

VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

**SUBMISSION TO THE COMMISSION ON PUBLIC SERVICE GOVERNANCE
AND DELIVERY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Performance

The Vale of Glamorgan Council has a successful Performance Management Framework that has been improved over a number of years and which links financial, risk, corporate, community and performance planning and monitoring. An extensive public consultation programme is carried out to ensure that their views inform the way we plan and deliver services.

Our Performance Management Framework is used in a systematic way to improve service delivery – examples are given to demonstrate this. Areas needing improvement are of particular concern, and we have robust means of identifying those areas and monitoring how weaknesses are overcome.

Service users are put centre stage in delivering services. Services are available in different ways to meet users' needs (e.g. Welsh language, multiple channels, disability access) and their views are captured through a variety of mechanisms.

Measuring the impact of partnership working on outcomes is something the Vale Local Service Board has put in place, with regular monitoring of performance against Community Strategy objectives. Joint working with other organisations and Councils is done in the interests of service users or where efficiencies can be gained.

Scale and Capacity

It is not the case that the bigger an organisation is the more economical or effective it becomes. Remoteness from the public and its own staff, and the need to introduce structures to compensate for its size, are both disadvantages.

In addressing the question whether there is a link between a Council's size and its capacity, we believe there is a critical mass that has to be attained if all the functions of a unitary authority are to be delivered effectively.

Our contention is that the Vale Council's size enables it to sustain that range of functions while still being responsive to local needs and maintaining local democratic accountability.

The Vale Council prides itself on delivering good services at a low cost, which we can evidence. The Council is the second lowest spender per head of population in Wales, and at the same time we consistently attain good assessments by external regulators.

We can also demonstrate a range of innovations and a capacity to respond to new developments – examples are given. There is ample capacity in a Council the size of the Vale to enable this to happen. The Council has not had any difficulty in recruiting to senior staff posts. Staff development is seen as key to the Council's success.

The 2011 Simpson report looked at what functions and services should be delivered locally, regionally and nationally, and we believe its conclusions remain valid. No organisation can deliver all its functions on its own – it has to do so in collaboration. Councils should be delivering services differentially and by means of commissioning, on the basis of various geographical groupings and via a range of providers from various sectors.

Complexity

Partnership and collaboration have a large role to play in the future development of public services. Some organisational overlap is therefore inevitable, but effective collaboration will eliminate duplication in areas such as health and community safety where more than one organisation needs to play a part.

We have shown in the Vale that collaboration has worked well: our long-standing LSB, which has brought local partners together and is now making a real difference in terms of outcomes, is one type of collaboration. The other broad type involves larger-scale regional projects, typically involving Councils working jointly. The first type has concentrated on joining up services for the benefit of local communities; the second tends to focus on savings and efficiencies through economies of scale.

The LSB is achieving significant coherence and synergy between partners at strategic and operational levels, and lessons can be learnt by other types of partnership in this respect.

We do not consider that a re-drawing of administrative boundaries will lead to better services. Welsh Government's regional "footprint" is appropriate in some respects, and the Vale is working with Cardiff in many projects, but it should not be the basis for all collaboration. Still less should it be the basis of a new Council. The keynote is one of flexibility and the ability to make the optimum arrangements for the delivery of a service.

The notion of a sense of place is central, and the role of Councils will continue to be crucial in giving expression to it. In a public opinion survey conducted in 2012 of Vale of Glamorgan residents, 97% of those polled said they were "proud to live in the Vale". If Councils are too big the connection with citizens and communities is lost, and our contention is that the Vale Council should continue in its current form for that to be achieved. Even if services are planned and delivered in various ways, the link between citizens and services should be the Council.

Issues of accountability are bound to arise when services are delivered jointly; however, we have demonstrated in the Vale how these can be overcome. Merging organisations would not mean that these issues would disappear: large multi-functional organisations are as complicated as smaller organisations working together. And the number and size of Councils is irrelevant as a consideration here: the issue is about how complicated services are delivered jointly by different organisations, which would continue to be an issue regardless of how many Councils there are.

Governance, Delivery and Scrutiny

The Vale Council prides itself on good governance, which is driving improvement. Our arrangements are clear and simple and are understood by elected members and officers alike.

Public engagement plays a significant role in influencing decisions and holding service providers to account. Proactive engagement is the norm in the Council, and a number of consultation exercises are listed and described. The Council holds a public opinion survey and a staff survey at regular intervals. The LSB has a citizens' panel (Vale Viewpoint) which is used by the LSB and its constituent organisations to gauge public views on a wide range of topics. The results of these exercises are used to improve service delivery.

The Council's website is a crucial mean of interacting with the public about Council services, and the use of social media is increasing rapidly.

The Council considers effective audit, inspection and regulation to be powerful tools in driving change, and regulators' recommendations are acted upon and those actions monitored. The only significant criticism we have is that individual bodies such as Estyn and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales do not have as wide a view as they might have of Council activities, preferring to focus too much on their specialism-

Culture and Leadership

We believe that there is ample evidence that the public sector in Wales shares a common set of values: a commitment to continuous improvement, innovation, flexibility, accountability and strategic change can all be evidenced. The drive towards collaboration is testament to this.

The Vale Council equally can demonstrate its commitment in this respect. We espouse certain values that are made public in our Corporate Plan and with which all our staff are expected to comply.

The drive behind change comes from the top, but the involvement of staff is crucial. The Vale Council has a good track record of corporate change, as evidenced by our recent OneVale transformation programme. We also use cross-departmental working groups to influence and implement change.

Effective leadership is essential in making change happen. It is particularly important in collaboration, which requires commitment and tenacity to overcome initial obstacles. Much progress has been made in developing a cadre of public sector leaders, but more training should be undertaken, through bodies such as Academi Wales.

Welsh Government has an important role to play in shaping values and behaviours; however, it should not concern itself with the micro management of Councils, which discourages innovation and weakens accountability.

We suggest some general improvements that could be made. Sharing best practice between organisations is something that should be much more widespread. An openness on the part of Councils about the weaker aspects of performance would be made easier if it did not result in a punitive response from Welsh Government and regulators.

Welsh Government and the National Assembly for Wales

The Welsh Government has articulated its priorities in the form of the Programme for Government. However, approaches to policy-making are varied, according to the division concerned. A Welsh Government wide approach to policy development should be considered.

In some cases there is excessive prescription, notably in the grants regime: as a rule, outcomes should be agreed with Councils and funding should be part of an unhypothecated settlement.

There has been good progress on making the most of Wales's status as a small country, with all Wales forums such as the Partnership Council and Public Service Leadership Group showing the way.

Concluding Thoughts

The biggest challenges facing Wales and its public services are the "demographic time bomb", the present and forthcoming austerity regime and the need to accelerate economic growth. Collaboration and partnership are key in addressing these issues. Society is also changing, and Councils need to respond. Rapid developments in ICT are driving the way people live their lives, and an awareness of the uses of ICT in improving services should be commonplace in Councils.

If Councils are to play a full role in the future, a measure of local autonomy will continue to be necessary. The Welsh Government will direct Wales's future, but a partnership approach with Councils is essential if services are to be delivered to meet the needs and expectations of citizens.

The distraction, cost and upheaval involved in restructuring local government would stall progress in improving services and meeting the challenges faced by the public sector. Councils facing such structural review would lose focus on innovation and service delivery and concentrate on the issues surrounding organisational change.



Commission on Public Service Governance & Delivery

Service Provider Consultation

Performance

1	<p>Does your organisation collect the right information to support and improve the services you deliver?</p> <p>Yes; the Council has a successful Performance Management Framework that has been revised and improved over many years. This is an iterative process, and flows in a circular rather than linear way. It links together financial, risk, corporate, community and performance planning and monitoring. Data is used to support the management of services.</p> <p>We have worked hard to achieve a performance management culture. Managers and staff are aware of their objectives and performance through a 'golden thread' running from the Community Strategy to individuals' performance reviews. Ffynnon software is used to collect and report information on risks, performance and actions.</p> <p>In July, the Budget Strategy is agreed. We review end-of-year performance for our performance measures, and set targets for the forthcoming year. We don't set targets until it is clear what the end-of-year performance is (for national statutory indicators and service improvement PIs). We also review our PIs; this year a larger exercise is taking place with a view to ensuring that all PIs measure our outcomes (as identified in our Business Planning process).</p> <p>In August, our PIs receive a final check prior to the Local Government Data Unit Performance Bulletin is released and our Outcome Agreement report is compiled. Corporate Management Team agrees the Business Planning format for the following year.</p> <p>In September, our draft Improvement Plan (part 2 looking back version) is scrutinised and is considered by Cabinet. Our Outcome Agreement report considered by CMT and Cabinet, and then forwarded to Welsh Government (we have achieved 100% of the grant in all previous years). Our corporate risks receive a half-year review. Quarter 1 performance monitoring takes place (by Scrutiny, with any recommendations going to Cabinet).</p> <p>In October, the Improvement Plan part 2 (looking back) is published. Corporate Management Team considers the performance of services for the previous year, using the national performance measures and the 'performance tool' created by the Local Government Data Unit. This identifies best, average and worst performance, as well as the performance which is deteriorating and improving. Proposals are set out to improve performance in under-performing areas.</p> <p>Individual performance is reviewed and targets set for the following year through our Performance Development Review system.</p>
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	<p>Business Plans are drafted between October and January for the new financial year. This process is supported by workshops for service managers by Improvement and Development Team staff, and includes the Director and the Cabinet member, with their management teams. Business Plans must be signed off by the Managing Director.</p> <p>For 2013/14, Business Plans were considerably revised, following a pilot in the previous year, following discussions with the WAO.</p> <p>In November, the draft budget is considered by Cabinet. The Improvement Plan summary is published and is available on the website and in main offices and libraries. Cabinet considers Quarter 1 performance monitoring. Team Plans are produced for the academic year.</p> <p>In December, the draft budget is scrutinised. The Improvement Plan part 1 (produced in April) monitoring takes place by Corporate Management Team. Quarter 2 performance is monitored by Scrutiny.</p> <p>In January, the Medium Term Financial Plan is reviewed. Q2 performance monitoring is considered by Cabinet. An analysis of the performance tool (previously considered by CMT in October) is considered by Scrutiny. CMT considers the results of 'Measuring Up' benchmarking.</p> <p>In February, the Medium Term Financial Plan and budget are agreed by Cabinet. Business Plans are scrutinised between February and March.</p> <p>In March, the budget is agreed by Council. Corporate Plan monitoring takes place and corporate risks are reviewed. Q3 performance monitoring is undertaken by CMT and Scrutiny.</p> <p>In April, Community Strategy monitoring takes place. Draft Improvement Objectives are considered by Cabinet and Scrutiny; we publish as soon as practicable following this. End-of-year performance measures are collected using Ffynnon.</p> <p>In May, national statutory measures (NSIs) are reported to Welsh Government. Annual performance measures review takes place in May and June.</p> <p>In June, a data return is made to Local Government Data Unit (PAMs). Team Plans are completed for services operating on a financial year.</p> <p>Throughout the year, service managers take part in national benchmarking clubs, organised by the Local Government Data Unit. We also collect a range of local performance measures that officers and elected members find helpful in managing performance.</p> <p>Performance measures are closely linked to outcomes identified in our business plans, and include NSIs, PAMs, SIDs and local measures. We also rely on learning from complaints, case studies and various engagement activities (including a Public Opinion Survey conducted every two years) when analysing performance.</p>
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	<p>We collect a wide range of information and data. However, we don't collect information where the cost of collecting and managing the data outweighs the benefits that it would bring to the organisation. This is considered on a case-by-case basis, and where the cost is prohibitive, proxy measures or work-arounds are implemented instead.</p> <p>By way of example, we hold regular stakeholder meetings with planning consultants and agents to discuss new initiatives and so that our users can provide feedback on the service they obtain from us. Recently, this initiative has been undertaken jointly with Bridgend CBC. In the same way, we hold a planning forum with Town and Community Councils and also hold regular meetings with traders and retailers on matters of mutual interest. Another example would be regular surveys of residents on the success or otherwise of the housing renewal policies being implemented.</p> <p>A number of service specific roadshows take place each year where information is obtained from the public and used to inform service improvements. In addition public consultation is undertaken to gauge the success or otherwise of new initiatives and again this information is used to improve service delivery.</p> <p>The Council has a tenant engagement strategy which details the Council's vision for engaging its public housing tenants in all aspects of the housing management process. This strategy is used to help drive service improvements in public housing with tenants able to influence public housing policies and procedures. Tenants are also represented on the Housing and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee where they can have an active and productive input into all aspects of the housing and building maintenance service.</p>
2	<p>How does your organisation manage its performance to improve delivery?</p> <p>Our Performance Management Framework (described above) ensures that performance information is available to managers and elected members, and that this information is cascaded through the organisation.</p> <p>We use the Ffynnon software system to collect and report data. This system is web-based, and therefore both managers and elected members have 24/7 access to performance data. Furthermore, we 'surface' key data from Ffynnon onto our website, which is automatically updated quarterly, and keeps members and residents aware of quarterly performance.</p> <p>Our business plans provide a context for how each aspect of the service is performing. The plans include a review of data to evidence claims about performance and provide a rationale for service improvement. Business Plans must be signed off by the Managing Director and are then scrutinised and referred to Cabinet for approval.</p> <p>Performance is scrutinised quarterly by Scrutiny Committees. Managers and elected members are very aware of performance, and have this information to hand when scrutinising decisions.</p>



Cabinet and CMT receive regular reports on performance, including an annual review of performance using the Local Government Data Unit toolkit. This shows improving and worsening performance for national indicators, along with direction of travel. Service managers must put forward proposals to improve poorly performing service areas.

In setting our annual improvement objectives, performance information from a number of sources is used. Performance that is in the bottom quartile or worsening is considered for improvement, along with any adverse reports from our regulators.

Two-thirds of our NSI performance (linked to the 'Programme for Government') for 2012/13 is estimated to be either in the Welsh top quartile or is improving, which under WG's new Outcome Agreement proposals would give the Council 100% of the Performance Incentive Grant, without the need for any additional supportive measures.

Managers are involved in benchmarking groups to enable them to learn from others in how services can be streamlined and improved.

Services have been changed strategically in order to drive up performance. Social Services were restructured in 2007/08 with a view to driving up performance. A contact centre was established as a result of consistently poor performance in call-handling. A service specific example involved the restructuring of the Development Control Group approximately 8 years ago in order to improve performance in determining planning applications. The Council had consistently achieved 'mid-table' status in terms of returns on key indicators. The restructuring has resulted in a consistent upper quartile performance since.

Several services have been changed as a result of poor performance being highlighted. In children and family social services, there was internal and external concern about the timeliness of initial and core assessments. The following table demonstrates the scale of sustained improvement achieved.

	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
No. Initial Assessments completed in the year	901	692	839	634	506
SCC 042a Timeliness of IA's completed (% in timescale)	38.1%	79.0%	88.0%	87.4%	89.1%
SCC 042b Avg number of days out of timescale (days)	19	13.6	13.3	14.9	13.8

No. Core assessments completed in the year	81	229	406	487	413
SCC 043a Timeliness of CA's completed (% in timescale)	74.1%	78.6%	88.4%	91.4%	87.4%
SCC 043b Avg number of days out of timescale (days)	53	53.4	60.1	46.9	47.4



To cite a different service area, several years ago, performance in recycling had stagnated. We moved from separated recycling containers to co-mingled recycling, which along with continuing publicity, has driven up recycling performance. For 2012/13, 54% of waste is recycled and the percentage going to landfill (currently 45%) is reducing.

One of the highest levels of concern from a range of customer contacts during 2011/12 was the levels of litter and dog fouling and the absence of stricter punishments for these crimes. As a consequence of this the Council's enforcement policy was changed to one of 'zero tolerance' and a private company was brought in on a trial basis to directly deliver environmental enforcement services. This private company issued 1483 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN's) during the 10 month period of the trial between 2012 and 2013. This represents an increase in FPN's of circa 300% when compared to the previous year when the problem was identified.

Performance against targets is scrutinised quarterly. Because we make extensive use of the Ffynnon performance management software, performance information is available 24/7. It is clear from the dashboards whether a target has been achieved or missed. Targets are set annually in July, following audit of the previous year's performance. Targets are challenged both by officers internally before being challenged by Members at Scrutiny. Unless there is good reason not to do so (reducing resources, changes in priority through the Corporate Plan, etc.) targets are set to improve performance.

Wherever possible, and where data is robust, it is compared with the submissions of other agencies. This is achieved through:

- Officer participation in benchmarking clubs
- Use of the LGDU benchmarking tool, which is reported to Corporate Management Team and Cabinet – officers are required to produce an action plan to improve performance where poor or worsening performance is identified
- 'Measuring Up' information is reported to CMT and Cabinet
- Elected members are encouraged to access benchmarking club data
- Comparative information, where available, is used in reporting on Improvement Objectives
- Comparative information is used in self-assessment and business planning

Performance information, particularly benchmarking data, is well-used by elected members. Performance is monitored quarterly through reports generated from Ffynnon to Scrutiny meetings. Members also have an opportunity to scrutinise annual self assessments and business plans, and to challenge and agree targets for the forthcoming year.

Performance data is used as a basis for the development of annual Improvement Objectives. Services exhibiting poorer performance are chosen for improvement, with a rationale also provided to explain the basis upon which they were chosen. Improvement objectives are monitored to ensure progress.

All Members have access to Ffynnon and use it to drill down to extract further information on performance. They are also encouraged to use the LGDU benchmarking hub, and are able to access the performance of our top ten performance measures on the Council's website (this is updated automatically by Ffynnon software in a process called 'surfacing').



	<p>Specific reports on performance are compiled (for example, 'Measuring Up', using the LGDU tool, and from individual services based on areas identified for improvement, or at members' request).</p> <p>Most Members are aware of how services in their area of responsibility are performing, through access to regular performance information. Newly elected Members are provided with induction training which includes the role of performance management and questioning skills.</p> <p>Members are increasingly developing their skills in this area, and the quality of challenge offered by them, both in Scrutiny and in Cabinet, is increasing.</p>
3	<p>Is your organisation delivering for your users?</p> <p>We put a premium on user consultation for all services. We commission an independent two-yearly Public Opinion Survey (last carried out in 2011/12 by Beaufort Research), which samples 1,000 residents via a random sample, giving a confidence rating of plus or minus 3%. Overall satisfaction with Council services was 93%. Satisfaction with communication from the Council was 76%. In terms of civic pride, 97% feel pride in living in the Vale of Glamorgan.</p> <p>We pay careful attention to the views of our residents, with a wide range of engagement taking place (see section 2, Governance, Delivery and Scrutiny, below). Following the Public Opinion Survey, action plans are drawn up relating to any areas of concern. The same is true for our staff survey, which is also undertaken two-yearly.</p> <p>Our outcomes are set out in our Business Plans. Targets and actions are set to achieve the outcomes, which are scrutinised on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Improvement objectives are set annually. If not achieved within the year, they are carried forward into the next year, together with the necessary explanations and revised action plans.</p> <p>The Vale Council has implemented a programme of business process re-engineering to achieve leaner business processes and strip out processes which are costly or fail to add value to the customer. (See also the Culture and Leadership section.)</p> <p>Despite having relatively low numbers of Welsh language users locally, we have made a considerable investment in our Welsh language website. We also have an in-house translation service which provides translation for documents, leaflets, posters, banners, etc.</p> <p>Key front-line staff are bilingual. Our Contact Centre has a Welsh language line, and we provide reception staff who are bilingual.</p> <p>A recent campaign 'Mae gen ti ddewis' was launched to encourage residents to contact the Council through the medium of Welsh. Several new Welsh schools have opened within the past two years to satisfy parental demand for Welsh medium education.</p>



Although we are driving the increased use of the Council's website through our channel strategy, we continue to provide services through traditional methods. Our Contact Centre handles requests in person, by telephone and via digital media, and service requests are also continued via post. Our regeneration bid for funding via the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places programme is seeking to progress digi hubs within key locations, including the town centre in Barry. The Council has also introduced a comprehensive planning service on line, which allows applicants to submit proposals online and also allows decisions and previous proposals to be viewed online via an interactive planning register.

As well as a two-yearly Public Opinion Survey to identify the views of the general public, we use links to local organisations and focus groups to obtain views. For example, we have an active local Asian women's group and have been able to meet their expressed needs to provide a women-only swimming session at Barry Leisure Centre. From this a women-only yoga group is also now in operation, providing for a group of residents who were previously unable to access this service.

Prior to revising our Welsh Language Scheme, we commissioned a market research company to recruit and question focus groups about what was working well, and areas in need of improvement. We have done similar types of focus group activities with our Polish community and for those in the protected groups (as identified by the 2011 Equalities Act). As a medium-size council, we are able to do this effectively as we are close to our local population, and can readily reconfigure services to fit the identified need.

For example, we found that the Polish community valued highly the computers and internet connections in our libraries in keeping in touch with friends and relatives back home. There was a request for more Polish language books to be available in the libraries, and we were able to meet these needs.

Welsh speakers found the Welsh language line provided by the Contact Centre as very good. A review of the Council's Welsh language website by the (then) Welsh Language Board was positive.

A general Public Opinion Survey has been taking place two-yearly since 2000. Arising from the survey an action plan is developed to meet some of the challenges as a result. For example, as a consequence of poor perceptions about highways maintenance, funding was directed towards improving our road surfaces. A campaign, called 'Big Fill', was implemented to improve road surfaces and to tell people about how to report potholes. These can be reported via our website, by email and by telephone. Reaction to these reports is very good, with residents impressed by the Council's speed of response.

Our website also provides a section called 'Report it', where as well as potholes our residents can report dog fouling, fly tipping, litter, etc. Reports are fed straight through to crews who are able to deal with the mess and take necessary enforcement, to enable the Vale to remain a clean, green and pleasant place to live.

Our Twitter and Facebook feeds also provide us with instant feedback on Council services and activities. Because of the interactive nature of social media, we respond immediately to complaints and reports, usually attracting positive comments. We have over 7,000 followers on Twitter, and have 2,000 "likes" on our community Facebook page. In addition to receiving comments, we are able to use social media to transmit key messages to our followers: information about roadshows on Welfare Reform and service updates in poor



	<p>weather are two such examples.</p> <p>Business Plans are developed annually and are published on the Council’s website. Our performance data is scrutinised quarterly. This information is also publicly available. Members of the public are welcomed to ‘Community Cabinet’ meetings which are held monthly in community buildings; members of the public are able to put questions directly to the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet.</p> <p>We also ‘surface’ performance information directly from Ffynnon onto our website. This link ensures that the most recent performance data is on the website.</p> <p>We also host ‘Infobase Vale’ on our website, which has all publicly reported data about the local area, broken down where possible to Lower Super Output Areas. This website area is maintained for us by the Local Government Data Unit.</p> <p>We publish annually two Improvement Plans: the first one, looking forward, identifies improvement objectives for the next year, and the second part looks back over the previous 18 months. A public bilingual summary is produced for residents, and hard copies are available in libraries and Council building reception area.</p>
4	<p>How has working with others delivered services for users?</p> <p>The Vale LSB has implemented a performance management and monitoring system whereby the Priority Outcomes of the Community Strategy are translated into a Delivery Plan and then into actions and measures, which are regularly reported to the LSB. The LSB’s Annual Report for 2012/13 sets out a number of areas where actions have been completed and where targets have been met or exceeded. They include a drop in criminal offences; a drop in repeat domestic abuse incidents; the establishment of smoke-free playgrounds (pilot completed, rollout expected); identifying and supporting those affected by changes to the welfare system; high levels of flu immunisation for the over 65s; users over 50 of TeleV (tele health system); reduction in those not in education, employment or training; the establishment of the Vale as a “Heart Borough”. None of the above could have been achieved by any one organisation acting in isolation.</p> <p>Performance data is also a key feature of how the LSB will progress its performance. There is an LSB Business Intelligence Group, consisting of research officers from a number of partner organisations, which is currently drawing up data sets for all ten Community Strategy Priority Outcomes. These data sets will be used as the basis for determining further actions necessary for each Priority Outcome, which will then be incorporated into the next Delivery Plan and monitored.</p> <p>As far as regional working is concerned, each collaboration project is subject to project management arrangements whereby a business case is drawn up in which the benefits and costs of the project are set out, including the resulting efficiencies and effects on users/customers.</p> <p>A good example of how the efficiency and impact of partnership working are managed is the joint Vale and Bridgend Audit Service, which is managed on behalf of both Councils by a single team and whose performance is assessed through the Vale Council’s performance management and staff appraisal systems.</p>



	<p>Another example is the co-location of the Council’s Contact Centre staff and Cardiff and the Vale UHB out-of-hours emergency GP service. As relationships develop, more and more services are being delivered jointly, and work is ongoing to identify common areas between the Council’s Social Services and the UHB which might be delivered through a single Contact Centre.</p> <p>A further example is the very successful use of Section 106 legal agreements entered into with developers. The Council has a policy whereby it seeks to maximise the community benefit of new developments, and works with developers to seek in kind or financial enhancements as a result of new planning proposals (e.g. new park equipment, school extensions, sustainable transport, community facilities). Decisions on how financial contributions are used in certain localities are taken having regard to the views of that community. The Council was successful in receiving a Chartered Institute of Transport and Logistics (Wales) award for this work and was a finalist in the UK leg of the same awards.</p> <p>The Council is delivering Civil Parking Enforcement Services in partnership with Bridgend County Borough Council, with the back office ticketing arrangements provided for both Councils by Denbighshire County Council. The economies of scale achieved by this project have meant that the Council is able to provide a Parking Enforcement service on at least a cost neutral basis.</p> <p>As a final example we might cite the joint Cardiff and Vale Councils’ approach to the Regional Collaboration Fund. A number of joint projects are being implemented under the overall management of a single Joint Governance Board rather than being considered separately.</p>
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Scale and Capability

1	<p>What is the evidence that an organisation’s ability to deliver its key functions is related to its size?</p> <p>There is clearly a critical mass that any Council must attain if it is to deliver all the functions of a unitary authority. The Vale of Glamorgan Council’s contention is that its current size enables it to sustain that range of functions while still being responsive to local needs and maintaining local democratic accountability.</p> <p>The Vale’s population was 127,500 in 2011, making the Council the 11th biggest of Wales’s 22 local authorities. This figure is forecast to rise to 132,500 by 2026. The Council’s gross revenue budget for 2013/14 is £327m while its capital budget is £55m. Its staff total about 5,500.</p> <p>Unit costs, overheads, service quality and service availability are driven largely by the excellence or otherwise of the organisation in question. There is no doubt that economies of scale apply to some extent – a very small organisation will tend to have higher unit costs. Nevertheless, it does not follow that the bigger the organisation the more economical it becomes: as it reaches a certain size, remoteness from customers and staff becomes an issue. To counteract that it will need to introduce compensatory organisational structures and procedures which add cost (as well as complexity).</p>
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There is no easy answer to the question of what the optimum size of an organisation such as a unitary authority is. All it can do is demonstrate its capability to carry out its functions effectively. Judgement on Councils will be brought to bear by external regulators, partner organisations and local people (the latter making their view known by engagement mechanisms introduced by the Council).

There is compelling evidence that the Vale Council's unit costs are low while its services are delivered effectively. There is a deliberate emphasis on the Council's part on keeping costs low by an expectation of high staff productivity, and the wide range of duties managers typically perform. Benchmarking information gleaned when drawing up business cases for collaboration with other Councils consistently demonstrates a lower cost per service in comparison with other Councils, and this is confirmed by the Council's position as the second lowest spender per head of population in Wales. As long as this is accompanied by a good quality of service it is something the Council believes should be a constant aim.

That the Council provides a good overall quality of service can be amply evidenced by the reports of external regulators over recent years. The 2013 WAO Annual Improvement Assessment made no recommendations or proposals for improvement. The Council was judged as having "made good progress in delivering improvement in all its priority areas identified as improvement objectives for 2011-12". It added, "The Council's planning for improvement and its arrangements to support improvement are sound" and "The Council's performance evaluation and reporting arrangements are improving (but do not yet provide a complete and easily accessible explanation of outcomes achieved)".

CSSIW reported in its annual assessment in November 2012 that "There is a clear and realistic direction for social services based around the need to provide sustainable social services in a challenging financial climate.....The Vale of Glamorgan Council has a major change plan in place (2011-14) with seven identified priority areas. It includes a focus on integrating services with health partners and collaboration with Cardiff social services including joint commissioning.

'The Council faces significant financial challenges. Its programme to support and encourage independence and to tackle high cost placements will be central to addressing budgetary pressures. The Council has also restructured and reduced management posts and is working collaboratively with Cardiff Council and Cardiff and the Vale UHB.

'In adult services the Council appears to have significant strengths in promoting access to services, and in particular access to community support. There has also been work undertaken to improve care planning for young people making the transition from children's to adult services more seamless. The Council has strengthened its processes in relation to adult safeguarding, which are effective.

'In children's services performance has been sustained, including good performance in safeguarding children. The triennial inspection of the Council's adoption service in March 2011 indicated a number of areas to strengthen. Fostering services were found to be largely compliant and operating well. At the time there was a need to appoint a fostering manager. This has now been achieved."



	<p>The Vale Council can demonstrate a range of innovations (most notably its e-government/transformation programme called OneVale) and a capacity to respond to new developments: both are testament to its ability to manage change at all levels of the organisation. Key to this ability is a corporate capacity at the centre of the organisation, strong links to service provider directorates which accept responsibility for delivering change and a focus on efficiency and effectiveness. As long as there is a core of staff whose job it is (even if among other duties) to enable this to happen, then the organisation is of the scale that is fit for purpose. What then enables the organisation as a whole to respond and develop is its leadership, and making the necessary changes will involve commitment throughout the Council.</p> <p>A similar service-based approach in the Council focuses on how we respond to major initiatives in land use planning and economic development. This involves a ‘development team approach’ whereby key proposals are highlighted and dealt with as a priority, e.g. proposals for the Aerospace Business Park at St Athan.</p> <p>The Penarth Learning Community (a scheme totalling £50m) is also an example of the Council’s ability to lead innovative and large-scale change. This major project rationalises the buildings of an existing secondary school, creates a single hub to provide specialist education for children with additional learning needs, and offers high quality community facilities on a single campus. One of its innovative features is the targeted recruitment and training of a number of “new entrants” as a contractual stipulation in the construction process. Making the best use of investment from Welsh Government’s 21st Century Schools programme, this innovative programme demonstrates the Council’s strengths in working effectively with local people to make the case for new ways of working, to procure and manage high quality delivery and secure community benefits.</p>
2	<p>What functions and services are most effectively delivered at which level?</p> <p>There is no doubt that the establishment of the Assembly in 1999 changed the nature of democracy in Wales by introducing a national democratic tier, and this should be reflected in the overall democratic composition of the country.</p> <p>One model is of the Welsh Assembly acting as the prime democratic forum in Wales, formulating and directly applying policy in a very wide range of matters. These matters would include those that currently come within the remit of local government, which according to this model would in effect be largely replaced by delivery bodies answerable to the Assembly.</p> <p>While this might achieve greater consistency and less scope for the “postcode lottery” (although nationally managed services are far from uniform), it would severely weaken the local democratic accountability that councils currently have and which is one of the most important reasons for their existence. It remains the case therefore that there should be a framework of other organisations operating below the Assembly level, each interacting with others to provide services.</p> <p>The 2011 Simpson report (“Local, National, Regional: What services are best delivered where?”) addressed itself to precisely this issue, and the Commission will be aware of the report’s conclusions and recommendations, which gained general support in Wales. As well as laying down ten principles underpinning public sector working, the Simpson report</p>



made a number of specific recommendations on how individual services should be delivered – that is, nationally, regionally or locally. Many of these recommendations are being implemented as part of the collaboration agenda.

The basic premise of Simpson, which the Vale Council endorses, is that no multi-functional organisation such as a unitary council – not even the biggest - can deliver all its functions effectively and efficiently on its own. It has to do so in collaboration with others. That being the case, we argue, the aim should be for a Council to be of a size which is large enough to manage services effectively but which is close enough to the population it serves. The different services that a Council is responsible for can then be delivered across geographical areas in the way Simpson outlined. Those services can be delivered differentially – some elements of Education and Social Services, for example, should be delivered locally and some regionally. Simply reducing the number of Councils to a small number of large regions delivering all services independently would do nothing either to improve efficiencies or to enhance citizens' involvement in how their communities' well being is safeguarded and developed.

It is notable that the recently-published Hill Report (“The Future Delivery of Education Services in Wales”), in its recommendations for changes in the roles and responsibilities of local authorities, regional consortia and national government, highlights the continued need for democratic local accountability. The report makes the point that a Council does not need to deliver all functions itself: its role is more about creating a vision for education and coordinating, commissioning and supporting service providers to deliver services to meet that vision. That role also encompasses ensuring that the public knows what level of services to expect, enabling service users to choose and access a diverse range of services and scrutinising overall performance and value for money on behalf of the community.

Although considerable work still needs to be done on what this means in practice, the Council would endorse the above principles, and would go further by applying them to all relevant public services and not only education.

If by “over-populated” the Commission means that there are too many public sector organisations in Wales, the answer is probably yes. We are of the opinion that the functions of some organisations such as Community Health Councils and National Parks Planning Authorities could be subsumed into Councils, thereby streamlining the public sector and strengthening those functions by bringing them into a more democratic context.

The question how many Councils there should be in Wales is not one we want to address in any detail. We have argued above that Councils have a valuable part to play given their unique nature, as long as they have the necessary critical mass. In some current instances, however, the lack of critical mass in the smallest of Councils may have led to poor performance in some service areas. There is a proper debate to be had about whether some Councils are too small to carry out the full range of functions, but simply making Councils larger will do nothing to address those issues of performance and may make the situation even worse.

Another key issue when looking at matters of scale and capacity to innovate is the ability of an organisation to commission services at the right scale and from a sufficiently wide range of service providers, including in-house. It is appropriate that different Council



	<p>services are commissioned at a different scale, depending upon factors such as high volume/low cost or high cost/low volume. The Vale of Glamorgan can demonstrate a good track record in making good use of commissioning plans and processes, including collaborative commissioning where there is a sound business case for working together with other organisations. For example, it procures external placements for looked after children from a collaborative commissioning unit which operates on behalf of fourteen local authorities. Making effective links with the third sector, independent providers and more recently with social enterprises gives the Council the ability to translate detailed knowledge about local need into cost-effective and responsive services which provide positive experiences for our service users.</p> <p>This local aspect remains crucial in any approach to the planning of service delivery, at whatever scale. There is a significant public interface in services such as land use planning, local transport matters (e.g. road safety) and local and community transport/bus services.</p> <p>In this context it would seem appropriate to raise City Regions as a model that is currently under discussion as a structure for the delivery of services. While the Council welcomes the debate and is supportive of the City Region concept with regard to regeneration, we are not convinced that it is appropriate as a unit of local governance since it is important that local distinctiveness is not lost.</p>
3	<p>Does the current number and structure of organisations provide value for money?</p> <p>We believe that the size and structure of the Vale Council are such that the full range of unitary authority services can be provided effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>The Council provides a mix of statutory and discretionary services. We are obliged to provide resources to deliver statutory services, though even here there is discretion in how and at what level they are operated. The Council has to balance the competing service priorities in setting its budget. The budget is also determined by demographics.</p> <p>Some flexibility is provided through the “well being” power that provides Councils with a discretionary power to do anything which improves the economic, social and environmental well being of the area; generally, however, the Council can only act or provide a service where it has a power to do so. Replacing the well being power with a broader power of general competence (similar to England) could provide Councils with more confidence to seek innovative solutions to achieve better value for money.</p> <p>As far as sectoral partnerships are concerned, we have argued above that even the biggest public service organisation cannot deliver all its functions itself (and were that to be the case, size and inflexibility would create a further raft of problems). The existence of partnerships does not therefore in itself imply anything since partnerships are an essential vehicle for delivering services, as long as a critical mass is attained.</p> <p>In terms of collaborative procurement, the Council is a member of the Welsh Purchasing Consortium and will shortly be joining the National Procurement Service. It is also worth noting that by internal collaboration on support services between different departments, the Council has done much to minimise overheads. Substantial service rationalisation was done as part of the Council’s OneVale programme to link services such as Finance, HR and</p>



	<p>the Contact Centre’s CRM system. In this way more savings were achieved than would have been the case had we collaborated with other organisations on these services.</p> <p>The OneVale programme (of which the above was part) was centred on ICT solutions to issues of service efficiency, operational effectiveness and customer relations. ICT has been central to the success of the programme. Collaboration with other organisations is also underpinned by good ICT systems, since the sharing of information is only possible if facilitated by effective and secure ICT.</p>
4.	<p>Does organisational size affect the effective management of human, financial and other resources?</p> <p>Again focusing on the Vale Council, we believe that it is of a size that fully enables the effective management of resources.</p> <p>The Council has not experienced any significant difficulty in attracting suitable candidates for posts. The most recent senior recruit was the current Chief Learning and Skills Officer, whose previous post was in a London Borough. Two other Heads of Service recently appointed came from Herefordshire and Worcestershire.</p> <p>It is probably true to say that small organisations find it difficult to attract good recruits. This is not a problem we have experienced in the Vale as a medium sized, well-performing Council. The reputation of the organisation is the most important factor in attracting staff.</p> <p>We believe strongly that we need to attract candidates from all parts of the UK and not just Wales – the above appointments attest to that. Through effective and innovative advertising campaigns, and on the strength of the Council’s good reputation, we have been successful in attracting high quality applicants.</p> <p>Developing talent has been flagged up in our new Training and Development Strategy, which includes the re-launch of a management development programme. Staff development is also an intrinsic part of the Council’s staff appraisal system (PDRS). The Council has recently agreed a comprehensive Corporate Workforce Plan which includes a management competencies framework and an approach to effective succession planning.</p> <p>The Council is constantly seeking to find ways to make us a more attractive employer. Flexible working (including homeworking), a good reputation from inspection reports, competitive salaries, effective change management in partnership with Unions, good workforce planning, appraisal and development systems and an excellent staff engagement approach all contribute.</p> <p>The size of the Vale Council enables the budget to be flexible to meet changing pressures, by the use of ample resources above the statutory minimum and by the use of reserves. The Council has never had difficulty in flexing budgets.</p>



1.

To what extent is there organisational overlap?

We are of the view that partnership and collaboration, in whatever shape or form, has to play a large role in the development of public services in Wales. That being so, some kind of organisational overlap is inevitable. Currently, there are two distinct types of partnership/collaboration. The first type is centred on the Local Service Board, which brings together the key partners operating locally – typically the Council, the Health Board, the Police, the third sector, the Further Education` College among others. The raison d’etre of the LSB is to agree a single Community Strategy for the local area and then to dissolve organisational barriers between partners and achieve synergies between these organisations in order to deliver the aims of the strategy. The focus is to shape and improve services for the benefit of local people and communities.

The second type of collaboration is more recent, and involves larger-scale regional projects, typically between Councils but sometimes also involving major players such as the Local Health Boards. These arose primarily from the Compact agreement endorsed by Councils in the wake of the Simpson report. They include the Joint Education Services, Prosiect Gwyrdd and now the Regional Collaboration Fund projects being progressed on the basis of Welsh Government’s regional “footprint”. The main focus of these collaborations is to make efficiencies, largely through economies of scale and the elimination of duplication.

The synergies between functions have depended on the type of collaboration being done. The focus of LSBs, particularly in the light of forthcoming legislation on Sustainable Development, will increasingly be on a holistic vision of the area as a whole rather than collaboration simply in terms of individual services and how they are best delivered. Single Integrated Plans will need to be drawn up on the basis of a concerted needs assessment of the area as a whole. The Vale of Glamorgan’s LSB already has a Single Integrated Plan, and a dedicated cross-organisational Business Intelligence Group is working on a new needs assessment which will underpin a revised Community Strategy delivery plan. Performance management in the form of regular performance reports to the LSB against key targets and actions will continue.

Because of these factors, there is already significant coherence and synergy at the LSB level between the functions of the various partner organisations, both at strategic and operational levels.

The intention of the regional collaboration projects is precisely to reduce any duplication and conflict between organisations by working together. Maximising resource efficiency is a key aim of such projects.

One of the issues that the Cardiff and the Vale region will be exploring as a Regional Collaboration Fund project is the extent to which the region can introduce common LSB arrangements. A feasibility study is now being commissioned, and will examine whether the two types of collaboration outlined above can be combined.



2. Do current structures enhance seamless services and provide better services?

It is not the current structures that are the essential element in this respect – it is managing the collaboration agenda effectively, regardless of structures, that will make the difference.

Current organisational and administrative boundaries are the result of developments over the decades: they were not put in place to facilitate holistic planning and delivery, and so there is no particular reason why they should be coterminous. The question is whether a restructuring of organisational boundaries is now necessary in order to get a better alignment to achieve seamless and better services.

In 2011 the Welsh Government, as a way of imposing a framework for collaboration, announced the regional “footprint” to which bodies would be expected to adhere. There are six footprint regions; the Vale Council is in the Cardiff and Vale region. A major issue is the role of the footprint in the way public service organisations are configured in the future.

The footprint was drawn up to be coterminous with the Local Health Boards. This is clearly beneficial in dealings between Councils and LHBs, and in Cardiff and the Vale for example an Integrated Health and Social Care Board involving both Councils and the LHB has been in being for some time. The Board has commissioned external assistance to develop the seamless provision of health and social care services across the region. Another example of partnership working on the basis of this region is the setting up of a joint Cardiff/Vale LSB.

That is not to say however that the footprint provides the basis for all collaboration. The Vale Council has had since 2010 a Memorandum of Understanding with Bridgend Council for sharing services. We have joint Internal Audit and Civil Parking Enforcement services as well as a number of other working arrangements for making best use of staff capacity across both Councils.

Other major regional initiatives involving the Council are on a wider footprint. Prosiect Gwyrdd – collaboration on waste disposal - involves ourselves, Cardiff, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire and Newport. The Central South Consortium Joint Education Service consists of ourselves, Bridgend, Cardiff, Merthyr and RCT. The project on joint Regulatory Services includes Bridgend in addition to Cardiff and ourselves. We are part of the Arts Connect region (RCT, Merthyr, Bridgend and the Vale) to deliver arts activities on a regional basis and to develop economies of scale. There is an effective framework in place to encourage joint planning, commissioning and provision of services across the ten local authorities in South East Wales.

Working with the Police is done both at the South Wales Police level and also locally through the Community Safety Partnership. It is worth noting that the police’s Basic Command Unit structure is a region consisting of the Vale and Bridgend.

In the Council’s view, nothing would be gained by wholesale rationalisation so that a single footprint model would apply to all collaborative activities. There is no doubt that Cardiff and the Vale is a viable region for many services, particularly for those involving



	<p>health and social care, and there is a great deal of progress being made in this respect by the organisations concerned. Equally, however, the other projects with the other partners mentioned above, and future projects, should not be jeopardised by too narrow a view of what boundaries should apply. A certain degree of flexibility over and above a minimum agreed footprint would be welcome.</p> <p>The notion of a sense of place is in our view crucial to any consideration of what public services will look like in the future. If local democracy is to thrive, that sense of place has to be given expression by Councils, which should continue to be the forum through which the wishes and ambitions of citizens via their elected representatives are given voice. There is growing evidence that public service organisations can be sufficiently innovative and responsive only where citizens identify closely with them and believe that there is a strong understanding of their needs and aspirations. Even issues which are of generic concern need a locality focus, to find solutions which are realistic but also ambitious. Only after the matter of the number Councils is determined can the shape and nature of service delivery be considered.</p> <p>The question about accessibility by citizens and their perceptions of service coherence is obviously related. The Council should be the fulcrum for the locality, however that locality is defined. Even though services may be planned and delivered in a certain way and on a certain geographical basis, the link between citizens and the services delivered should be the Council.</p>
3.	<p>Has collaboration led to improved services?</p> <p>Yes – see our response to Question 4 of the section above on Performance, which lists where collaboration has led to better performance. As far as the LSB is concerned it has taken some time to get to the position where it can point to the achievement of the specific outcomes listed under Question 4. The LSB has built however on sound foundations, and we are in a good position from which to progress further.</p> <p>Other regional projects are at varying stages of progress. If they do progress they should do so as a result of a sound and detailed business case rather than a bland expectation that collaboration means a better service. If the business case holds water and the project is managed properly that should ensure its success.</p> <p>There is no doubt that collaboration is time-consuming and sometimes difficult. However, there is an overwhelming case that it is necessary, and we argue this case in our replies to other questions. If it is a management burden, then it is one which it is incumbent on managers to shoulder. As an organisation we believe we have embraced the collaboration agenda willingly and, as evidenced by this submission, have played a significant role in a large number of collaborative activities.</p> <p>As to the last question, there is no reason why improving services and an organisation’s effectiveness should not be aligned: certainly in this council’s case they have been.</p>
4.	<p>Do current arrangements blur accountability?</p> <p>There are certainly instances where accountability is problematic – e.g. delayed transfers of care (“bed-blocking”) is a shared problem between Adult Social Services and the Health Board; a school’s performance can be laid at the door of the school itself, the education</p>



	<p>authority or the Joint Education Service. This does not mean however that a single-organisation solution is the remedy: in the above instances, clear and understood procedures between participating organisations should prove sufficient. And there are dangers accompanying very large multi-functional organisations, not least of which is that separate departments would be needed, which would merely duplicate the separate organisations already in existence.</p> <p>Collaboration can pose questions of accountability, since by definition a shared outcome between organisations cannot be linked either to a single manager or a single organisation. In the Vale we have tended to link outcomes to the specific Key Partnership responsible for them – either Children and Young People, Health and Wellbeing, Learning and Skills, Regeneration or Safer Vale. Each Key Partnership reports to the LSB, which has an umbrella role. For complex issues covering several Key Partnerships (such as alcohol abuse, NEETs and public health), one partnership takes the lead and involves others as appropriate, with the LSB taking an overview. This arrangement has developed over time and, as trust between organisations has improved, so has the effectiveness of the arrangement. Because of this, blame passing or cost shunting become less of an issue.</p> <p>It is important to note that the question of the number and size of Councils has no bearing on this matter. The issue is about how difficult and complicated service areas such as the ones mentioned above are approached jointly between different organisations to find solutions. These service areas would remain problematic regardless of how many Councils there are, and would continue to need a multi-organisational approach.</p> <p>There is certainly a need for collaboratives to evolve. For example, shared accountability is more evident in Local Safeguarding Children Boards than in Adult Protection Committees. The question of appropriate representation on partnerships is also a key consideration.. As collaboration initiatives get started, senior representation is crucial to their success. As the projects and mechanisms bed in, more junior staff are appropriate, particularly since this aids in the development of those staff. There is certainly a problem for certain organisations working on a regional basis (eg Police, Fire Service) to ensure senior representation on a number of local LSBs within their region. As we state elsewhere, the Vale and Cardiff are exploring joint LSB arrangements under the Regional Collaboration Fund, and this is one central issue that needs to be resolved.</p>
5.	<p>Do different organisational scales and boundaries affect the ability your organisation to collaborate effectively?</p> <p>No. As we have argued, a certain amount of flexibility in collaboration is a healthy thing if the alternative is to reorganise to bigger boundaries simply in order to put in place coterminous regions. The gains this would achieve in being able to draw a simpler map of Wales would be far outweighed by the problems that would be generated by monolithic structures which would risk being out of touch with citizens and would not necessarily achieve better levels of performance.</p> <p>The Council is currently collaborating in groupings covering several geographical areas, the partners in each case having got together according to the service in question rather than a single region. So while Cardiff and the Vale makes sense for Health, for example, the approach for Safer Communities would be for the Vale and Bridgend to collaborate as part of the two Councils’ Memorandum of Understanding, on the basis of the existing</p>



	<p>Basic Command Unit. And instances exist of the Vale working with non-neighbouring Councils such as Swansea on Oracle development and Denbighshire on parking enforcement.</p> <p>A model might be developed whereby lead authorities are identified for services delivered on a regional basis – i.e. for each service delivered in this way, one Council takes the lead. This would simplify arrangements and strengthen accountability without the need for wholesale reorganisation. Examples include the Integrated Family Support Services in place across Wales.</p> <p>As to the current numbers of partnership arrangements, there are a significant number. As we mention elsewhere, they range from large scale regional partnerships such as the Joint Education Service to much smaller scale and more informal agreements with neighbouring Councils. A full list of these projects is maintained by the Council; we are happy let the Commission have it on request.</p> <p>A successful collaboration is one in which partners are accorded equal status, where partners trust each other, and where there is clarity about exactly what outcomes are to be achieved by the collaboration. Delegation of functions (not transfer) and maintenance of accountability appear to important determinants of success.</p>
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Governance, Delivery and Scrutiny

1.	<p>Are the principles of good governance being upheld, and are they driving improvement? If not, why not? What needs to change?</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>The Vale Council, in common with all Welsh Councils, has a constitution which reflects statute. The Council is constituted so that there is an Executive (or Cabinet) tasked with making decisions within a policy context set by the full Council, and a scrutiny system which holds the Executive to account. The effectiveness of formal scrutiny is addressed under Question 4 below.</p> <p>We believe that our governance and decision-making arrangements are clear and simple, and are understood by elected members and officers alike. The constitution is reviewed at least annually to ensure it is fit for purpose and up to date, and undergoes a more fundamental review once in every new administration.</p> <p>All Welsh Councils are required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement. The statement includes a review of internal controls, but it also constitutes a more detailed review of the wider governance framework. In 2012/13 the Auditor General for Wales published a study on the effectiveness of Councils' Governance Statements: the Vale Council was particularly commended in the study.</p> <p>The relationship between Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees is a constructive one. The current political administration has kept its election commitment to increasing the amount of business that is referred to Scrutiny Committee in advance of its being considered by Cabinet.</p>
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	<p>The question of alternative and innovative ways of delivering services has been covered under the Culture and Leadership section.</p> <p>In terms of the collaboration agenda, all proposed collaboration activities are brought to Cabinet for their endorsement, and regular reports covering all such activities are considered by them. Large regional projects may well have individual Cabinet Member involvement. Welsh Government is encouraging Councils to establish joint Scrutiny Committees to oversee joint services, and this is something that has already been established for Prosiect Gwyrdd. Similar arrangements are being considered for the Central South Joint Education Service. We are not convinced however that establishing joint Scrutiny Committees on a service-by-service basis is the best way forward – given the number of collaborations, Council agendas could soon become over-burdened with unnecessary, confusing and repetitive business. One solution would be multi-purpose joint Scrutiny Committees, tasked with scrutinising all (or a large number of) services.</p> <p>Note: There is considerable overlap between this and Question 4 below. See comments in answer to both questions.</p>
2.	<p>How effective is public engagement in influencing decisions and holding service-providers to account?</p> <p>Public engagement plays a significant role in influencing decisions at all levels of the Vale of Glamorgan Council and in holding those responsible for delivering services to account.</p> <p>A culture of engagement exists in the Vale. The Council was one of the first local authorities in Wales to endorse the <i>National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales</i> and has a network of officers that are committed to delivering good quality and meaningful public engagement work. Consultation (including Ward Member consultation) is also a standard item on all reports to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees.</p> <p>We undertake public engagement exercises at a formative stage of large projects, and the results of these are reported to Cabinet, where they are given careful consideration before initial decisions are taken. An ongoing project to develop a large former school site recently commenced with a public consultation on suggested uses for the site, and these have provided the template for the project.</p> <p>Public engagement in the Vale is a proactive rather than reactive process. The strategic documents that guide the work of the Council are the products of an ongoing process of engagement with our residents that provides us with a solid understanding of what matters to Vale residents. The Vale of Glamorgan Community Strategy, the key document outlining future service delivery across the LSB, is underpinned by effective long term public engagement. _The views of Vale residents have been used to shape the strategy and ensure that it targets the areas of most concern to the public. _When the Strategy was updated in 2011 an engagement event was held with over a hundred delegates from a range of public and voluntary organisations across the Vale.</p> <p>The need for effective engagement is not limited to large projects, and so a large number of smaller ad hoc exercises are undertaken to inform individual pieces of work. _These</p>



range from policy consultations to community design exercises. These types of project are particularly prevalent in recent regeneration schemes within the Vale. The results of these pieces of work play a key role in influencing decisions and are considered at the highest level of decision making within the Council.

A strategic framework sets out a template for effective engagement within the organisation and to enable this we have developed number of corporate tools. A shared LSB citizens' panel (Vale Viewpoint) with nearly 1,000 members is available for use by all public service providers, as is a directory of community and voluntary groups operating in the Vale designed to enable effective engagement with hard to reach groups.

To ensure that a shared understanding of the importance public engagement to the Council is preset at all levels of management, a mandatory training programme has been created in partnership with Participation Cymru and delivered to Heads of Service and Operational Managers.

The views of our residents are a powerful driver for improvement. A large number of public engagement performance indicators exist, and strategic level engagement exercises are designed to gather feedback from Vale residents on the services that the Council delivers. The feedback gained in these exercises is gathered independently by the corporate policy team and used as a tool for service improvement.

The two yearly Public Opinion Survey provides a comprehensive review of Vale residents' opinion of the work that the Council does and the quality of the services it offers. Areas that receive a significant amount of negative feedback are targeted for improvement and this improvement is monitored and reported as part of the Council's performance management work.

The Council is leading on a programme to coordinate aspects of public engagement with its LSB partners. This has led to the creation of a shared citizens' panel, Vale Viewpoint. The early work of this panel has played a role in shaping the work of not only the Council but also of Cardiff and the Vale UHB and the voluntary sector within the Vale.

Responding and accounting to citizens effectively is a challenge for any large organisation. However, an agile corporate centre enables the Vale Council to collate and disseminate a large amount of performance information to residents. A corporate approach to engagement ensures that all exercises are undertaken to a high standard and that the results of these activities play a meaningful role in decision making which is communicated effectively to citizens.

Providing feedback to citizens on the outcome of public engagement exercises is an essential component to transparent decision making. We use a number of methods of communication to ensure that we do this effectively. These include press releases, the Council website, social media channels, input into community newsletters, printed leaflets and flyers and community events. In addition, residents are encouraged to submit any queries on the results of engagement activities, and each query receives a



response from the Corporate Consultation Officer.

In our view, it is unlikely that all or even most residents understand in detail how the Council operates - nor is this particularly necessary. The important issue is that residents are aware of how to get their views heard. The Cabinet meets monthly in community venues, and residents are invited to attend (publicised in the press, website and via social media) and to put their questions directly to the Cabinet and the Leader of the Council.

The Vale enjoys lively and active debate in the local press. According to the most recent public opinion survey, 57% of local people source information about the Council primarily from the local press. Two paid-for newspapers (Barry and District Times and the Penarth Times) and three free papers (The Gem – Barry, Llantwit Major and Cowbridge) cover the whole of the Vale and are well read locally. Letters to the editor, along with news stories generally, are summarised in a media briefing (which also includes the Western Mail and South Wales Echo, along with stories about the Vale on the main news websites) which is circulated daily to officers and elected members.

Individuals are contacting us more and more through the use of social media. Because of its interactivity, information about public views, while not representative, can be gleaned from this source. It is also an increasingly important way of promoting local information and events.

We have recently adopted a new complaints procedure, with the express purpose of learning from complaints received. Although only 4% of residents are likely to make a complaint to the council, it is likely to represent wider views, and officers are trained in and receive information on complaints and are expected not only to act on them but also to put in place changes so that the same complaints can't re-occur. Relevant scrutiny committees receive routine reports which describe on an aggregated basis the use made of the complaints process, the outcomes and the changes made to practice or policy as a consequence.

We undertake activities annually in celebration of local democracy week. During this week we organise activities for young people to enable them to understand local government and the importance of voting, and to help them to express their views to decision-makers. A project to elect a youth cabinet and mayor is being developed.

Tenant engagement is an important part of our role as a social landlord. Tenants have been engaged in the WHQS works being undertaken. The tenant liaison service managed by the Council has initiated a Quality Design Forum, so that tenants are involved in the work specification, kitchen choices, choosing contractors and challenging the performance of contractors. All tenants are surveyed for satisfaction following work undertaken, and investigations are carried out where there is dissatisfaction.

The range and quality of the above activities amply demonstrate the Council's ability to account and respond to citizens effectively.



3.	<p>How effective are audit, inspection and regulation in driving change and supporting accountability and improvement?</p> <p>Effective audit, inspection and regulation (AIR) are powerful tools in focusing improvement efforts and in driving change. By and large, we consider the current arrangements to be effective. The Council has not seriously questioned the recommendations of AIRs regarding our services or governance arrangements. Action plans are drawn up and implemented in the wake of regulators’ reports, and there is no doubt that they contribute significantly to improving the way we work. Scrutiny Committees take a keen interest in their work areas, and we have begun the regular reporting of a compendium of regulators’ recommendations to our Audit Committee to ensure progress is made on all of them.</p> <p>The Council is proud of the fact that it has never been in special measures or in need of intervention.</p> <p>The only significant criticism we have regarding external regulators is that individual bodies such as Estyn or CSSIW do not have as wide a view of Council activities as they might, preferring to focus too much on their specialism. Council business is more complex than these bodies sometimes assume, and the way different services interact gives their management a wide-ranging nature. More integrated working by the various bodies responsible for AIR is crucial - especially where services are shared across organisational boundaries. The merger of WAO, Estyn and CSSIW is often mooted, and the Council would support a development of that kind.</p> <p>Currently there is little regulatory activity with regard to partnerships. We mention in the Scale and Capability section (Question 3) that WAO guidance would be useful in clarifying issues around spend on collaborations where that is outside an organisation’s strict statutory remit.</p>
4.	<p>How well does formal and political scrutiny influence decision-making and improve accountability?</p> <p>The Council’s scrutiny arrangements have been continually developing over time, and we believe that they are very effective. The Council recently participated in a Wales Audit Office all-Wales study into Scrutiny Improvement. An evaluation report has been published on the peer learning exchange exercise that was part of the overall study. In the report, the Vale Council’s scrutiny arrangements are almost exclusively regarded as “positively supporting effective scrutiny”, with two aspects viewed as “significantly supporting effective scrutiny” (viz, “Are Overview and Scrutiny chairs and Executive Members actively promoting the role and value of the scrutiny function to a variety of internal and external stakeholders?”, and “Is information provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committees relevant, robust, balanced, meaningful, responsive to requests, of high quality and provided in a timely and consistent manner?”)</p> <p>We believe there is ample evidence of the effectiveness of our Scrutiny Committees in improving performance by holding both the Cabinet and officers to account. This is expanded on in the section on Performance.</p> <p>We consider the level of legislative/prescriptive requirements surrounding scrutiny already to be substantial and see no reason for any further prescription.</p>



	<p>There is good evidence of public engagement with scrutiny. Recent examples include a welcome for the public to engage on the future of a local residential care home, supporting businesses and the local economy, and gypsy and traveller sites. In addition to the scrutiny process, we have engagement mechanisms such as the Community Liaison Committee (involving all Town and Community Councils), the Voluntary Sector Joint Liaison Committee and the Equalities Consultative Forum.</p> <p>The Council is currently formalising arrangements for the public to be able to participate in Scrutiny Committees and the Planning Committee – guidance will be introduced later in the year. As part of this exercise additional information on the role of scrutiny and ways for the public to get involved will be placed on the Council’s website. An annual report on Scrutiny Committees describing what has been done over the previous year and outlining work programmes for the coming year is already on the website.</p>
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Culture and Leadership

1.	<p>Does the public sector in Wales share a common set of values?</p> <p>Yes - there are numerous examples in Wales of a shared commitment to the positive attributes listed in this question, and at all levels. Our experience of bodies such as the Partnership Council, PSLG and ODSI is that a common set of values does indeed exist. A willingness across the board to collaborate, on the basis of a shared public service ethos, illustrates the positive attitude of politicians and officers alike. Professional networks and benchmarking clubs are also good examples of like-minded people getting together to explore how changes can happen throughout Wales.</p> <p>This is not to say of course that improvements could not be made. Spreading good practice should be more widespread, particularly given the size of Wales: there are numerous examples of innovative and effective solutions to common problems being confined to single organisations. Thought needs to be given to ways in which these innovative approaches can be made known throughout the public service and applied generally as opposed to being known only to one set of practitioners.</p> <p>A related issue is the willingness of Councils to admit that no Council performs to the same standard in all the services it delivers, and that an acknowledgement of the need to improve certain services is a necessary precursor to making those improvements. Too often, making such an acknowledgement is feared by Councils and is seen by regulators as an admission of weakness to be punished rather than an honest starting point to improve the quality of services. A more co-productive approach between Councils, regulators and Welsh Government would foster a culture which encourages and rewards such critical self-evaluation. The PSLG may have a role in making this happen.</p> <p>The linguistic and cultural features of Wales are what lend it its distinctiveness and can be channelled as a source of national pride and ambition.</p>
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	<p>As far as the Vale Council is concerned, we believe that we can demonstrate amply that we are an organisation with a good track record of achieving continuous improvement, innovation, flexibility, accountability and strategic change. We have well developed programmes to develop Members and managers: our responses to the questions in this and other sections give examples. This leads to the Council achieving high levels of performance against a low spend.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>How successfully do organisations have clear values that the whole organisation is behind?</p> <p>The Vale Council considers it of paramount importance that we espouse certain values and make sure that staff throughout the organisation understand those values and have regard to them as they carry out their work. As an indication of this, we revised our Corporate Plan shortly after the 2012 elections, when a new Cabinet was in place. The new plan highlighted a new set of core values that the new political administration regards as fundamental. They are:</p> <p>“Delivering good Services: We believe in providing high quality, value-for-money services and will always strive to do so while abiding by our other values. We will embrace innovative ideas so that services continue to deliver improved outcomes and meet the needs of our customers.</p> <p>Transparency: All council decisions will be open and transparent, and we will make changes to the way the Council works to accomplish this.</p> <p>Engagement: Before making significant decisions, we will engage with the individuals, groups and communities who are affected by them.</p> <p>Empowerment: We will strive to enable all sections of the community, including those whose voices have not been heard in the past, to take control over their lives”</p> <p>These are specific pledges, and the Council’s Cabinet and Corporate Management Team have worked hard to imbue the organisation as a whole, regardless of the nature of the service, with a culture that ensures that we work in this way at all times.</p> <p>The Council has an Internal Communications Strategy through which engagement with the workforce is continuously exercised. A two-yearly Staff Attitude Survey gauges the views of staff on a number of aspects of the Council, and an action plan is agreed and implemented by way of addressing the issues raised. The current action plan, for example, highlights the review of the staff appraisal system and the need for a formal staff engagement strategy, both of which are now being progressed. There are also a number of “business as usual” mechanisms such as a daily updated StaffNet, a monthly Core Brief from the Corporate Management Team and several service-generated newsletters, briefings and updates. All these vehicles are used to communicate and assess the success of the initiatives that the Council wants to see implemented.</p> <p>Embedding the strategic objectives of the Corporate Plan throughout the organisation is an essential aspect of performance management, and is done systematically. This is amplified in the section above on Performance.</p>



3.

Where does change in organisation values come from?

The drive behind change comes from the top, but the nature of the changes has to be derived, at least in part, from the staff of the organisation. The Corporate Management Team has to put in place mechanisms through which ideas are generated and buy-in is achieved.

Many of the mechanisms introduced by the Vale Council to engage the workforce and stimulate change and innovation were set in place initially during a corporate change programme which then developed into a transformation programme called OneVale. As part of that programme staff forums were used extensively, both at senior levels to ensure the buy-in and understanding of all departments, and in specific services with staff at all levels to undertake the detailed systems analysis that was required to integrate various services into new systems and new ways of working and organisation. A number of initiatives including the corporate Contact Centre, the introduction of a single integrated Finance/HR/CRM system, a corporate Electronic Records Management system, Agile Working and buildings rationalisation were introduced in this way.

The Council also has a number of central teams whose role it is to identify where change might happen and be instrumental in making it happen. Examples are the Policy and Strategy team, the Corporate Partnership Team and the Business Process Engineering Team – all these are corporate resources, working with all Council departments to innovate and improve services.

A number of senior cross-departmental working groups are influential in introducing and implementing change – the Heads of Service Forum, the Sustainable Development Working Group (an umbrella forum ensuring that Sustainable Development is the central organising principle governing the Council's plans and policies and overseeing such initiatives as Green Dragon, the Council's Travel Plan, climate change adaptation and the Carbon Management Plan), the Corporate Safeguarding Group, the Customer Relations Project Board and the Corporate Risk Management Group are examples.

The cross-organisational professional groups that have worked effectively in particular are the Treasurers group, SEWIC (the Social Services regional improvement collaborative) and SEWDERB (regional group for Directors of Regeneration and Environment). In each case the exposure to senior colleagues in other Councils has proved invaluable in suggesting the changes that can be made.

The Welsh Government has several roles to play in respect of shaping values and behaviours. It should not concern itself with the micro-management of Councils, which tends to discourage innovation and weaken responsibility and accountability. WG should demonstrate rather that it has confidence in Councils themselves to develop values and a culture that encourage innovation and change. It can also support innovation and change in Wales by continuing to support bodies such as Academi Wales and by commissioning pieces of work by external think tanks and universities. Thirdly, it should lead by example – a willingness to innovate on the part of the WG, allied to a positive attitude to innovations by other public organisations, would send a positive message to all sectors in Wales.



4.

What role does leadership play in improving performance

It is a truism that change cannot happen unless effective leadership is in place. All successful organisations depend on leadership for their success. The ability of a Council to maintain high levels of performance is reliant on strong leadership and a corporate approach in both political and officer spheres.

Collaboration with other organisations is intrinsically challenging and needs a special effort. Senior leadership is needed initially to determine what collaborative projects to focus on and to be clear about the benefits to be gained – whether it be an improved service to the public, or efficiencies, or both. Leaders then need to demonstrate commitment to the projects, bring the required influence to bear, be tenacious in overcoming obstacles and challenge any reluctance by more junior staff. Typically, any collaboration will meet problems and difficulties in its early days, with the benefits coming only at a later stage. In the Vale Council, Directors and Heads of Service are expected to lead and report back on progress on individual service collaborations. We have a number of joint posts with other organisations at a senior level, to ensure unified management where this is needed.

Much progress has been made of late in developing a cadre of public sector leaders and managers. Formal training and development programmes for senior figures, for example through Academi Wales, are an essential component of this, but the other networks that are possible in a country the size of Wales is an equally important dimension. SOLACE (Wales) is an obvious example, but close contact is also being made between senior officers and politicians from a wide range of national and local bodies through collaborative networks where problem-solving is the focus. This would not be possible in a country the size of England for example.

We would like to see a greater emphasis given to training in the special skills needed for collaboration, which should be a core skill in all senior managers' armouries.

The difference between political and managerial functions is well understood in the Vale. Essentially, elected Members' main relationship is with the electors, from whom they derive their mandate and to whom they are accountable: a political programme and set of policies are pursued against which Members are judged by the electorate. Officials are responsible for delivering Members' programmes and objectives, whether in collaboration with other organisations or acting as a single organisation. There are overlapping aspects of these two spheres of course, but the good relationship between politicians and senior officers in the Council ensures that the separate spheres are understood and given due respect.



Welsh Government and National Assembly for Wales

<p>1.</p>	<p>How could Welsh Government do more to achieve policy coherence and aligned delivery?</p> <p>The Programme for Government has clearly articulated WG’s priorities for the term of government. As to achieving a shared commitment, there was no consultation of local government or any other sector before the programme was agreed and published. It could be argued that this is inappropriate since it is an expression of political priorities. However, since local government in Wales is a prime vehicle for the delivery of policies, expecting Councils to deliver a programme of which they were previously unaware, which may conflict with local priorities and which is uncostered and unbudgeted for by local authorities presents many difficulties.</p> <p>The policy-making approaches adopted by WG towards local government are varied, and this may be a reflection of the different WG Policy Divisions’ approaches. In some areas, there is excessive prescription: in the grants regime for example, it is very bureaucratic to have to make detailed submissions and then prepare equally detailed returns (It is a welcome development to see grants for specific programmes such as Families First being subsumed within the Revenue Support Grant – although this practice is by no means universal, and again may reflect the approach of a particular Policy Division). As a general rule, WG should proceed on the basis of agreeing outcomes for specific initiatives with individual Councils, and then funding them as part of the unhypothecated settlement. This would give WG confidence that the outcomes will be achieved and enable Councils to make best use of resources, particularly with the likelihood in the future of extremely tight funding settlements.</p> <p>In other areas such as Local Service Boards, WG policy has been refreshingly free from detailed prescription, rightly allowing local ideas to determine the way ahead and explore innovative solutions (although the recent Sustainable Development White Paper as it relates to LSBs is a worrying change in tack).</p> <p>It is not clear that the policy-making approaches listed below have been considered in any systematic way by WG. If any can be so regarded, it is probably the result of efforts by individual policy makers. It could be argued that a WG-wide approach to policy development should be put in place, setting out what approaches are appropriate and in what cases. That would certainly minimise the conflicting messages currently emanating from different parts of WG.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Is the distinctive role of the national government in Wales well understood?</p> <p>One of the advantages of country the size of Wales is that its governance should be easier. For this to happen there must be an understanding and communication between the Assembly as the legislative body and the other organisations that make up the body politic, including Councils. It is entirely possible to set up all-Wales forums not only in order to facilitate this understanding but to drive forward projects to which all will sign up. Our view is that the necessary mechanisms in this regard such as the Partnership Council and the PSLG are already enabling this to happen. More remains to be done, but current progress is on the right track.</p>



	<p>Perhaps of more concern is the perception of the general public about what the Welsh Government is responsible for. There is no doubt that there is confusion in many people's minds in this regard, with a widespread belief that policies relating solely to England in areas such as Health apply in Wales. How this perception is to be countered is difficult to answer and is linked to where people get their news from; but there is a case for saying the Welsh Government should consider a publicity campaign to raise public awareness.</p> <p>On the accountability question all we would say is that there is clarity about what powers are devolved to the Assembly and therefore about the accountability of Councils: upwards, it is overwhelmingly to the Assembly and its regulators; downwards (or rather sideways), it is to the communities we represent.</p> <p>It is too early to assess the effect of the acquisition of legislative powers since little legislation has been enacted so far. By the same token it would be premature to comment on scrutiny by the Assembly of the delivery of legislation. Certainly, our wish would be that such scrutiny would lead to the development of more appropriate and well thought out policies.</p>
3.	<p>How have arrangements between the Welsh Government and organisations developed to enable and encourage improvement in delivery?</p> <p>Some of these issues have been addressed above in Question 1. We would reiterate in particular here the point about our wish to be funded via an unhypothecated settlement and agreed outcomes rather than through ringfenced grants.</p> <p>In terms of performance management and scrutiny, we do have some concerns that both Welsh Government and the Wales Audit Office are involved in the "scrutiny" of Councils in some areas. While this may be appropriate in some crucial services, nevertheless the scrutiny function should not take on too large or disproportionate a role in WG's overall remit.</p>
4.	<p>How effectively does the Welsh Government directly manage services?</p> <p>The Council as an organisation which is not directly managed by the Welsh Government would not wish to comment on these issues.</p>
5.	<p>How well does Wales handle cross-border service provision between Wales-England/ Devolved-non-devolved?</p> <p>The non-devolved area having the greatest impact on us is the Police service, which remains outside the remit of the Assembly. Community Safety funding arrangements can be confusing in that grants come from the Police and Crime Commissioner, Welsh Government and the Ministry of Justice. Some of these grants, notably those which come under the purview of the Ministry of Justice, are prone to cuts at short notice and which therefore make it difficult to plan ahead. Different priorities may also come from Cardiff and Westminster. The Youth Offending Service suffers from similar bi-polar policies and confusion.</p> <p>The Council is involved in the implementation of Welfare Reform. This involves working with partners from the DWP, particularly with the implementation of the changes to</p>



	<p>Housing Benefit. The Council is working at a local level with LSB partners and the local DWP office. The DWP is also engaging at a UK level and with the devolved administrations. Council officers are involved with some of the UK-wide working groups.</p> <p>Certain aspects of Welfare Reform have resulted in functions being devolved to the Welsh Government – Council Tax Reduction and the Discretionary Assistance Fund. There will inevitably be tensions between the Welsh Government and the UK Government over Welfare Reform and its impact in Wales. The implementation of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme was difficult, with the necessary regulations being made on an extremely tight schedule and changed as additional funding became available. Although the additional funding from WG was welcome and helped to ease pressure on Councils and claimants affected by the wider aspects of Welfare Reform, the situation is not sustainable in the medium term. While there should be advantages in Wales of having an all Wales scheme, there is less flexibility over the use of discounts in the system to help fund the scheme than in England.</p>
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Concluding Thoughts

1	<p>What are the greatest challenges that you see in delivering public services in the future?</p> <p>The “demographic time bomb” is the biggest long term challenge. The rise in the numbers of older people will need a re-think of how public services are planned and delivered since the balance between health and social care for the elderly and other services will be substantially altered. This also presents opportunities of course: the use of technology in finding new ways of delivering health and social care, particularly in enabling people to take control of their own care, will be accelerated by the need to explore alternative, and cheaper, methods.</p> <p>In the more immediate future, increasing austerity will present challenges, firstly in downsizing and then in managing and motivating a smaller workforce. It will also require a willingness in the public service to consider and implement solutions which are more radical than those considered in the past. Doing so with a reduced workforce will inevitably be difficult, although it should be achievable with a committed leadership.</p> <p>We would also draw attention to the repercussions of the Welfare Reform Act, which is already putting a strain on local authority budgets as various client groups are affected. As the Act continues to be rolled out, we foresee a worsening of this position.</p>
2	<p>How would you like to see public services delivered in the future?</p> <p>What public services should look like in the future is directly linked to the challenges facing them. As society changes, so should organisations in fulfilling the needs of citizens.</p> <p>The changing demographic has already been mentioned above, and new ways of working will need to be developed in response. However, there is a more general change in the way we live our lives, and this change is happening as a result of very rapid developments in information and communication technology. Dealing with service users and citizens online so as to improve convenience and effectiveness will become the norm, and there</p>



	<p>will need to be a continuing investment in technology to enable public organisations to make that happen. Social media in particular is an area where public organisations need to keep up with the private sector if our credibility with the public is to be assured.</p> <p>An awareness of the use that can be made of ICT in improving services needs to be fostered, to be brought to bear in the form of applications across the board, including mobile working, automatic dissemination of information to customers, web development, systems integration, document and records management, information sharing between organisations, performance management – the list is endless. There is no doubt that some of this is already happening (in fact, it formed the drive behind OneVale, the Council’s transformation programme), but it needs to be more widespread and more rapid.</p> <p>The other priority, explored in detail in previous questions, is a collaborative approach. Complex social issues or complex service delivery cannot be resolved or accomplished by organisations acting alone, and as we have said above, collaboration will become the default position.</p> <p>Accordingly, our elected Members and senior managers need to recognise the need for continuous change: no organisation or service can assume that what worked in past will work for the future. In addition to an awareness of developments in ICT, the necessary skill set will include change management, systems thinking and collaborative working, and we would support a drive by Welsh Government to educate and train senior managers in these crucial aspects of management.</p> <p>As to the role of Councils, we would argue strongly that a measure of independence is crucial if we are to act as bodies representing local wishes and commissioning services through a variety of means and various geographical entities to meet local demand. The support of Welsh Government and its agencies is very important in helping us achieve this, and a positive partnership approach is one that we would welcome.</p>
3	<p>Are there any other areas of focus that the Commissions should be looking at as part of their evidence gathering?</p> <p>An interesting recent initiative in England was the Total Place exercise. Total Place considered how a “whole area” approach to public services can lead to better services at less cost. The aim was to mitigate the impact of austerity measures by finding new and more efficient ways of serving the public. Those local authorities piloting the initiative looked at how much public money went into a given area, which organisations it passed through and to what end. They considered in turn the total public spending picture, spending by local bodies, spending by non-local bodies and spending to support the Community Strategy, with the aim of achieving efficiency savings and improvements in outcomes across public service.</p> <p>The initiative was discontinued with the change in UK government, but there is evidence that it was beginning in some areas to have a positive result. The Commission should consult the English pilot areas for lessons learned and possible ways forward.</p>