

# Annual Governance Statement



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## 1 Foreword

### “One Council working together to improve lives”

**This is the Council’s vision as stated in the [Corporate Plan](#) for 2018-2023 reviewed for 2021-22, which also sets out what our long-term well-being objectives are so that amongst all of the complexity of increased demand and reduced resources we can keep a clear focus on what is really important for our communities.**

We want to contribute to a place where people want to live, work, study and do business, where people have the skills and qualifications they need to improve their life chances, enjoy good health and a sense of well-being and independence.

It is necessary to ensure that our communities and those that use and pay for our services, those who deliver our services and our partners and suppliers have confidence in our governance arrangements. They must be assured that our services are provided effectively and efficiently and delivered on a consistent basis, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for; and that decisions are taken transparently and lawfully. This is especially the case given the ongoing challenges during the worldwide Coronavirus pandemic that has affected everyone and every business across the county borough since March 2020. Additional measures have been put in place to ensure the Council maintains proper governance through this unprecedented event.

The Council also has a duty to set well-being objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to make arrangements and keep under review the extent to which it is exercising its functions effectively, using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively and to ensure its governance is effective for securing these performance requirements.

Our governance arrangements operate effectively in supporting the Council in meeting its challenges and responsibilities and have continued to do so in the current uncertain times. Improvements are continually being made and opportunities to do so going forward have been identified. These will be monitored during 2021-22 to ensure that the necessary improvements are made.



Cllr Huw David  
Leader of the Council



Mark Shephard  
Chief Executive

## 2 Governance Framework

### What is Corporate Governance?

Corporate governance comprises the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Council is directed and controlled, led and held to account, and how it engages with stakeholders. It is also about the way that Councillors and employees think and act.

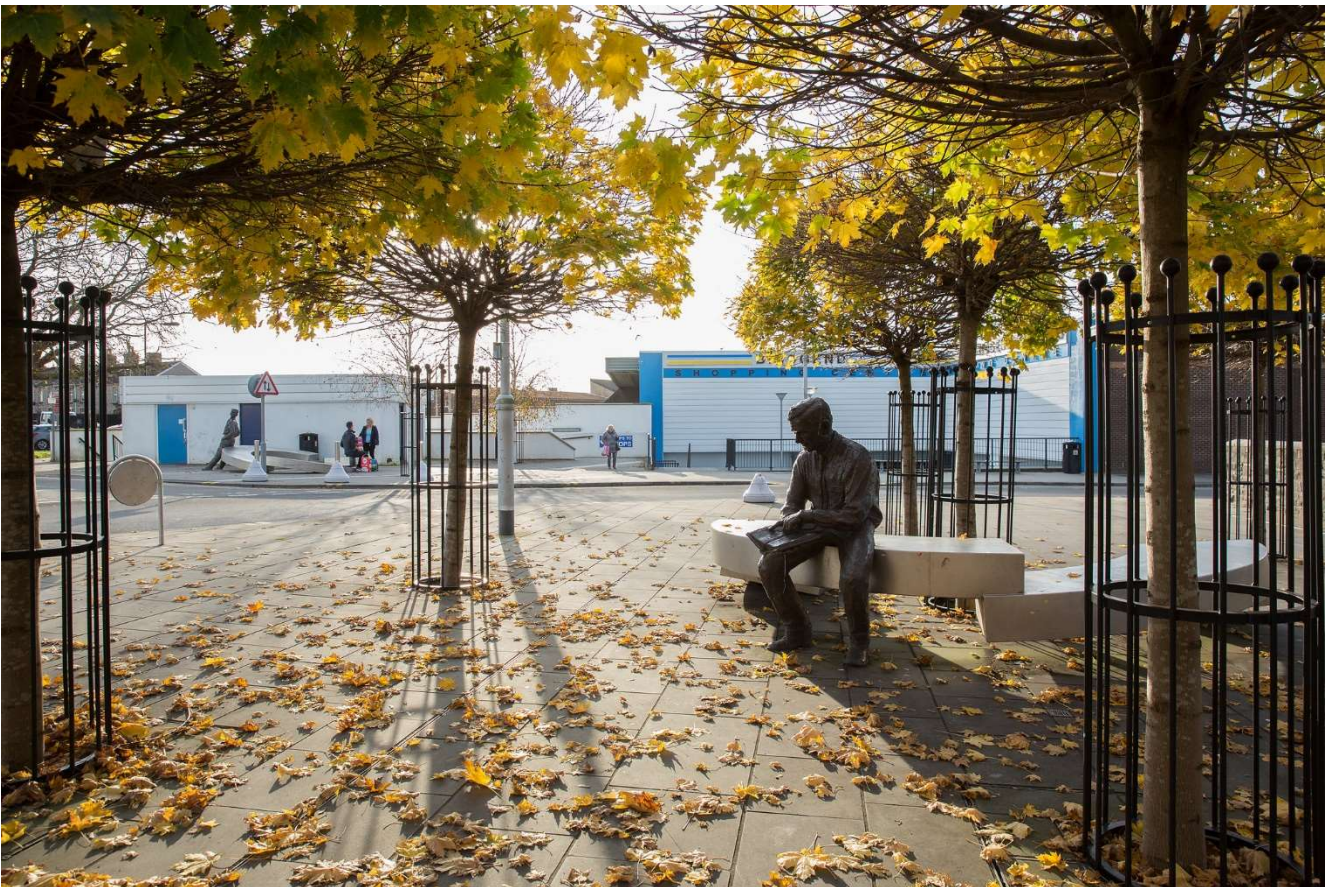
The Governance Framework enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether they have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

### What this Statement tells you

This Statement describes the extent to which the Council has complied with its Code of Corporate Governance and the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Accounts and Audit (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 for the year ended 31 March 2021.

It also sets out how the Council has responded to governance issues identified during 2020-21 and actions to be undertaken during 2021-22 following an annual review of the Governance Framework.

The Statement has been prepared in accordance with the 2016 guidance: [‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework’](#) produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE).



*Bridgend Town*

## The Council's Governance Responsibilities

The Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

The Council must consider the longer term impact of any decisions it makes, and should work collaboratively with other public bodies to improve well-being in Wales.<sup>1</sup>

As a public body the Council has to ensure it delivers sustainable social, cultural, environmental and economic outcomes as a key focus of its governance process and structures. This is achieved by:

- behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law
- ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance sets out its commitment to, and responsibility for, ensuring that there is a sound system of governance in place. The [Code](#) and [Governance Framework](#) is on the Council's website or can be obtained from the Section 151 Officer.

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance sets out the seven principles of good governance in line with CIPFA's 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework'.

Bridgend County Borough Council Code of Governance (2017)	
The Council's Governance Principles are based on the following:	
A	Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law
B	Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
C	Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
D	Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
E	Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it
F	Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management
G	Implementing good practice in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability



<sup>1</sup> Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

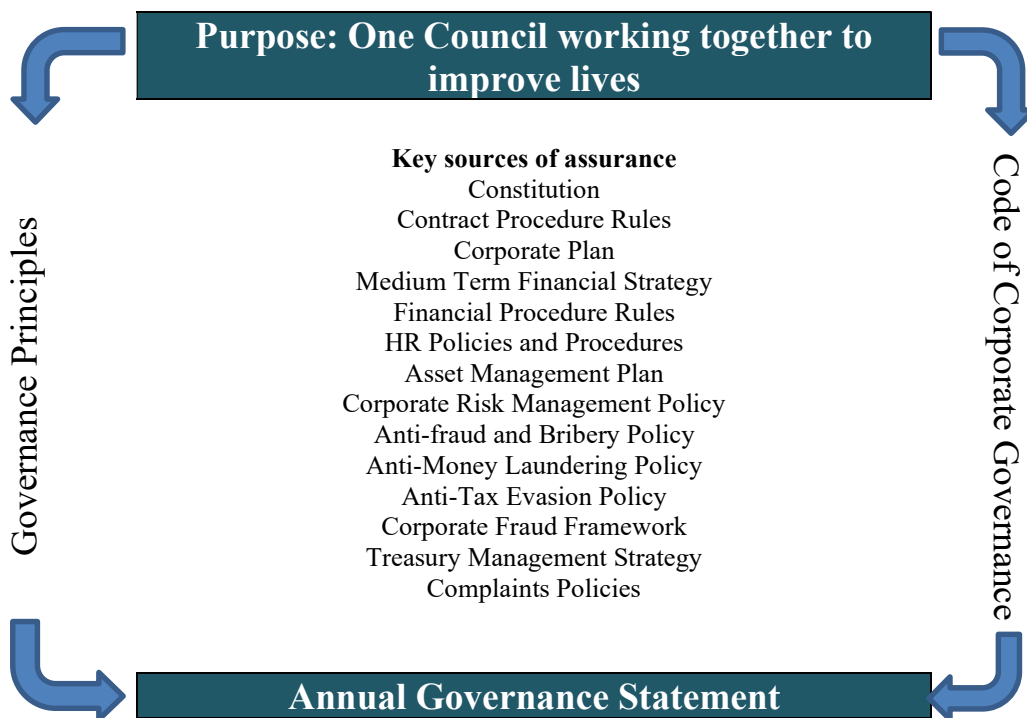
## The Council's Governance Framework

**The Governance Framework comprises the systems, processes and values by which the Council is directed and controlled and the means by which it accounts to, engages with and leads the local community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.**

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to make appropriate use and prevent loss of public funds. It also assists with managing the risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. It does not eliminate all the risk; the system of internal control is designed to identify and prioritise risks, evaluate the likelihood of those risks materialising and manage their impact.

In order to review the effectiveness of the governance framework, assurances are provided to, and challenged by, the Governance and Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committees, Council, Cabinet and Corporate Management Board as appropriate. In addition the Section 151 Officer promotes and delivers good financial management and the Monitoring Officer promotes and delivers legal and ethical assurance.

Some of the key elements of the governance framework are highlighted below.



More widely, as part of its partnership and joint working arrangements, the Council is involved in bespoke external governance arrangements driven by the different partnership and delivery arrangements in place. Examples of these include the following:

- The Council is one of ten Councils jointly delivering the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal (CCRCD), which has in place joint Scrutiny and Cabinet to ensure governance in its implementation. The CCRCD aims to raise economic prosperity, job prospects and improve digital and transport connectivity and is a significant investment into the South Wales economy.

The Council is committed to contributing to the delivery of these objectives across the region to ensure that the community and business within the Borough can benefit from this investment.

- During 2019-20 the new regional arrangements were put in place for the health and social care partnership and the Cwm Taf Regional Partnership Board established and these arrangements are successfully bedding in. The Regional Safeguarding Board and Regional Partnership Board provide leadership across the region for safeguarding an integrated planning of health and social care services. There are a small number of key services that still operate on the previous 'Western Bay' footprint.
- The Council is a participant in a number of shared services, with other local authorities, such as the Shared Regulatory Services with Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan Councils, and Central South Consortium, a joint education service for five local authorities. These are governed by joint committees which comprise elected members from each of the local authorities. The Council also is a partner in the Regional Internal Audit Shared Services with Vale of Glamorgan, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil Councils.

## Decision Making and Responsibilities

**The Council consists of 54 elected Members, with an elected Leader and Cabinet who are supported and held to account by Scrutiny Committees.** The Council's constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures for ensuring that the Council is efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. It contains the basic rules governing the Council's business and sets out a list of functions and decisions exercisable by officers. It also contains the rules and protocols by which the Council, Members and officers operate.



Through the Constitution, along with the Member's Code of Conduct, Standards Committee and role of internal audit, the Council operates with **integrity**, **ethical values** and within its **legal** powers.

All Council and Committee meetings' agendas, papers and minutes can be viewed on-line and pre-pandemic all meetings were open to the public unless exempt or confidential matters were being discussed. Since the pandemic meetings are held virtually and recorded and placed on the Council's website for the public to access. The Council's forward work programme contains information about all matters that are likely to be the subject of a decision taken by full Council or Cabinet during the forthcoming period. They also include information regarding Scrutiny Committees. To further enhance **openness** and **comprehensive stakeholder engagement** the Council has a Citizen's Panel, which takes part in surveys on a range of issues. The Council also uses social media to promote services and engage with the public and makes information available in a range of formats to maximise the opportunity for information sharing and to enable residents to communicate with the Council.

## Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act received Royal Assent on 20 January 2021. The Act is a substantial piece of legislation covering electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance and regional working. There are many reforms within the Act, however, in summary the Act introduces:

- Reform of electoral arrangements for local government, including extending the voting franchise to 16 and 17 year olds;
- Introduction of a general power of competence;
- Reforming public participation in local government;
- Reforms around democratic governance and leadership;
- Collaborative working;
- Reform of the performance and governance regime;
- Powers to facilitate voluntary mergers of principal councils.

In order to provide local authorities with certainty as to what legislative changes are being implemented when, and ensure the required preparations can be made, Welsh Government has made three Commencement Orders, which will be accompanied by other relevant subordinate legislation, which will bring the relevant provisions into force on a series of dates between March 2021 and 5 May 2022.

The Act will have a wide ranging impact on the organisation, powers, performance measurement and governance of the Council, including changes to the composition and terms of reference of the Audit Committee (which was re-named the Governance and Audit Committee by Council in September 2020, in anticipation of the requirements of the Act). New responsibilities include a role in reviewing the Council's self-assessment report and making any recommendations for change, consideration of the outcome and response to a panel performance assessment of the Council, and responsibility for making reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively. The Council will need to address these changes and amend its governance structures and arrangements accordingly.

### Role of the Governance and Audit Committee

The **Governance and Audit Committee** provides independent assurance on the Council's internal control environment. It is a statutory Committee and consists of 12 Councillors and 1 Lay Member. Its main functions are:

- Review and scrutinise reports and recommendations in relation to the Council's Financial Affairs
- Review and scrutinise reports and recommendations on the appropriateness of the Council's risk management, internal control and corporate governance arrangements
- Oversee the Council's internal and external audit arrangements
- To be responsible for ensuring effective scrutiny of the Treasury Management Strategy and Policies
- To monitor the Council's Anti-Fraud and Bribery Strategy, Anti-Money Laundering Policy and Anti-Tax Evasion Policy
- To review and approve the Council's Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Statement of Accounts
- To review and consider reports from the External Auditor and Inspectors



### 3 Assessing Performance

The Councils' performance is reported in its [Annual Report](#), its annual self-evaluation of progress against the Council's Corporate Plan. The report looks back on the progress made during the year on the steps to meet the well-being objectives. The report considers measures of success with targets set annually and used to drive improvement. During 2020-21 a key factor faced by the Council over the year was the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the governance arrangements and processes that the Council had to put in place to ensure it could continue to support residents and businesses during this difficult and challenging year.

#### The Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan 2018-23, updated for 2021-22, agreed in February 2021 sets out the Council's vision: '**One Council working together to improve lives**'. The Plan defines the Council's three priorities well-being objectives and its organisational values and principles that underpin how it will work to deliver its priorities. The Council defines its purpose to 'contribute to a place where people love to live, work, study and do business, where people have the skills and qualifications they need to improve their life chances, and enjoy good health and a sense of well-being and independence'.



Underpinning the Council's Corporate Plan and throughout its decisions-making process, the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 are applied. The table shows how the Council's well-being objectives contribute to the seven well-being goals.

Well-being Goal	Well-being Objective		
	Supporting a successful sustainable economy	Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient	Smarter use of resources
A prosperous Wales	✓		✓
A resilient Wales			✓
A healthier Wales	✓	✓	✓
A more equal Wales	✓	✓	✓
A Wales of cohesive communities	✓	✓	✓
A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	✓	✓	
A globally responsible Wales	✓		✓




In addition to the seven well-being goals, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 puts in place the sustainable development principle and defines the five ways of working that public bodies must adopt to demonstrate they have applied the sustainable development principle. The five ways of working are:


















**Long-term:** thinking of future generations and of our natural resources.

**Prevention:** this is the step before any issues arise and is aimed at making sure that solutions and interventions are targeted and available to stop statutory services being required.

**Integration and Collaboration:** with colleagues and partners. Ensure decisions are joined up across services and work more closely with partners in the public, private and third sectors.

**Involvement:** consult and involved local people in planning and delivering services.

5 Ways of Working	Long term	Prevention	Integration	Collaboration	Involvement
<b>Our Principles</b>					
To support communities and people to create their own solutions and reduce dependency on the Council.					
To focus diminishing resources on communities and individuals with the greatest need.					

5 Ways of Working	Long term	Prevention	Integration	Collaboration	Involvement
To use good information from service users and communities to inform its decisions.					
To encourage and develop capacity amongst the third sector to identify and respond to local needs.					
To not let uncertainty over the future of public services prevent meaningful and pragmatic collaboration with other public sector bodies.					
To work as one Council and discourage different parts of the organisation from developing multiple processes or unnecessarily different approaches.					
To transform the organisation and many of its services to deliver financial budget reductions as well as improvements.					

**Welsh language** – Wales has two official languages, Welsh and English, and services and information should be equally available in both. The Council’s internal business language is English, but all the services and information we provide for local people will be equally available in either language.

The Corporate Plan identifies a number of key principles which underpin its Well-being objectives and has adopted a set of values that represent what the Council stands for and influences how it works. The key principles are set out below.

- Wherever possible the Council will support communities and people to create their own solutions and reduce dependency on the Council
- The Council will focus diminishing resources on communities and individuals with the greatest need
- The Council will use good information from service users and communities to inform its decisions
- The Council will encourage and develop capacity amongst the third sector to identify and respond to local needs
- The Council will not let uncertainty over the future of public services prevent meaningful and pragmatic collaboration with other public sector bodies
- The Council will work as one Council and discourage different parts of the organisation from developing multiple processes or unnecessarily different approaches
- The Council will transform the organisation and many of its services and in so doing will deliver financial budget reductions as well as improvements

The Council’s values, or the **FACE** of the Council are:

- **F**air – taking into account everyone’s needs and situations
- **A**mbitious – always trying to improve what we do and aiming for excellence
- **C**itizen-focused – remembering that we are here to serve our local community
- **E**fficient – delivering services that are value for money

## Covid-19

The UK was put into lockdown on 23 March 2020 in an unprecedented step to attempt to limit the spread of coronavirus. This followed similar action in other countries across the world. The UK Government put into place a limited number of reasons for people to be allowed to leave their homes. As a consequence many non-essential shops and businesses had to close, schools were closed and all workers were required to work from home where possible. Initially the lockdown was for a period of 3 weeks but this was then extended over the next couple of months with the First Minister of Wales announcing an easing of lockdown rules from 1 June into July 2020, with confirmation that swimming pools, gyms, leisure centres and indoor play areas could open from 3 August 2020. Further lockdowns followed, the first a two week “firebreak” from 23 October until 9 November, followed by a further lockdown from midnight of 19 December 2020 due to a significant surge in cases from a new strain of the virus.

Throughout this period the Council has had to adapt and implement significant changes to the day-to-day management of the Council, and the nature and delivery of its operations. In order to maintain continuity of service wherever possible, the Council moved extremely quickly to equip office-based staff with mobile technology at the end of March 2020 and into the new financial year, to enable home-working within a very short timescale. Office-based staff are now equipped to work at home either with laptops and telephone facilities installed on the laptops, or on home computers linked to the Council’s corporate network. The Council significantly increased its infrastructure ability to enable all who could work from home to do so. This included providing multiple accessibility platforms to enable access. The capacity of back end storage has been increased. Whilst the security of the network remains at a high level, to mitigate potential risks the use of Outlook Web Access was removed. In addition to this and to further strengthen network security, the Council has increased its firewall provision. Decisions were made to deploy employees to key priority areas wherever possible to ensure continuity of essential services. During the year the focus has remained on ensuring the resilience of front line services to cover absence and acute pressure points, and to supporting services that promote public health, including the Test, Trace, Protect service and, latterly, the vaccination programme and community testing.

At the start of the pandemic a number of services, including schools, were closed, although the Council continued to maintain a significant number of essential services running, particularly the provision of social care services for vulnerable adults and children and waste collection services. Services that were closed included cultural venues, leisure centres, community recycling centres and day services. During the year, as lockdown restrictions initially eased, a number of these reopened, but with social distancing measures in place, or were provided differently. Schools adapted to provide blended learning and during full lockdown, online learning, with most pupils being taught via their home computers. Those pupils eligible for free school meals have been provided with weekly food parcels, delivered to their homes, and funding was secured to enable digitally excluded pupils to continue to learn from home.

When the country moved into lockdown, all formal meetings of Council were immediately cancelled. However, under the Local Authorities (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020, Local Authorities were given powers to hold meetings virtually using video conference technology from 22 April 2020. As a result the Council held its first virtual meeting of Development Control Committee on 4 June 2020, followed by a meeting of Cabinet on 30 June 2020. Other virtual committee meetings followed with the first meeting of full Council on 22 July 2020, and a full programme of meetings has been followed since this time. The meetings initially held via Skype, are now held via Microsoft Teams, are recorded and uploaded to the Council’s website following the meeting. This enables full and transparent decision making and includes procedures for enabling Members to vote on key decisions. The initial Covid-19 group, consisting of members of the Cabinet and Corporate Management Board (CMB), along with a number of key officers, was stood down as official meetings resumed, but bi-weekly meetings of Cabinet and CMB were reinstated to consider other Council business. In January 2021, as the latest lockdown

came into place, CMB introduced a specific CMB Gold meeting to discuss Covid related issues, outside of their regular CMB agenda. This was supplemented by a Covid Silver Group, consisting of Heads of Service, some group managers and other key officers, to consider more of the operational implications of the pandemic. The Covid Silver Group escalates any decisions required and any recommendations made to the Covid Gold Group. Both groups initially met weekly, but as the crises has reduced this was then reduced to fortnightly. More recently the groups have, in relation to the Covid response, been stood down in line with other regional and national 'pandemic' management groups however the benefit of having such groups has seen them refocus to consider wider strategic, operational and non-Covid cross-Council issues and have continued in this respect..

In June 2020 a report was presented to Cabinet recommending the establishment of a cross-party, elected member, Recovery Panel to help to shape, inform and advise Cabinet on the Council's recovery planning. The Panel met on six occasions during August. During its meetings the Panel considered presentations from requested invitees, including the Public Services Board (PSB), Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO), the Corporate Director – Social Services and Wellbeing, the director of Bridgend County Care and Repair, and the Head of Partnership Services and Group Manager – Housing. The Panel's recommendations were presented to Cabinet on 15 September 2020 and then taken forward for consideration. It was agreed that the work of the Panel would continue with further recommendations reported to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet for approval. A Cabinet response to the Recovery Panel's recommendations has been provided to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in December 2020.

Part of the national response to the impact of the pandemic has been to provide additional financial support to the economy, including the distribution of Business Grants and extended business rates relief, both of which have been administered by the Council. This has required staff to focus on administering, managing and paying a large volume of grants in short timescales. During the financial year there have been a number of different grants and schemes funded by Welsh Government, but managed and administered by the Council, providing support to businesses including:

- Business and Charity Grants Phase 1                      March 2020
- NDR Lockdown / Firebreak Grant                              November 2020
- Business Restrictions Fund (various phases)              December 2020

In total over £50 million has been paid out to a wide range of businesses and charities throughout the year. Each of these grants has had different criteria (those paying business rates only, or a wider cohort), different awards processes (automatically paid or application process) and different funding amounts. This has required a coordinated effort between the taxation section, regeneration team, and eligible businesses as quickly as possible, at the same time ensuring that public funds are used appropriately and that control mechanisms are in place to safeguard the funding.

This is in addition to a range of other individual grant payments, including:

- Social Care Workforce Payments of £500
- Self-Isolation Payments for those on low incomes
- Statutory Sick Pay top-ups for social care workers

All have required new processes to be put in place to administer them, including digital changes to enable applications to be submitted online, system changes, cash management and accounting processes to be considered. Taking into account the business grants, over £53 million additional grant income has passed through the Council's accounts for these specific grants alone.

Other services have had to think differently about how they could continue to provide services during the lockdown period. Most service areas have had to adapt and many employees have been able to work in a different and more agile way. There is a significant challenge to the organisation moving forward in ensuring that many of the new ways of working that have worked well continue to do so.

Other services have had to reconsider how they continue to deliver to the public over time. One example is the provision of free school meals, which initially was provided through a 'packed lunch' style arrangement, which pupils collected from specific locations. Over time, and to address social distancing rules, this changed to a food parcel delivery service to pupils' homes. Whilst alternative service delivery options have been considered during the year, including payment of cash or vouchers to parents, the Council still feels that at this time this service provides the best all-round option for pupils, taking into account nutritional value and supporting children whilst at home. However, this is constantly under review.

In addition to the business grants, Welsh Government has provided a number of specific grants to meet the additional costs of Local Authorities as a result of the pandemic, for costs in general and targeted at specific areas, such as adult social care, free school meals, homelessness and personal protective equipment. Costs are collated across the Council to enable these grants to be drawn down, the majority of which are claimed against the Welsh Government Hardship Fund. There is also the impact of lost income from fees and charges, which creates an additional pressure, coupled with a downturn in council tax collection due to the impact of the financial circumstances on a number of residents, and the consequential increase in those claiming council tax reduction. The Council has claimed and received the following amounts:

<b>Welsh Government Hardship Fund</b>	<b>Claimed £000</b>	<b>Paid £000</b>	<b>Disallowed £000</b>
Additional expenditure	15,791*	15,013	778
Loss of income	5,697	5,574	104
<b>Total</b>	<b>£21,488</b>	<b>£20,587</b>	<b>£882</b>

\* including £271,000 relating to 2019-20.

Cost pressures and loss of income not covered by Welsh Government have created additional pressures on the Council budget, so the Council established a specific earmarked reserve at the end of 2019-20 to enable it to mitigate any non-funded Covid related costs in both 2020-21 and beyond.

The Council took on board the guidance and advice set out in Procurement Policy Notice 01/20: Responding to Covid-19, and subsequent notices, and put in place a number of measures to support suppliers, including payments in advance of supply where appropriate, maintaining management fee levels for some of our key providers during the pandemic, and increasing the number of BACS payments made per week to ensure funding reached supplier accounts more quickly. This was done mindful of the Council's Financial Procedure Rules, delegated powers process and the Covid-19 decision making process. Whilst supporting suppliers in this way, to minimise any risk of fraud, those who received funding from the Council were requested to sign up to an open book accounting process so that the Council could verify any funding the organisation received, to ensure no duplicate funding was made.

Whilst a number of Council capital schemes were delayed, the Council also experienced additional costs as a result of the need to implement social distancing on building sites, when new schemes have been tendered, so it is clear the longer term consequences of the coronavirus pandemic cannot yet be known in full or be quantified. However, it seems inevitable that a number of businesses will find themselves in financial difficulties and maybe go out of business, despite the various support schemes that have been put in place over the year. The town centres may be particularly hit as staff are directed to continue to work from home if they are able to do so and not in their usual office base, including staff in the main town centre Council offices, thus impacting on the footfall in these main retail areas. There are also likely to be potential increases in levels of deprivation with associated demands placed upon Council services as a consequence of the increased number of families applying for universal credit and council tax support. Financially we expect there to be pressures on service costs, reduced council tax and business rates income, ongoing reduced income at car parks, rental income where the Council is the landlord and playing fields and other facilities as people remain wary of going out and socialising in large groups. Whilst the vaccination programme is well underway and Welsh Government expects all nine priority groups to have received their first vaccination by mid-July 2021, the impact of the

pandemic is still expected to be felt for many years to come and potentially unequally with those living in areas of most deprivation most impacted. Short-term measures such as rental holidays for businesses and business rates relief will provide them with some support, but it will be difficult to fully offset the devastating economic impact that the pandemic has caused. In addition, consumer habits have changed, with people having been forced to shop and do business differently, and there is no guarantee that they will revert to old habits.

In March 2019 Estyn inspected Bridgend's local government education services. Following the inspection Estyn identified four recommendations to further improve Bridgend's provision of education services to children and young people. These included the need to develop literacy in primary schools, support schools, causing concern, develop post-16 education and support the work of the statutory Welsh in Education Strategic Plan. While work against the four recommendations has continued since March 2020, the pandemic has impacted on progress. Updates are provided to the Council's School Improvement Group on a bi-monthly basis and we will continue to monitor progress against these priority areas.

Care Inspectorate Wales has carried out regulatory inspections of the Council's registered care provision. One service, a children's residential care home, was a service of concern for a period in 2020 but has now satisfied all regulatory requirements. There have been positive regulatory inspections of other provision. The Council is a significant provider of adult and children's regulated care services and the Head of Adult Services and the Head of Children's Services are Responsible Individuals for the provision, with legal responsibilities in accordance with the Regulation and Inspection of Care (Wales) Act (2018). There have been regular meetings between senior officers and Care Inspectorate Wales during 2020-21 to provide assurance in respect of the safety and wellbeing of people during the Covid-19 pandemic. An assurance check was carried out by Care Inspectorate Wales in April 2021 and any areas for improvement identified will be progressed in a timely way.

The Government is likely to impose social distancing rules for some time to come, which will have consequential impacts on services such as leisure and cultural services, where mass attendances at leisure centres, swimming pools and public performance events will have to adjust to any new rules following Covid-19. Retail and leisure services independent to the Council will also be affected as it takes time for public confidence to increase. In July 2020 each Directorate was asked to complete a corporate questionnaire ("COVID-19 Service Recovery Planning Assessment") that was designed to identify lessons learnt from each of its service areas during Covid-19 Lockdown. An Improvement Plan was developed to "ensure that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council services are delivered safely and to a high standard." This exercise has helped ensure that the Council is able to respond more effectively to any future significant events that affect service delivery. In the coming year the Council will need to focus on restoring services, supporting communities and particularly the most vulnerable in our society, as well as doing all we can to help our local economy to recover. Implementing agile working has afforded the Council opportunities for efficiencies and benefits to both the organisation and employees. This includes less travelling reducing the impact on time of working, as well as environmental benefits. Moving forward agile working will allow the Council the opportunity to assess its needs for office space, and the benefits to staff of a longer-term agile working approach.

## Annual Improvement

Audit Wales<sup>2</sup>, our External Auditor, assesses the Council's arrangements for delivering continuous improvement and subsequent performance, the results of which are published in their [Annual Audit Summary 2020](#). In January 2020 they reported that the 'Auditor General certified that the Council has met its legal duties for improvement planning and reporting, and believes that it is likely to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure (2009) during 2020-21'.

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<sup>2</sup> Since 1 April 2020 the Wales Audit Office and Auditor General are branded as Audit Wales. The statutory names remain Wales Audit Office and Auditor General for Wales.

Audit Wales have undertaken and reported on a number of reviews during the year, the key outcomes of which are set out below.

Report	Key outcomes
<p><b>Financial Sustainability Assessment, February 2020</b></p>	<p><b>The purpose of the review was to assess the sustainability of council's short to medium term financial position.</b> This included a focus on the financial strategy of each council as well as reviewing some key financial indicators of each council's financial position in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• performance against budget;</li> <li>• delivery of savings plans;</li> <li>• use of reserves;</li> <li>• council tax; and</li> <li>• borrowing.</li> </ul> <p>Overall the review found that the Council has a strong financial position, but aspects of financial planning and its Medium Term Financial Strategy would benefit from strengthening. This was because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy would benefit from strengthening in some important areas. The review found that cost pressures were only included for one year; it does not provide detailed activity and expenditure projections for the four years of the Strategy, and does not evaluate past financial performance, such as budget underspends and the lower-than-forecast use of reserves.</li> <li>• In recent years the Council has underspent all its annual budgets</li> <li>• The Council has a good track record of achieving most of its planned savings</li> <li>• The Council has a high level of useable reserves, which are ring-fenced for specific purposes and potential risks to the Council. Approximately a third of the total reserves are earmarked to fund specific schemes within the Council's capital programme and 5% relate to equalisation and grant reserves.</li> <li>• The Council has a good track record of collecting its council tax</li> <li>• The Council has a relatively low level of borrowing and interest costs and has not sought any new long-term loans since 2012.</li> </ul>
<p><b>'Raising our Game' Tackling Fraud in Wales, July 2020</b></p>	<p><b>The report was to examine seven 'key themes' to ensure that the arrangements for preventing and detecting fraud in the Welsh public sector are effective.</b> The seven 'key themes' examined were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and culture</li> <li>• Risk management and control frameworks</li> <li>• Policies and training</li> <li>• Capacity and expertise</li> <li>• Tools and data</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Reporting and scrutiny</li> </ul> <p>For each theme the report examines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why it is important</li> <li>• What the audit fieldwork identified in terms of current working practices and their effectiveness across the 40 Welsh public sector bodies that were examined</li> <li>• What needs to happen to generative improvement</li> </ul> <p>A mapping exercise by the Council identified that there are many positive aspects identified across each of the themes. High standards for both Members and Officers are set and the Council has always dealt with any</p>



	allegations or suspicions of fraud, bribery and corruption promptly. Fraud training has recently been improved and an e-learning module is now in place. The next stage will be to develop an action plan to strengthen the measures already in place to establish best practice in respect of fraud prevention, investigation and detection in line with the themes and recommendations within the Audit Wales report.
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## Managing Risk

**The Council faces a range of risks as would be expected from the broad range of services it delivers and activities it is engaged with. On a day-to-day basis operational risk arises from the challenge of ensuring sufficient capacity and capability to advise on, and to deliver, the key policy objectives of the Council.**

The Council has developed a robust approach to the management of risk. The Corporate Risk Management Policy is aligned with Directorate Plans and the Council's performance management framework. The Council defines risk as: 'Any potential development or occurrence which, if it came to fruition, would jeopardise the Council's ability to:

- achieve its well-being objectives
- provide services as planned
- fulfil its statutory duties, including the duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement.'

Risks are viewed from both a Service and Council-wide perspective which ensures the key risks are distilled in the [Corporate Risk Assessment](#). The Risk Assessment sets out how the Council is addressing these risks and the mitigating actions it will put in place to reduce them. It is regularly reviewed and challenged by both senior management and the Governance and Audit Committee. It is not possible to eliminate all risk of failure to meet the targets in the Council's policies, aims and objectives and cannot therefore provide absolute assurance of effectiveness, but one of reasonable assurance.

## Financial Management

**The financial management of the Council is conducted in accordance with all relevant legislation and the Constitution. The Council has in place Financial Procedure Rules, Contract Procedure Rules, a specific Financial Scheme for Schools, and the scheme of delegation also provides the framework for financial control. The Section 151 Officer is responsible for establishing a clear framework for the management of the Council's financial affairs and for ensuring that arrangements are made for their proper administration.**

The Council's ability to deliver savings and contain its expenditure within its overall budget is well established. However, the Council faces significant challenges in the future in the face of further Government plans to cut public spending, particularly as it is assumed that at some point the substantial additional Government expenditure on the pandemic will need to be recovered. There also remains significant uncertainty as a result of Brexit and the impact this might have on Council services including the receipt of European grants. The Council estimates that it will need to generate approximately £22 million of savings over the period 2021-22 to 2024-25. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy has taken account of cost pressures and priority areas in line with the Corporate Plan and undertaken extensive consultation to ensure a robust process. To ensure greater involvement of stakeholders in the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy an eight week consultation 'Fit for the Future' was undertaken between 19 October and 13 December 2020, the emphasis of which was on the Council's

recovery plans, following the pandemic, including what the public felt were important services during the lockdown and what services they actually accessed. Due to social distancing requirements, the budget consultation was pre-launched on social media prior to the live survey date and the consultation itself focused more on online, social media and interactive engagement methods. Communication took place through a wide variety of methods, including surveys, social media, online engagement sessions, online Frequently Asked Questions as well as videos, radio adverts and media releases. To gather the views of young people the consultation team attended a Bridgend Youth Council meeting and promoted the consultation amongst learners, staff and parents at Bridgend secondary schools and Bridgend College. The Medium Term Financial Strategy can be found on the Council's website [here](#). Given the single-year funding provided by the Welsh Government, the Council has developed detailed budgets for year one of the Strategy with indicative budgets thereafter based on a range of funding scenarios.

The Council has in place robust arrangements for effective financial control through the Council's accounting procedures, key financial systems and the Financial Procedure Rules. This includes established budget planning procedures and regular budget monitoring reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee, as well as detailed information to budget holders. The Council prepares its Annual Accounts as required by the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations and in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom.

The Council follows the CIPFA Code on Treasury Management and Welsh Government's Guidance on Local Authority Investments to ensure that funds invested are secure, accessible when necessary and attract an appropriate return and any borrowings needed are in line with the Council's Treasury Management Strategy, as approved by Council. During the Coronavirus pandemic reliance on Treasury Management advice has been crucial, and significant levels of cash movements meant an increased focus was needed on managing cash flows in as secure a manner as possible. Significant use was made of the Treasury's Debt Management Office to deposit funds during the initial stages of the crisis to maintain security and liquidity, but as the crisis begins to ease monies will be invested in wider instruments in line with the Council's Treasury Management Advisor's advice.

The Prudential Code and Treasury Management Code of Practice, issued in December 2017, set out new requirements in relation to the production of a Capital Strategy. CIPFA are currently consulting on both these Codes of Practice. The proposed changes to the Prudential Code include: commercial investment should be 'proportionate' to service and revenue expenditure; capital expenditure should be "sustainable in accordance with the corporate objectives of the authority"; capital strategies should provide more commentary on the affordability of commercial activities; 'Liability Benchmark' to replace prudential indicator on gross debt and the capital financing requirement; and two new prudential indicators on affordability. The proposed changes to the Treasury Management Code include: new knowledge and skills schedules for treasury management roles to assess and track competencies; new council committees to focus solely on scrutinising treasury management decisions; and new Treasury Management guidance on assessing the environmental, social and governance risks of future investments. The outcome of these consultations will need to be considered when revising both the Treasury Management and Capital Strategies. The Capital Strategy currently requires the Council to consider the longer term as well as the short term. It requires that capital expenditure plans are affordable, prudent and sustainable and outlines the future commitments so that affordability of both the long-term plan and any new proposals can be properly understood. Furthermore it enables the ongoing capital and revenue implications of capital expenditure to be better understood. The Capital Strategy is evolving to provide a robust, medium to long term capital plan for the Council.

## Compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code of Practice

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) launched the Financial Management Code of Practice (FM Code) in November 2019. The FM Code was developed in the context of increasing concerns about the financial resilience and sustainability of local authorities.

The FM Code sets out the principles by which authorities should be guided in managing their finances and the specific standards that they should, as a minimum, seek to achieve. It clarifies how Chief Finance Officers should satisfy their statutory responsibility for good financial administration as required in section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and emphasises the collective financial responsibility of the whole leadership including the relevant elected members.

By complying with the principles and standards within the code authorities will be able to demonstrate their financial sustainability. Whilst the Code is designed to be flexible to the nature, needs and circumstances of individual authorities, it is up to each authority to determine the extent to which it complies with the FM Code and to identify what action it may wish to take to better meet the standards that the FM Code sets out. Full compliance is expected for the 2021-22 financial year (i.e. from April 2021) with the 2020-21 financial year acting as a shadow year. In its Guidance Bulletin 06 (*Application of the Good Governance Framework 2020/21*) CIPFA has stated that the Annual Governance Statement for 2020-21 should include the overall conclusion of an assessment of the organisation's compliance with the principles of the FM Code. Also, that where there are outstanding matters or areas for improvement, these should be included in the action plan.

The Council has made an assessment of its current compliance with the 19 Standards outlined in the FM Code. The assessment has identified that the Council can demonstrate compliance with all of the Standards, but that further actions can be taken to enhance compliance during 2021-22. These actions are included in the Action Plan in Section 5.

## 4 Audit Assurance

### Audit and Audit Assurances

**The Council is audited externally by the Auditor General for Wales, supported by Audit Wales. The objectives of this are to obtain assurance on whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error; that the accounts have been prepared in accordance with legislative requirements and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom; and to issue an opinion thereon. They also assess our arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.**

In 2020 the External Auditor gave an unqualified audit opinion on the financial statements 2019-20.

Audit Wales also audit a number of grant claims and in the year completed 5 audits of grants and returns. The audit confirmed that there were generally sound working papers and all claims were certified ahead of the audit deadlines in place. One claim for Housing Benefit was qualified due to a few errors however this did not affect the reimbursement of the claim.

In addition Audit Wales undertake reviews of various services and also performance reviews throughout the year, the outcome of which are reported to the Governance and Audit Committee.

The Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control for 2020-21 is:

***“Reasonable Assurance”***

The opinion states that, based on the work completed by the Regional Internal Audit Shared Service for the financial year, no significant cross-cutting control issues have been identified that would impact on the Council's overall control environment. The weaknesses that have been identified are service specific.

As described earlier in the Annual Governance Statement the way the Council has had to operate during 2020-21 has been severely affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. Many staff have worked remotely, and systems & processes have had to be adjusted to cater for the new ways of working. Similarly, Internal Audit has worked remotely, conducting audits and obtaining evidence digitally. Each audit has considered the potential impact of COVID 19 and remote working to ensure adequate controls and governance arrangements remained in place.

The pandemic did have some impact on the delivery of the internal audit plan for 2020-21 and a limited number of audits were deferred due to the pressures on some service areas. These audits will be carried out in 2021-22. The Internal Audit coverage was still sufficient for the Head of Audit to be able to give an opinion.

The recommendations made to improve governance, risk management and control have been accepted and are at various stages of implementation.

During the year there continued to be interim arrangements in place to cover the statutory position of the Council's Section 151 Officer/Head of Finance, which does cause some concern from a continuity and capacity perspective. Whilst there is little or no risk in the short term as the current Statutory Officer is extremely experienced and more than capable to fulfil the role, it is important that the vacancy is filled

on a permanent as soon as possible. To help strengthen the resilience of the Finance function, a temporary Deputy Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer post was appointed in May 2019. Following a review of the Head of Finance role, Council agreed the post should be re-designated as Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change. The post was subsequently advertised at the start of 2020 and further in June 2020, but there were not sufficiently qualified applicants with the required skills and experience to be able to progress through all stages of the appointments process.



*The Pavilion, Porthcawl*

## 5 Improving Governance

A number of significant issues were identified in the Council's 2019-20 Annual Governance Statement. The progress made on the significant issues is shown below:

<p>Covid-19 will have significant impacts as the infection rate increases. This will impact on workforce, delivery of services, economic and social pressures and disruption for months and possibly years to come.</p>	<p>After over a year from the original Covid-19 outbreak in the UK and the national lockdown, the Council continues to learn to live with the consequences of delivering effective public services amidst an ongoing global pandemic. The majority of the Council's staff continue to work from home and significant investment has been made in ensuring that this can be done as effectively as possible. While there continues to be a great deal of focus on delivering services directly related to the pandemic, including ensuring adequate PPE, contributing to the test, trace and protect, and supporting the mass vaccination programmes, priority is also being given to 'recover'. The Council has set an approved recovery plan based on four themes of financial stability for the organisation, economic recovery, service restoration (adapting services to ensure they are Covid safe) and public health. The cross-party recovery panel established, made sixteen initial recommendations to Cabinet to inform the Council's detailed recovery planning. In addition, a lessons learnt exercise was undertaken and a document produced to ensure the Council is best placed to respond even more effectively to any future lockdowns or crises.</p>
<p>The uncertainty regarding the impact of and exit from the European Union may well place continued increasing expectations and demands on public sector organisations and the Council which will need to be factored into the Medium Term Financial Strategy</p>	<p>As the UK exited the European Union, with a last-minute deal, a new Treaty came into force from 1 January 2021, taking over from the previous transition period arrangement. The consequences of having a trade agreement in place are inevitably likely to be more positive than a no-deal situation. However, it is unlikely that there will be no impact, but it is too early to ascertain what this will be. The Covid-19 pandemic has overtaken the impact of the exit from the EU and will place continuing pressures on Council resources and budgets, at least in the short to medium term. The two events will continue to have an impact in the future, and the Council will need to closely monitor costs and lost income as a result of both significant events on its budget and cash-flow requirements.</p>
<p>Changes in Senior Management at Corporate Management Board level</p>	<p>A new Corporate Director Communities took up position in March 2020. The Corporate Director Social Services and Wellbeing was due to retire at the end of April 2020 but agreed to continue to provide leadership for the service in the role for a 6-month period during the pandemic. The virtual recruitment exercise for this vacancy was shown to work well, with strong interest for the post and an effective recruitment process, with the successful candidate taking up post in October 2020. There is now greater resilience across the Council's senior management team.</p> <p>The Council was unable to recruit to the Chief Officer, Finance, Performance and Change and the interim arrangements have continued.</p>
<p>Outcome of the Audit Wales report into Safeguarding and implementing the recommendations made therein</p>	<p>The Audit Committee held on the 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020, received the October 2019 WAO report: 'follow up review of corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children'. The actions and progress made against the proposals for improvement were noted and the item recorded as resolved.</p>
<p>Outcome of the Care Inspectorate Wales – Inspection of Older Adults Services Bridgend County</p>	<p>The service continues to progress the recommendations from the Care Inspectorate Wales inspection of older people. The impact of Covid-19 means some timescales in actions plans have been delayed as adult services has focussed on the considerable impact of the pandemic on social care services.</p>

Borough Council (January 2020)	
Strengthen the scrutiny and oversight arrangements of environmental health services and work with the Shared Regulatory Services and other providers to explore the opportunities for future improvements	<p>A report on SRS was scheduled to go to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) in March 2020 but the meeting was unfortunately cancelled due to the covid-19 pandemic and only essential meetings of COSC were held until after the Annual Meeting of Council when Scrutiny resumed with reduced reports. A draft Forward Working Programme for the coming year will be prepared shortly and SRS will be on the draft FWP.</p> <p>SRS are at the forefront of the Covid response which has given increased visibility of their role. There continues to be meetings of the SRS Joint Committee and regular meetings with the Head of Service and relevant Cabinet Member.</p>
The risk of fraud especially in the current Covid-19 pandemic with significant funding moving around and increased digitalisation of transacting with the Council	<p>The Council has placed a strong emphasis on the prevention of fraud during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially with the large volume and value of grants being paid out to individuals and organisations through various WG support schemes.</p> <p>The Council appointed a Senior Fraud Investigator in August 2020, who is playing a lead role in the detection and investigation of suspected fraudulent activity within the Council, and actively promoting fraud awareness across the Council.</p> <p>The Fraud Prevention e-learning module has been developed and rolled out to staff, fraud information is being updated and being made available to staff on the intranet and a more detailed fraud risk assessment process is being developed that will link to the corporate risk management process. A Corporate Anti-Tax Evasion policy has also been developed and approved by Cabinet in February 2021.</p> <p>The Council has submitted National Fraud Information (NFI) in two parts. The first non-Covid-19 grant data was submitted to NFI by 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the Covid-19 grant data was submitted on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021.</p>
The increasingly challenging budgets for Schools, with potential for greater deficit school budgets	<p>The impact of Covid-19 on schools has been significant, with schools closed from 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and did not reopen until September 2020, although some were used as childcare hubs during the summer months. School budgets were still required to be set for the financial year with deficit recovery plans in place as per the Financial Scheme for Schools. Due to the pandemic and school closures this had been a slower process than usual, but work continued on supporting those in deficit, agreeing deficit recovery plans and monitoring balances overall.</p> <p>Whilst schools were anticipated to stay open until 18 December 2020, many once again closed early due to the pandemic and increasing numbers of infections. Limited reopening of schools for children up to the age of 7 commenced from 22 February 2021, with the majority of other children not due to return to full time education until after the Easter break.</p> <p>There have been some savings arising in school budgets as a consequence of the closures, including savings on energy, cleaning, supply cover and some resources. However, when schools have reopened there have been additional cost pressures to put systems in place to maintain social distancing, for more regular cleaning, and purchase of ICT equipment to enable continued education for those children that are self- isolating. Some of the funding has been met from one-off grants from Welsh Government (e.g. cleaning</p>

resources) and others are being claimed from the Welsh Government Hardship Fund, but not all are eligible. Any claims for additional costs had to be net of any savings made, so significant work was necessary to identify these.

The net overall school balances as at 31 March 2021 was £8.491 million. There has been a significant improvement from the projected deficit position for schools reported during the year, primarily due to additional grant funding received late in 2020-21 committed to be used by schools in 2021-22.

Based on a review of the governance framework, and an assessment of compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code, the following significant issues identified in 2020-21 will be addressed in 2021-22 with the links to the [Governance Principles](#) on page 5:

Issue	Governance Principle	What the issue is	Proposed Actions to address issue
Implementing the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021	A	The Act will introduce changes covering electoral reform, public participation, governance and performance and regional working. This will have an impact on the way the Council operates.	The Council will need to implement measures to comply with the Act. This will include for example changes to the composition and terms of reference of the Governance and Audit Committee title from May 2021, the establishment of Corporate Joint Committees, wider performance review and self-assessment, and the introduction of measures to establish public participation. The Council will consider the Welsh Government Commencement Orders and subordinate legislation and will put in place processes for implementing the required changes.
Financial Sustainability	F	The ongoing financial pressure from the pandemic with increased pressure on expenditure and reduced income will impact on the 2021-22 financial year.	External funding to support additional pressures will be sought where possible from Welsh Government via the Hardship Fund. Earmarked reserves will be reviewed and maintained to support specific Covid-19 costs arising as a result of local decisions, in addition to provision to meet other unfunded pressures such as reductions in council tax income and additional costs of council tax support. Assumptions for future years' budgets will continue to be reviewed and amended to



			reflect the changing circumstances.
Review of Financial Procedure Rules	F	It is key that the Financial Procedure Rules are kept up to date to ensure they are fit for purpose.	Last updated in 2017, needs review and update to reflect current practices, especially with agile and home working arrangements.
Review of Code of Corporate Governance and associated schedule	A	Ensuring that the Code of Corporate Governance is kept up to date is crucial to ensure it is fit for purpose.	Last updated in 2017, needs review to ensure it reflects current governance framework.
To continue to support professional development	E	In order to deliver the best services and meet statutory requirements staff must be sufficiently skilled to deliver their responsibilities.	To assess skills needs as part of the finance restructure and support continuing professional development at all levels where considered necessary. Also to consider other training to both finance and non-finance staff, as well as Elected Members.
Digital / management and control of ICT assets with new ways of working	A	The ICT estate due to Covid-19 has become decentralised with officers working from home, which poses challenges with regard to the recording and management of the devices.	Change control processes – including patch management for all devices and applications across the ICT landscape.  Use of Configuration Management Database (CMDB) to store information about hardware and software assets.  Independent Audit assessments reviewing the management of the ICT infrastructure inclusive of devices and software.
Cyber Fraud	F	Cyber Security Risks refers to any <b>risk</b> of financial loss, disruption or damage to the reputation of an organisation resulting from the failure of its information technology systems.	Staff procedures and guidance through IT security policies, e.g. Six Simple Rules, Data Protection training.  Corporate blocks on online file storage.  Port control and encryption of USB devices.  Public Services Network / Certification accreditation.
Impact on the Social care sector of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ending of the hardship funding to the sector	C	The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the Social Care sector. Short term hardship funding has helped to support the sector, but the ending of this funding will have an impact moving forward.	A market stability plan is in development to mitigate the impact on older people's care homes of the pandemic and ensure that there continues to be sufficiency of quantity and quality of provision in Bridgend.

GDPR issues with new ways of working	A	Remote working demands a different security stance than working in centralised offices and the Council must ensure that it remains compliant with data protection laws.	<p>A Bridgend message was circulated in September 2020 on data protection and working from home. It provided guidance on issues such as communicating securely, keeping software up to date, ensuring no personal data is compromised, only using the Council's approved technology.</p> <p>The Council has strict ICT and Data Protection Act (DPA) policies and the Information Governance Board (with representation from each Directorate) continues to meet quarterly ensuring information security remains a top priority during this time.</p> <p>All staff and Elected Members are also required to undertake the mandatory DPA e-learning module.</p>
Workforce issues / wellbeing	E	To identify future working models for staff, following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions and ensure that wellbeing considerations are given priority.	Develop HR policies to support future working arrangements. Develop and implement additional actions to support a wellbeing culture across the organisation. Improve communications to help staff access information relating to Covid-19 and recovery.

These issues will be monitored via a detailed action plan during 2021-22, with the responsible officer and deadline for implementation identified for each action and reported to Cabinet/Corporate Management Board and to the Governance and Audit Committee.

## 6 Assurance Statement

The Council reacted quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic to put in place controls to ensure that a record was maintained of decisions made to ensure that appropriate governance arrangements were in place. Given these arrangements no significant internal control or governance issues have arisen, and the Council continues to have in place appropriate internal control and governance arrangements.

Subject to the above issues being resolved, we can provide an overall reasonable assurance that Bridgend County Borough Council's governance arrangements remain fit for purpose.

Steps to address the matters referred to above will be taken to further enhance our governance arrangements.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Leader)

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Chief Executive)

