

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 19TH OCTOBER, 2023

REFERENCE FROM GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE: 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2023

“335 DRAFT ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT 2022-23 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 7th September, 2023 was presented by the Director of Corporate Resources. The Annual Self-Assessment formed part of the Council’s legislative requirements and performance management framework, which entailed the self-assessment of its work against the Annual Delivery Plan, which formed part of the overall Corporate Plan for 2020 to 2025. The Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report 2022/23 appended at Appendix A, with an ‘easy-read’ version at Appendix B.

It was reported that the Self-Assessment was a considerable piece of work, which evaluated a wide range of performance, engagement and other data insights from the Council’s annual planning and performance framework including the annual Directorate Self- Assessment and Peer Challenge process which enabled the Council to draw conclusions on how well it was using its resources to support the achievement of the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. This also tied in with how Directorate services were applying the five ways of working [Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015].

The Council believed that on balance it had met its Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2022/23, in what continued to be another challenging year for the Council. It had attributed a judgment of ‘Good’, reflecting the achievement of over 85% of in-year activities and performance target. Use of resources by the Council was also judged to be ‘Good’ because it had good evidence of how resources had been used economically, efficiently, effectively and equitably to enhance performance, achieve outcomes, meet need and was in a strong position to secure future service improvements. From the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken throughout the year via the internal and external audit work programme as well the findings of the performance evaluation, reasonable assurance could be given that the governance arrangements for the Vale of Glamorgan Council continued to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Workshops and other means of engagement with partners, trade unions, local businesses, residents and Council staff were also undertaken as part of this self-assessment process.

Following the presentation of the report, the following comments and observations were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor J. Protheroe was of the view that the report was easily accessible given the level and detail of information provided. She asked for extra context to be added around the use of agency staff and the percentage of overall Council salaries that agency contracts make. In addition, some information regarding the Council's policies around the use of staff employed via agencies would also be useful.
- Councillor M. Hooper questioned who the targeted audiences were as it would be difficult for the ordinary person to engage with the report, and he commented that consideration should be given to the balanced opinions provided in the report, particularly as Council Tax was rising and the level of services were decreasing. Councillor Hooper also referred to Brexit, which was mentioned under the Critical Challenges section but there was very little detail about what that meant. In addition, Councillor Hooper also asked for more balanced commentary around Project Zero given that at its previous meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee, the Committee had asked for the risk to be attributed a "catastrophic" status. He also referred to staff absence days increasing, so more context behind that was required as well as data to show as a comparison to other Local Authorities Finally, Councillor Hooper stated that the report mentioned that the Council had introduced new technology to facilitate hybrid Council and Committee meetings, but given recent progress was that a true reflection.
- Councillor E. Goodjohn stated that it was important to highlight the risks associated with Project Zero as the Council had committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030.
- The Chair, Gareth Chapman, with regard to areas that had missed targets, stated that further consideration should be given as to how these were presented and to also include further commentary under the Regulatory Improvements section.

In response to the above comments, the Director of Corporate Resources referred to the following:

- With regard to agency staff, that would be passed back to the Performance Team as would more commentary around work force pressures.
- In terms of the audience, that was difficult as the Council had to demonstrate how it complied with various regulations. Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections Act was very prescriptive in some areas so the language used had to be quite technical which led to a fairly large report.
- Around Brexit, it was not necessarily a critical challenge, but it was a risk in terms of the context of organisational resilience. The wording of how that was illustrated in the report would be considered.
- In relation to Project Zero it was important to consider that the report demonstrated how the Council had achieved actions agreed for the year as opposed to setting out how the Council would limit climate change.
- Comments relating to Hybrid meetings would be taken on board.
- Further consideration would also be given to the reporting of areas that had missed target.

Mr. M. Evans (Lay Member) queried how comfortable was the Council with the statements and judgements in the report and were those backed up by evidence. Mr. Evans referred to engagement surveys where the number of respondents was in single figures, and he queried how comfortable was the Council in making conclusions based on a small sample of opinions. In reply, the Director of Corporate Resources clarified that there was a range of activities such as self-assessments of Directorates and the Scrutiny process that were used to test any judgements and opinions brought to the Committee. With regard to engagement surveys, the Director confirmed that there wasn't any minimum threshold around the number of responses because that could be dependent on the engagement or consultation exercise. In some circumstances the Council may only be targeting a relatively small number of people. A key element was therefore to demonstrate that people's views were being considered and taken into account.

Councillor E. Goodjohn commented on the assessment around the lobbying work undertaken of Welsh Government by the Wales Local Government Association (WLGA), and he wanted to highlight some areas of successes such as public transport investments. The Director stated that that lobbying via the WLGA for multi-year funding settlements was something that regularly came up as part of the Council's self-assessment process.

With regard to the size, layout and content of the Self-Assessment report, the Director confirmed that Welsh Government had not issued any guidance, but for consistency and the sharing of best practice, regular meetings were held between Heads of Policy from across Wales.

Subsequently, the Committee

RESOLVED – T H A T the comments made by Members of the Governance and Audit Committee be referred to Cabinet. The comments being:

- The report was easily accessible given the level and detail of information provided;
- For extra context to be added around the use of agency staff and the percentage of overall Council salaries that agency contracts make. Also to add in some information regarding the Council's policies around the use of staff employed via agencies;
- Who were the targeted audiences as it would be difficult for the ordinary person to engage with the report;
- Consideration be given to the balanced opinions provided in the report, particularly as Council Tax was rising and the level of services were decreasing;
- Brexit was mentioned under the Critical Challenges section but there was very little detail about what that meant;
- Was more balanced commentary needed around Project Zero given that at its previous meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee, the Committee had asked for the risk to be attributed a "catastrophic" status;
- It was important to highlight the risks associated with Project Zero as the Council had committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030;

- The report mentioned that the Council had introduced new technology to facilitate hybrid Council and Committee meetings, but given recent progress was that a true reflection;
- There was reference to staff absence days increasing, so more context behind that was required as well as data to show as a comparison to other Local Authorities;
- With regard to areas that had missed targets for consideration to be given as to how these were presented and to also include further commentary under the Regulatory Improvements section.

Reason for decision

Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting. “