

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>COUNCIL</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>19 NOVEMBER 2025</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT AND PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE JNC SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE</b>
<b>Report Owner: Responsible Chief Officer / Cabinet Member</b>	<b>LEADER OF THE COUNCIL  CHIEF EXECUTIVE</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>JAKE MORGAN CHIEF EXECUTIVE</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>There is no effect upon the policy framework and procedure rules.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>The purpose of this report is to advise Council of the initial response to the Panel Performance Assessment and proposes amendments to the JNC senior management structure.</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to set out the initial response to the Panel Performance assessment (PPA) including the recommendation regarding the need for the development of a transformation strategy. It also proposes amendments to the JNC senior management structure to support change, ensure risk is managed effectively to enable change.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Bridgend County Borough is widely considered to be at a crossroads in its development with a need to modernise and undertake significant change if it is to be to meet future demand and be sustainable in the future. There is a broad consensus that continuing to do things in the same way will lead to managed decline across all services. This paper sets out the recommended direction of travel and seeks to put in the building blocks of capacity to manage risk and realise these ambitions for change recommended in our external evaluation reported to council on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2005. **(Appendix A)** Work is underway to respond in detail to each of the 8 recommendations. This report will set out the intended direction of travel on how to take this forward including some essential amendments to the JNC senior management structure to enable parallel risk management of the council's core

business whilst also ensuring there is capacity to drive change. The Peer review gave 8 recommendations:

**2.2 Recommendation 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.***

2.3 It has been identified by the Peer Review that there is an appetite for change across both Council staff and Elected Members. It has been widely accepted that there is a long term ‘vision gap’ and need for a transformation plan that sets out a vision for the people of Bridgend and the place they live. This plan should set out the aspiration for the council that will guide strategic decision making and change at least until 2040.

2.4 To do this, the Council needs to develop an approach and timetable for the development of a suite of related documents that will be informed by the long-term transformation plan including:

- An updated Corporate Plan Delivery Plan (CPDP) for 2026/27 that sets out the measures of success for the year ahead – reflecting the new vision.
- More robust Service self-evaluations feeding Directorate Business Plans that outline how each Directorate will contribute to the CPDP and transformation plan.
- A more robust system of self-evaluation of every key service area.
- Appraisals that set out how individual employees will contribute to the plans set out above.

**3. Current situation/proposal:**

3.1 It is recommended to create structure and pace to the change that the Council aims for each element of the performance framework and for this to be in place by Summer 2026. This is an ambitious timescale. As concluded in the PPA report, this will require work at pace.

3.2 The proposed timeline is set out as a cascade from broadest to more specific levels in the table below:

<b>What</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>When</b>
Budget Development	CMB / Cabinet / budget working group / Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee (COSC) / Council	January-February 2026

Transformation Plan Development	Cabinet / All Members / Corporate Management Board (CMB) / Heads of Service / Staff and Trade Unions / Stakeholders / Public	November 2025- March 2026
Service Self Evaluation	Heads of Service	February- April
CPDP development	CMB / Heads of Service / COSC / Cabinet and Council	April / May 2026
Directorate Business Plan Development	CMB / Heads of Service / Group Managers/ Scrutiny	June 2026
Key development of enabling strategies EG workforce and Technology,	CMB/ Heads of Service/ Scrutiny/	June- November
Appraisals	All	June / August 2026

## Transformation Plan

- 3.3 The Transformation Plan should set out a clear, long-term vision for Bridgend in 2040, and some broad themes and work streams for how we will achieve that vision. CMB, Heads of Service and a cross section of service managers have started the very early stages of a visioning process and developing prospective themes for inclusion in the transformation plan.
- 3.4 The next phase of development of the transformation plan will include discussions around themes, and consideration of the priority ambitions or outcomes that sit underneath them. Discussions must include –
- Cabinet / CMB
  - Group Leaders
  - Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees
  - All members
  - Heads of Service and Group Managers
  - All staff
  - Trade Unions

- Stakeholders (including Public Scrutiny Board (PSB) and Town and Community Council Forum)
- The public

3.5 This engagement will start in November 2025 and continue into spring 2026. It is proposed that the draft transformation plan be considered by Cabinet and council in April 2026, following approval of the budget. Whilst the timing is challenging, it reflects the need for live management of the authority (annual budget setting etc) must be completed in parallel with the need to plan long term. It is also mindful of the need for pace to ensure there is impact of actions prior to the 2027/28 budget setting process.

### **Corporate Plan Delivery Plan (CPDP)**

- 3.6 BCBC currently has a high level, five-year Corporate Plan 2023-28. The Council took a new approach for 2023 and did not include commitments or performance indicators in the Corporate Plan. Instead, we developed a one-year delivery plan so we could be more agile and flexible to our changing operating environment.
- 3.7 For 2025/26, the CPDP was streamlined to better reflect Cabinet aspirations, the Council's budget and CMB / Heads of Service requests for a shorter, more focused document.
- 3.8 For 2026/27, once the development of the Transformation Plan is underway, we will review our priorities for the CPDP. We have said we will take our updated Corporate Plan Delivery Plan to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2026, with targets to be set and taken to Cabinet / Council alongside the CPDP in May 2026. This will be with a view to ensuring the delivery plan for the council reflects the emerging transformation plan.

### **Directorate Business Plan, service self-evaluations and individual appraisals**

- 3.9 Following completion of the CPDP, Directorate Business Plans will be completed to reflect the updated plans and other work underway in Directorates. The process will be similar to the one in 2025 with a slightly later proposed deadline of June 2026.
- 3.10 Appraisals will take place in line with the existing protocol – that is April to September 2026 (with managers considering the extent of any changes proposed in the transformation plan / CPDP when timing appraisals). There will be a greater degree of performance monitoring compliance in this area.
- 3.11 ***Recommendation 2- Put in place leadership development for senior staff and members to support this change.***
- 3.12 It is proposed to develop a leadership development programme and enhanced members training in 2026 and to support this scheme to allocate funding from our transformation earmarked reserve to support a two-year programme of development to underpin cultural change, and support our aim to being a more dynamic, creative, adaptable and sustainable Council.

- 3.13 **Recommendation 3- *The Council should 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***
- 3.14 It is proposed that a Workforce Strategy is developed in 2026 that sets out the behaviours and attributes we want in our workforce. A key element of change must be a programme of development that makes decision making and business process reengineering part of our core business. This will speed up decision making and enable processes to be more efficient, reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and deliver savings. Work is underway to identify the capacity and skills we have and need to deliver an effective improvement programme. This will resolve a central challenge in Bridgend that we have had limited automation of processes that would drive savings as the processes have to be first re-engineered to be able to apply automation. It is intended that a corporate transformation team will be established for this purpose ensuring modernisation, led by a Corporate Director will deliver change and sustainability to the council.
- 3.15 **Recommendation 4 - *Rapidly review corporate and strategic capacity to ensure both sustainability of service delivery and supporting the 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***
- 3.16 The Council has, over the last decade reduced its second tier dramatically with less capacity than any other local authority we can identify in Wales. This poses a significant risk to the sustainability of the Authority. Specific risks and challenges include:
- Creating several single points of failure in key statutory Directorates with potential regulatory and performance risk.
  - That Directors have focussed, appropriately on core business rather than transformation and change. Where this has been required (e.g. Childrens Services relatively modest investment in capacity has produced substantial results), a focus on core business has meant we successfully deliver good Social Services, Schools and we are financially safe with amongst the lowest borrowing in Wales. However, as pressures, expectations and finances tighten it has become increasingly challenging to deliver excellent, sustainable services in this way and this has left the Council at what the PPA describes as 'at a crossroads' in its development - recognising the need for change but struggling to have the capacity to drive it.
  - Regular acting down from Corporate Directors and Chief Officers as they spend disproportionate time firefighting operational problems.
  - Some Senior Officers having a wider span of responsibility than any equivalent post in Wales.
  - An inability of Corporate Directors to step back and drive strategic solutions and transformation of services and sustainability. As sector inflation continues to run higher than settlement figures this space to transform services will be essential.
  - We currently have a Chief Executive's Directorate combining a wide range of functions from corporate e.g' Finance, Human Resources etc to wholly operational

such as Registrars, Housing, and Communities administration. This makes little sense to the public and has a lack of coherence in delivery.

- The lack of strategic capacity has created the lack of a pipeline of strategic investments and projects that would enable the Council to draw down external funding at a rate other neighbouring authorities are able to do. As a result the council risks missing the opportunity for millions of regional and national investment.

3.17 The current Corporate team structure is:

Chief Executive					
<b>Corporate Director - Communities</b>	<b>Corporate Director - Education, Early Years and Young People</b>	<b>Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing</b>		<b>Chief Officer - Finance, Performance &amp; Change</b>	<b>Chief Officer - Legal &amp; Regulatory Services, HR &amp; Electoral Services</b>
Head of Operations	Head of Learning	Head of Adults Social Care	Head of Children's Social Care	Head of Partnership Services	

- 3.18 There are currently five Heads of Service within the Council. As far as we can determine this is the smallest number in Wales. It has been referenced by Audit Wales reports and in the recent PPA that this is a very lean structure and negatively impacts on the overall strategic capacity within the Council and specifically the capacity to manage risk.
- 3.19 A success rightly highlighted in the peer assessment is the turnaround of Childrens Services. However, it is an illustration of the cost reputationally and financially where we are not sufficiently agile in acting at pace to address workforce or demand issues. The challenges facing Bridgend in workforce were the same as every other authority post pandemic but the lack of capacity to address this undoubtedly cost the authority more than if we had addressed shortfalls at an earlier stage. Following investment, the Social Services structure, whilst still relatively lean is structurally fit for purpose.
- 3.20 The proposal for change is to place transformation at the heart of the Council whilst ensuring we have sufficient resilience to manage risk across the Directorates. To correct a structural anomaly, it is proposed that a Chief Officer post be consolidated to Corporate Director (in line with every local authority in Wales) and to introduce two new Heads of Service: a Head of Strategy, Early Years and Youth in the Education, Early Years and Young People Directorate and a Head of Public Realm reporting directly to the Chief Executive as set out below. It is further proposed that the current temporary Head of Service arrangement (in place to continue well into 2027) in the Communities Directorate be made permanent. Through reorganising priorities and re-alignment these can be largely delivered through existing budget

levels. The proposed changes to the structure are referenced A,B,C,D and in bold below:

Chief Executive – <i>(B) Head of Performance and Workforce Cultural Change</i>							
Corporate Director - Communities		Corporate Director - Education, Early Years and Young People		Corporate Director - Social Services and Wellbeing		<i>(A) Corporate Director - Finance and Transformation</i>	Chief Officer – Legal, Regulatory, and Electoral Services
Head of Operations	<i>(C) Head of Public Realm</i>	Head of Learning	<i>(D) Head of Strategy, Early Years and Youth</i>	Head of Adults Social Care	Head of Children's Social Care	Head of Partnership Services	

### 3.21 **(A) Corporate Director - Finance and Transformation**

The current Chief Officer Finance, Housing and Change is a structural anomaly sitting within an ill-defined Chief Executive's Directorate. In addressing this it not only aligns us with every other local authority in Wales where the finance function is held at a Corporate Director level, but it also enables us to disaggregate the Chief Executive Directorate (save for some key central functions) and ensures financial stability, sustainability and transformation are at the heart of the organization, driven by an accountable Corporate Director. This new emphasis will give the postholder the statutory responsibility for the finances of the council (near half a billion pounds) alongside the tools and enablers to drive change through IT and programme management. The cost differential is contained within the existing corporate budget.

- 3.22 As it stands, the Chief Officer post covers such a range of services with areas as diverse as Housing, Democratic Services and ICT. By linking a transformation program of major projects and change (Note the transformation team proposed in paragraph 3.14). Through this we will ensure this post is dedicated to deliver strong core finances and to drive and facilitate the transformation of services. It will also lead the development of a transformation unit designed to be the engine room of change bringing together ICT/digital functions and change management capacity to improve pace, accountability and delivery in large change projects. The duties and span of responsibilities have been evaluated using the Council's approved Job Evaluation Scheme, and there is a consequent change in the grade. Following a period of consultation, the Council's Appointments Committee will be recommended

to approve a matching process for the re-designated role. This is on the basis that the current postholder will have a very strong contractual claim on the role.

**3.23 (B) Head of Performance & Workforce Cultural Change**

This post will report directly to the Chief Executive to lead and drive a performance culture across the Council ensuring the whole Authority works corporately to embedded cultural objectives. Its role will be to ensure the whole workforce is prepared, developed, challenged, and supported to be adaptable, creative, and accountable to meet Bridgend's Corporate Objectives. It will ensure there is a golden thread between corporate policies, strategies and how we measure and report performance progress across the Council. It will ensure our communications internally and externally utilize modern communication methods of the highest standard and that the whole Council is galvanized to deliver clear and transparent communication.

3.24 As part of this portfolio the post holder will be responsible for policy, performance, Human Resources and Communication. This development responds directly to address a recommendation from the Peer Review. Without this addition the Council will carry significant risk of not delivering the workforce and performance changes that it needs to increase productivity across its workforce. The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and associated technology is likely to have a profound impact on our workforce and helping staff to adapt and develop to work in different ways has to be a core part of our transformation strategy. The current arrangements are not sustainable, creating services against individuals larger and more diverse than any other comparable authority and resulting in functions such as Human Resources being predominantly transactional rather than as a catalyst for service development and cultural change.

3.25 The new post of Head of Performance and Workforce Cultural Change impacts on the direct reports of the Chief Officer – Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and electoral and will thus be re-designated as the Chief Officer – Legal, Regulatory and electoral Services. There is recognition that given the substantial responsibilities in this role (wider than anyone we can identify in Wales undertaking Head of Legal and monitoring officer functions) and the expanding functions as Deputy returning officer, that there will be no detriment to this post holder. This has been confirmed using the councils job evaluation scheme.

**3.26 (C) Head of Public Realm**

Effective delivery of public facing environmental services has been a principal priority for some time in the Council. Change has been challenging to manage across these large operational public facing services. Bringing waste back in house will add to the scale of delivery and there is currently provision to enable us to do this. As a result, there are already effectively two Heads of Service posts funded within the Directorate with the Head of Operations seconded to deliver the in-sourcing Waste Project and a backfill until 2027 (at least) of this post through the secondment of the Head of Partnership Services. It is proposed to replace the secondment with suitable project management arrangements and return this front facing Directorate to having two Heads of Service as was the case historically. Even with this addition it is relatively lean, but this does give much needed capacity in delivering services such as Waste, Highways and Green Spaces that many residents are most concerned about whilst allowing the Corporate Director to lead these but also to drive transformation in areas such as re-generation. Without this



long-term commitment, the Directorate carries significant risk and an over reliance on posts that could be points of critical failure.

**3.27 (D) Head of Strategy, Early Years and Youth**

The Education Directorate is our largest Directorate in terms of spend and staffing. The Directorate has been left vulnerable over the last year with the Corporate Director providing strategic oversight to the Directorate, and its 59 schools with no Head of service in place for a 6-month period. No other Directorate in a comparable authority in Wales has this low level of strategic cover. Through rationalising the Directorate's wider management structure, this post is within the existing costs of the Directorate but crucially provides strategic capacity to provide more effective cover for the Corporate Director which allows for additional capacity for risk and change management. Without this additional post, the Directorate carries significant risk and an overreliance on posts that could be points of critical failure.

3.28 The new post of Head of Strategy, Early Years and Youth will assume strategic management responsibility for childcare and youth services (including youth justice), and a range of high-risk, significant-value service areas (such as home-to-school transport and health and safety).

3.29 Given the changes to the portfolios and Job Descriptions of the current Heads of Service in these areas, the duties and span of responsibilities have also been evaluated using the Council's approved Job Evaluation scheme, and there is no change to the grade. There will need to be statutory consultation with current postholders. This will be led by the relevant Corporate Directors and Chief Executive with HR support. Following this consultation, an appointments process will need to be undertaken in compliance with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Wales) Regulations 2006 (as amended) and the Officer Employment Procedure Rules within Section 12 of the Council's Constitution. The Council will engage professional support to undertake an executive search and assessment for these roles to ensure that it is marketed widely and that a robust appointments process is followed. The Council's Appointments Committee will undertake shortlisting and final interview of candidates.

**3.30 *Recommendation 5- Review and refresh its approach to digital and data to support the emerging transformation plan including- Funding, systems, skills, culture***

3.31 A formal review is underway to appraise the capacity and skills we currently have. This should be completed in December 2026 with recommendations for change to ensure the service is fit for purpose to act as an enabler of change and modernisation across the council. We are substantially behind where we need to be in relation to applying artificial intelligence. It is envisaged some pilots will be identified to ensure some critical areas are developed where the model is proven elsewhere. This approach will inform a digital strategy, governance and any investment that is needed.

**3.32 *Recommendation 6 – Consider a whole authority approach to promoting the work of the council and the County of Bridgend with pride.***

3.33 Bridgend has much to be proud of in terms of place, many services and its people. Cultural change means celebrating success better and getting an appropriate balance that delivers transparency about performance (owning when we can do

better) and a celebration of Bridgend as a place to live and work. Work is underway to determine how we celebrate success internally. A new structure for the communications team has been put in place in recent weeks and communicating with residents about what we do and how we are working on the areas that are a concern to them will be key.

3.34 ***Recommendation 7- Consider building on its good relations with partners in the public, private, community and voluntary sector in order to deliver Bridgend's vision and priorities.***

3.35 This is cross cutting all areas and engaging initially with partners and communities in the development of our transformation strategy will be critical.

3.36 ***Recommendation 8 - As an immediate priority, the council should improve its responsiveness to members, stakeholders and citizens as a part of building a culture of mutual respect for all.***

3.37 New arrangements will be put in place to establish clear standards and timelines of communication and to ensure where issues are not easily resolvable that members have a clear pathway to engage with officers. It is envisaged this will be in place by December 2025 with a review then in March to consider the impact of changes.

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

5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

#### **6 Climate Change and Nature Implications**

6.1 There are no climate change or nature implications directly arising from this report. However, if the proposal proceeds the postholders can contribute strategically in both these areas.

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

7.1 There are no direct safeguarding or corporate parent implications arising from this report.

#### **8 Financial Implications**

8.1 The proposed funding of these changes is detailed below:

- Corporate Director – Finance and Transformation, will be funded from uncommitted centrally held provisions for pay awards, following the lower than anticipated pay increases in 2025 / 2026.
- Head of Performance & Workforce Cultural Change - this post will be funded from the earmarked reserve (EMR) that was established to support change management for a period of at least two years and subsequently reviewed. It is intended this post will support the delivery of base budget reductions that will support its ongoing funding.
- Head of Public Realm – The additional funding required will be funded from the recurring Extended Producer Responsibility funding. In the event this ends it will be reviewed in line with a wide range of other commitments.
- Head of Strategy, Early Years and Youth – this post will be funded through rationalising the directorate's wider management structure and will be within the cost of the directorate.

8.2 The net base budget cost of the proposed management restructure is £20,000.

8.3 The ongoing funding of those posts funded by grant and / or EMR will have to be determined should there be a change to these funding arrangements.

## **9 Recommendations**

It is recommended that Council:

- 9.1 Note the initial response to the PPA recommendations with progress to be monitored through the corporate planning structures;
- 9.2 Delegate authority to relevant Corporate Directors and the Chief Executive to commence a formal consultation with relevant JNC officers;
- 9.3 Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to determine the final JNC senior management structure following the formal consultation and appoint to it in accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules within the Constitution;
- 9.5 Delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments to the Constitution and the Scheme of Delegation of Functions in relation to references to the portfolio and job title of the relevant JNC officers following the appointment processes.

## **Background documents**

None



# Bridgend County Borough Council Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) Report September 2025



Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol



## **1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 In accordance with the performance duties under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Bridgend County Borough Council (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-Y-Bont ar Ogwr) commissioned a Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).
- 1.2 The onsite assessment was completed over a four-day period concluding on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025 with a feedback presentation provided to the Council outlining the key findings detailed within this report.
- 1.3 The assessment was undertaken based on the Council's agreed scoping document and the WLGA's PPA methodology, which was developed with the sector. The PPA methodology provides an overarching framework: the lines of enquiry are not prescriptive but provide guidance to the Panel on the areas that could be explored to meet the statutory duty. However, the extent to which the Panel explores those areas should be proportionate to the Council's scope but sufficient to enable the Panel to form a conclusion.
- 1.4 In accordance with the statutory guidance the PPA is not an audit or an inspection and does not seek to duplicate work undertaken by regulators and other bodies. Whilst the Panel has undertaken a corporate assessment, this assessment was not in-depth and should be considered alongside other sources of assurance such as the Council's own self-assessment, internal audit reviews, external audit, and regulatory reviews.
- 1.5 In preparing for the PPA, the Council scoped their requirements to maximise the value and impact of the assessment to the Council. The specific areas of focus identified by the Council are reflected in paragraph 3.2.
- 1.6 This report provides a summary overview of the conclusions of the Panel reported by exception.

## **2. Peer Team**

- 2.1 The following Peers were commissioned by the WLGA to undertake the assessment. Selection of the Peers was agreed and at the discretion of the Council, based on suitability of skills and experience:
  - Independent Chair: Sally Loudon - Former Chief Executive of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), former Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Council.
  - Senior Member Peer: Cllr Andrew Stevens - Serving Councillor and Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure at Swansea Council.
  - Senior Officer Peer: Gareth Newell - Head of Performance and Partnerships, Cardiff Council.
  - Wider Public, Private, or Voluntary Sector Peer: Anne-Louise Clark, former Executive Director – Communication and Change for Audit Wales & Chair of the Board of Trustees for Platform for Change Ltd.
- 2.2 The Panel was supported by, Cerith Thomas, Senior Policy Officer (Improvement – Democratic Services) and Lyndon Puddy (Panel Performance Assessment Manager, both from the WLGA's Improvement Team.

### 3. Scope and Approach

- 3.1 The Panel is required to assess the extent to which the Council:
- Is exercising its functions effectively.
  - Is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively; and
  - Has effective governance in place for securing the above.
- 3.2 The Council identified the following three areas where peer insight would be valued as part of the Panel assessment: **Transformation, Addressing Workforce Challenges and Improving Engagement**. The Council welcomed the Panel's support in providing high-level insights on these priority areas which encompass the whole Council and involve all directorates.
- **Transformation** – The development of the Council's approach to transformation that meets political and key stakeholder aspirations, including how effective arrangements are for delivery, performance management and the culture underpinning transformation. The Council had identified a clear need to focus on mechanisms and capacity for transformation that would improve citizens experience and create an organisation that is sustainable in the medium and long term.
  - **Addressing Workforce Challenges** – Building on strengthened workforce planning, consider the Council's approach to address challenges in recruitment in key areas, and improve succession planning, to help create a long-term workforce strategy.
  - **Improving Engagement** – Building on improvements to strategic communication, identify what further the Council can do to improve engagement and relationships internally with Councillors and externally with local communities and Town and Community Councils to help it become more citizen focused.
- 3.3 To prepare for the onsite assessment, the Panel first conducted a desktop review of Council documentation, data, external reports, and other relevant intelligence. The Peers also participated in preliminary online meetings.
- 3.4 The Panel spent approximately 240 hours plus, during onsite stage of the review involving a series of individual meetings and focus groups with the following stakeholders:
- Leader of the Council
  - Chief Executive
  - The Cabinet – Focus Group
  - Cabinet Member for Health & Social Services and Deputy Leader
  - Cabinet Members for Resources (Job Share)
  - Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources
  - Focus Group, Elected Members - non-executive
  - Leaders of the Opposition Groups (Bridgend County Independents & Democratic Alliance)
  - Focus Group - Scrutiny Chairs
  - Chair of Democratic Services Committee
  - Independent Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee
  - Independent Chair of the Standards Committee

- Chief Officer, Legal and Regulatory Services, HR and Corporate Policy
- Chief Officer Finance Housing & Change (Section 151 Officer)
- Corporate Director, Social Services and Wellbeing
- Corporate Director, Communities
- Corporate Director, Education, Early Years and Young People
- Interim Head of Operations - Community Services (recently seconded from Head of Partnerships and Housing)
- Group Manager - Human Resources and Organisational Development
- Group Manager for Communications and Public Affairs, Marketing, Consultation and Engagement
- Deputy Head of Finance and Deputy Head of the Regional Internal Audit Service Corporate Policy and Public Affairs Manager and Corporate Performance Manager
- Group Manager Economy, Natural Resources & Sustainability
- Group Manager Planning & Development (Head of Planning)
- Staff Focus Group - Heads of Service and Deputy Heads of Service
- Staff Focus Group (Group Managers)
- Staff Focus Group – (Frontline staff)
- Headteachers - Focus Group
- Youth Council Representatives – Focus Group
- Leader and Chief Executive of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
- Leader and Chief Executive of the Vale of Glamorgan Council
- Chief Executive of Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board
- South Wales Police – Chief Superintendent
- Town and Community Councils – Focus Group
- Trade Unions – Focus Group
- Business Community – Focus Group
- Citizens Panel Focus Group
- Stakeholder Focus Group - Older people
- Chief Executive of Halo Leisure – Community focussed social enterprise

#### **4. Overall Conclusion**

- 4.1 Bridgend is a good Council with untapped potential. The political and managerial leadership is ambitious for the whole County and they have the full support of a dedicated and enthusiastic workforce. The staff are deeply committed to the Council and the communities it serves, demonstrating a high level of self-awareness and a shared understanding of both the Council's strengths and the challenges ahead.
- 4.2 The Council has already demonstrated its capability with impressive turnarounds in key areas, particularly Children's Services, and is well positioned to build on this success for the benefit of the wider Council. The assessment findings show that Bridgend is ready and ambitious for change and has a positive outlook on its future.
- 4.3 The Council is, however, 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 ensure it can sustain services and continue to deliver for its communities for years to come.

#### **5. Local Context (source PPA scoping document)**

- 5.1 Bridgend County Borough Council covers around 110 square miles, stretching from the Ogmore, Garw, and Llynfi valleys in the north to the Bristol Channel coastline in the south. The main commercial centres are Bridgend, Maesteg, and the seaside resort of Porthcawl. The county borough is divided by the M4 and boasts main-line rail links going east to London and west to Swansea.

##### **Population and Community Demographics**

- 5.2 Bridgend had a population of 145,760 at the 2021 census, a 4.5% increase from 2011. The population is projected to grow by 7.5% in the next 20 years. In its population:
  - 50.6% are female and 49.4% are male.
  - 96.78% identify as white. 1.48% of people identify as Asian. 1.16% identify as mixed race. 0.29% identify as black. 0.29% identify as other ethnic group
  - 22.64% have disabilities that limit their day-to-day activities a little or a lot.
- 5.3 Similar to the rest of Wales, the borough has an aging population with the fastest growing age category being over 65 which increased by 21.5% between 2011 and 2021. During the same time, under 15s only increased by 2.6%. This can present challenges to the Council's services including health, social care and housing.



## **Health and Deprivation**

- 5.4 In 2021, 46.3% of residents described their health as “very good,” up from 45.1% in 2011. However, there are significant health disparities. Bridgend has 7 areas identified as having ‘Deep Rooted Deprivation’. These are areas that have remained within the top 50 most deprived areas in Wales for the last five publications of Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks. In Bridgend 70% of people aged 16+ are in “good or very good” general health, which is the national average. Physical activity uptake and healthy eating rates are below the national average and Bridgend is home to some of the most materially deprived places in Wales. Bridgend has an obesity rate above the national average. The healthy weight in under 25s is also slightly below the Wales average. 18% of adults in Bridgend smoke, slightly above the national average (17%). Mental wellbeing is slightly better than the Wales average.

## **Employment and Skills**

- 5.5 Bridgend has around 3,770 enterprises, with a significant number of micro-enterprises (up to nine employees). Key employers include Bridgend County Borough Council, which employs around 6,000 people, and major public and private sector employers in manufacturing and medical device engineering. The employment rate (ages 16 to 64) is 67.1% and employment in Bridgend has decreased compared with the previous year. Bridgend's employment rate was lower than Wales as a whole in the year ending December 2023.

## **Skills and Unemployment Welfare**

- 5.6 As of May 2024, Bridgend has an unemployment rate of 3.5%, though people looking for work has risen since a year earlier. The most recent unemployment rate for Bridgend was lower than Wales as a whole. Economic inactivity has increased since the previous year; these are people who are neither employed nor seeking work. The Claimant Count measures the number of people who are claiming unemployment-related benefits between the ages of 16-64 is 2.8%. Claimant Count was lower in March 2024 compared with a year earlier.

## **Infrastructure and Transport Links**

- 5.7 The county benefits from excellent transport infrastructure, including the M4 motorway, which provides quick access to Cardiff and Swansea. There are also high-speed rail services and proximity to Cardiff Airport. Active travel routes are being developed to improve walking and cycling infrastructure. The Council has recently adopted a new [Local Development Plan \(LDP\)](#), which will shape development up to 2033.

## **Housing and Affordability**

- 5.8 The average house price in Bridgend is approximately £187,812. 71% of households in Bridgend County either own their home outright or via a mortgage. A further 15% rented privately, while 14% rented socially. Porthcawl has the highest levels of home ownership and the Pyle/Kenfig Hill area the lowest. The Ogmore Valley had the highest proportion of private tenants (21%). The Council manages a common housing register to allocate social housing and offers various support services to prevent homelessness. The Council's [Housing Support Programme Strategy 2022-26](#) sets out six new priorities and associated objectives.

The proportion of properties liable for council tax that are second homes (0.1%) is well below the all-Wales average (1.8%).

### **Local Climate Challenges**

- 5.9 Bridgend has committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. The Council has a comprehensive [strategy](#) to address climate change, including decarbonising its operations and promoting sustainable practices. Achievements to date include LED street lighting, retrofit programme for energy efficiency, the expansion of local nature reserves, tree planting and a sustainable procurement strategy.

### **The Council**

#### **5.10 Political Leadership**

At the last local elections in May 2022, there were 51 seats contested in the election, 3 fewer than in 2017. The next Bridgend County Borough Council elections are due to take place in May 2027.

- 5.11 The current administration is a Labour majority with 26 Councillors, 23 independents (13 Bridgend County Independents, 8 Democratic Alliance and 2 Independent), 1 Conservative and 1 Reform.

- 5.12 The Leader of the Council is Councillor John Spanswick and Councillor Jane Gebbie is the Deputy Leader.

#### **5.13 Senior Management**

The Council's senior management comprises the Chief Executive, Jake Morgan, who started in post in July 2025. He is supported by three Corporate Directors who are responsible for services delivery. There are two Chief Officers in the Chief Executives' directorate, and a Head of Internal Audit.

## **6. Strengths and Areas of Innovation**

- 6.1 Bridgend County Borough Council demonstrated a consistent alignment of ambition for the area. The Panel noted that Cabinet, Officers, backbench Members, opposition Members and stakeholders were positive and ambitious for the County, promoting a positive, welcoming and friendly culture. This is supported by enthusiastic, committed and caring staff who are optimistic about the future. The Council shows a tangible appetite for change that was evident to the peer panel members.
- 6.2 A prime example of this is the successful turnaround in children's services. This achievement highlights strong political and officer leadership and remarkable resilience, providing valuable lessons that can be shared throughout the organisation to drive future success.
- 6.3 The Council also exhibits a high level of self-awareness with a clear and shared understanding of both its strengths and its areas for improvement. This is further reinforced by the establishment of a new **budget working group** which demonstrates a proactive and collaborative approach to financial management and strategic planning that involves a substantial number of elected members from across the Administration and Opposition parties.

- 6.4 The Panel noted that Bridgend Council has the highest recycling rate in Wales, 73% in 2023-24. That exceeds the Welsh Government's statutory target for all Councils to reach a recycling rate of 70% by 2024-25, a target that Bridgend and a few other Councils have already exceeded.
- 6.5 Schools in Bridgend are rated as strong in inspections, with only one school currently requiring follow up by Estyn. There have been 18 spotlights of effective practice were identified by Estyn from the 15 core inspections in the 2024-2025 school year.

## **7. Local and National Challenges**

- 7.1 Bridgend County Borough Council, like all Councils in Wales, is facing significant financial sustainability challenges with a Q1 projection of £898k overspend for 2025/26.
- 7.2 The Council highlighted exceptional demands across some of its key service areas including support for children with Additional Learning Needs, older people's care, complex children's placements and homelessness. There are changing patterns of need in other service areas, for example behaviour in schools and attendance. Some services have worked hard to meet expectations but have limited capacity and resilience following years of budget cuts.
- 7.3 **Financial Performance:**
- In 2024/25 Bridgend underspent by £300,000 against its £361 million budget, which is around 0.1% of the budget. However, the overall position masks significant pressure in some areas of the budget as well as a significant contribution to reserves.
  - Schools' balances fell from £2.4m on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 to a negative balance of £619,000 on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025
  - The Council reported that 88% of the 2024/25 budget savings were achieved in full.
- 7.4 **Strategic Financial Planning:**
- The total budget gap over the four-year period from 2025/26 is approximately £39.5m using a most likely scenario. After identified savings (25/26) a gap of £27.265m remains.
  - The Council reports work will now be undertaken to identify the mitigations required in order to bridge the gap and allow for any required investment over and above the unavoidable pressures already identified.

## 7.5 **Budget Setting:**

- The 2025/26 budget includes a Council Tax increase of 4.5%.
- The 2025/26 Local Government Funding Settlement was better than the Council's initial assumptions.
- The budget required £8.379m of savings. It would have been higher but for the better-than-expected financial settlement from Welsh Government

## 7.6 **Other Issues:**

- The August 2024 Audit Wales Financial Sustainability Assessment review of Bridgend County Borough Council found *'the Council understands its financial position with good arrangements to support its financial sustainability which it flexes and adapts but is at the early stage of developing its long-term approach'*.
- The Council does not have its own housing stock so does not have a Housing Revenue Account (HRA).
- Bridgend has a ten-year rolling capital programme that has been set for 2025-26, and on an indicative basis for the nine years thereafter. It has been profiled in accordance with technical advice relating to regulatory processes, timetables and work plans.

## 7.7 **Performance Against its 2024/25 Budget**

- 7.7.1 The net revenue budget for 2024-25 was £360.671 million. The overall outturn at 31st March 2025 was a net under spend of £300,000 which was transferred to the Council's General Fund.
- 7.7.2 This takes into account the setting up of a net £13.063 million of new earmarked reserves in 2024-25 to enable service investment, to mitigate future risks and expenditure commitments. Total Directorate budgets had a net over spend of £2.376 million and Council Wide budgets a net underspend of £15.128 million. The outturn position includes additional council tax income collected over budget of £611,000 during the financial year.
- 7.7.3 The Council states *'the overall under spend on the Council budget significantly masks underlying budget pressures in Additional Learning Needs services, Home to School Transport, and Children's social care'*.
- 7.7.4 The main reasons for the overall under spend in 2024-25 are: -
- Unanticipated Welsh Government grant of £3.290 million towards the teachers' pay award for 2024 25 and NJC pay pressures.
  - A £2.044 million saving from Council agreeing a change in the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy on 23 October 2024.
  - Unanticipated Welsh Government grant of £2.024 million towards revenue cost pressures.
  - Not needing to utilise the £1.558 million that was built into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-28 towards emerging budget pressures and as a contingency against non-deliverability of budget reduction proposals.

- 7.7.5 The budget approved for 2024-25 included budget savings of £13.045 million. At 31st March 2025 there was a shortfall on the savings target of £1.569 million, or 12.03% of the overall reduction target.
- 7.7.6 During 2024-25 Directorates drew down funding from specific earmarked reserves. The final draw down of revenue reserves was £5.397 million.

## **8. Overview of Findings.**

### **Local areas, as identified by the Council, where peer insight would be valued as part of the Panel assessment**

#### **8.1 Transformation**

- 8.1.1 There is a clear alignment of ambition for change, with a strong appetite and excitement for transformation across the organisation. This shared belief that it is the right thing to do at the right time, coupled with evidence of innovation in some areas, provides a powerful foundation. To fully capitalise on this momentum, the following areas require focussed attention:
- 8.1.2 **Develop a new Transformation Plan:** The Council should create a clear, comprehensive transformation plan. This process must be highly collaborative, actively involving staff, Members, partners, and communities to ensure buy-in and a shared vision.
- 8.1.3 **Strengthen Strategic Capacity:** Delivering on this level of change requires greater strategic and corporate capacity within the organisation. The Council should address any gaps to ensure its ability to manage and implement a large-scale transformation programme, maintain or improve its performance and the ability to measure impact.
- 8.1.4 **Transformation based on Data and Insight:** To be truly effective, the Council's transformation efforts must be grounded in robust data and insight. This will ensure its decisions are evidence based and its efforts are focussed on the area that will deliver the greatest impact.
- 8.1.5 **Review Digital and Data Approach:** A critical component of the emerging transformation plan is the Council's approach to digital and data. It should review its current funding, systems, skills and culture to ensure the digital function can be an enabler to the changes it aims to achieve.

#### **8.2 Addressing Workforce Challenges**

- 8.2.1 Bridgend County Borough Council has a strong and positive organisational culture, staff feel appreciated and the culture is perceived as caring. This is further reinforced by the strong working relationships with Trade Unions. Officers are also proud of the impact the Council has on communities across the County.

- 8.2.2 While the Council has a firm foundation, there are opportunities to become more strategic and forward-thinking. The current workforce plan needs to evolve to be more aligned with a new vision and transformation plan for the organisation. This includes addressing key areas such as succession planning, developing the workforce for the future to meet changing demands, and integrating digital and data capabilities into the workforce strategy.
- 8.2.3 To support this the Council should consider implementing a corporate “grow your own” programme. This would involve strengthening links with local higher and further education institutions to create a pipeline of talent that is specifically developed to meet the Council’s needs.
- 8.2.4 Finally, while staff already feel appreciated, the Council should consider a more formal and corporate approach to staff celebration and appreciation. This could further embed positive feelings across all departments and initiatives.

### **8.3 Improving Engagement**

- 8.3.1 The Council demonstrates a clear commitment to improving engagement with its citizens and communities. This commitment is evidenced by the appointment of a Town and Community Council Liaison Officer and the refreshing of the Citizens Panel – recruiting new members and utilising citizen focus groups. The plan to utilise citizen focus groups is a positive step towards gaining deeper insights into community perspectives. Furthermore, the organisation has a corporate communications function in place and shows evidence of engagement across various departments.
- 8.3.2 However, several areas require attention to ensure a consistent and effective approach to engagement. While there are pockets of good practice, responsiveness to key stakeholders, including Members, scrutiny bodies, Town and Community Councils, and the general public, is not consistent across all parts of the organisation and was frequently reported as being slow and frustrating to those involved. The Council should focus on improving responsiveness to Members and the public as a short-term priority.
- 8.3.3 The Council should consider a more holistic, “whole Council approach” to promoting its work and the wider county of Bridgend. This would help to create a unified message and ensure that all departments are aligned in their communication efforts. While corporate communications are in place, they need to become more forward looking and proactive, especially in a period of change. It is vital that these communications effectively reach all staff, as internal communication is a key element of a successful and responsive organisation.
- 8.3.4 Additionally, there is a need to improve existing consultation and engagement practices. This includes making greater use of local Members, community groups,

and other existing or established engagement or community infrastructure to promote engagement initiatives.

- 8.3.5 A critical component of effective engagement is “closing the feedback loop,” in a timely manner and this needs to be strengthened to ensure that members, citizens and wider stakeholders are informed of the results of engagement and how it has been used to inform decision making.

#### **Statutory performance requirements considered by the Panel.**

#### **8.4 The extent to which the Council is exercising its functions effectively.**

- 8.4.1 Bridgend County Borough Council demonstrates a robust framework in the effective use of its resources, shown by good performance across its services and a consistent performance narrative shared by both Members and Officers. This success is underpinned by the dedication and commitment of its staff and elected Members, who share a genuine eagerness for positive change.
- 8.4.2 While there are commendable examples of cross-Council collaboration, this practice is not yet evident across the entire Authority, suggesting an area for future development. The Council’s self-assessment also identifies key areas for improvement. Specifically, there is a need to strengthen corporate and strategic capacity.
- 8.4.3 The Panel notes from a number of different meetings that unnecessary bureaucracy and procedures are currently stifling empowerment and delaying decision-making, which hinders the agile and efficient use of resources including staff time. The panel heard, for example ‘having to have a business case for all spend’, ‘committee reports having multiple versions as it went through the different layers of the Council’ and that this took significant time and led to frustration. Addressing systematic and potentially unnecessary procedural delays will be crucial for unlocking the full potential of the Council’s workforce.

#### **8.5 The extent to which the Council is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively.**

- 8.5.1 Bridgend County Borough Council demonstrates strong financial stewardship, characterised by effective financial management and robust monitoring. This is further enhanced by greater involvement from a wider range of Members in the budget setting process, promoting a more collaborative approach to financial planning. The Council also benefits from good relationships with its partners and stakeholders, who have expressed a strong desire to be more strategically involved in future activities.
- 8.5.2 Looking ahead, there are key opportunities for improvement. It is essential to ensure that the budget and Medium-Term financial Strategy (MTFS) are more closely aligned with the new vision and change programme, providing a clear financial roadmap for the Council’s strategic direction. The Council as a whole

should also encourage a greater appetite for innovation moving beyond traditional approaches to find new and innovative ways of working.

- 8.5.3 A significant area for development is cultivating a unified “Team Bridgend” culture. This involves promoting greater cross-service and partner working to break down silos and encourage a more collaborative environment. To support this a whole Council approach to communication is needed, moving beyond the sole responsibility of the Communications Team to ensure a consistent and cohesive message is shared by everyone.

## **8.6 The extent to which the Council has effective Governance in place.**

- 8.6.1 Overall, the Council demonstrates strong governance arrangements and systems, with a robust performance management framework already in place. The organisation’s engagement with Trade Unions is effective, supporting positive relationships that contribute to a collaborative environment. Furthermore, the existing scrutiny arrangements are well-regarded by the majority of Members, highlighting their value overseeing the Council’s work.
- 8.6.2 While there are clear strengths, the Panel identified several key areas for improvement to enhance overall effectiveness:
- 8.6.3 **Leadership and Culture:** There is a continuing need to build a more cohesive leadership team and develop a culture that promotes unity and shared purpose.
- 8.6.4 **Performance Management:** Although a good framework is in place, it needs to be more deeply embedded across the Council to ensure consistent ownership and accountability for performance goals.
- 8.6.5 **Stakeholder responsiveness:** The Council’s responsiveness to Members, Scrutiny committees, stakeholders and citizens is inconsistent. Efforts should be made to ensure that communication and action are uniform and reliable across all services.
- 8.6.6 **Scrutiny Processes:** Scrutiny papers should be more concise, the panel heard of some papers being over 600 pages and lengthy Scrutiny Committees. Additionally, there is a need for greater evidence demonstrating the impact of outcomes of the scrutiny process.



## 9. Opportunities for Improvement – Recommendations

- 9.1 We have carefully considered the three required performance areas and the additional three areas identified by the Council for local consideration as part of the assessment process. This report contains a number of observations and comments about the Council's performance in each of these areas. They should be considered along with the recommendations set out below.
- 9.2 Overall, the Panel has concluded that Bridgend is a good Council at a crossroads. Without effective change, service delivery will be impacted; however, this can be avoided and for the Council to take its performance to the next level we recommend it should implement the following recommendations:

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.	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.	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.	Review and refresh its approach to digital and data to support the emerging Transformation Plan including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funding</li><li>• Systems</li><li>• Skills</li><li>• Culture</li></ul>
6.	Consider a whole Authority approach to promoting the work of the Council and the County of Bridgend – with pride.
7.	Consider building on its good relations with partners in the public, private, community and voluntary sector in order 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.

## **10. Improvement Support**

If you would like to discuss any further improvement support, please contact Jo Hendy, WLGA Head of Improvement.

## **11. Acknowledgements**

- 11.1 The Panel and the WLGA would like to extend their thanks to the Council for its engagement throughout the PPA and we especially appreciate the support and openness from the Leader, Councillor John Spanswick and Chief Executive, Jake Morgan. Our thanks and appreciation also go to the following Council Officers for their invaluable support in coordinating documentation requests, responding to queries, arranging meetings and workshops, and providing onsite assistance:

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Emma Griffiths – Senior CMB Support Officer

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