision-making frameworks. The group will identify areas for improvement and develop recommendations to modernise and streamline constitutional processes to ensure it is effective, transparent, and fit for purpose in a changing local government environment. The group itself will have no decision-making powers and will report its findings and recommendations to full Council when a decision is required, and it would be proposed that the group will meet as required to achieve its objectives. Progress reports will be provided at key milestones, with reports outlining findings, recommendations, and an implementation plan at various intervals.
Internal Audit Service	87% of the revised Internal Audit Plan 2025/2026 has been delivered to draft audit report at year end. For the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026, the Audit Manager's overall opinion is that a reasonable level of assurance can be provided in connection with Neath Port Talbot Council's governance, risk management and internal control environment.

	The findings that have contributed to the level of assurance are those that have been reported to Governance and Audit Committee during 2025/2026.
Governance & Audit Committee	The council's Internal Audit Plan was approved on 20th May 2025. It monitored Internal Audit performance against the plan. In addition, external audit performance has been monitored and update reports from Audit Wales have been received. The Committee received Treasury Management Progress Reports to fulfill their obligations in relation to the Scrutiny of Treasury Management activity. Received six-monthly Programme and Timetable Updates from Audit Wales which provided the Committee with an update on the work undertaken by Audit Wales during the year. The updates included information on the following work undertaken by Audit Wales: • Financial Audit Work • Performance Audit Work • Local Government National Studies (planned/in progress). The update also included progress on the planned work of Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).
Standards Committee	On signing their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, Members are required to give an undertaking to abide by the Members' Code of Conduct. A detailed Member Induction Programme took place following local government elections in May 2022. This included specified training relating to the member code of conduct, social media issues, gifts, and hospitality and officer/member protocols. Refresher training takes place on an annual basis to enhance member's compliance with the Members Code of Conduct, and to ensure members are aware of the responsibility to act ethically and with integrity throughout the year. Advice is also provided on a variety of matters throughout year on interests and predetermination matters. All members and officers in the council are required to fully comply with Codes of Conduct as set out in the Constitution, which sets out the particular roles and responsibilities of Officers and Members, and provides clarity on the interfaces between these roles. These include: • Functions and subsections delegated to Officers • Members' Code of Conduct (Including Social Media Principles) • Employees' Code of Conduct

	• <u>Protocol on Member / Officer Relations</u> The Chief Legal Officer is the Monitoring Officer, and holds the specific duty of ensuring that the council, its officers, and its elected councillors maintain the highest standards of conduct in all they do based on Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, as amended by Schedule 5 paragraph 24 of the Local Government Act 2000. The Standards Committee has a responsibility to monitor and scrutinise the ethical standards of the council, its members, employees and any associated providers of council services, and to report to the council on any matters of concern. The Committee is chaired by an independent person, and its role includes determining the outcome of complaints against councillors and co-opted members. During the reporting period, there were six complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales concerning County Borough Councillors. The Ombudsman did not investigate any of these matters, either because there was no evidence of a breach of the Code of Conduct or because it was not considered to be in the public interest to take them forward. This provides assurance that no issues requiring formal action were identified. The Standards Committee and Full Council considered the Committee's Annual Report 2024/2025 in April 2025 and outlined the work of the Committee.
External Auditors	In the Neath Port Talbot – Annual Audit Summary 2025, which detailed the work completed since the council's last Annual Audit Summary, the Auditor General provided an unqualified true and fair opinion on the council's financial statements on 10th September 2025, in line with the statutory deadline.

Table 1 – Governance Improvement Action Plan - 2025/2026

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
PRINCIPLE A: BEHAVING WITH INTEGRITY, DEMONSTRATING STRONG COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL VALUES, AND RESPECTING THE RULE OF THE LAW			
1.1.3 / 1.3.3	i. Ensure all members attend annual refreshers in respect of the Members Code of Conduct undertaken by the Monitoring Officer; ii. Ensure all Group Leaders make Standards and Ethics a standing item on their political group meeting agendas; iii. Ensure all members are completing their declarations of gifts and hospitality, including where such gifts and hospitality are declined; iv. Encourage Group Leaders to consider bi-annual meetings with	Chief Legal Officer	All 60 elected members (included those who have joined after 2022) received a detailed induction programme. The next scheduled training is September 2026. Advice has also been issued throughout the year to advise members on declarations of interest and the importance of not predetermining matters with a focus on current advice regarding the council's Replacement Local Development Plan. The Standards Committee undertook a review of the training that is provided to elected members in respect of the Code of Conduct, and whether it met all requirements. This included a review of the Code of Conduct to ensure it meets the necessary requirements. The Standards Committee has always stressed the importance of regular Member training. This is particularly important for newly elected Councillors, following the May 2022 local elections, although long-serving Councillors should still undertake refresher training to ensure that they keep up to date with the requirements of the Code of Conduct and any changes in the law or procedures. The Committee has previously recommended to the council that it should be compulsory for all councillors to attend training on the Code of Conduct. The independent review of the Ethical Standards Framework in Wales, commissioned by Welsh Government and carried out by Richard Penn, recommended that the declaration of acceptance of office for all councillors should be amended to include a commitment to undertake training as well as to abide by the Code. This recommendation was fully supported and endorsed by Standards Committee.

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
	the Monitoring Officer to discuss standards and ethics and how they can work together to promote standards within their political groups; v. A series of guidance documents 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.		An audit in respect of Members ethics was undertaken in accordance with the provision made in the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan. The ethical conduct of all elected members is of paramount importance to the council as a whole. Not only must elected members comply with the Members' Code of Conduct (the Code) and associated protocols they must be seen to behaving with integrity to ensure that the electorate have confidence that decisions taken by them are lawful, considered and free from any personal gain. The role of officers is to ensure that members have the necessary protocols to guide them, to provide advice when required, and to take robust action when inappropriate behaviour is reported to them. Following this audit, reasonable assurance can be provided that there are appropriate internal processes in place to help ensure that members act in an ethical manner. Standards Committee have agreed to work with the Governance and Audit Committee in future matters to ensure both committees can work collaboratively to promote ethical behaviours and practices. The Planning Protocol is intended to guide the procedures by which Councillors ('Members') and Officers of the council deal with planning matters and to set standards of probity and conduct expected of them. Neath Port Talbot Council will seek to adopt best practice in its administration of the planning process. It recognises that the public expects the council to subscribe to the principles of fairness, consistency and objectivity. Members of the Standards Committee undertook a review of the protocol, making some minor suggestions which will be factored into the next iteration of that document which will be updated by the Planning Committee and approved by Full Council in May 2026. Whilst the Standards Committee strive to resolve matters proactively without having to hold a formal hearing, it is recognised that sometimes hearings will be necessary following referrals from the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales. Part 3 Local Government Act 2000 enables the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales to require Standards Committees to determine

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			whether a councillor or co-opted member has breached the code of conduct, where the Ombudsman considers that the facts of the alleged breach do not warrant an immediate reference to the Adjudication Panel for Wales. The Standards Committee were pleased to review the procedures for such hearings and have also undertaken an update to modernise. This update was to ensure that it reflects the principles such as hearings being conducted in Welsh, should the Councillor choose, and to further expand on the possibility that a hearing could be conducted by written representations, and to enable the possibility of a hearing being conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. Similar procedures adopted by other councils, and the procedures adopted by the Adjudication Panel for Wales, aim to set out clearly to the committee, officers, and councillors and their representatives, that the process that will be followed in the event that a disciplinary breach is referred to the committee for consideration. The Standards Committee considered one of the key protocols that exists within the local council, the Member Officer Protocol. The purpose of this protocol is to guide members and officers of the council in their relations with one another. The strength of the relationship between members and officers is vital in ensuring that the council practices the highest ethical standards in both its private and public dealings. This protocol also seeks to reflect the principles underlying the respective rules of conduct which apply to members and officers. The purpose of the rules and this protocol is to enhance and maintain the integrity (real and perceived) of local government, by demanding very high standards of personal conduct. The Standards Committee was content that the protocol was operating satisfactorily and that there were no ethical concerns arising. The Standards Committee welcomed the opportunity to consider the Local Resolution Protocol. This protocol recognises that the freedom of expression enjoyed by members is not absolute, and the exercise of the freedom incurs responsibilities and may be subject to

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			restrictions, notably the protection of the reputation and other rights of other members and preventing unauthorised disclosure of information. The freedom to express their political opinions is not restricted by agreeing to this Protocol. The Standards Committee were pleased to note that there had been no occasions in the last 12 months where the protocol was required to be invoked but would continue to publicise its requirements to elected members and ensure they consider the same, to negate any complaints to bodies such as the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales. The Standards Committee will continue to promote the use of this protocol to Group Leaders. The Standards Committee's terms of reference include responsibility for monitoring and overseeing the council's Whistleblowing Policy and considering any ethical issues arising from complaints made under the policy. The Committee was informed about work undertaken with management teams to raise awareness of the Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure., The information leaflets produced for employees and managers had some amendments suggested as to how the Whistleblowing Policy could be improved and clarified in some areas to provide greater ease of understanding, The Standards Committee was content that the council's whistleblowing arrangements were operating satisfactorily and that there were no ethical concerns arising. The Standards Committee welcomed the opportunity to review and comment on the council's Employee Code of Conduct. The Committee was informed about work undertaken to promote the Code of Conduct and identified some areas which could be improved and clarified to provide greater ease of understanding. These will now be considered by the council's Personnel Committee as part of their review. The Standards Committee was content that the council's Employee Code of Conduct is operating satisfactorily and that there were no ethical concerns arising and were pleased to

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			note that their previous recommendations were taken on board by the council's Personnel Committee. In addition to the above activities the Standards Committee also: • Received and considered the Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales; • Received and considered case decisions of the Adjudication Panel for Wales; • Received and considered case decisions made by other Standards Committees in Wales; • Received and considered the Code of Conduct casebook published by the Ombudsman. • Received guidance on the role of the Adjudication Panel for Wales and its remit in promoting and upholding the standards regime; • Received guidance on the role of the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales on how they approach determinations whether to investigate complaints against elected members. Members resolved here to write to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales to express concern over the use of terminology such as "thicker skin" and whilst acknowledging it derives from case law, whether the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales could address the use of such phrases in its guidance; • Promoted the Town and Community Councils, Civility and Respect Pledge https://www.slcc.co.uk/news-publications/civility-respect-pledge/ as an initiative introduced by a partnership of organisations working on behalf of Town and Community Councils, the SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks), NALC (National Association of Local Councils) and OVW (One Voice Wales), inviting Community Councils to sign the Pledge to publicly commit that it will treat councillors, clerks, employees, members of the public, and representatives of partner organisations and volunteers with civility and respect in their roles, with a number of specific supporting commitments.

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			Where appropriate, the Standards Committee have identified points of learning and best practice and have taken them into account in their own decision making and included them in any training provided.
1.1.4	Democratic Services Committee will oversee a review of the Member Induction Programme as part of the preparation for the 2027 Local Government Elections, and to prepare for future inductions.	Chief Legal Officer	Officers are actively engaging with the WLGA Heads of Democratic Services network to ensure alignment with national standards and expectations. Internally, work is progressing on the development of new platforms such as THINQI, which will support a modern and accessible approach to learning. A cohesive induction programme will be designed in collaboration with the Democratic Services Committee throughout 2026, with work commencing in early 2026, ensuring that elected members are fully supported in their roles and equipped to meet future governance challenges.
1.2.2	Progress recommendations made by Audit Wales as a result of the Springing Forward: Strategic Workforce report.	Head of People & Organisational Development	The two recommendations set out in the Audit Wales Springing Forward: Strategic Workforce report which focused on workforce planning and delivery, and monitoring and governance, have been completed. Workforce planning and delivery: - It is a mandatory requirement for each service to have an up-to-date succession plan in place. In 2025 we launched a new interactive Excel based succession planning toolkit, which each manager receives pre-populated with data specific to their workforce. This has improved completion rates and quality of plans. Workforce governance and monitoring: - The quarterly performance indicators developed for People & OD focus on key aspects of the council's workforce and to determine the overall effectiveness of our strategic workforce planning. We also review the delivery plan appended to the workforce

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			strategy on an annual basis, to determine whether we did what we said we would do in the previous 12 months, but also to determine the effectiveness and impact of what we did. - We continue to work with the CIPD and in 2025 we repeated the People Impact Tool benchmarking survey to determine whether progress had been made since we first did this in 2022. As part of this exercise the CIPD benchmark the council against a range of public sector organisations. The 2025 CIPD People Impact Survey shows a strong upward trajectory in HR capability, business impact, and future readiness since 2022. Overall ratings also place Neath Port Talbot well above public-sector comparison groups and the feedback from the survey shows that the HR Team is increasingly trusted, strategically aligned, and delivering value to the organisation. - The OD Delivery Board was stood down in 2025, as its purpose has been overtaken by the development of the council's performance management framework which now provides this integrated oversight.
1.3.4 / 1.4.4	Continue with future training of officer groups in the significance of the member and officer relations protocol.	Chief Legal Officer	In the last twelve months, eight sessions of the importance of the member and officer protocol have been given to a variety of groups, including aspiring leader groups, Accountable Managers and individual service areas. The Standards Committee has also considered an updated member and officer protocol which was considered by Council in May 2026.
1.4.9	Progress recommendations made in the Internal Audit Complaints Review report	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	Work continues to implement the recommendations contained within Internal Audit's Corporate Complaints Report, published in June 2025. The review was presented to Governance & Audit on 9th September 2025 and sets out the eight recommendations – (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Governance and Audit Committee, 09/09/2025 10:30 A key piece of work completed during 2025/2026 was the review of the council's current Corporate Complaints Policy. The revised Corporate Complaints and Compliments Policy was presented to Cabinet on 12th March 2026 which includes a complaints definition in line with the Public Services Ombudsman (PSOW) definition. In addition, complaints and compliments resources for officers have been created. The resource pack includes guidance, templates,

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			process flows and checklists and will support the relevant officers when investigating complaints, ensuring a consistent approach to complaints handling across the council. To support the Policy, meetings with Digital Services have been undertaken to progress updates on the corporate website to ensure the website aligns with the revised policy and forms. The Intranet will also be updated to include complaint resources for staff. As part of the development of the council's Customer Hub and MyNPT, residents of Neath Port Talbot will be able to log all service requests, complaints, compliments, and comments in one place. This initiative is designed to streamline processes and ensure that accurate information, including response timeframes, is communicated to complainants. The Customer Hub will integrate with a new performance monitoring system currently in development, providing corporate oversight of the volume and types of complaints, compliments, and comments received. This will enable the council to identify trends across services and address areas of concern more effectively. Work to review the Unreasonable Behaviour Policy is also nearing completion. Meetings have been held with the Environment and Regeneration Directorates to gain an understanding of current processes and the actions taken against vexatious complainants. A process of notifying the relevant internal stakeholders will be developed and a live list of individuals on the vexatious list, which will be shared to ensure it is kept up to date.
1.4.10 / 2.3.3 / 2.4.1	The Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders will be updated to take into account the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023.	Chief Legal Officer	In September 2024, the council approved its procurement strategy which sets out its vision for procurement to implement the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023. February 2025 saw Full Council also approve the Contractual Standing Orders for procurement activities to implement the strategy and legislative requirements. Throughout 2025/2026, the Council has continued to deliver targeted procurement training to officers across all service areas. To date, 226 members of staff have completed this

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			training, strengthening organisational compliance with procurement legislation and improving assurance around purchasing activity, contract management and decision-making. The programme will continue into the next year to ensure all relevant staff receive the necessary training and support.
2.1.1	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.	Chief Legal Officer	As part of ongoing work programmes with the implementation of the Procurement Strategy and development of new Contract Procedure Rules, the Corporate Procurement team have undertaken a detailed review of spend analysis within the council and to identify ways to ensure efficiency and financial savings for the council. Ongoing training will be delivered to ensure the principles are embedded in activities, this will be subject to regular review. Spot checks have been undertaken on procurement processes to ensure appropriate compliance is taken place. The council's Internal Audit Section has also undertaken an audit on the use of purchasing cards and will be factoring further compliance checks into their future audit work programme.
3.3.1	The council's report template will be updated to ensure all matters that should be considered are incorporated when making a decision.	Chief Legal Officer	The council's report template has been updated following consideration by the council's Modernisation Group, and a revised corporate template for both executive and non-executive reports was implemented on 1 October 2025. This updated template ensures that all matters which should be considered are incorporated when decisions are made. It brings key information to the forefront of reports so that decision-makers can immediately identify critical issues. The template now includes a stronger focus on risk management, ensuring risks and mitigation measures are clearly set out, and provides greater visibility of potential impacts such as financial, legal, equality, well-being, and service implications. A new section has been added requiring authors to outline alternative options, with clear explanations of whether each option can or cannot be implemented and why. These changes aim to improve the quality of reports, provide

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			comprehensive information to support informed decisions, and ensure safer and legally compliant decision-making.
3.5.1	The Standards Committee have identified the following as their programmes of work for 2025/2026: • All members ensure they are completing their declarations of gifts and hospitality, including where such gifts and hospitality are declined, utilising the new online reporting tools. • Group Leaders continue to have regular meetings with the Monitoring Officer to discuss standards and ethics and how they can work together to promote standards within their political groups	Chief Legal Officer	The Standards Committee has made notable progress across its priority areas. Work on the Members' Code of Conduct has included a survey of Community Council training plans and the delivery of targeted training sessions for Town and Community Councillors. Engagement activities such as presentations and meetings with Chairs and Vice Chairs have strengthened understanding of ethical obligations. A review of declarations of interest by Town, Community, and County Borough Councillors has been completed, with updated guidance scheduled for release early next year. The Committee has also drafted an easy-read guide for prospective council candidates on ethical obligations, which is currently under review and will be published on the council's website in the coming months. Observations of Council and Committee meetings have continued, with feedback informing training priorities and guidance materials. The annual meeting with Group Leaders was held to review compliance with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and a framework for regular reporting has been agreed. In line with this, all Group Leaders have now made Standards and Ethics a standing item on their political group meeting agendas, and bi-annual meetings with the Monitoring Officer have been introduced to discuss standards and ethics and explore ways to promote these within their groups. A set of practical case studies on ethical behaviour and declarations of interest has been developed for use in future training sessions, and steps have been taken to promote the Member-Officer Protocol to all elected members and officers, with training provided as appropriate. Additionally, a series of guidance documents covering key conduct matters—including declarations of interest,

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
	• Steps be taken to promote the Member Officer Protocol to all elected members and officers of the council, with training provided as appropriate • Consideration be given to inserting a guidance note on the website for those individuals wishing to stand for County Borough Council or Town/Community Councils highlighting the key ethical principles that if elected they will have to comply with. • A series of guidance documents 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 to supplement the existing guidance		predetermination, conduct case studies, and essential information for members—has been circulated to all members. Initial collaboration with the Governance and Audit Committee has been established to ensure assurance processes for ethical decision-making. The Committee continues to monitor proposals for changes to the national standards framework and has prepared an internal briefing on potential impacts for Neath Port Talbot. Social media training has been delivered to members, and further guidance on appropriate online conduct is being developed. The Local Resolution Process has been promoted, with options to extend it to Town and Community Councils under consideration. Training needs for conflict resolution have been identified, and a pilot workshop is planned for early next year. Findings from recent work on member harassment and intimidation have been reviewed, and recommendations for support mechanisms will be presented in the next quarter. Updates on governance arrangements for the South West Wales Corporate Joint Committee have been received, and ethical implications are being monitored. Finally, early planning has begun for the 2027 induction programme for newly elected members, with a focus on embedding ethical standards from the outset.

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
	available from the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales.		
PRINCIPLE B: ENSURING OPENNESS AND COMPREHENSIVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT			
4.5.3	Embedding the Social Partnership Duty with our recognised trade unions.	Head of People & Organisational Development	The council maintains a strong social partnership with our recognised trade unions. In May 2025 we consulted and engaged with our trade union partners in relation to the revised Corporate Strategy. Regularly convened directorate joint consultative group meetings, health and safety committees, the LGS Negotiating Forum, the School Partnership meeting and the Staff Council, provide formal mechanisms for consultation, engagement and negotiation. These formal meetings are supplemented by regular informal dialogue. For example, the Head of People and OD meets informally with trade unions on a monthly basis. This proactive approach facilitates the early identification of concerns or problems thereby strengthening relationships and enhancing communication. Our first annual Social Partnership Annual Report was submitted for the 2024 / 2025 period. We submitted our second report developed in partnership with our trade union partners in March 2026.
4.5.4	Progress recommendations contained in the review of Corporate Communications and Marketing	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	In July 2024, Westco was commissioned by the council to conduct a review of communications, marketing and customer services across the corporate team and the wider council. The final review report emphasised the vital role of communications, marketing and customer services as a leadership function, integral to shaping strategy and policy across the council and recommended the communications and marketing lead should sit at Tier 3 in the council to increase the influence of this role and function. To address this recommendation, on 17th December 2025, Council approved the establishment of the post of Head of Customer Experience and Communications to enhance strategic capacity and capability. The recruitment process is due to be completed by the end of May 2026. Work is underway to

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			implement other recommendations contained within the final review report. These include updating the council's Brand Guidelines outlining how and when the council logo is used and the development of a social media gateway policy and archiving of dormant or underused accounts.
PRINCIPLE C: DEFINING OUTCOMES IN TERMS OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS			
5.4.1	Progress recommendations contain within the Audit Wales Review of Corporate Risk Management	Strategic Manager - Policy, Governance and Performance	The final Audit Wales report "Review of Corporate Risk Management Arrangements in NPT" was received on 5th September 2025. The key finding was that the Council is taking steps to strengthen its culture around risk management and is reviewing its arrangements. However, Audit Wales found a number of areas where the council could further strengthen its arrangements. These include ensuring alignment between the corporate risk register and its strategic objectives, clearly articulating risks, and the comprehensiveness of reporting. Officers completed the Management Response Form which sets out the planned actions the council will take to address the recommendations. The Audit Wales report along with the Management Response Form was presented to the Governance & Audit Committee on 20th January 2026. A number of improvements have been implemented during 2025/2026 including the alignment of the strategic risk register with the council's well-being objectives.
PRINCIPLE D: DETERMINING THE INTERVENTIONS NECESSARY TO OPTIMISE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE INTENDED OUTCOMES			
6.7.1	Developing a set of actions in response to the outcomes of the CIPD People Impact Survey 2025, assessing the capability and effectiveness	Head of People & Organisational Development	The 2025 CIPD People Impact Survey shows a strong upward trajectory in HR capability, business impact, and future readiness since 2022. Overall ratings also place Neath Port Talbot well above public-sector comparison groups and the feedback from the survey shows that the HR Team is increasingly trusted, strategically aligned, and delivering value to the organisation.

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
	of the HR team and people practices.		Alongside this progress, there are some themes that continue from 2022 and new themes for 2025 shown below: - • The continuing priorities from 2022 are Change Management, Reward and Valuing People • The new priorities are People Practice, Commercial Drive and Learning & Development These themes will be developed into actions in the Strategic Workforce Plan Delivery Plan for 2026 / 2027.
6.9.1	Further development of a medium-term financial strategy.	Director of Finance	A Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was approved by Cabinet on 7 th January 2026. The MTFS will be refreshed on an annual basis.
PRINCIPLE E: DEVELOPING THE ENTITY'S CAPACITY, INCLUDING THE CAPABILITY OF ITS LEADERSHIP AND THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN IT			
7.6.1	An updated Delegation Document will be presented to Full Council in April 2025 following a review by the Modernisation Group of current delegations and a further work programme will be embarked to look at the officer delegation decision making process.	Chief Legal Officer	Democratic Services have continued to play a vital role in ensuring that council decision-making is carried out in a legal, transparent, and democratically sound manner. The team has supported the modernisation of governance structures, including proposals to streamline decision-making processes through revised frameworks for Cabinet member decisions and officer delegations. These changes aim to enhance efficiency while maintaining legal integrity and democratic accountability. Protocols have been reviewed and updated to clarify the roles and responsibilities of members and officers, fostering mutual respect and ensuring that decisions are taken with appropriate legal oversight. New report templates and guidance materials have been introduced to embed legal and ethical considerations into the decision-making process from the outset.

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			Support for elected members has remained a priority, with tailored briefings, training sessions, and procedural guidance provided to help members make informed decisions at the right time. Feedback from the Annual Member Survey has been used to refine support mechanisms and ensure that member needs are met effectively. Democratic Services have also facilitated key governance and scrutiny meetings, ensuring that statutory requirements are fulfilled and that decision-making remains transparent and accountable. The Monitoring Officer function has continued to provide assurance that all decisions are legally sound and ethically robust, with additional support offered to members navigating complex or reputationally sensitive issues. Overall, the service has demonstrated a strong commitment to upholding democratic principles and legal compliance, enabling members to carry out their roles confidently and effectively within a well-supported governance framework.
7.8.1	Democratic Services Committee to undertake a review to commence in 2025/2026 to look at the member induction and learning and development needs for the local government elections in 2027 onwards.	Chief Legal Officer	Officers are actively engaging with the WLGA Heads of Democratic Services network to ensure alignment with national standards and expectations. Internally, work is progressing on the development of new platforms such as THINQI, which will support a modern and accessible approach to learning. A cohesive induction programme will be designed in collaboration with the Democratic Services Committee throughout 2026, with work commencing in early 2026, ensuring that elected members are fully supported in their roles and equipped to meet future governance challenges.
7.8.2	Continue to promote the member development and performance assessment process in Democratic Services Committee	Chief Legal Officer	Democratic Services has continued to actively promote the member development and performance assessment process through a series of targeted actions. The Democratic Services Committee endorsed and launched the updated Member Development Programme for 2025/26, incorporating the new THINQI learning platform to provide flexible and accessible training opportunities. Reports have been presented to the Committee highlighting

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
			the ability to undertake annual member reports, mentoring, and performance assessment processes through programmes delivered via the WLGA and internally with other members. An annual member survey was conducted, achieving strong engagement and generating valuable feedback that has informed the refinement of development priorities. In addition, tailored briefings and training sessions have been delivered to embed performance assessment principles into committee work and strengthen governance support. These efforts demonstrate an ongoing commitment to ensuring elected members are equipped with the skills and resources necessary to perform their roles effectively.
PRINCIPLE F: MANAGING RISKS AND PERFORMANCE THROUGH ROBUST INTERNAL CONTROL AND STRONG PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT			
8.6.1	Continue to promote the member development and performance assessment process in Democratic Services Committee	Chief Legal Officer	Democratic Services has continued to actively promote the member development and performance assessment process through a series of targeted actions. The Democratic Services Committee endorsed and launched the updated Member Development Programme for 2025/26, incorporating the new THINQ! learning platform to provide flexible and accessible training opportunities. Reports have been presented to the Committee highlighting the ability to undertake annual member reports, mentoring, and performance assessment processes through programmes delivered via the WLGA and internally with other members. An annual member survey was conducted, achieving strong engagement and generating valuable feedback that has informed the refinement of development priorities. In addition, tailored briefings and training sessions have been delivered to embed performance assessment principles into committee work and strengthen governance support. These efforts demonstrate an ongoing commitment to ensuring elected members are equipped with the skills and resources necessary to perform their roles effectively.

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
8.14.1	A review of Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing work to be undertaken by the Information Governance team.	Chief Digital Officer	The review of Data Processing and Data Sharing arrangements is incorporated into the Data Protection Impact Assessment processes which requires these are undertaken for all new processes and changes to existing data processing. These identify and address higher risk data processing and sharing with an ongoing review cycle.
8.14.1	Development of the existing Directorate Information Officer role to improve the management of information, and the addressing of identified risks with robust reporting mechanisms.	Chief Digital Officer	The planned redevelopment of the existing Directorate Information Officer (DIO) has been delayed due to reliance on other changes including the Data Protection Impact Assessment process. The development and implementation of this role, expected in 2026/2027 will improve the management of information, and in turn assist in the addressing of identified risks with robust reporting mechanisms.
PRINCIPLE G: IMPLEMENTING GOOD PRACTICES IN TRANSPARENCY, REPORTING, AND AUDIT TO DELIVER EFFECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY			
9.9.1	From 1st April 2025, PSIAS have been replaced by the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK public sector. Within 2025/26 internal audit teams are required to work towards the new standards. The Quality Assurance Improvement Program (due for presentation to July 2025	Audit Manager	The Internal Audit service worked towards the new Standards within 2025/26. The 2025/26 Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) was presented to May 2025 Governance and Audit Committee as part of the Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/25. The 2025/26 QAIP actions are currently being progressed, and final update will be provided to September 2026 Governance and Audit Committee in the Internal Audit Annual Report 2025/26. This action was identified for 2025/26 due to the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector being new; and will become 'business as usual' going forwards as the Internal Audit service continues to work towards compliance with the Standards. Self-assessment against the Standards will then be completed and reported annually through the Annual

Ref (action)	Improvement Action undertaken during 2025/2026	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2025/2026
	Governance and Audit Committee) will confirm key actions needed to ensure compliance with the new standards.		Report and QAIP. External Quality Assessment (EQA) against the Standards is also due in 2028/29.

Table 2 - Governance Improvement Action Plan – 2026/2027

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2026/2027	Responsible Officer
PRINCIPLE A: BEHAVING WITH INTEGRITY, DEMONSTRATING STRONG COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL VALUES, AND RESPECTING THE RULE OF THE LAW		
1.1.3	As part of consideration of the annual report, the Standards Committee would make the following recommendations to Neath Port Talbot Council: (1) All Members continue to attend mandatory Code of Conduct training and annual refresher sessions, with particular emphasis on equality and respect, social media use, and the management of conflicts of interest, and that attendance continues to be monitored and reported to the Standards Committee. (2) Group Leaders actively demonstrate leadership on standards and ethics within their political groups, including by maintaining standards and ethics as a standing agenda item at group meetings and by reinforcing expectations around behaviour, social media conduct and early engagement with advice where concerns arise. (3) Group Leaders continue to meet regularly with the Monitoring Officer, and that these discussions move beyond assurance statements to include reflection on emerging risks, recurring themes, and practical steps taken within groups to address conduct issues at an early stage. (4) The Chair of the Standards Committee periodically attend meetings, by agreement, to promote understanding of the standards regime, reinforce shared expectations and support Group Leaders in discharging their leadership responsibilities. (5) All Members ensure that declarations of gifts and hospitality are completed accurately and promptly, including where gifts or hospitality are declined, and that Members continue to use the Council's agreed reporting mechanisms to support transparency and public confidence. (6) The Council continues to promote high standards of conduct within Town and Community Councils, including through engagement with Chairs, Vice Chairs and Clerks, targeted training opportunities, and the continued observation of meetings by Standards Committee members, with constructive feedback shared where appropriate.	Chief Legal Officer

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2026/2027	Responsible Officer
	(7) The Confidential Reporting Procedure and Local Resolution Procedure are actively promoted to Members, so that concerns about conduct—particularly low-level or early-stage issues—are raised and addressed proportionately and without unnecessary escalation. (8) Learning from the elected member survey on bullying, harassment and intimidation is embedded into future training and guidance, with particular attention given to social media conduct, interactions with the public and member wellbeing, and that progress against the agreed action plan is reported back to the Standards Committee. (9) The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Guidance be maintained as the primary reference document for ethical standards, and that locally relevant case studies continue to be developed and circulated to Members to support practical application of the Code of Conduct. (10) Clear and accessible guidance continues to be provided to prospective candidates for County Borough and Town and Community Council elections, setting out the ethical standards and obligations that apply if elected, including during the pre-election period.	
1.2.1	Work will be undertaken to review and refresh the Council's values and behaviours, ensuring they remain relevant, clearly understood and aligned with the council's strategic priorities and culture.	Strategic Manager – Policy, Governance & Performance / Learning, Training & Development Manager

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2026/2027	Responsible Officer
Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management		
5.1.1	Further develop the holistic approach to performance monitoring to enable a more transparent and comprehensive view of progress on the delivery of the Corporate Strategy and to inform decision making. This will be supported via the council-wide implementation of iCo View.	Strategic Manager – Policy, Governance & Performance
5.4.1	Further develop the council’s corporate risk management arrangements via the ongoing delivery of the action plan following Audit Wales Review of our Corporate Risk Management Arrangements and the council-wide implementation of iCo Risk.	Strategic Manager – Policy, Governance & Performance
8.14.1	Improvement activity will focus on progressing the Information Asset Audit using a risk-based approach focused on higher-risk assets and activities, with data processing and sharing reviews built into normal Information Governance work. While capacity is limited, higher-risk issues will continue to be managed through existing processes, with the audit moving over time into a business-as-usual review model. Alternative delivery options are being explored to support completion of the information asset audit and improve resilience.	Strategic Manager - Digital

Signed:



Chief Executive: Frances O'Brien

Date: 30/07/26

Signed:



Leader of the Council: Cllr Steve Hunt

Date: 30/07/26

Appendix A

Financial Management Code of Self-Assessment (FREM)

CIPFA issued a new code, The FREM, which sets out the standards of financial management for local authorities. Adoption of the Code commenced in April 2021. This appendix provides a self-assessment which has been approved by Corporate Directors Group and provides assurance that the financial management of the council are being met.

Section 1: The Responsibilities of the Director of Finance and the Strategic Leadership Team

Standard Reference & RAG Status	Financial Management	2025/2026 Update
A 	The Strategic Leadership Team can demonstrate that the services provided by the council provide value for money.	The council continues to deliver its services within the overall budget available. In terms of demonstrating value for money the council will continue to look for ways of comparing costs and income in a meaningful way. Historically the council has participated in benchmarking forums to compare costs however due to a lack of perceived benefit these have been wound down.
B 	The council complies with the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Director of Finance in Local Government.	The council comply with the requirements of the code. The Director of Finance is a CIPFA qualified accountant with over 20 years of local government experience, and sits on the Strategic Leadership Team, influencing material decisions and ensuring financial implications are provided in all reports. The Director of Finance is responsible for maintaining and resourcing an effective Internal Audit service and leads on risk management.

Section 2: Governance and Financial Management Style

Standard Reference & RAG Status	Financial Management	2025/2026 Update
C 	The leadership team demonstrates in its actions and behaviours responsibility for governance and internal control.	The council adopts the Nolan principles as can be evidenced in the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). The AGS is reviewed by Audit Wales as part of the accounts audit process.

D 	The council applies CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2016	The Governance & Audit Committee reviewed the adequacy of governance arrangements of the council, reviewing the AGS and receiving risk management updates.
E 	The financial management style of the council supports financial sustainability	Audit Wales' latest Financial Sustainability review concluded that the council is financially sustainable.

Section 3: Long to Medium-Term Financial Management

Standard Reference & RAG Status	Financial Management	2025/2026 Update
F 	The council has carried out a credible and transparent financial resilience assessment	The budget setting for 2026/2027 includes a statement relating to the robustness of the estimates used in calculating the budget requirement and indicates the budget process has been prepared in conjunction with officers. It also identifies the risk areas that will be actively managed during the financial year.
G 	The council understands its prospects for financial sustainability in the longer term and has reported this clearly to members	The council has an approved Medium Term Financial Strategy.
H 	The council complies with the Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities	The council complies with all elements of the Prudential Code.
I 	The council has a rolling multi-year financial plan with sustainable service plans	The council has an approved Medium Term Financial Strategy which will be refreshed annually. Heads of Service business plans have been developed and are being monitored and updated annually

Section 4: The Annual Budget

Standard Reference & RAG Status	Financial Management	2025/2026 Update
J 	The council complies with its statutory obligations in respect of the budget setting process	The council complies with its statutory obligations in respect of the budget setting process as set out in the Local Government Finance Act (1992). A legal and balanced budget set by the council by the statutory deadline was approved by Council on 5 th March 2026. The council is aware of the circumstances under which a Section 114 notice should be issue.
K 	The budget report includes a statement by the Director of Finance on the robustness of the estimates on the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.	The budget setting report comments upon the robustness of the estimates included therein and a balanced affordable budget has been set. The reserves are reported within the budget setting process and monitored throughout the financial year.

Section 5: Stakeholder Engagement and Business Plans

Standard Reference & RAG Status	Financial Management	2025/2026 Update
L 	The council has engaged with key stakeholders where appropriate in developing its long-term financial strategy, medium term financial plan and annual budget.	Key stakeholders are consulted on key projects for example stakeholder views were sought when developing the corporate plan. Cabinet approved the consultation process with stakeholders on the draft budget. Consultation responses are reported to Council.
M 	The council uses an appropriate documented option appraisal methodology to demonstrate the value for money of its decisions.	An investment proposal template has been created and utilised. More work is needed to refine the processes around agreement and priority of the investment appraisals put forward.

Section 6: Monitoring Financial Performance

Standard Reference & RAG Status	Financial Management	2025/2026 Update
N 	The leadership team takes action using reports enabling it to identify and correct emerging risks to its budget strategy and financial sustainability.	- Monthly reports are considered by budget holders and reported to the Strategic Leadership Team. - Quarterly finance revenue and capital reports are presented to Cabinet. - Treasury management reports are taken to Cabinet on a quarterly basis, any significant issues identified are reported to the Strategic Leadership Team.
O 	The leadership team monitors the elements of its balance sheet that pose a significant to its financial sustainability.	The balance sheet is monitored by the relevant service department accountants as part of the budget monitoring process. With the balance sheet being reviewed by the Director of Finance as part of the closure of accounts process.

Section 7: External Financial Reporting

Standard Reference & RAG Status	Financial Management	2025/2026 Update
P 	The Director of Finance has personal and statutory responsibility for ensuring that the statement of accounts produced by the local council complies with the Code Practice in Local Council Accounting in the United Kingdom.	The Director of Finance's responsibilities are set out in the "Statement of responsibilities" within the Statement of accounts. This clearly sets out that the Director of Finance is responsible for the preparation of the council's Statement of Accounts in accordance with proper practices as set out by the Code of Practice on Local Council Accounting in the United Kingdom. The annual audit letter confirms that the statement of accounts has been prepared on time and in accordance with the code of practice.
Q 	The presentation of the final outturn figures and variations from budget allows the leadership team to make strategic financial decisions.	The outturn figures are reported to Strategic Leadership Team and Cabinet and is included in the narrative report of the Statement of Accounts.