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The team who delivered the work comprised Ian Phillips, Katherine Simmons, Samantha Clements and Steve Barry.

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Summary report

The Council has responded effectively to the issues we raised in the Corporate Assessment and has either fully implemented our proposals for improvement or has made progress against them

- 1 In January 2016 we published our Corporate Assessment report. The purpose of the Corporate Assessment was to provide a position statement of Bridgend County Borough Council's capacity and capability to deliver continuous improvement. It considered the Council's track record of performance and outcomes as well as examining the key arrangements necessary to underpin improvements in services and functions We found that: The Council was developing appropriate plans for the future and subject to aligning ICT and human resource functions with the transformation programme, is well placed to secure improvement. Our report made the following proposals for improvement:

The Council of the future
P1 Establish the vision of the Council for 2020 that will support a strategic approach to service delivery and guide service planning.
Performance management
P2 Explain the reason for an improvement target and the scale of improvement expected. (Annual Improvement Report 22 September 2015)
P3 Review 'measures of success' to ensure they enable an evaluation of intended performance and that the explanation of performance is based upon that measure. (Annual Improvement Report 22 September 2015)
P4 Ensure performance rating reports clearly state whether the Council has achieved what it intended.
ICT
P5 Develop the ICT service to ensure it supports the Council's transformation agenda.

Human Resources

P6 Develop the HR service and, specifically, workforce planning so that they support the Council's transformation agenda and ensure workforce considerations are embedded in service business planning.

Asset Management

P7 Ensure service business plans incorporate consideration of future property requirements.

Collaboration

P8 Build upon the current development of Local Service Board arrangements by adopting measures to evaluate the success of the key collaborative activities.

- 2 This report examines whether the Council is making effective progress against the proposals for improvement issued in the Corporate Assessment report. We found that **the Council has responded effectively to the issues we raised in the Corporate Assessment and has either fully implemented our proposals for improvement or has made progress against them.** We came to this conclusion because:
- the Council has established a vision for 2020 that will support a strategic approach to service delivery and guide service planning.
 - the Council is refining its performance reporting:
 - the Council includes the rationale for targets in performance reports where appropriate, and these set out the scale of improvement expected;
 - the Council is working towards ensuring 'measures of success' enable an evaluation of intended performance and that the explanation of performance is based upon that measure; and
 - the Council has more clearly defined how it applies RAG ratings within Scrutiny and Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) reports and is refining its public performance reporting to ensure it clearly states whether the Council has achieved what it intended.
 - there have been developments in the ICT service to ensure it supports the Council's transformation agenda; some actions have been completed whilst others are progressing, but are at a formative stage.
 - workforce considerations are now embedded in service business planning. There are other developments in progress within the HR service that whilst not explicitly supporting the Council's transformation agenda, are intended to develop the HR service.
 - Service Business Plans now incorporate consideration of future property requirements.

- Public Services Boards have replaced Local Service Boards and there remains scope to strengthen arrangements with regard to the adoption of measures to evaluate the success of the key collaborative activities.
- 3 We have set out our findings in relation to the Council's progress against each proposal for improvement in [Appendix 1](#). We intend to give further consideration to the matters that remain outstanding as part of our programme of audit work for 2017-18.

Appendix 1

Proposals for improvement and findings

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
<p>P1 Establish the vision of the Council for 2020 that will support a strategic approach to service delivery and guide service planning.</p>	<p>Complete – the Council has established the vision of the Council for 2020 that will support a strategic approach to service delivery and guide service planning: The Council's Corporate Plan for 2016-2020 sets out three priorities: supporting a successful economy, helping people to become more self-reliant and smarter use of resources. Our May 2017 report Good Governance when Determining Significant Service Changes found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • these priorities provide the Council with a defined focus for activity and Cabinet members and senior officers are able to articulate how they are shaping decisions on service change. There is alignment between the Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan and, as part of the budget-setting process, savings proposals are mapped against the three priorities to help ensure they are guiding decision-making. • the Directorate Business plans for 2017-18 contain an action plan or, in the case of the Communities Directorate Business Plan, a section entitled 'Commitments, Milestones and Indicators' that is centred around the three improvement priorities in the Corporate Plan and with specific actions set out under each of the three improvement priorities. Therefore, the Council can demonstrate that the vision and priorities they have set is guiding service planning.
<p>P2 Explain the reason for an improvement target and the scale of improvement expected. (Annual Improvement Report 22 September 2015).</p>	<p>Complete – the Council includes the rationale for targets in performance reports where appropriate, and these set out the scale of improvement expected: The process for setting and challenging the rationale is embedded in business planning and is reflected in Directorate Business Plans, Scrutiny reports and its Corporate Plan 17-18.</p>

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
<p>P3 Review 'measures of success' to ensure they enable an evaluation of intended performance and that the explanation of performance is based upon that measure. (Annual Improvement Report 22 September 2015).</p>	<p>In progress – the Council is working towards ensuring its 'measures of success' enable an evaluation of intended performance and that the explanation of performance is based upon that measure:</p> <p>The only complete cycle of Corporate Planning and Performance Evaluation since the Corporate Assessment is for 2015-2016. The Council recognised that it requires a range of evidence to demonstrate its progress in achieving its improvement objectives and took a more outcome focussed approach to performance evaluation reporting for 2015-2016.</p> <p>We found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the links between the measures of success set out in the Corporate Plan and the evaluation of progress presented within the Annual Report were not always clear. • there were instances where the descriptions of the 'measures of success' differed between the Corporate Plan and the Annual Report/Annual Report Annexe. • the presentation of parts of the contextual data within the Annual Report and parts in the Annual Report Annexe could also have an impact on the reader's ability to have a clear and complete understanding of progress made. • For 2016-2020, the Council streamlined its Corporate Plan and reviewed its success measures. The template for the Annual Report 2016-2017 replicates the measures of success from the 2016-2017 Corporate Plan. This provides an opportunity for far greater alignment between the performance planning and evaluation reports, making it easier to compare intended against actual performance and eliminating the variance in definitions. We will be undertaking the audit of Bridgend's assessment of 2016-2017 performance later in the year.
<p>P4 Ensure performance rating reports clearly state whether the Council has achieved what it intended.</p>	<p>In progress – the Council has more clearly defined how it applies RAG ratings within Scrutiny and Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) reports and is refining its public performance reporting to ensure it clearly states whether the Council has achieved what it intended:</p>

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
	<p>the Council aims for its presentation of performance information to be appropriate to the audience, while being sufficiently detailed to give a clear picture of performance. This has led to a greater focus in its public reporting on outcomes/impact and the use of narrative instead of RAG ratings to provide context on performance against commitments. As per P3 above, although we found that the links between the Corporate Plan's measures of success and the explanation of performance in the Annual Report 2015-2016 were not always clear, the Council's Annual Report for 2016-2017 provides an opportunity for greater clarity on whether the council has achieved what it intended.</p> <p>Since the Corporate Assessment, the Council has worked to more closely align the quarterly performance reports that go to the CPA meetings and those that go to the Corporate Resources and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Council uses a key to clarify the method for determining the RAG rating for these reports.</p>
<p>P5 Develop the ICT service to ensure it supports the Council's transformation agenda.</p>	<p>In progress – there have been developments in the ICT service to ensure it supports the Council's transformation agenda; some actions have been completed whilst others are progressing, but are at a formative stage:</p> <p>The Council has produced a revised ICT Strategy that explicitly recognises that the service must support the Council's transformation agenda. The strategy is appropriately future-focused in that it sets out that the Council will deliver a transformational shift towards digital access to services and digitisation of the most common internal processes.</p> <p>Our January 2016 Corporate Assessment set out that the ICT service was under-resourced, which was hindering its ability to identify and progress opportunities for modernisation and development. Historically, the Council has had difficulty recruiting</p>

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
	<p>staff to enable the service to operate at full capacity. The Council, having exhausted external recruitment processes, made the decision to use an apprenticeships model to fill outstanding vacancies. The Council recognise that this approach is not without risk as it is necessary to account for a period where new staff are learning their trade and developing their skills. However, the Council has reduced the number of Full Time Equivalent vacancies from eleven to two. The service is therefore on the whole much better placed to provide support to the Council's transformation agenda and the organisation as a whole.</p> <p>Our January 2016 Corporate Assessment set out that in 2014 SOCITM, the society for IT practitioners in the public sector, gave the Council website a one star rating, which is the lowest rating. The Council acknowledges that its website needs to improve and one of the aims of its digital transformation programme is to improve its website. As part of that digital transformation programme the Council is developing 'My Account' which is an online feature enabling access to Council services. The Council is shortly going to be 'going live' with its Council tax service and with its Benefits service later this year.</p> <p>The Council is also looking to redesign its website in order to facilitate the promotion of 'self-service' ie residents accessing services more directly and it will shortly be engaging with residents to determine user needs.</p>
<p>P6 Develop the HR service and, specifically, workforce planning so that they support the Council's transformation agenda and ensure workforce considerations are embedded in service business planning.</p>	<p>Part complete/Part in progress – workforce considerations are now embedded in service business planning. There are other developments in progress within the HR service that whilst not explicitly supporting the Council's transformation agenda, are intended to develop the HR service:</p> <p>The Council has completed the main focus of this proposal for improvement in that all business plans for 2017-18 have a section on workforce planning. The format used</p>

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
	<p>for four of those business plans allows sufficient detail to be provided. There is less detail in the Communities Directorate Business Plan and it would benefit from using the same format as the other business plans in respect of workforce planning information.</p> <p>HR have also been involved in other aspects of the Council's workforce planning. In 2015-16 they piloted an exercise to progress workforce planning through a dashboard approach. The feedback from this pilot indicated that another approach was needed and HR are currently planning a more tailored approach to workforce planning with each Directorate. The Corporate Management Board receives a workforce information report every six months that is designed to assist with workforce planning at a directorate and Council wide level. The Council's 2017-18 update to the workforce plan is close to being finalised, and the transformation agenda is central to that plan.</p> <p>Since the Corporate Assessment the HR team have worked to make line managers more independent. The Council procured and developed the iTrent system to allow managers to access information they need instead of raising queries with HR. One of the strands of the digital transformation programme that is being rolled out is called HR self-serve. In 2016-17 the following elements of that programme went live:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employees able to update personal details ie name, address; • line managers have direct access to absence management module; and • line managers have direct access to employee training records. <p>Further development of the internal HR system to ensure efficient on-line service is planned.</p>

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
	<p>There have been other developments in the period since the Corporate Assessment was published (January 2016) to date. These developments are more regular business developments as opposed to explicitly supporting the Council's transformation agenda, but they are included here as they reflect issues that were raised in the Corporate Assessment. Our Corporate Assessment reported that staff views about the appraisals process were mixed; some considered that it generally led to support (particularly if necessary to secure planned improvements), others that the system was inflexible and budget limitations restricted opportunities for skills development. The Council have subsequently developed an appraisal toolkit which is designed to support managers undertaking appraisals.</p> <p>The Corporate Assessment reported that improving the management of sickness absence has been identified as a key corporate priority. HR have attempted to address this issue by producing an Absence Management toolkit and by offering absence management training courses to managers, albeit these are not mandatory courses. Despite these initiatives, a Council internal audit report dated September 2016 sets out that the number of FTE days lost due to sickness marginally increased in the period from 2013-14 to 2015-16 and is above the public sector average. The Council have informed us that since then sickness absence has improved marginally, but it remains a long-standing issue for the Council.</p> <p>Our Corporate Assessment outlined that the Council has experienced significant challenges in recruiting staff. As set out above (in ICT PFI section) the Council has sought to address the under-resourcing in its ICT service by adapting an apprenticeships model. HR are currently considering rolling out this model for other departments as well, but recruitment remains an ongoing challenge for the Council.</p>

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
<p>P7 Ensure service business plans incorporate consideration of future property requirements.</p>	<p>Complete – Service Business Plans now incorporate consideration of future property requirements:</p> <p>All of the 2017-18 Business Plans contain a section on future property requirements, although the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate Business Plan could benefit from a bit more explanatory detail. This plan refers to certain proposed property upgrades but would benefit from further information as it is not clear what some of the bullet points mean in isolation eg one bullet point is ‘Mental Health Team accommodation’ and another is ‘AWEN Cultural Trust Asset Development’ but there is no supporting text to explain why these matters need to be taken into account as part of the service business plan.</p>
<p>P8 Build upon the current development of Local Service Board arrangements by adopting measures to evaluate the success of the key collaborative activities.</p>	<p>In progress – Public Services Boards have replaced Local Service Boards and there remains scope to strengthen arrangements with regard to the adoption of measures to evaluate the success of the key collaborative activities:</p> <p>Local Service Boards were replaced with effect from 1 April 2016 by Public Services Boards. Obviously, the Council is just one member of the Bridgend Public Services Board (PSB), and is not solely accountable for its governance arrangements. Nevertheless, the Council is an important member of the PSB and is in a position to make an important contribution to evaluating the success of key collaborative activities undertaken by the PSB. Furthermore, under section 35 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, an overview and scrutiny committee of a local authority has the power to review or scrutinise decisions made by the PSB and to review or scrutinise the PSB’s governance arrangements. The Council has a track record of successful collaborative activity that it undertakes outside of the PSB, and the Council’s Partnership Support Team has worked with members of both the Local Service Board and the PSB to develop a performance management framework, that includes a project pro-forma and a project monitoring form. The project monitoring</p>

Proposal for improvement	Follow-up findings
	<p>form contains progress report stages that helpfully enable ongoing project monitoring and this may include project reviews carried out by the PSB. However, there remains scope for the PSB to adopt further measures to evaluate the success of key collaborative activities, for example by formally introducing post project learning into its arrangements to ensure that the PSB is clear on what went well, and conversely where lessons could be learned, in terms of its collaborative activity. This is important for all members of the PSB to engage with. The Council needs to know the outcomes of all its collaborative working, as such working is a key contributor to realising its three overarching priorities of Supporting a successful economy, Smarter use of resources and Helping people to be more self-reliant.</p>

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