

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>21 NOVEMBER 2023</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>CORPORATE SELF-ASSESSMENT 2022/23</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CHIEF OFFICER – LEGAL AND REGULATORY SERVICES, HR AND CORPORATE POLICY</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>ALEX RAWLIN, POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS MANAGER</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>Council priorities arising from the self-assessment inform Service Plans and the Annual Improvement Plan which form part of the Policy Framework.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The report outlines the process and findings of the Council’s self-assessment for 2022/23.</b></li> <li>• <b>The approach is more embedded in regular quarterly reporting than in the previous year.</b></li> <li>• <b>The main differences from last year’s final report are –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Challenge sessions took place earlier</b></li> <li>○ <b>Case studies are included</b></li> <li>○ <b>More comprehensive coverage of consultation and engagement through the year is included</b></li> <li>○ <b>Annual performance data will be published alongside and to support the self-assessment</b></li> <li>○ <b>Planned consultation is more comprehensive.</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>The self-assessment judgements are –</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Wellbeing Objective One – Good</b></li> <li>○ <b>Wellbeing Objective Two – Adequate</b></li> <li>○ <b>Wellbeing Objective Three – Good</b></li> <li>○ <b>Use of resources – Adequate</b></li> <li>○ <b>Governance – Good</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Changes have been made to reflect public responses during the formal consultation period</b></li> </ul>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Council’s second corporate self-assessment report and judgements, and to seek endorsement for the corporate self-assessment report 2022-23 in **Appendix 1**, to be submitted to Council for approval on 22 November 2022.

1.2 The Welsh Government Statutory guidance on Part 6, Chapter 1, of the Local

Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 requires the Council to present the self-assessment to Governance and Audit Committee. This was completed in July 2023 (pre-consultation) and November 2023 (including changes to be made based on consultation responses).

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which received royal assent in January 2021, set out a new local government improvement regime. The Act requires the Council to make and publish a self-assessment report once each financial year. The self-assessment report has to set out conclusions on whether the Council met the 'performance requirements' during that financial year, and actions needed to improve. The 'performance requirements' focus on -
- Are we exercising our functions effectively;
  - Are we using our resources economically, efficiently and effectively;
  - Is our governance strong.
- 2.2 The Council published its first self-assessment in October 2022 based on performance in 2021/22. The process was new, but based on existing data, reports and review / challenge meetings where possible. Feedback on the report was generally positive in terms of the honesty and transparency of ratings, length of the report and simplicity of the language. However, some Elected Members felt that annual performance data should have been published alongside self-assessment. For the 2022/23 report, the annual performance dashboards (those that were considered at the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) session on 14 June 2023) will be published alongside the self-assessment. For future years, with the new corporate plan, a more user-friendly performance summary will be developed.
- 2.3 Many parts of the self-assessment process have now been embedded in the Council's regular performance management process, for example the regulatory tracker and inclusion of consultation, engagement and involvement in the quarterly dashboard. By design, it was intended that the process for 2022/23 should be simpler and less resource intensive than the previous year.
- 2.4 Existing end of year performance processes / timelines have been used to capture Directorate self-assessments of performance to satisfy the first performance requirement (as in 2021/22). However, this year a simpler template was designed with the previous year's information pre-populated for Directorate Management Teams (DMTs) to update. Directorates were asked provide a realistic assessment of progress, use plain English to outline their challenges and achievements, retain the format of the information and keep contributions brief and to the point. The 4 templates were then collated by the Performance Team for scrutiny and challenge.
- 2.5 The main change to this section is the inclusion of case studies. Having reviewed all other self-assessments in Wales, this is the one feature that stood out. Around half of local authorities included case studies, and they added an extra dimension to the reports.
- 2.6 The second performance requirement, on use of resources, also followed a similar process to last year. The seven use of resources templates were reviewed and

updated by the lead officers. All of the seven areas have been included in the work of Audit Wales in the past year, and in many cases reviewed and discussed by the Governance and Audit Committee, or Scrutiny Committees, or are included in the year ahead, so there is significant additional evidence to draw on. These seven were then collated by the Performance Team for scrutiny and challenge.

- 2.7 The third performance requirement, on governance, is largely covered by the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which is scrutinised and approved by the Governance and Audit Committee. This document was summarised, and used to inform the self-assessment.
- 2.8 The Corporate self-assessment process and findings have, in large part, already been considered by Cabinet through the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) process in July, and changes to the draft self-assessment report have been made as a result of those discussions.

### 3 Current situation / proposal

- 3.1 The draft findings from each of the three performance requirements were pulled together into a single presentation for a full-day Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) meeting on 14 June 2023 and considered alongside end of year performance. Their changes were used to develop a draft self-assessment report.
- 3.2 The Council's proposed self-assessment judgements for 2022/23 are –

<b>Wellbeing Objective One</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Wellbeing Objective Two</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>Wellbeing Objective Three</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Use of resources</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>Governance</b>	<b>Good</b>

- 3.3 Following its consideration at Governance and Audit Committee, the Council commended formal consultation on the draft document with the public as well as -
- discussion with Trade Unions
  - discussion with Town and Community Councils at the Town and Community Council Forum
- 3.4 The Council developed a communication plan for the draft self-assessment. The draft self-assessment was available over the summer on the Council's website.

Social media, the citizen's panel and a range of partner discussions were used to raise awareness of it. The Council consulted on the draft self-assessment between 17 August and 28 September 2023. The level of responses was –

- 584 visitors to the consultation page
- 238 responses to the questions
- 129 downloads of the self-assessment (just over half of those who responded)

Although a communication plan was developed and implemented, this is still a relatively low response rate. This provides some crucial learning for the self-assessment consultation process in the future which will need to be changed.

3.5 Responses to the individual, closed questions posed throughout the consultation document are summarised in the table below. They show that –

- Just over half of respondents (52 - 56%) agreed that we had provided sufficient evidence in each section of the report (albeit almost half had not read the report)
- A slightly lower proportion (49 - 55%) agreed that it was clear what more we have planned in each section of the report (again, this should not come as a surprise given almost half had not read the report).
- A slightly higher proportion (54 - 58%) agreed the judgements were about right.

	Did we provide enough evidence?		Is it clear what more is planned?		Is the judgement about right?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Wellbeing Objective 1	120 (53%)	105 (47%)	111 (50%)	112 (50%)	121 (54%)	103 (46%)
Wellbeing Objective 2	115 (52%)	108 (48%)	111 (50%)	111 (50%)	131 (58%)	94 (42%)
Wellbeing Objective 3	127 (56%)	100 (44%)	123 (55%)	100 (45%)	125 (56%)	100 (44%)
Use of resources	116 (52%)	109 (48%)	110 (49%)	114 (51%)	128 (57%)	98 (43%)
Governance	116 (52%)	109 (48%)	113 (50%)	112 (50%)	120 (54%)	103 (46%)

The intention was that respondents gave feedback having considered the evidence provided. But almost half of respondents did not download the self-assessment evidence and their responses are likely to be on the basis of individual / anecdotal perceptions of performance. Again, the performance team will reflect on this issue moving forward and seek to find a method that better allows judgements to be made on the evidence provided.

3.6 Large numbers of comments were made on the open questions in each section of the consultation. The most frequent issues raised about the Council were –

- The Council does not listen to residents
- The Council does not provide information on what it is planning / doing
- It is hard to get responses from the Council
- Council tax and business rates are too high
- Bridgend town centre is neglected and does not feel safe

- Services that everyone uses (like roads and pavements, grass cutting, parks, waste collection) are not being prioritised

The feedback also demonstrates that there is more work for us to do to provide information to the public on the Council's priorities and ensure there is greater understanding of the services the Council delivers and the choices it has to make with limited resources. For example, the Council does not set and is not responsible for the level of business rates. The comments are like those in the Corporate Plan consultation. The new Corporate Plan, delivery plan and Performance Indicators have been developed to reflect this and should provide significantly more detail on these areas of interest for future self-assessments.

3.7 As over half of respondents were satisfied with the contents of the consultation report, the judgements have not been changed following consultation. As the results were relatively close in terms of those satisfied or dissatisfied with the contents of the consultation report, changes are made to the broader content and context of the report, to reflect that balance as well as some of the specific feedback and comments including –

- A new section early in the report summarising progress on the specific areas for improvement identified in the first self-assessment.
- Additional general information on the consultation undertaken on the self-assessment and responses received.
- Information on consultation responses to each separate section
- A summary of the key issues raised for each separate section, within that section.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this information report.

#### **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

5.1 This report measures progress against the following corporate well-being objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 that formed part of the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-23:-

1. Supporting a successful sustainable economy
2. Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient
3. Smarter use of resources

5.2 The 5 ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act form a key part of the key lines of enquiry for officer and member challenge of the self-assessment findings. The annual wellbeing assessment will be merged with the annual self-assessment for 2022/23, as it was for 2021/22.

#### **6. Climate Change Implications**

6.1 There are no specific implications of this report on climate change. However, the self-assessment will consider the Council's performance and progress on specific climate change related commitments and targets in the Corporate Plan 2018-23.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

7.1 There are no specific implications of this report on safeguarding or corporate parenting. However, the self-assessment will consider the Council's performance and progress on specific safeguarding and corporate parenting related commitments and targets in the Corporate Plan 2018-23

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 There are no financial implications associated with these arrangements.

## **9. Recommendation**

9.1 Cabinet is recommended to: -

- Endorse the corporate self-assessment report 2022-23 in **Appendix 1**, to be submitted to Council for approval on 22 November 2022.

## **Background documents**

None.

## Appendix 1

### Corporate Self-Assessment 2022/23

#### 1. The purpose of this report

In January 2021, the Welsh Parliament passed a new law that changed the way councils work. Every year, we must publish a self-assessment report. This report covers 6 April 2022 to 5 April 2023.

We want the report to assure Welsh Government that we are performing well. We also want it to tell them that we are using our money and other resources properly and making decisions in a sensible, open way. Most importantly, the report must tell local residents, businesses and all stakeholders how we are doing.

Welsh Government and the Welsh Local Government Association published guidance that told us how to develop our self-assessment and what evidence to use to judge ourselves.

#### 2. The changing world for local government

The world has changed a lot since the pandemic, and it is having a big impact on the way the Council works.

The cost-of-living crisis is making things difficult for you as residents and businesses, and it is making it harder for the Council to manage too. Some of the challenges your Council faces are –

- Increasing energy costs for community centres, leisure centres and schools
- Increasing fuel costs for school transport, home carers and recycling vehicles
- Changes to the cost and availability of goods like food for residential homes and building materials for new schools
- Pay rises for our staff who provide indispensable services
- Government asking us to provide extra services like distributing cost of living payments
- Impacts on residents that add demand to services, including increased homelessness and safeguarding referrals
- Funding for the Council not increasing at the same rate as prices.

#### 3. How is the council performing?

Every 5 years the council publishes a new Corporate Plan. This plan describes the council's priorities, why they are important and how progress will be measured. The priorities, or well-being objectives, show our commitments to our citizens and our contribution to Wales's seven well-being goals -

Well-being Goal	Priority 1: A successful sustainable economy	Priority 2: Helping people be more healthy & resilient	Priority 3: Smarter use of resources
A prosperous Wales	✓		✓
A resilient Wales			✓
A healthier Wales	✓	✓	✓

Well-being Goal	Priority 1: A successful sustainable economy	Priority 2: Helping people be more healthy & resilient	Priority 3: Smarter use of resources
A more equal Wales	✓	✓	✓
A Wales of cohesive communities	✓	✓	✓
Vibrant culture & thriving Welsh language	✓	✓	
A globally responsible Wales	✓		✓

The Future Generations Act says we must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Based on the sustainable development principle, our well-being objectives will deliver long-term positive outcomes. We review progress every year to make sure our actions are getting us closer to our goals. This report covers the final year of the corporate plan published in 2017, (although it is refreshed and updated annually), with three priorities for the council -



When we developed this corporate plan, we thought hard about the type of organisation we wanted to be. Our vision is to act as **One Council** working together to improve lives. We have a process for measuring how we are doing on these priorities. We use –

- performance indicators,
- evidence on delivery of our projects,
- feedback from residents, businesses, and partners, and
- the views of our regulators and auditors.



Each part of the council pulls this information together and presents it to councillors who look at the data, check it and ask questions. This was done for the year 2022-23 in June 2023. We use this information to come to a judgement on each priority using this scale -

<b>EXCELLENT</b>	Very strong, sustained performance
<b>GOOD</b>	Strong features, minor aspects need improvement
<b>ADEQUATE</b>	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects need improvement
<b>UNSATISFACTORY</b>	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths. Needs urgent improvement.

### **Consultation, engagement and communication**

We developed a communication plan for the self-assessment. The draft plan was available over the summer on our website and we used social media, the citizen's panel and a range of partner discussions to raise awareness of it.

For the first time this year, we have formally consulted on our self-assessment. The consultation was available on the council's website between 17 August and 28 September 2023. The response rate was –

- 584 visitors to the consultation page
- 238 responses to the questions
- 129 downloads of the self-assessment document (only just over half of those who responded)

This is quite a low response rate. For future years, we will need to develop a different approach to consulting on our self-assessment.

More detailed responses to the consultation have been included in each section of this document.

## **Our progress against last year's areas for improvement**

In our 2021/22 Annual Self-Assessment we identified a series of areas that needed specific improvements in the 2022/23 year. Below is an update on the work we have undertaken in these areas. More detail is provided on actions to date, and those that are still planned in each detailed section of this report. In 2022/23 we have -

### **Priority One**

Provided **significant, continuing support for schools to deal with the impact of COVID-19**. Schools have done self-evaluation work with their improvement partners to identify where extra support is needed for learners after the pandemic. Young people who are engaging with support services are presenting with a wide range of social and mental health difficulties, and the majority have said the pandemic is the main contributor.

Undertaken a range of activities to **improve school attendance**, including school attendance audits, a new task and finish group with headteachers, education welfare officers and legal representation to revise the local authority's attendance strategy, truancy patrols, encouraging use of a 'buddy system' and reintroducing the Consortium's 'Callio' system.

Appointed an exclusion lead in the Education Engagement Team to help make sure schools follow the **right processes and procedures on fixed-term and permanent exclusions**.

Worked with Central South Consortium to support schools on self-evaluation and assessment, continuous improvement, and **implementation of the new Curriculum**.

Worked with the council's cabinet and scrutiny committees to **address the budget pressures** we are facing in education, including school transport and the school modernisation programme.

Made some improvements to our **staffing capacity issues in the education directorate**, including strengthened staffing resource within Early Help Screening Team and Education Engagement Team, learner support, the Communication and Relationships Team (CART) and the school modernisation team.

Continued to improve the **Bridgend Youth Justice Service**, which is now no longer under special measures and the Youth Justice Board has removed any formal monitoring of the service.

Had our **Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP)** approved by Welsh Government covering 2022-2027 and appointed a full-time Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Co-ordinator. All actions in the WESP for 2022-2023 have been completed.

**Reinvigorated Bridgend Business Forum** to deliver business support events, including a business support event in June 2022.

### **Priority Two**

Developed an action plan to **address workforce issues in children's social work and domiciliary care**. We have made progress by using agency workers to make sure we meet statutory duties, bringing in social worker support officers, introducing market supplements to salaries, developing a social worker charter and recruiting an officer to

promote the opportunities in social care roles. We are also making progress on international recruitment and growing our own future social workers.

To help us **improve the consistency of social work practice in children's social care** we are implementing the 'Signs of Safety' model of social work practice and staff have received training on this approach. We have had three inspections of our children's social services in the last year, and each has shown improvement.

To **improve the quality and consistency of children's residential care services**, we have done a review of our residential provision and appointing a dedicated Responsible Individual who is responsible for the quality of care. Regulatory inspections have shown an improved position.

To **improve the 'front door' of children's services**, we have put more staff into our multi-agency safeguarding hub and despite increases in demand we are performing well. In adult services, we have improved our use of the 'common access point' by diverting calls that don't need a social services response to other appropriate services in the council.

Set up a youth voice forum to help us listen to the voices of care experienced young people. We are improving the way we **develop services with people who will use them**, good examples of this recently include the young carers card and supported living for people with learning disabilities.

Putting in new pathways to **improve the hospital discharge processes**, but capacity in community care services is still a challenge. We are modernising in-house domiciliary care, getting rid of 'split shifts' and recruiting to vacant posts.

Been out to tender for a new carer's wellbeing service **to enhance support for carers**. We have a new direct payments policy which was developed with parents and carers. We have developed a young carers network, young carers ambassadors and expansion of benefits through the young carer's ID card.

Worked with BAVO to develop community representative networks that support prevention and well-being, operating our National Exercise Referral scheme and developing Disability Sport, supporting the development of Age Friendly Communities and running programmes of family support including the Family Active Zone, Made for Mams and Early Years opportunities. **Leisure and cultural services are recovering from the pandemic** with a focus on supporting the most vulnerable and preventing escalation of need.

Developed a **Play Sufficiency Action Plan for 2022-24** which has been approved by Cabinet. It aims to secure the best possible play opportunities for children and young people in a broad range of activities across the county borough.

Made further **progress on ALN reform** including implementing the ALN Improvement Plan, developing an effective cluster working model involving additional learning needs coordinators, establishing a weekly ALN Panel and creating an ALN Statutory Team. We have opened a learning resource centre (LRC) for learners with moderate learning difficulties in Welsh-medium primary school (Ysgol Cynwyd Sant) and an LRC for learners with autism spectrum disorder in an English medium primary school (Tremains Primary School).

Commissioned a review report on the **major strategic parks in Bridgend**. In the coming year, we will consider the recommendations and implement an action to address them.

Continued the programme of **improvements to children's play areas** with 9 playgrounds completed in 2022. £2.9m further investment is planned for the next two years, including accessible play facilities

Developed and consulted on a new, four year '**Housing Support Programme 2022-2026**' to explain the top priorities for the council and its partners in the delivery of homelessness prevention and housing support services.

Worked with Welsh Government and other authorities on our **approach to housing refugees** (including Ukrainian refugees)

Worked with the joint partnership board to **understand the needs and views of prisoners in Parc Prison**. The partnership is currently establishing a whole prison approach to the prevention of ill health, promotion of well-being and a focus on recovery and rehabilitation; and to a single shared vision and rehabilitative culture for HMP & YOI Parc.

### **Priority Three**

Concluded the statutory processes for the **Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr and Heronsbridge School** proposals and started the design process for the new schools. We have developed options for delivery during future bands of the School Modernisation Programme, which will be considered in coming year.

Improved the proportion of our buildings that meet **required standards for compliance**, appointing a compliance officer and Schools Surveyor. Statutory compliance is now over 90% on 4 of the 5 Big Risk areas - Gas, Electricity, Fire and Asbestos. A Legionella Officer has also now been appointed.

Continued to develop our future service delivery approach, and now have an agreed **hybrid working policy and flexi-time working scheme in use**.

Awarded an **interim waste contract for 2024-26** to Plan B Management Solutions Ltd, ensuring that our waste and recycling will continue to be collected when the current contract ends in March 2024. We are already working on plans for waste in Bridgend after this contract, from March 2026.

Developed and published a new, **Biodiversity Duty Plan, 2022 to 2025**, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to promoting the resilience of ecosystems.

We have not been able to open the **new community recycling facility in Pyle** and realise the savings this creates. But we have submitted an updated application for a permit from Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

Consulted on, published, and started to implement our **net zero carbon strategy and action plan, Bridgend 2030** to help us respond to the climate emergency.

### **Use of Resources**

The budget for 2022-23 was agreed in February 2022, before major increases in inflation, energy costs and the cost of living. This means our service budgets have been under severe pressure during the year. The **way we monitor and act on financial pressures**

**has improved**, including holding budget briefings for members. In the coming year, deep dives will be added to the budget setting process to make sure all areas of service are examined and reviewed.

**Improved our self-assessment process** to make it part of the council's regular performance management approach and formally consulted on the draft report

**Developed a new, 5 year Corporate Plan** that explains the council's priorities and a 1-year delivery plan to measure our progress on them. As part of this, we have also agreed a plan for improving the way the council manages performance.

Acted on the findings in the **2021 staff survey** and ran a new staff survey in late 2022. An action plan has now been developed to address this including actions on the organisational culture, understanding of priorities, management, communication and engagement, knowledge and skills development and hybrid working.

Developed a **new participation strategy** for the council that will be published soon, and a digital engagement platform to help residents contribute to council decision making by taking part in consultations.

Made plans to set up a working group with commissioners and the corporate procurement team, to help us **make commissioning more consistent**.

**Improved our asset management** by reviewing the 2030 Strategic Asset Management Plan, reducing our maintenance backlog, improving our management of Statutory Building Compliance, and made progress on the Integrated Works Management System (IWMS) to improve our data and benchmarking.

Developed a **Strategic Workforce Plan** which will be approved at Cabinet in the coming year. Strategic Workforce Planning training for Directors and HR officers has been undertaken with the Local Government Association.

## **Governance**

Completed work on the Council Chamber and Committee rooms, so **hybrid meetings** can be held.

Developed a **new constitution and easy read guide**, to make us consistent with other councils across Wales.

Done a programme of **induction, training and development with elected members**.

## Priority One – Supporting a successful, sustainable economy

We want to build a place where people can have good jobs and careers and improve their family income. Prosperity boosts health and well-being and creates more resilient communities that need fewer services. Education is the most important part of improving the life chances of young people. Our main ways of achieving this objective are -

- **Improve learner outcomes** – Support children, adults and families to get better education outcomes;
- **Growth and prosperity** - Promote the conditions for growth and prosperity by helping people and business to succeed.

### What is our judgement?

Supporting a successful, sustainable economy	GOOD
--	------

- **Learner outcomes** – There is no data available for the school year 2021-2022 for comparison with previous years. We continued to align monitoring and evaluation processes with Welsh Government's 'Framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability'. Work continued with secondary schools to improve progress of Key Stage 4 learners and to retain Post-16 learners. A Post-16 Improvement Plan has been approved. Schools submitted 'Statements of Intent' for any changes to their curriculum, to share good practice, improve collaboration and avoid duplication. Unfortunately, young people in Bridgend who are engaging with support services are presenting with a wide range of social and mental health difficulties, and the majority have said the pandemic is the main contributor. We delivered the first phase of the universal primary free school meals for pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2.
- **School support** – We worked with Central South Consortium to support schools on self-evaluation and assessment, continuous improvement, and implementation of the new Curriculum. Estyn resumed school inspections in spring 2022. There are currently no schools in statutory categories in Bridgend, but six schools are receiving 'enhanced monitoring'. School self-evaluation work with their improvement partners continues to identify where additional support is needed for learners after the pandemic. Officers offered enhanced support and more frequent monitoring visits to any early years non-maintained setting if concerns were identified after inspections.
- **Welsh Language Education** – The Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) has been approved by Welsh Government covering 2022-2027 and we have appointed a full-time Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Co-ordinator. All actions in the WESP for 2022-2023 have been completed. Welsh language immersion provision continued to develop and numbers of Year 1 learners in Welsh-medium primary schools has increased. Our capital schemes are helping to grow Welsh-medium school places. Construction work for the Welsh-medium childcare scheme at Bettws was completed.
- **Attendance and exclusions**– The creation of an exclusion lead within the Education Engagement Team has assisted schools in ensuring the correct processes and procedures are being followed related to fixed-term and permanent exclusion. While the percentage of school days lost due to fixed-term exclusions in primary schools, in the 2021-2022 school year (reported in 2022-2023), was static when compared to pre-pandemic levels, the situation in secondary schools was double pre-pandemic levels.
- **Regeneration** - The Town Centre Masterplan for Bridgend, including redevelopment of the Railway station are progressing. The new site for the Bridgend College Campus in the town centre is being cleared and prepared and the planning application is in. The Placemaking agenda for Porthcawl is looking at infrastructure, public realm, and green

spaces. The Aldi store at Salt Lake is now open. The £6m sea defences scheme is complete at the Eastern Promenade and open to the public. The Council got an £18m grant for the Grand Pavilion, to refurbish and extend the venue and provide a wider range of events and activities. We are working with housing providers to invest in housing in the Town Centres. Maesteg Town Hall is progressing, but its completion date is delayed. We are investing in town centres and working with partners to redevelop sites and buildings. The regeneration programme delivered over £600k of improvement grants for commercial premises after covid. There is £1.36m support available for a further 3 years. Vacant properties in all town centres have decreased.

- **Business support** - The Bridgend Elevate and Prosper Project (EAP) is supporting start-ups and micro-business. Business start-ups have increased to 770, that is by a further 28% since 2021-22. The socially responsible 3-year procurement strategy and delivery plan is ensuring our spending is more accessible to local small businesses and the third sector. There is significant demand for the new commercial units at the Cosy Corner development in Porthcawl and we are working with Agents to let these new premises which will open in August 2023.
- **Support for employment** - Employability Bridgend provides support to residents and council employees, including unemployed people, and those in work but struggling with low skills or in-work poverty. The number of people from the Employability Scheme who have gone into employment is 392 in 2022-23. We have also addressed work poverty by assisting some 107 people into higher paid jobs.
- **Tourism** – We have worked with partners to put on events to increase tourism in Porthcawl, including the Senior Open Golf tournament at Royal Porthcawl. Also giving advice on the Porthcawl Triathlon, Porthcawl Truck Gathering and the Porthcawl Elvis Festival. The Cosy Corner development will provide new community facilities following a £3m investment and will be complete in late summer 2023. More people are visiting Bridgend and Porthcawl, this is up by 3% from last year and has now reached pre-pandemic levels. Tourism expenditure data will tell us more at the end of the year.
- **Transport** - Work is continuing on new active travel routes throughout the Borough to ensure that communities are linked via sustainable transport means. This work is funded via a Government Grant scheme and an annual application is submitted. The active travel schemes are included as an integral part of the Council's Strategic Transport Plan, which is in the process of being updated and will be put forward to Cabinet for approval in Autumn 2023. The Porthcawl Metrolink Project is progressing well and is on target for completion in Spring 2023. Other major transport schemes including the new Penprysg Road Bridge in Pencoed and improvements to the Railway Station in Bridgend remain strategic priorities but are not currently funded. Work will continue with partner organisation such as Transport for Wales, Welsh Government and the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) to look at potential funding opportunities.

## Regulators assurances

Our education services were last inspected by Estyn in [March 2019](#). Since the inspection, we have been working to address their recommendations, raising the standards of literacy in primary schools, improve outcomes for post-16 learners in sixth forms, increasing the pace of improvement in schools causing concern and strengthening the role of the Welsh Education Strategic Forum (WESF) to deliver the priorities in the WESP.

Estyn also carried out an inspection of Adult Community Learning in February 2023 and the Estyn report that was published on 7 June 2023 identified that many learners make suitable progress in their learning with the partnership offering a useful range of courses,

based on the Welsh Government priorities of literacy, numeracy and digital skill, and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) The partnership provides a range of impartial advice, guidance and support to help learners stay on track and progress in their learning and Estyn identified that the partnership worked effectively together providing advice, support and guidance to learners with honest evaluations.

### Consultations and engagement activities

Consultation	Dates	Findings and Impact
WESP 2022-2032 and 5 year WESP plan.	July 2022 to March 2023	WESP was approved by the Welsh Government and workshops held with Welsh in Education Forum to create the five-year WESP plan.
Healthcare needs policy	January to March 2023	Consultation and engagement sessions held with pupils, staff and parents. Pupils felt their health care needs were being met in school and that if they voiced an opinion then they would be listened to. Pupils felt confident that staff had the knowledge and awareness to take action where needed. Information was provided to schools and parents to explain the policy. Further awareness to staff and pupil provided in regard to assisting with their health care needs.
Planning for improvement	Ongoing	School support attend and support the engagement of all primary and secondary schools leads within the 'Planning for Improvement' network. Workshops take place, alongside guest speakers / opportunities to network / share information.
Seren activities	Ongoing	Activities organised by Seren hub co-ordinators aim to provide learners with increased resilience to dealing with exam stress, workload and everyday life. Learner voice is regularly requested, and feedback has informed us that their engagement in the events has been impactful.
Higher education programme	Ongoing	Aimed across all key stages has also promoted resilience and healthy mental well-being whilst dealing with school pressures.
Bridgend Forces Festival	June 2023	We worked with 'Forces Fitness', 'YourNorth' and 'SSCE Cymru' to create the 'Bridgend Forces Festival' for service children. 100 service children, who are categorised as vulnerable learners, came together for the first time to take part in activities to improve their well-being and resilience. The festival highlighted emotional challenges that service children face in their education through interviews and questionnaires.
Local Development Plan – Examination in Public	January to March 2023	The Planning Inspector is considering the evidence, but no significant changes have been requested to date. It is anticipated the outcome will be known in late Autumn 2023.
Consultation on the Hybont Project at Brynmenyn Industrial Estate	Dec 22 ongoing	Two public exhibitions held on the 13 <sup>th</sup> and 14 <sup>th</sup> December 2022 these were followed up with a post consultation feedback public information event on the 9 <sup>th</sup> February 2023. The formal planning application has now submitted and is being determined by the LPA.
Consultation on 2030 Strategy	Dec 2022 ongoing	The Strategy is now approved by the Council and an action plan was approved by Cabinet in December of 2022.



Placemaking strategy in Porthcawl	Completed May 2023	The overarching strategy was consulted on in March 2022, and provides a framework to shape future development within the regeneration area. Flowing from that a further consultation on Public Open Space has also been taken place between to May 2023, including meetings with all schools in Porthcawl, stakeholder workshops and public consultation at the Pavilion.
-----------------------------------	--------------------	---

## Consultation responses

The responses to the consultation on the self-assessment showed –

- 53% of respondents believed we provided enough evidence of our actions / progress
- 50% of respondents believe it is clear what more we have planned
- 54% of respondents think the judgement of ‘Good’ is about right

The main issues raised in the open questions about this wellbeing objective were –

- Bridgend town centre is neglected, with lots of empty shops
- Business rates are too high and there isn’t enough support for businesses
- Education is so important that budgets should be protected

## What will we do to improve?

Some of the main improvements we will make for this priority are –

- Using the Post-16 Improvement Plan, we will work with schools to improve outcomes for learners in sixth forms.
- The use of permanent exclusions will be reviewed, and we will increase opportunities for managed moves in schools in Bridgend.
- We will support the ambitions of the local authority’s Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) (2022-2032).
- We will deliver at least 20 more face-to-face Adult Community Learning sessions and increase learner engagement by 20%.
- That the Bridgend Business Forum delivers business support events in 2023.
- Introduce the Integrated Works Management System (IWMS) to improve the speed of work instructions and real time statutory compliance data.

## Case studies

### Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd

Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd is a Welsh-medium secondary school that received The Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) grant, to help mitigate the effects of the pandemic on learners. The funding provided an opportunity to recruit a teacher to focus on Years 11, 12 and 13, to provide support and increase retention of post-16 learners. The school has also appointed a classroom assistant to help learners with welfare issues, transition and develop the use of Welsh to build learners’ confidence. The school encourages learners to have confidence in speaking Welsh, by providing tutor sessions and cross-cutting activities to practice oral language, in groups or through one-to-one sessions. The school also works with parents so that they also emphasise the importance of using the language. The school has focused on addressing the needs of different learner groups and aspects of the curriculum, by setting up groups to develop literacy, numeracy and digital competency skills, as well as providing transition to learners

in years 5 and 6. Learners have been graded based on their support requirements so that targeted support can be provided, which includes one-to-one work with the pastoral team, mentoring sessions and additional help with their work. Through blended learning and collaboration with other schools, resources and expertise can be shared to enhance the support provided to learners. The school plans to work in partnership with universities to utilise cross-cutting skills to develop a balanced programme of learning.

### **Oldcastle Primary School**

Oldcastle is an English medium primary school in Bridgend with 445 learners. Well-being champions have worked with all year groups on key life skills. Learners have experienced how to cook, grow vegetables, basic sewing, and increased understanding of the importance of keeping healthy. A well-being dog is now part of the team, supporting more anxious learners arriving at school every morning, and working with target groups during 'Thrive' and well-being sessions. The 'Recruit Recover and Raise Standards' (RRRS) grant has also been utilised to employ a Family Engagement Officer trained in the Thrive approach to work with learners and their families. They address attendance issues using a mixture of approaches including one-to-one, nurture groups, attendance meetings, and linking with external agencies. A structured enrichment programme takes place every Friday afternoon delivered by the whole school staff. This offers a range of activities, skills, and experiences. Through this, all learners have access to the same opportunities. External professionals are often involved, and a network of community members now exists. As a result of the grant and the projects it has supported, there are closer relationships between the school, parents, and the community. Attendance has improved across the whole school, most notably amongst learners with anxieties around attending school. Behaviour has improved with Thrive and 1-to-1 sessions available to be booked or accessed instantly.

### **Corneli Primary School**

In 2015, Corneli Primary School opened a savings scheme, in partnership with Bridgend Lifesavers Credit Union. Since then, Corneli Primary has won a Credit Unions of Wales award for a video entry and has been nominated for a Credit Unions of Wales School Partnership. Nearly all pupils and families now understand the benefits of regular saving and financial management. Through pupil voice, older pupils have taken ownership working alongside staff and governors to successfully manage weekly savings provision. The majority of staff, as well as members of the community, save on a weekly basis as role models for pupils. The school has created a real-life context where pupils can save for a purpose. The school has enhanced its Enterprise initiative weeks and has had an integral role in developing the 'Four Purposes' of Curriculum for Wales. Standards of financial literacy have increased across the school impacting on problem solving and thinking skills. A more positive impact has developed on attitudes towards financial management within the community, as well as enhanced life skills and social skills needed to thrive in society, and enhanced life chances and quality of life and to enable future aspirations for employment and economic well-being.

### **Cosy Corner Development**

In October 2020 the planned regeneration of the Cosy Corner site, by Credu, ended and the site returned to the Council as a partial commenced construction site. We wanted to develop this prominent and valuable site for a community facility. We have worked with Visit Wales to develop a design and secure funding and in May 2021, appointed architects to develop a single storey glass and stone building containing community facilities, including accessible toilets and a changing place facility, new facilities for Marina Berth Holders and the Harbour



Master, shops and restaurant. This building will be surrounded by landscaped grounds and have a children's play area and outdoor seating. Extra Welsh Government funding has been secured, planning permission granted and in May 2022 John Weaver Construction were awarded the construction contract. The site will be completed, opened and occupied by new businesses by

August 2023 and will hugely enhance the tourism and community offer on the Porthcawl waterfront as well as providing business and employment opportunities.

## Priority Two – Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient

We want to provide support to help individuals and families thrive. A focus on prevention and well-being helps us support people to lead independent lives and reduces the likelihood of them becoming dependent on council services. Our main ways of achieving this objective are -

- **Community support and services** – Provide support and services to those who need our help and help them to stay independent for as long as possible.
- **Resilient communities** – Develop innovative ways to improve well-being and deliver services.
- **Health and well-being** – Improve the physical, mental and emotional well-being of children and young people and vulnerable citizens.

### What is our judgement?

Help people & communities be healthy & resilient	ADEQUATE
--	----------

- **Social services** - Increases in demand in children's social care continue, including people contacting social care and needing safeguarding investigations. There are challenges across the health and social care system and difficulties recruiting and keeping social care staff. We have focused on improving quality and performance. Our plans to improve workforce recruitment and retention, include using agency workers to make sure we meet our statutory duties, bringing in social worker support officers to case management teams, introducing market supplements to salaries in some teams, development of a social worker charter and recruitment of an officer to promote the opportunities in social care roles. We are making progress on international recruitment. Social worker trainees and secondees are being supported to help us develop a professional social worker workforce in the long term. We are also making sure that specialist well-being support can be provided.
- **Children's services** - Delivering children's social care services is still very difficult but we are making progress on our top priorities of practice improvement, workforce, provision of services, hearing and acting on the voice of people and effective partnership working. We have worked with partners to prepare, understand and act on learning from the child practice review and our own internal reviews, including 6 week and 6 month plans for all parts of children's social care. We have retained our gold, silver and bronze governance structures to deal with continuing high levels of contacts to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) and information advice and assistance services (IAA). These services have been reviewed and a future model for the service agreed. We have appointed a lead for Social Worker Transformation who has started implementing 'Signs of Safety' model of practice to drive practice improvement. We are embedding focused learning from audits and reviews and enhanced performance data to ensure continued management oversight of the service. We have done a review of our residential provision and strengthened leadership by appointing a dedicated Responsible Individual. We have improved our Quality Assurance framework in residential children's services. The solo residential provision which was registered in November 2022 will build capacity into our residential services.
- **Adult services** - There have been challenges in meeting care and support needs in a timely way in adult services. We are improving our customer services and response

times to initial inquiries through the Social Work Review Project and Corporate Front Door project and the introduction of the new telephone systems. We are focused on strength based social work practice and quality assurance and management oversight is being strengthened. A new 'Outcome Focused, Strength Based' model of practice has been launched which will strengthen further how we understand and act on what matters to individuals. Pressures in meeting the needs of older people is a high priority. We are putting in new pathways to improve the hospital discharge processes, although capacity in community care services is still a big challenge. We are modernising in-house domiciliary care services, getting rid of 'split shifts' and recruiting to vacant posts in care and support roles. Deep dives are being done in every adult social work team and a new operating model will be approved in 2023. Where changes have been needed more quickly, they have been made. We are transferring the Council's telecare service from analogue to digital and improving the use of assistive technology to improve outcomes for people. We are reviewing our learning disability direct services to make sure we have a sustainable day opportunities and supported living model.

- **Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform** – Our ALN implementation Plan 2022-2023 was completed and Early Years ALN processes were established and embedded. We continued the quality assurance monitoring of local authority individual development plans (IDPs) for learners and the use of Early Years ALN toolkits by Early Years settings. We held events for school staff and partners to support those involved with ALN Reform. We extended our provisions for primary-aged learners with ALN, opening two new learning resource centres in autumn term 2022 - one at Tremains Primary School for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, one at Ysgol Cynwyd Sant for pupils with moderate learning difficulties.
- **Safeguarding** – We are accountable to the Regional Safeguarding Board for making sure we are safeguarding children and adults at risk. They are responsible for publishing child / adult practice reviews. One child and one adult practice review were published in 2022/23 about Bridgend. Four more child practice reviews will be published in the coming year. We host a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) where Council officers and partner agencies work together to respond to safeguarding concerns. In the last year we have strengthened the leadership and governance of social care services by employing dedicated Responsible Individuals who oversee the safety and effectiveness of these services. We hold Corporate Safeguarding Group meetings monthly where safeguarding data is reviewed. Silver group meetings take place fortnightly / weekly chaired by the Corporate Director to consider performance data and areas of pressure so that the whole council understands what's going on. These meetings report up to a fortnightly gold command meeting chaired by the chief executive and attended by the Leader/ Deputy Leader. We have improved the way we safeguard children at risk of harm from criminal or sexual exploitation. Two officers have been appointed and an exploitation panel established bringing together partners to address the risks. We also have an Education Safeguarding Board which meets termly and examines safeguarding data and practice across the directorate. Information is about policies and procedures is shared. All schools in Bridgend have adopted the Safeguarding Board policy. Schools do audits on their safeguarding approach and 90% of schools are rated as green, 10% as amber and none are red.
- **Housing** - The Council's housing duties changed during the pandemic and we must provide accommodation for all homeless people. People presenting as homeless and numbers of people on the register for social housing have increased. We have had to

rely on different options including hotels and Airbnb's to provide temporary accommodation as the supply of suitable accommodation can't be met through our usual supply of accommodation. During 2022/2023 we have also needed to provide housing for Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war in their country. At the end of March 2023 198 Ukrainian individuals had arrived in the local authority, of which 100 individuals have found housing in the area. The Council has also worked with one of our Registered Social Landlords to bring 35 long term voids back into use.

- **Community Safety** – We have dealt with 1219 anti-social behaviour referrals and 88% were successfully addressed at stage 1. We have worked with partners to improve CCTV coverage, brighten up spaces with Street Art and employ taxi marshals so that no-one is left waiting alone after a night out. The review of regional Community Safety arrangements has been completed. Assia domestic abuse service has completed needs assessments on 2,010 referrals. We have delivered exploitation workshops for college students and tutors and training on domestic abuse awareness and coercive control. All Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) representatives across the region have been fully trained in the process and understand their role. A SafeLives review resulted in us recruiting a dedicated Older Persons IDVA alongside our Male Victim IDVA. We chair and contribute to the local joint agency Events Safety and Advisory Group which advises event holders on risk assessments and general safety and good practice planning for public events.
- **Recreation, green and open spaces** – In November 2022, Council approved the Biodiversity Plan 2022-25, setting our plans to protect and enhance biodiversity. It includes new projects at the disused coal washery site at the Ogmore Washeries and the “Dune 2 Dune” Project, bringing together nature reserve managers, volunteers and landowners to sustainably manage habitats along the coastline of Bridgend. A comprehensive programme of improvements to children's play areas is continuing with 9 playgrounds completed in 2022. There is £2.9m further investment in playgrounds throughout the Borough targeted for the next two years, including accessible play facilities, such as wheelchair friendly roundabouts. We have transferred a further 10 assets in 2022-23 through the community asset transfers programme (CAT's). This is below target, but is reflective of the cost price inflation everyone is experiencing.
- **Youth Justice** - There was a reduction in the number of first-time entrants to the Bridgend Youth Justice Service (YJS) and a reduction of re-offending behaviour among children and young people. In line with the ‘Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales 2021’, a robust system was developed to monitor the education, training and employment (ETE) of young people engaged with the YJS and ensure education needs are met. The service continued to collect and present the views of service users to education provisions. An in-house accreditation scheme enabled ETE work undertaken by service users to be recognised and awarded accordingly. The Council also made a bid for funding through the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) via its Trauma-Informed Practice Funding Round, co-funded by the Home Office, which funds projects that aim to gain knowledge of successful strategies to prevent children and young people becoming involved in violence. This ‘Relationship Building Together’ (RBT) project would help us look at how services using the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) can benefit children and young people affected by trauma.
- **Family Support** - Edge of Care services supported 527 children and prevented over 90% of them from becoming care experienced. Funding was secured to continue development of a trauma-informed approach. The ‘Rise Service’ was successfully implemented, providing practical, emotional and therapeutic support to families.

Despite the increasing complexity of cases supported by the Early Help staff, 75% of Team Around the Family support plans were closed with a successful outcome, 2% higher than in 2021-2022. Inspectorate Wales categorised all of our Flying Start settings as 'good' or better.

- **Prevention and Well-being** – These services are steadily recovering from the pandemic with a focus on supporting the most vulnerable and preventing escalation of need. We are including working with BAVO to develop community representative networks that support prevention and well-being, operating our National Exercise Referral scheme and developing Disability Sport, supporting the development of Age Friendly Communities and running programmes of family support including the Family Active Zone, Made for Mams and Early Years opportunities. Services for carers have been reviewed and improved including developing a carers ID card. Like other services with high energy consumption, leisure venues have significant cost pressures.

### Regulators assurances

An inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons in 2022 found significant improvement in our Youth Justice Service. Since then, the Bridgend Youth Justice Service has further strengthened its management structure, partnership relationships, preventative service offer and first-time entrant system, to give good, timely services to children who need support. The service is no longer under special measures and the Youth Justice Board has removed any formal monitoring of the service.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) carried out a Performance Evaluation Inspection (PEI) of children's social care, published in May 2022. They identified a number of areas requiring improvement where they had significant concerns. The Improving Outcomes for Children Board, chaired by the Chief Executive and informed by an independent advisor, focused on delivering actions in the 3-year strategic plan to address these concerns and make improvements.

CIW undertook a follow up improvement check in November 2022 which found that improvements had been made but further actions are needed, so it remains that the Authority's Childrens Services require improvement. Evidence from other councils who have been in similar positions tells us that 3 years is a realistic timescale to progress from being a service where there are serious concerns to one that requires improvement (at the end of year 1) to adequate and then good performance. And it requires understanding and action across the council to improve. We will test progress against our 3 year plan in coming months and present an updated plan to Cabinet in September 2023. This will be a sustainability plan, financial strategy, workforce plan and action plan.

There have also been a number of inspections of regulated care services. Where priority action notices or improvements have been identified there has been good progress made in follow up inspections in the vast majority of cases.

### Consultations and engagement activities

Consultation / engagement	Dates	Impact
Engagement on the play sufficiency assessment	March 2022- Nov 2022	Diverse range of engagement exercises on play opportunities and facilities with children and young people including those with diverse needs.

Care experienced and care leavers' Youth Forum	Ongoing	Meet regularly to inform a range of work – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Director's Annual Reports.</li> <li>recruitment and selection for a variety of Children Services posts.</li> <li>media clips for Member training</li> <li>The Corporate Parenting brand / strategy</li> <li>name of a new Childrens Residential home</li> <li>consultation on the Saving Policy and evaluation of Foster Carer Reviews</li> </ul>
Care reform	Ongoing	Two young people represent Bridgend CEC Forum as Ambassadors for Voices from Care Cymru. They have been involved in a summit meeting with Ministers to discuss reform of the care system in Wales. The result has been a declaration on radical reform to the care system and the production of a Welsh Parliament report 'If not now, when?'
Promoting advocacy	Regular Meetings	Engagement including the local advocacy attending Bridgend Locality Safeguarding & Community Safety Group, promotion of advocacy as part of routine contract monitoring with providers, Learning Disability Advocacy Service, People First Bridgend, being embedded in local stakeholder groups.
Community meetings in domiciliary care services	Quarterly	Feedback on areas including health and well-being, Health and Safety, community and 'at home' activities
People's First Bridgend, an independent advocacy group for people with learning disabilities and autism	Regular meetings	Contributions on the development of services. Including advocacy, self advocacy, easy read documentation, support for representation in planning groups and assistance with service developments.
Group for people with experience of substance misuse	Regular meetings	Link to similar regional groups. Involvement in appointments / service developments.
The young carers network	Quarterly - engaged over 280 young carers	Well-being workshops were co-produced and ran, in partnership with young carers, "You are Valued" days. Young adult carer ambassadors are leading the network group. Young Carers Network Group created and co-produced opportunities to support physical and mental well-being.
Feel good for life	August 2022	The National Lottery has provided 5 years investment to further progress the work and develop learning and insight into the Feel Good for Life programme
What Matters conversations by the carer well-being service	410 conversations	581 people received information, advice or assistance including signposting.
Consultation on service user experiences	May 2023	4 online questionnaires to inform the annual director of social services report and how to



		improve our services. Analysis of findings will be included in the 2022/23 annual report
Homelessness strategy	Throughout the year	Stakeholders have been engaged during the year in the development of the new homelessness strategy. This included interviews with officers and elected members, service users and partners and an online survey. The findings have been included in the homelessness strategy and action plan.

## Consultation responses

The responses to the consultation on the self-assessment showed –

- 52% of respondents believed we provided enough evidence of our actions / progress
- 50% of respondents believe it is clear what more we have planned
- 58% of respondents think the judgement of ‘Good’ is about right

The main issues raised in the open questions about this wellbeing objective were –

- Town centres do not feel safe – there are drugs and alcohol everywhere
- There is not enough for children to do and playgrounds aren’t good enough
- There should be more focus on cleanliness and maintenance of open spaces

## What will we do to improve?

Some of the main improvements we will make for this priority are –

- We will increase adult basic education provision by 50%.
- Working with our partners, we will take the actions within the ALN Implementation Plan for 2023-2024.
- We will develop an effective cluster working model involving ALN co-ordinators and we will train individual development plan (IDP) champions within ALN clusters.
- In partnership with Mudiad Meithrin, we aim to provide Welsh-medium childcare in Bettws and in the Ogmere Valley by September 2023.
- We will make UPFSM available for Year 1 and Year 2 pupils from April 2023 and Nursery pupils from September 2023.
- Complete the merger of the community safety partnerships to create one Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership and continue to ensure local issues are considered in a timely manner
- Consult on our new draft homelessness strategy and get it agreed by members
- Work with Welsh Government and other authorities on our approach to housing refugees (including Ukrainian refugees)
- Improve our work with Registered Social Landlords to improve housing options.
- Address workforce issues in social worker and social care worker including international recruitment and ‘growing our own’ workforce of the future
- Improve the consistency of social work practice in children’s social care, which supports improved outcomes, allows families to stay together (wherever possible) and

safeguards people from harm through implementing our Signs of Safety model of social work practice.

- Improve outcomes for adults with care and support needs through implementing our 'Strength Based, Outcome-Focussed' model of social work practice
- Open our new children's residential care service and implement enhanced therapeutic support for all our residential care and inhouse fostering services
- Deliver year one of a sustainability plan for children and families
- Work with partners to deliver our Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Work on admission avoidance and discharge services with the NHS to reduce delays in people receiving care
- Develop capacity in reablement services so more people are able to be supported to retain or regain independent living skills
- Provide enhanced support for adult and young carers through carer's networks
- Enhance well-being and preventative support in all parts of the County through appointment of local community co-ordinators
- Modernise learning disability services to ensure people are supported to live as independently as possible and enjoy meaningful day time occupation
- Awareness Raising of the Bridgend Biodiversity Duty 22-25
- Continuing to progress Community Asset Transfers

## Case studies

### Telecare

Telecare supports people in their own homes when they need support to remain independent. It offers the security of knowing someone can help 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Telecare packages are tailored to individual's needs, and adapt as peoples' needs change. In 2017, BT announced plans to switch off their analogue telephone network and replace it with a digital solution. This meant we had to switch over to digital technology, and we decided to become one of the first Welsh authorities to do this. £1.4 million funding for the project was agreed as part of the budget setting process and the project team manage this budget. The project team are working with the installers - Care and Repair. At the moment, the remaining replacement installations are taking place by post code area. The next phase of the project will see new installations taking place.

### Super -Agers



BCBC has led a regional project called Super-Agers, to support older adults to have healthy and active lives and to be connected to support in their community. The programme has included community based exercise and activity sessions and also the training of older adults to lead and run their own activities. The Super-Agers programme has included events such as the Olypage games including inter-generational approaches with young people from Bridgend College and local secondary schools. £3.80 of social value has been delivered for every pound invested. People who have done the activities have valued the support provided, opportunities to have social interaction and build bonds in their communities and opportunities to gain information and advice in less formal settings.

## Corporate Parenting

We have recently launched a new Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by the Deputy Leader, worked with care experienced children, young people, care leavers and Bridgend Youth Voice Forum to co-produce the document, working with council officers, partner agencies and elected members. The strategy focuses



on addressing the needs, views and wants of our care experienced children and young people to help them live happy, fulfilling lives. It includes a list of promises made by over forty professionals, carers and councillors, stating their own commitment to children and young people. The strategy has been welcomed by the Children's Commissioner for Wales and Deputy Minister for Social Services, both of whom visited Bridgend for the launch of the Strategy. The launch event itself was facilitated by eight representatives of

Bridgend Youth Voice Forum

## Signs of Safety

Children Social Care is working with Wales' only Licensed Signs of Safety Consultant, to implement the Signs of Safety framework. It is a child protection framework using a questioning approach, and focusing on the strengths in families to ensure safety and good care. The framework uses assessment, danger statements and safety goals to help professionals and families through the child protection process. Children's Social Care introduced Signs of Safety to their workforce and partner agencies during two Launch days in March and through two multi agency workshops in April. The Leadership Team also presented their Leadership Promise, which highlighted their commitment to staff and the families they work with. Staff have been attended training and practice days to help them use the signs of safety approach. There are also workstreams that focus on meaningful measures, system alignment, leadership and management, learning and development and partner agencies. Social Workers and Social Work Assistants have provided lots of examples of where they have used a number of creative direct work tools with children to help achieve positive outcomes. Families who have been involved in using this framework, report that they feel more positive about intervention, felt more included and able to understand the process.

## Community Asset Transfers (CAT)



To date the Council have spent or committed £1.38 million in improving community assets including, sports pavilions, bowling greens, children's play areas and community centers through the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) programme. This has been an

investment in assets that have been or are to be handed over to community groups, sports clubs or town and community councils for future management and operation. The CAT program secures the long-term viability of assets and makes sure that future generations

continue to be able to enjoy the benefits these assets bring to the community. 10 further assets were transferred in the 2022/23 financial year.

### Priority Three – Smarter use of resources

We want to make the best possible use of public money. We want to make smarter use of our resources while minimising reductions in services. Over the period 2018-19 to 2022-23, the council made budget reductions of over £18.5 million. As austerity continues, it becomes harder each year to make further cuts. Our main ways of achieving this objective are -

- **Transforming our estate** – Using our land and buildings to improve service delivery, reduce running costs, minimise our impact on the environment and meet the needs of service users.
- **Corporate change** - Embracing innovation and technology, developing the skills and approaches of staff and new ways of working.
- **Environmental sustainability** - Protecting and safeguarding the environment by lowering the council's carbon footprint, looking at waste reduction, re-use and recycling and promoting environmental responsibility in communities.

#### What is our judgement?

Smarter use of resources	<b>GOOD</b>
--------------------------	-------------

- **Budget reductions** - The budget for 2022-23 was agreed in February 2022, before major increases in inflation, energy costs and the cost of living. This means our service budgets have been under severe pressure during the year. We have had to pay for increases in staff pay, energy costs across all our properties, and increased cost of food in the school catering service. There also been a significant pressure on the capital budget due to inflation, supply chain issues and lack of staff.
- **Digital transformation** - Bridgend County Borough Council's Digital Strategy outlines how we aim to achieve being a Digital Council. It aligns with the ambition of the Welsh Government 'Digital First' strategy focusing on; getting smarter by understanding challenges; using resources more effectively, developing integrated solutions and planning future developments based on better evidence. End-to-end integrated digital services will be built around the people who use them, meeting our priorities to help people and their communities. The successful implementation of the digital strategy will lead to improved services, embedded community benefits, integration with well-being goals, citizen satisfaction and reduced service costs.
- **Estates** – We are looking at how our buildings will be improved / remodelled through the Future Service Delivery Model. Digital transformation will help us find ways to remodel, reduce or use our office spaces in a smarter digitally enabled way. Our capital receipts have achieved their targets, as the sale of the land at Salt Lake in Porthcawl to Aldi was completed at £3.5m. Although our buildings are classed as safe, some compliance targets have not been met, but they are significantly improved, with gas, electricity, fire safety and asbestos compliance being above 90%. We have appointed a legionella officer and have commissioned a new legionella contract and expect to see compliance in this area significantly improve over the next twelve months.
- **School modernisation** - Construction was completed of the Bettws Welsh-medium childcare setting, and we commenced a process to source a service provider. The statutory consultation processes concluded for the replacement Mynydd Cynffig Primary School, replacement Heronsbridge School and the replacement Ysgol

Gymraeg Bro Ogwr and we commenced the design stage for all three schools. We concluded the first stage of the design process for the Bridgend West scheme, which will provide a new English-medium primary school (that is, to replace Afon y Felin Primary School and Corneli Primary School), and replacement Ysgol y Ferch o'r Sgêr. We commenced consultation processes in respect of a proposed enlargement to Coety Primary School and a proposal to establish a Welsh-medium seedling school and childcare provision in Porthcawl. We completed a scoping exercise and commenced the tender process for kitchen pod schemes, which will form a critical element of the next implementation phase for the delivery of UPFSM.

- **Corporate change** – We developed a plan for future working with our staff and trade unions, improved staff well-being activities, and continued work on our 'grow your own' schemes to develop apprentices and graduates. The Future Services Delivery project continues to look at the hybrid working model which offers a blended approach that takes account of the wide range of services delivered. We have some new regional frameworks where we procure goods and services jointly with other authorities, for example grounds maintenance and civil engineering.
- **Waste** – Our recycling rates are 70.49%, making us one of the top recyclers in Wales. Waste generated per person has reduced by 9% over the last year. 76% of people rate waste services as very or fairly good. The new community recycling centre at Pyle is complete although the site is yet to gain its operators licence from Natural Resources Wales. We recycle 40% of Street litter. Public campaigns are ongoing around food waste recycling, reminders on what to place in recycling containers, nappies and garden waste. Anti-dog fouling messages, including on our enforcement policy have been promoted. We are out to tender for an interim waste contract for 2024 to 2026. This will use the same vehicles and waste collection methodology. Options for future waste services are being prepared for post-2026.
- **Sustainability** – We are part of the Welsh Government's net zero carbon plan for the public sector and now have an approved Bridgend 2030 – Net Zero Carbon Strategy. We are the first council in Wales to use new Welsh Government Greenhouse Gas Reporting Protocol. We have successfully implemented the £1.3m Ref-fit programme on 19 school buildings which is already savings energy and reducing utility bills. Phase 2 of the re-fit scheme is being designed. £3m of Active Travel routes have been implemented we have an additional £1.5m to continue routes throughout the borough. We have invested £1.3 million to install energy and cost saving technologies to reduce energy consumption and CO2 emissions. Including replacing all our 16,000-street lighting in the Borough with LED bulbs. We have installed a network of electric vehicle charging points across the Borough, 27 chargers are in use, 20 are awaiting power connection. We are trying to speed up our fleet transition. We have implemented a Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy to make sure our suppliers also focus on climate change and circular economy.

## **Regulators assurances**

In August 2022, Audit Wales completed a review of the council's performance management arrangements. The review sought to answer the question: Do the Council's performance management arrangements support robust and effective decision-making and improvement? Overall, it found that: The Council's performance management arrangements do not consistently enable it to effectively evaluate and manage its performance. Following the review, we have made improvements in various areas but there is a lot more to do. A plan has been developed so that these improvements can be



agreed, communicated and monitored, including recruiting to the remaining vacant post, developing and publishing a new performance framework, improving our data quality and accuracy and improving our performance culture.

The Local Government Association (LGA) carried out a peer review of our Communications and Marketing functions during February 2023 which involved assessors spending a number of days talking to the key individuals involved in providing this service, seeking feedback from relevant stakeholders and observing how the Council communicates both within the organisation and externally with residents. As a result, we received a series of recommendations from the review and an action plan has been developed for the next year, that will help our communications to be more effective and more aligned to our priorities.

### Consultations and engagement activities

Consultation	Dates	Impact
Héronsbridge School	April 2022 to May 2022	Consultation processes concluded in respect of a 300-place replacement Heronsbridge School on the Island Farm site. Engagement with staff and pupils regarding the school relocation and Cabinet approval gathered for relocation.
Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr	March 2023	Consultation processes concluded in respect of regulated alteration to Ysgol Gymraeg Bro Ogwr in the form of an enlargement of the school to 2.5 form-entry, a 90-place full-time-equivalent nursery and an 8-place observation and assessment class. The replacement school will be located on land off Ffordd Cadfan, Brackla. Consultation session held around the design of the school.
Mynydd Cynffig Primary School	July 2022 and October 2022	Consultation processes concluded in respect of regulated alteration to Mynydd Cynffig Primary School in the form of an enlargement to 2 form-entry plus a 75 full-time-equivalent nursery. Engagement sessions held with staff, pupils and governors around the design of the site.
Budget Survey	December 2022	The findings informed the final budget proposals and Corporate Plan objectives which were approved by Cabinet at the end of February and Council on March 1st. They have also informed this self-assessment.
Staff survey	December 2022	Responses are feeding into the ongoing development of the strategic workforce plan as well as informing corporate plan objectives.

### Consultation responses

The responses to the consultation on the self-assessment showed –

- 56% of respondents believed we provided enough evidence of our actions / progress
- 55% of respondents believe it is clear what more we have planned
- 56% of respondents think the judgement of ‘Good’ is about right

The main issues raised in the open questions about this wellbeing objective were –

- It is hard to talk to council staff
- Complaints about roads, potholes and 20mph limits
- Complaints about waste collection, litter and flytipping

### **What will we do to improve?**

Some of the main improvements we will make for this priority are –

- A new nine-year investment programme for school modernisation will be established during this year in preparation to commence in April 2024.
- We will complete the creation and integration of key information into the new management information system and develop data reporting mechanisms to ensure services have access to good quality data, which can be used to inform service improvements.
- Continue to address the recommendations of the Audit Wales reports on workforce planning, asset management and performance management
- Continuing to develop our Future Service Delivery approach
- Develop our budget, savings plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- Implement the provisions of the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes)(Wales) Bill once these are known and understood. Following completion of the public consultation, Cabinet will decide on the content of the Air Quality Action Plan for the Park Street Air Quality Management Area and implement improvement measures.
- Implement the action plan for communications following the LGA peer review
- Complete, consult on and publish a new workforce strategy
- Work with HMLR to migrate all local authority land charges data to a central register to streamline the homebuying process
- Agree a regional framework for food procurement by December 2023
- Refreshed Corporate Fleet Transition Plan to accelerate move to ULEV.
- Develop options for our future waste service model for post 2026
- Open the new community recycling facility in Pyle and realise the savings this creates.
- Design & Implement Phase 2 of the Re-fit Scheme to reduce our building energy costs
- Put in place a further 43 electric vehicle charging points by August 23

### **Case studies**

#### **Grow Our Own**

We want to invest in people to develop future skills and secure employment. Staff development is promoted to enhance skills and our human resources teams have been encouraging the use of grow your own approaches to help with recruitment challenges. These include an apprenticeship programme which started in 2013, and focused on ICT, Procurement and Building Control. Following appointment, regular support is also in place for the learners and their managers, whilst a programme of planned workshops is established for all apprentices. With Corporate investment and coordination, there has been an increase in the number and range of apprenticeships, including in social care, highways and planning. We have now appointed 151 apprentices, with 85 securing permanent roles. This has increased capacity; helped us overcome skill shortages and helped with staff retention. The council launched the introduction of a corporately



coordinated in-house graduate scheme in 2021, recognising that such roles can make an important contribution towards building capacity, skills development, and workforce planning, at a higher level. We have appointed 7 graduates across a range of services, such as planning, digital transformation, policy performance and public affairs, commissioning and civil engineering. The aim is to provide graduates with a programme where they will be exposed to genuine challenges early on in their development. They will be equipped with a base of skills to meet and manage these challenges effectively and ensure that each experience provides opportunity for personal growth.

### **Valleys 2 Coast**

A digital platform was launched in March 2021 to allow elected members and the public to report issues with V2C homes or in their local area. Since then, 45,605 users have created an online account. There are 105 forms available via the digital platform. From May 2022 to February 2023 there were 82,343 transactions. Using this digital platform has enabled the Council to review some of its operational models of work, for example, the waste and recycling team introduced tablets for operatives to receive all fly-tipping, litter, abandoned vehicles and other waste issue reports. This has led to the team working more efficiently, as well as reducing the need to produce paper work tickets and unnecessary administrative tasks.

### **Empty Properties**

Bridgend Council worked in partnership with Valleys to Coast to bring 35 long term empty properties back into use. This was done using over half a million pounds from Council resources. Our contribution allowed Valleys to Coast to secure an extra £2 million of funding from Welsh Government towards the refurbishment and improvement of the properties. Investment was not only focused on bringing the properties back into use but also improving the energy efficiency of the homes, reducing running costs for the future tenants.

### **Welsh Government Fuel Support Scheme**

Welsh Government made funds available for a 2022-23 Fuel Support Scheme to help people with their living costs. Eligible households claimed a one-off £200 cash payment to provide support towards paying their winter fuel bills. The scheme was open to households where an applicant was in receipt of specific benefits between 1 September 2022 and 31 January 2023. To administer the scheme, the Council developed an on-line system that maximised automated technology to process applications quickly and accurately, with minimum data input. In just the first week of the scheme, 9,500 applications were completed (out of 10,500 applications received), with around 9,000 of these approved for payment. At the end of the scheme, 17,854 Bridgend households had received a payment – a total of over £3.57 million of support during the cost of living crisis.

### **Street Lighting**

Between 2018 and 2023 the authority has been replacing our traditional street lights with energy efficient LED lamps. We have changed around 20,000 streetlamps. The work was funded using £2.242 million from the Salix loan programme, (Salix is a non-departmental public body, owned wholly by Government. Salix administers funds on behalf of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.) As well as reducing the carbon impact of the authority and contributing to the net zero 2030 ambitions, the programme is delivering annual energy cost savings of around £420,000 every year.

## How is the council using its resources?

We have always had to report how well we are using our resources. For example, we must tell Audit Wales about our spending, our workforce and our buildings. Until recently, we did not have a common process for reviewing how we are managing all of our different resources. This year, to help us judge our use of resources and write this report, we developed a new process. We held a workshop with managers and staff to look at –

- finances,
- procurement,
- corporate planning,
- performance management,
- risk management,
- workforce planning, and
- asset management.

To come to our judgements, we used

- performance indicators e.g. staff vacancy levels and building maintenance,
- evidence on delivery of our projects and improvement plans,
- feedback from customers, staff and trade unions, and
- the views of our regulators e.g. Audit Wales report on workforce planning

We asked each other questions based on the well-being of future generations act, including

- Do we focus on prevention, not just putting things right when they go wrong?
- Are we making strong long-term plans?
- Do we share ideas, plans and resources with partner organisations?
- Are we making links and doing things consistently across the council?
- Are we involving the community and customers in key plans and decisions?

Like the performance information, we presented our findings to councillors who scrutinised the information, checked it and asked questions. We used the same scale from excellent to unsatisfactory as the one used for performance. This was done in June 2023.

## What are our judgements?

Use of resources	Adequate	<p>Day-to-day management of our resources is good. There are clear and agreed working models and strong, working relationships between corporate teams and directorates.</p> <p>Use of resources overall is judged as adequate again this year. Significant improvements are underway, particularly around workforce planning, asset management and performance management – with detailed improvement plans agreed following poor judgements in regulatory reviews last year. We are keen to implement these plans but to become ‘good’ will require additional investment in support services.</p> <p>There are still some vacancies and capacity issues both in corporate teams, and the senior managers who work alongside them. In some areas, we need to improve member engagement / challenge and develop modern, joined-up IT systems that help us with decision-making. Some directorates are better resourced than others to be able to respond and</p>
------------------	----------	---

		work with corporate teams. Those with well-resourced business teams were seen as more successful.
--	--	---

Our overall judgement looks at use of resources of all types. We also have a specific judgement for each resource type, to help us with our improvement planning.

Finances	Good	Financial management is good. We successfully balance our budget and keep within budget during the year. Feedback from our regulators is positive. We have a healthy financial position, and respond quickly to new pressures, through effective management of budgets and reserves and member challenge. The cost of living crisis has impacted on our funding, with much higher than anticipated pay awards and unprecedented levels of price inflation. Our budget has faced unavoidable pressures from all services and any previous flexibility within the budget has been eroded.
Corporate planning	Good	This year we have developed a new corporate plan to reflect the ambitions of elected members, staff and partners. It also reflects the challenges we face including covid recovery and the cost-of-living crisis. It is a different, more accessible document than ones produced in the past. The development process has been more inclusive, working closely with elected members, staff, trade unions, and partners at three stages of its development. The corporate plan was agreed by council on 2 March 2023.
Risk management	Good	Risk management is good. Further improvements have been made to the identification and management of risk, through an updated Corporate Risk Management Policy. Reporting of risk is simple and accessible. The Corporate Risk Assessment is reported to Governance and Audit Committee and up to two risks are looked at in more detail, with the relevant Chief Officer, so members of the Committee can probe in more depth. A review by internal audit of our Risk Management, in March 2023, gave us a 'Substantial Assurance' opinion, and raised no findings or recommendations.
Procurement	Adequate	Commissioning is adequate. Procurement remains good. The Socially Responsible Procurement Strategy, delivery plan and updated Contract Procedure Rules have been embedded and extra training has been provided. We have some new regional frameworks, for example grounds maintenance and civil engineering. We need to work to develop a culture of forward planning and early engagement between commissioners and the corporate procurement team. This will lead to opportunities to identify and address problems and better consider things like Decarbonisation and Community Benefits. A working group will be set up with commissioners and the corporate procurement team, to help us collaborate better to meet the objectives of the Strategy.
Performance management	Adequate	Performance management is adequate. We have had an internal audit of performance indicators and an Audit Wales review of performance management which found that the Council's performance management arrangements do not consistently enable it to effectively evaluate and manage performance. Since then, we have made improvements, but there is more to do. Performance management arrangements are patchy but are good in some areas. A plan has been developed so that these improvements can be agreed, communicated and monitored, including recruiting to the

		remaining vacant post, developing a new performance framework, clarifying roles and responsibilities, improving our performance culture, data quality and accuracy.
Workforce planning	Adequate	Workforce management is good. Feedback from employees, managers, trade union representatives and internal audits is generally positive. Managers are assisted to deal effectively with people issues through appropriate and timely support from HR. The HR operating model, aims to give managers an improved service based on an increasing focus on proactive and preventative HR services and an incremental reduction in the need for and provision of reactive support services. The overall judgement is assessed as adequate as we need to improve capacity amongst managers and in the HR team, and focus on strategic workforce planning, long term workforce needs and succession planning. Following an Audit Wales review of Workforce Planning, we are developing a Strategic Workforce Plan 2023-2028, developing HR policies and procedures, co-designed and to focus on proactive HR services. We need to continue to streamline HR processes, including using automation.
Asset management	Adequate	Asset management policy is good with strong engagement from directorates. The asset management strategy for our property is dynamic and reviewed regularly. The overall judgement is adequate, based on the need to address workforce and resource challenges that result in a continued reactive approach. In response to last year's Audit Wales review we have; reviewed the 2030 Strategic Asset Management Plan, reduced our maintenance backlog, improved our management of Statutory Building Compliance, and made progress on the Integrated Works Management System (IWMS) to improve our data / benchmarking. More improvements are needed, including adopting the strategic asset management plan, continuing improvements in the maintenance backlog and statutory building compliance, implementing the IWMS and focusing on our workforce capacity. Separate reviews are in place for management of other assets including highways / streetlighting.

## Consultation responses

The responses to the consultation on the self-assessment showed –

- 52% of respondents believed we provided enough evidence of our actions / progress
- 49% of respondents believe it is clear what more we have planned
- 57% of respondents think the judgement of 'Good' is about right

The main issues raised in the open questions about this issue were –

- Council tax is too high and shouldn't be increased
- Staff shouldn't be working from home any longer
- Some council buildings aren't needed anymore

## **What will we do to improve?**

Some of the main improvements we will make in our management of resources are –

- Developing and implementing a Strategic workforce plan
- Communicating and implementing the Performance Management Improvement Plan (PMIP) including developing a Corporate Delivery Plan and Performance Framework
- Asset management improvements, including adopting the strategic asset management plan, continuing improvements in the maintenance backlog and statutory building compliance, implementing the IWMS and focusing on our workforce capacity
- Making Corporate planning and updates earlier in the year
- The system we use to monitor and report risk will be improved
- We will work to identify more longer term savings options, based on agreed priorities
- A working group will be established with relevant commissioners in the authority and the corporate procurement team
- Review and update the council's hybrid working policy
- Consider building rationalisation as part of the development of the medium term financial strategy (MTFS)
- Streamline HR processes, including using automation.

#### 4. How good is the council's governance?

Organisations that have good governance use clear decision-making processes and communicate openly about what they are doing. They work well with their stakeholders, manage the risks they face, and take responsibility for their assets.

We have always had to report on our governance, to Audit Wales. There is a clear process for developing an 'Annual Governance Statement' that has existed for many years. This year, to help us judge our governance and write this report, we have added more thinking about our consultation, engagement and involvement. We have well established and effective political governance, with Cabinet as part of regular Cabinet/Corporate Management Board meetings and formal Cabinet meetings, and with full Council when necessary. With scheduled Overview and Scrutiny meetings and an enhanced and important role for the Governance and Audit Committee. Additionally, when required separate member panels are set up to improve the governance process and make better evidenced based, informed decisions. For example, the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel (BREP) which is used to share emerging budget issues on a confidential cross party basis and the Social Care Member Panel which allows risks and issues in that service to be discussed and better understood at an earlier stage.

#### What is our judgement?

<b>Governance</b>	<b>Good</b>
-------------------	-------------

Organisations that have good governance use clear decision-making processes and communicate openly about what they are doing. They work well with their stakeholders, manage the risks they face, and take responsibility for their assets.

#### Decision making

Our governance arrangements are good, and work well. Our [Governance Framework, Code of Corporate Governance](#) explain how we work, how we are accountable and how decisions are made. In 2022 we developed a new constitution to take into account the new legislative requirements placed on local authorities under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It was approved by Council on 19 October 2022 and implemented from 1 December 2022. A [guide to the Constitution](#) has also been produced and published, to help members of the public understand our constitution. Through these documents (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. Governance arrangements are reviewed each year to update the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). It is considered and approved by the Governance and Audit Committee. A number of significant issues were identified in the Council's 2021-22 AGS, so in the past year we have made improvements including –

- Publishing our first Corporate Self Assessment in October 2022
- Developing a transition plan for the South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee
- Updated our Medium Term Financial Strategy to reflect the current position and started a review of our earmarked reserves
- Done work to assess and address issues with increased costs in existing contracts and tenders for new contracts, including a specific piece of work for the social care sector.
- Completed a member induction programme, events, training and drop-in sessions.
- Raised awareness of roles and responsibilities for GDPR when working from home.
- Developed a multi-locations meetings policy, approved by Council on 15 June 2022.

## Consultation, engagement and involvement

There is a large amount of consultation with our local residents and businesses. The corporate consultation team have a programme of future consultations and support directorates to consult in a timely and effective way. We have a range of consultation channels, mechanisms and groups, but these could be broadened. Engagement and involvement is adequate. Engagement activities take place in directorates, some using industry best practice. But engagement is patchy and the corporate team is not always involved or informed. Engagement is usually reactive rather than proactive. The pandemic has had a big impact on our capacity and ability to engage. There is not yet much activity focused on trust or relationship building between the community and BCBC and we are in the process developing our new engagement platform which offers various methods of communication tools which are being utilised for enhancing our abilities to connect with residents.

We have positive and constructive social partnership arrangements. We work with recognised Trade Unions (TU's), with clear and regular arrangements for consultation and engagement. Local and regional TU representatives meet HR officers monthly. Other officers are brought in as needed, for example the Chief Executive on future service delivery and the Section 151 Officer on the budget. Two Cabinet members attend bi-monthly so TU representatives can talk to them directly. There are separate meetings for schools. TU representatives play an important role in decision making and organisational change. They contribute different ideas and perspectives and support their members at meetings which focus on the workforce impacts of any changes. All HR policy reviews are done with full consultation with TU's.

As well as regular staff and trade union engagement, we run an annual staff survey. The last one, in December 2022 had over 1000 responses. The survey contained many questions which repeated previous surveys so we can see how we are doing over time. Overall satisfaction with BCBC as an employer has increased in recent years but reduced slightly in the last year, from 59% in 2018, 66% in 2020, 73% in 2021 and 67% in 2022. A detailed feedback report was developed, and an internal action plan is being developed to act on issues from the staff survey.

Engagement with regulators is strong and systematic. Regular meetings take place between regulators and senior officers in the Council to discuss regulators' work and the council's improvement plans.

### Consultation responses

The responses to the consultation on the self-assessment showed –

- 52% of respondents believed we provided enough evidence of our actions / progress
- 50% of respondents believe it is clear what more we have planned
- 54% of respondents think the judgement of 'Good' is about right

The main issues raised in the open questions about this wellbeing objective were –

- The council doesn't listen to residents
- The council doesn't keep residents informed or provide evidence of what it is doing



- There is not enough focus on universal or visible services – litter, fly tipping, maintenance of roads and pavements, grass cutting etc

### **What will we do to improve?**

Some of the main improvements we will make in our governance are -

- Development of the council's strategic workforce plan
- Making improvements to strategic asset management
- Develop a contractors' framework for Disabled Facilities Grants to provide the Council with end-to-end ownership of the process from referral to completion
- Implement our Decarbonisation 2030 plans
- Improve long term financial management
- Providing training on Capital Strategy, Earmarked Reserves and Statement of Accounts for all members.
- Implementing our performance management improvement plan.
- Improving our approach to regular and ongoing engagement and involvement
- Implementing our new participation and engagement strategy for the council
- Improving the council's communication and place narrative and providing additional evidence about actions the council is taking

### **5. Our Strategic Equality Plan**

In developing the equality objectives, we have talked to our residents, stakeholders and employees and used relevant information, including EHRC reports, Welsh Government reports and internal strategies. In addition to this we have:

- Developed a [Strategic Equality Plan 2020-24](#) and associated action plan
- Reviewed our old Strategic Equality Plan and action plan to see how we have done;
- Developed a consultation toolkit to improve the way we engage with our communities;
- Given further consideration to each of the nine protected characteristics covered by the three main aims of the general duty and the requirement to eliminate discrimination, harassment and other actions prohibited in the Equality Act 2010;
- Looked at regional approaches to meeting the needs of Gypsy and Traveller families and people who have experienced domestic abuse and hate crime.
- Started the process for developing a new Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28

### **How do we identify and collect relevant information?**

We are committed to collecting and using data to identify where some protected characteristic groups experience a disproportionate impact or where we could deliver services in a different way. We collect data on customers and residents via our consultation and engagement activities and on our employees via our own internal systems. We will collect and use the following equality data:

- Employment profile data for all protected characteristics;
- Service user data to understand the characteristics of our service users;
- Job applicants for all protected characteristics.

This data will be published annually as part of our Strategic Equality Plan annual reporting process. In addition we will publish annually:



- The Full Equality Impact Assessments undertaken;
- The Strategic Equality Plan action plan review;
- The Strategic Equality Plan annual report.
- Welsh language standards annual report

### **How effective are arrangements for identifying and collecting relevant information?**

Each year we try to improve the Equality Monitoring Data we hold for employees. We encourage employees to update information through communications / appraisals.

### **What does this tell us about equality of access to employment, training and pay?**

Every year, we report our 'equalities in the workforce' report to councillors. This tells us about our numbers of employees with protected characteristics. It also tells us about pay, recruitment and training of employees with protected characteristics. This is all put together and included in the strategic equality plan. Areas for improvement are included in the [strategic equality plan action plan](#).