

Meeting of:	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	30 OCTOBER 2025
Report Title:	PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
Responsible Officer:	ALEX RAWLIN POLICY AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS MANAGER
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	The Corporate Plan and Performance Framework (on which Self-Assessment and Panel Performance Assessments (PPA) are based) form part of the Policy Framework.
Executive Summary:	This report informs Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) of the findings of the Panel Performance Assessment that took place between 16-19 September 2025, and set out the next steps in terms of - • Writing a formal, Council response to the PPA • Communicating the findings more widely • Developing actions to address the findings

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) of the findings of the Panel Performance Assessment that took place between 16-19 September 2025, and the agreed next steps.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 set out a new local government improvement regime. One of the requirements of the Act is for the Council to undertake a Panel Performance Assessment, or PPA, between each local government election. The PPA 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 In addition to the three statutory areas, the Corporate Management Board (CMB) and Cabinet agreed three further areas for the peers' consideration which were -

- **Transformation** – The development of a transformation strategy that meets political and key stakeholder aspirations that is underpinned by effective arrangements for delivery, performance management and a culture of constructive challenge. A clear need to focus on mechanisms and capacity for transformation that will improve citizens experience and create an organisation that is sustainable in the medium and long term.
- **Addressing workforce challenges** – Building on strengthened workforce planning, address challenges in recruitment in key areas, and improve succession planning, to help the Council create a long-term workforce strategy.
- **Improving engagement** – Building on improvements to strategic communication, improve the Council's engagement and relationships internally with councillors and externally with local communities and town and community councils to help it become more citizen focused.

2.3 The panel were on site between 16-19 September 2025 and consisted of –

Role	Name	Details
Independent Chair	Sally Loudon	Former Chief Executive of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), former Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Council.
Senior Elected Member	Cllr. Andrew Stevens	Serving Councillor and Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure at Swansea Council.
Serving Local Government Senior Officer	Gareth Newell	Head of Performance and Partnerships, Cardiff Council
Associate Peer from the Wider Public, Private or Voluntary Sectors	Anne-Louise Clark	Former Executive Director – Communication and Change for Audit Wales & Chair of the Board of Trustees for Platform for Change Ltd.

2.4 During the onsite week, the Panel undertook 1-2-1 interviews with a range of elected members, council officers and partners. They also held focus groups with users of council services and community representatives including:

- Trade Unions
- Town & Community Councils
- Business community
- Youth Council
- Older people
- Citizens
- Headteachers

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 At the end of the peers' week on site, they gave a presentation on their findings which addressed the three performance requirements and the three areas of focus we provided. Since then, their final report has been received by the Council. The report is included at **Appendix 1** and presentation at **Appendix 2**.

3.2 The headline findings of the PPA are –

- Bridgend is a good Council with untapped potential.
- A political and managerial leadership that is ambitious for Bridgend.
- Workforce that is enthusiastic, committed, cares deeply about the Council and the communities it serves.
- High levels of self-awareness - clear and shared assessment of strengths and the challenges ahead.
- Ready for change and positive about the future.

Despite these positives it describes the council as now being at '*a crossroads in terms of its development and now is the time to act at pace. By making the necessary changes now, the council can make sure it can sustain services and continues to deliver for its communities for years to come.*' This description aligns strongly with most officers and elected members' assessment of the council, its services and the imperative and desire to change.

3.3 For each of the three performance requirements, the peers outlined strengths and areas for improvement. These are -

Exercise of functions / council performance

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Good performance in services and consistent performance narrative across members and officers.	Unnecessary bureaucracy and procedures are stifling empowerment and delaying decision making.
Dedicated and committed members and staff.	Corporate and strategic capacity required.
A real eagerness for change.	
Some examples of cross-Council working, but not evident across the whole authority.	

Use of resources

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Good financial management and monitoring.	Looking forward, ensure the budget and MTFS is closely aligned with the new vision and change programme.
Wider member involvement in the budget setting process.	The Council should, as a whole, increase its appetite for innovation.

Good relationships with partners and wider stakeholders, who are eager to be more strategically involved.	An opportunity for greater cross-service and partner working and culture – 'Team Bridgend.'
	Whole Council approach to communications needed.

Governance

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Overall, the Council has good governance arrangements and systems in place.	Continuing to build a cohesive leadership team and culture.
Good performance management framework in place.	Performance management framework needs to be embedded across the Council and culture needs to be developed to ensure ownership and accountability.
Good engagement and relationships with Trade Unions.	Responsiveness to members, scrutiny, stakeholders and citizens is not consistent across the Council.
Good scrutiny arrangements which are valued by members.	Scrutiny papers could be more concise, with greater evidence of impact of scrutiny also needed.

- 3.4 For each of the three focus areas provided by the Council, the peers outlined strengths and areas for improvement. These are –

Transformation

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Alignment of ambition for change.	Develop and agree a new transformation plan, involving staff, members, partners and communities.
Excitement and appetite for change.	Strategic and corporate capacity required to deliver change.
It's the right thing to do at the right time.	Transformation programme needs to be based on data and insight.
Evidence of innovation in some areas.	Review approach to digital and data to support the emerging Transformation Plan including funding, systems, skills and culture.

Workforce challenges

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Staff feel appreciated – it's a good and caring culture.	Move to a more strategic and future focussed workforce plan, linked to new vision and transformation plan – including

	succession planning, workforce of the future, digital and data.
Proud of Bridgend County and the impact the Council has.	Consider a corporate grow your own programme, developing links with local higher and further education.
Good relationships with Trade Unions.	Consider approach to staff celebration/appreciation.

Engagement

Strengths	Areas for improvement
Strong desire and commitment from Cabinet to hear and listen to citizens and communities.	The Council should consider a whole-Council approach to promoting the work of the Council and the county of Bridgend.
Evidence of engagement with stakeholders across the organisation.	Responsiveness to members, scrutiny, town and community councils and citizens is not consistent across the Council.
Town and Community Council liaison officer now in place.	Improve consultation and engagement practice, including greater use of local members, community groups and infrastructure to promote engagement and closing 'the feedback loop'.
Citizen panel in place and innovative plan to use citizen focus groups	Forward-looking corporate communications needed which reaches all staff – especially at a time of change.
Corporate communications in place.	

3.5 Finally, the peers provided eight recommendations which are –

1. The Council has appointed a Chief Executive to lead and deliver change. The Council should now support him to develop an inspiring vision, a transformation strategy, underpinning corporate strategies and the cultural shift required to produce both sustainability of services, greater cross-Council working and innovation – which involves staff, communities and partners.
2. The Council should put in place leadership development for senior staff and Members to support this change.
3. The Council should, as a whole, increase its appetite for innovation with a focus on the future and delivery of outcomes, supporting staff and Members to do that. This should involve reducing unnecessary bureaucracy to release capacity and empower managers.
4. The Council should rapidly review corporate and strategic capacity to ensure both sustainability of service delivery and supporting the overall emerging change programme. In addition, the Council should consider bringing together key corporate enablers to unlock the potential of the organisation: e.g. Human Resources, performance and communications.

5. The Council should review and refresh its approach to digital and data to support the emerging Transformation Plan including: funding, systems, skills, and culture.
6. The Council should consider a whole Council approach to promoting the work of the Council and the county of Bridgend – with pride.
7. The Council should consider building on its good relations with partners in the public, private, community and voluntary sector to deliver Bridgend's vision and priorities.
8. As an immediate priority, the Council should improve its responsiveness to Members, stakeholders and citizens as part of building a culture of mutual respect for all.

Next steps

- 3.6 Following the Council's receipt of the PPA report, it is required to produce a response, and to test the response through the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC). Corporate Management Board and Cabinet will work together to develop this response. It will be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee and Full Council for their consideration, alongside an action plan that is already in development.
 - 3.7 The Council will also communicate the findings of PPA through -
 - Town and Community Council Forum
 - Trade Unions through the regular monthly meeting
 - Staff Forums
 - 3.8 It is evident from the report that there is an urgency to act '*at pace*'. Any delays will pose potential risks to the Authority's sustainability. There is a widespread acceptance of the report's main findings. The next step is to develop an action plan and the capacity and skills to manage the change. A full action plan will be developed to allow the Council to meet these expectations by the end of November.
- 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 the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Wellbeing of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Wellbeing Objectives

5.1 This report reviews the following corporate wellbeing objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 that form part of the Council's Corporate Plan Delivery Plan 2025/26:-

1. THRIVING - A prosperous place with thriving communities,
2. EMPOWERING - Supporting our most vulnerable,
3. ACHIEVING - Enabling people to meet their potential,
4. MODERNISING - Creating modern, seamless public services

5.2 The 5 ways of working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act have also been included in the Council's wellbeing objectives. The ways of driving and measuring them is also contained in the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan.

6. Climate Change and Nature Implications

6.1 There are no specific implications of this report on climate change or nature.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

7.1 There are no specific implications of this report on safeguarding or corporate parenting.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

9. Recommendations

9.1 It is recommended that the Governance and Audit Committee:-

- Consider the findings of the PPA in **Appendix 1** and **Appendix 2**.
- Consider the next steps in responding to the PPA (including GAC's role) as outlined in paragraphs 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 of the report.

Background documents

None