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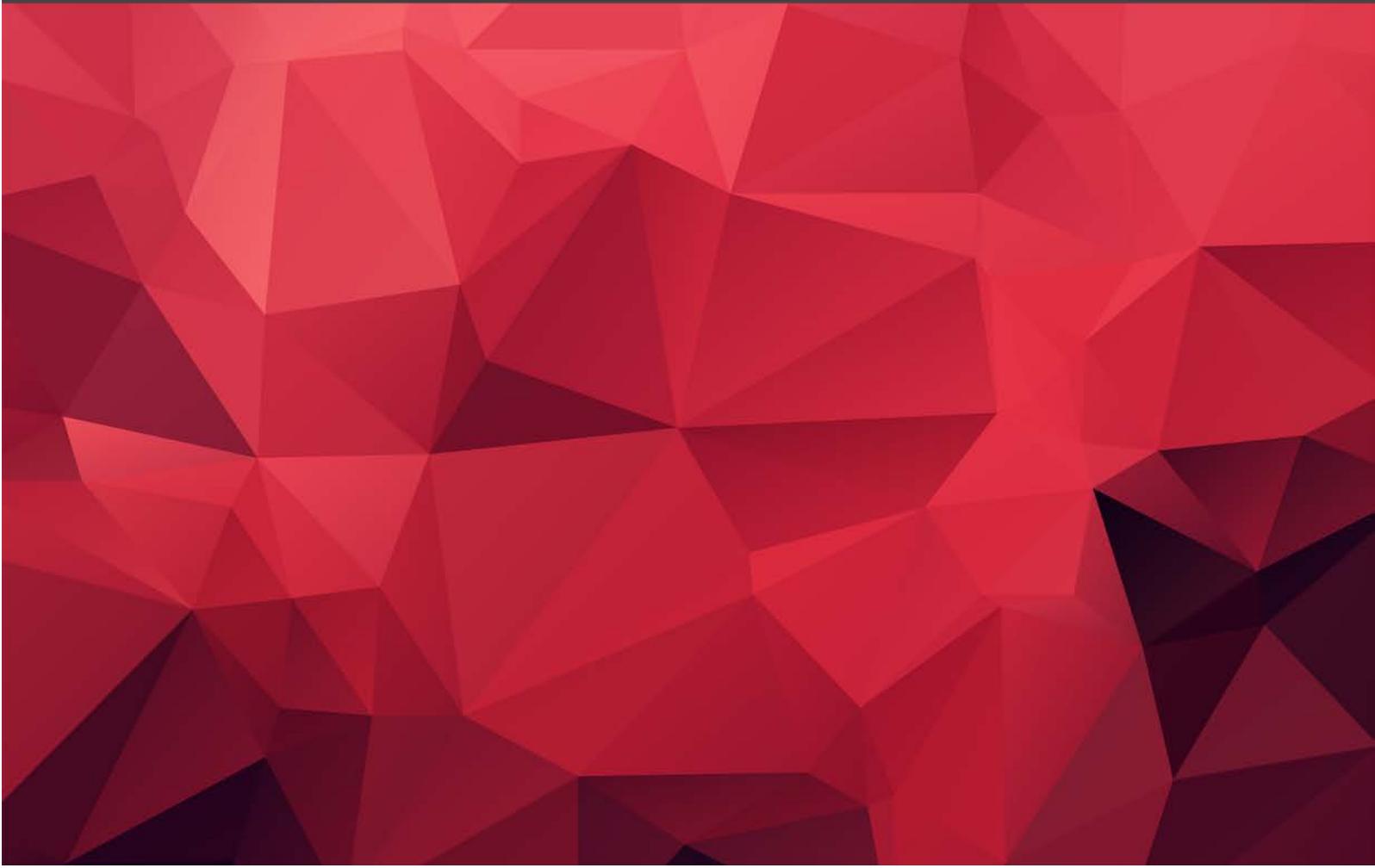
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Good Governance when Determining Significant Service Changes – **Vale of Glamorgan County Council**

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Summary report

Summary

- 1 'Governance is about how public bodies ensure that they are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. It comprises the systems and processes, and cultures and values, by which public bodies are directed and controlled and through which they account to, engage with and, where appropriate, lead their communities'¹.
- 2 Good governance is essential for the effective stewardship of public money and the continued delivery of efficient and trusted public services. The current financial climate and reduced settlements for local government as well as rising demand for some services mean that all councils are likely to continue to need to make decisions regarding the future configuration and level of service delivery. It is appropriate that public bodies continuously seek to improve. Small, incremental changes to service delivery are made at a managerial and operational level as part of normal, operational decision-making. However, good governance supported by effective planning and rigorous processes is critical when determining significant service changes. Such decisions are often controversial, generate considerable local interest and can have significant impacts on the individuals and groups affected.
- 3 From April 2016, councils are required to comply with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and associated Statutory Guidance. The Statutory Guidance states that: 'Together, the seven well-being goals and five ways of working provided by the Act are designed to support and deliver a public service that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.² This legislation emphasises the importance of effective governance in achieving well-being goals.
- 4 The focus of this review is on the effectiveness of the Vale of Glamorgan Council's (the Council) governance arrangements for determining significant service changes. We define this as any significant change in delivering services and/or any significant change in how services are experienced by external service users. This could include, for example, significant changes to the way the service is delivered, the level of service provided, the availability of the service or the cost of the service.
- 5 Taking the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) revised framework for 'Delivering good governance in local government' as an appropriate standard, this review provides the Council with a baseline, from which to plan further improvement. In this assessment, undertaken during the period

¹ **CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework 2007**

² **Shared Purpose: Shared Future, Statutory guidance on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, Welsh Government**

September to November 2016, to inform our assessment of the Council's overall arrangement for developing and determining service changes we looked at aspects of decision-making arrangements in relation to a range of significant service change proposals. The examples of service changes we looked at included:

- review of library provision;
- care packages budget reduction;
- supported bus services and fee paying school transport on supported buses;
- Review of the countryside function;
- car parking; and
- street lighting.

- 6 We did not look in detail at each of the individual service change decisions, but rather used them as examples to draw from and inform how the Council goes about making decisions in relation to service changes.
- 7 In this review we concluded that the Council has a clear corporate framework for determining and delivering service changes and effective arrangements to support delivery, with some opportunities to strengthen stakeholder engagement.

Proposals for improvement

Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P1	The Council should include more information in Cabinet and Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes of the detail and purpose of forthcoming items (including, but not limited to, service change proposals) to improve the transparency of arrangements and opportunities for stakeholders to engage in decision making.
P2	The Council should continue to consult and engage with stakeholders on all service changes where there is likely to be a clear impact on the public and/or service users, or ensure that a clear and transparent rationale for not doing so is documented.

Detailed report

The Council has a clear corporate framework for developing and determining significant service changes and effective arrangements to support delivery, with some opportunities to strengthen stakeholder engagement

The Council's Reshaping Services Programme provides a framework for determining significant service changes and supports their delivery

- 8 In 2014 the Council formulated its Reshaping Services Programme (RSP) to meet the dual challenges of likely increases in demand for its services and diminishing resources. It commenced the implementation of the RSP during 2015. The overall aim of the RSP is:
- ‘to reshape the Council to enable it to meet the future needs of citizens of the Vale of Glamorgan within the context of unprecedented financial challenges’.
- 9 The RSP also has the following objectives:
- ‘to identify alternative ways of delivering services which provide better outcomes for citizens and/or more efficient means of delivery;
 - to meet future financial challenges while mitigating the impact of cuts on service users; and
 - to develop the Council and its partners to ensure they are able to meet future challenges’.
- 10 In January 2015 we reviewed the Council's approach to reshaping services. We concluded that it was adopting appropriate processes to drive transformation. In initiating the RSP, the Council reviewed all of its service areas to identify opportunities to deliver better outcomes and/or financial savings. The information from the reviews was considered by an internal ‘Challenge Group’, chaired by the Council's Leader, and proposals were put forward for development then implementation in tranche 1 (2015-16) and tranche 2 (2016-17)³.
- 11 In August 2016, our Corporate Assessment also noted that the Council had implemented a number of delivery models and was continuing to progress service change through the RSP. Similarly, in this review we heard how the Council has decided to follow a pragmatic approach to service change. The Council considers

³ The members of the Challenge Board are the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder. The group is supported by the Managing Director, Head of Finance, Head of Performance & Development, Head of HR and the Executive Director Vale Council for Voluntary Services.

that different models of delivery may be appropriate for different services and that this flexibility will be a benefit. While the Council is taking a flexible approach, the RSP provides a broad framework for decisions on significant service change and sets out a structured approach to delivery.

- 12 As the RSP has developed, the Council has continued to look at how other opportunities, such as annual revenue savings proposals, can be incorporated into the programme. Of the service changes we looked at as part of this review, the Council's reviews of library provision, street lighting and the care packages budget reduction (as part of the social services budget programme) were managed through the RSP.
- 13 The Council has produced RSP Business Case Guidance. The guidance states that all reshaping services projects must describe how they will contribute to the overall programme objectives. The three RSP objectives are clearly reflected in the programme's specific work streams. For example, there is a 'Town and Community Councils' work stream that has been established with the aim of developing relationships with, and capacity within, those organisations to help meet future service delivery challenges. The RSP Business Case Guidance also makes clear that SMART⁴ objectives should be set for projects.
- 14 While most of the examples we looked at pre-date the guidance, they also included objectives and links to wider corporate priorities. For example, the investment of Public Rights of Way and Coastal Access Improvement grants link to corporate objectives. The development of tourism and commercial opportunities at countryside service sites also demonstrates how the Council is seeking to link activity to wider priorities. The Council achieved savings in the Countryside Service that were reinvested in a new Commercial Opportunities Officer post. The post was tasked with developing opportunities that increase leisure and tourism activities in the Vale of Glamorgan and benefit the local economy.
- 15 The Council made reference to the RSP within its 2015-16 and 2016-17 budget consultations. The 2016-17 consultation asked a general question on whether respondents agreed that significant changes are needed to the way the Council operates in order to make changes. It also included three specific questions on income generation and charging, and transferring services to the community. The Council is also considering how its more recent Public Opinion survey will inform the development of the RSP.
- 16 The Council has sought to ensure that the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (the WFG Act) are reflected in how it makes decisions. Specifically, the Council revised its Corporate Plan for 2016-2020, setting out four intended 'well-being outcomes', along with eight supporting 'well-being objectives'. The revised plan also describes how planned activity will contribute to the well-being goals for Wales. The Council has restructured its scrutiny committees and developed integrated performance reporting, both aligned to its well-being

⁴ (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely)

objectives. This is designed to ensure that activities are scrutinised in the wider context of how they are contributing to well-being objectives and outcomes. The Council is also planning to change the format of Cabinet reports and is considering how it can make reference to the WFG Act's 'five ways of working' in covering reports (see [paragraph 3](#))⁵. Carrying out sustainable development and ensuring a focus on the five ways of working should have a positive impact on decision making on service change.

- 17 The Council is developing the relationship between the WFG Act and the RSP. The Council's document 'Collaborative Working Guide for Managers', (part of the RSP Business Case Guidance) states that managers must follow the Council's project management toolkit for any collaborative project and this includes examination of Privacy Impact Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), and Sustainability Checklist. The Council recognises there may be opportunities to update the Collaborative Working Guide for Managers and RSP Business Case Guidance to reflect the WFG Act and the five ways of working.

Clear roles and responsibilities and strong programme and project governance are supporting the Council's decision making on significant service changes

- 18 The Council's governance and accountability arrangements for decisions on service changes are clear and well understood by senior officers and members. The Council has also taken steps to ensure that staff are aware of the RSP and the work that is being taken forward through it. In 2015, the Council undertook detailed engagement with councillors and all staff to explain the rationale for the RSP and obtain views and ideas to support the implementation of change. Information and papers from the RSP Board are made available on the Council's intranet and in briefing documents.
- 19 There is a clear governance structure for the RSP. The Council established a Programme Board, which meets every four to six weeks⁶. Roles and responsibilities are set out in the RSP guidance documents. For example the business case development process identifies Programme Board, Cabinet and Scrutiny as providing approval and assurance at key identified stages including at the strategic outline case, outline business case and final business case stages.

⁵ The Well-being of Future Generations Act and supporting statutory guidance sets out five ways of working that public bodies are required to take into account when applying sustainable development. These are: long term, integration, collaboration, prevention and involvement.

⁶ The members of the Reshaping Service Programme Board are the Leader, the Managing Director (Programme Sponsor), Head of Performance and Development (Programme Director), Corporate Management Team, Head of Human Resources and Executive Director Vale Council for Voluntary Services.

- 20 The Cabinet works effectively with senior managers to develop and deliver service change. For example, a Cabinet-led review group was established as part of the Council's libraries review. The Leader and Cabinet member were members of this group, along with relevant officers from across the organisation. This ensured there was Cabinet involvement in the libraries service change at an early stage.
- 21 Scrutiny arrangements also operate within a clear framework and the Council has developed a Scrutiny and Cabinet Roles and Responsibilities Protocol that clearly distinguishes between the role of officers and Cabinet members in attending scrutiny committees.
- 22 Cabinet consider scrutiny involvement and whether pre-decision scrutiny should be undertaken. Scrutiny committee chairpersons also meet with senior officers to discuss items for their Forward Work Programmes. Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programmes for quarter one of 2017 include RSP service changes.
- 23 Governance arrangements are also set out via a range of documents including the Council's Constitution, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. The Council has also developed a standard report format for reports to Members that includes reference to comments relating to resources (finance and employment), legal, sustainability, equality (including Welsh language), crime and disorder, links to corporate priorities and consultation (including ward member consultation). Expectations arising from the WFG Act have also been introduced into the Council's corporate planning processes and in 2016 are being integrated, as principles, with service plans.
- 24 The Council's Collaborative Working Guide for Managers also sets out a clear expectation that collaborative projects must have strong governance arrangements from the start and that the purpose of the project will affect the choice of governance arrangements. It also states that advice should always be sought from finance, legal and HR officers at the inception of any collaborative process to ensure compliance with relevant requirements and minimise risk to the Council.
- 25 Officers told us of a range of staff training activities to support the delivery of the Reshaping Services Programme and wider change activity. This includes specific training for tranche one and two project managers as well as an integrated approach with the Council's Management Development Programme, which most recently ran in the spring of 2017 covering topics including contract management, project management and drawing linkages with the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 26 The Council has provided extensive staff training on completing Equality Impact Assessments from January – April 2016 and is developing an e-learning model to help officers undertake those assessment effectively. The Council's Internal Audit have reviewed its Equality Impact Assessment process and the Council's corporate equalities officers have been working to implement improvements (see [paragraph 44](#)).

The Council's decision making process incorporates options appraisal arrangements and reports set out detailed information when determining significant service changes

- 27 The Council's reports to members presented a range of service delivery options for some of the examples we looked at as part of this review. The proposals to change street lighting included eight options and the second phase of implementation included consideration of a further four options. These were clearly set out in the Cabinet report and were also referred to scrutiny. The approach was different in the case of the Council's changes to library provision; the Council's Library Review Board reviewed various options, then Cabinet and scrutiny received a series of recommendations.
- 28 The Council's service change proposals are supported by appropriate and detailed information. For example substantial background information was provided in relation to proposals on street lighting and car parking. The Cabinet report on proposed changes to school pupil fares also included clear financial and usage figures to support decision-makers. This included total numbers, average cost and average subsidy per pupil.
- 29 In the case of street lighting, a 'Part Night Lighting Board' was established to consider changes to street lighting. The Board was made up of officers from Highways and Engineering, Road Safety, Community Safety and the Police. The Board used a risk matrix to analyse the stock and a copy of this risk matrix and associated explanatory information was included with the report to Cabinet and scrutiny.
- 30 For some of the examples we looked at, scrutiny committees undertook pre-decision scrutiny. In the case of street lighting, the Environment and Economy (subsequently Environment and Regeneration) Committee received the Cabinet report on the Street Lighting Energy Reduction Strategy for information. However, for the second phase of implementation they were invited to consider options and undertake scrutiny prior to the Cabinet decision. Cabinet accepted their recommendation.
- 31 In the case of car parking, scrutiny were invited to comment on proposals before a Cabinet decision. The Environment and Regeneration Committee expressed a number of concerns. Cabinet subsequently requested that officers undertake further work.
- 32 The Council's RSP Business Case Guidance describes a 'Reshaping Services Project Development Process'. The process sets out how RSP service change proposals are to be developed, from the identification of opportunities through to monitoring post-implementation. The guidance also states whether responsibility for approval or assurance sits with the Challenge Board, Programme Board, Cabinet or scrutiny at each stage of the process. The Reshaping Services Project Development Process means that the development and selection of options should be documented through development stages.

- 33 The Business Case Guidance states that outline business cases are intended to go to Cabinet and scrutiny. If there are material changes, final business cases should also go to Cabinet and scrutiny. This means the full range of options and options appraisal process is designed to be transparent and subject to challenge. During our fieldwork officers told us that the business case approach is flexible and is intended to be applied proportionately.
- 34 By consistently adhering to the steps outlined within the Business Case Guidance, the Council should ensure that scrutiny committees are able to consider significant service changes at the options appraisal stage. The Council's more recent proposal to change respite care for adults with learning disabilities is an example where scrutiny was built into the decision-making process. In this case, the Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee were given two opportunities to consider the proposal. They discussed the outline proposal prior to the development of the business case and then undertook pre-decision scrutiny on the detail of the business case before it went to Cabinet for a decision.

The Council has effective corporate arrangements to consult with stakeholders, but there are some instances where consultation could have been strengthened

- 35 The Council's communications team provide support and advice to service areas on conducting consultation and engagement with stakeholders. Whilst the majority of consultation exercises are managed by the relevant service area, the corporate communications team take a lead role on higher profile consultations. At the time of this review, the communications team were reviewing the Council's Public Engagement Framework. The Council intends to emphasise the importance of making the most effective use of the information it already holds as part of the revised framework. Officers explained the inclusion of consultation and engagement as part of the Council's revised integrated planning activity which is managed by the cross-departmental Insight Board. The role of the Insight Board is to ensure regular monitoring and management of the various support activities that underpin the delivery of the Corporate Plan.
- 36 The Council also has a clear ambition to improve its focus on equality data and improve engagement with protected characteristic groups. For example the first objective of its 2016-20 Strategic Equality Plan is:
- ‘collect and analyse service data by protected characteristic so services meet the diverse needs of the public’⁷.
- The purpose of the objective is to find out who is using services, identify gaps and barriers and ensure that services meet the needs of groups who share protected characteristics.

⁷ Vale of Glamorgan Council, **Strategic Equality Plan 2016-2020**, April 2016

- 37 The Strategic Equality Plan also includes the following objective:
'seek the views of protected groups on proposed changes to policy, budgets and services'⁸.
- This is supported by an action to 'review methods of engagement to ensure that we reach 'seldom heard' groups'. This should help to ensure that the views of people with protected characteristics are taken into account when significant service changes are being considered.
- 38 The Council consulted on its Corporate Plan 2016-2020 and its 2016-17 budget proposals as part of the same exercise. The consultation ran from 9 December 2015 - 20 January 2016 and the main method was an online survey. The Council sought to learn from the previous year's exercise by providing additional information to accompany the online survey to ensure respondents could provide an informed view. This included a series of web pages outlining the Council's current financial position, work undertaken and savings found to date, and a budget FAQ guide⁹. However, the Council only received a comparatively modest total of 209 survey responses. The Council recognises that this is a lower response rate than previous years (though only received 401 responses to the online survey in the 2015-16 budget consultation). It attributes this to the shorter consultation period which it states was a 'consequence of the delayed Welsh Government funding announcement'¹⁰. The Council also consulted its Local Service Board and town and community council partners and its stakeholder forums; the 50+ Strategy Forum, the Vale Youth Cabinet and a local Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) support group. The Council captured the views of these stakeholders via facilitated discussions, responses to the online survey or separate written responses.
- 39 Consultation has been a contentious issue for some of the service changes we looked at because some of the service changes themselves have been contentious. Specifically, scrutiny members and members of the public were critical of the Council for the lack of engagement on proposals to introduce car parking charges in Barry and Cowbridge. Minutes of the meeting of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee show that a 'number of Members were concerned as to the repeated reference to the lack of consultation and agreed that more in-depth discussions should have been held'¹¹. However we are aware that officers did attend a number of meetings with traders to explain the rationale for

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Cabinet report: Final Proposals for the Revenue Budget 2016-17 Appendix B: Corporate Plan 2016-20 and Budget 2016-17 Consultation report, 22 February 2016, Vale of Glamorgan Council

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Minutes of the Economy and Environment Scrutiny Committee, 1st September 2015, Vale of Glamorgan Council

suggested service changes and to consider the views of traders on those proposed changes.

- 40 The Council did not consult the public on proposed changes to street lighting, but instead opted to monitor complaints after implementation. Changes to income fees and charges at heritage and countryside locations involved consultation with ward members but do not appear to be supported by public consultation.
- 41 However, the Council is providing more opportunities for the public to engage in decision-making processes by creating the opportunity for members of the public to register to speak at meetings. In addition to being able to register questions for Council, the facility has been extended to enable registration of questions for Scrutiny Committees, the Planning Committee, and to increase public participation in the scrutiny process. Representatives of traders spoke at the Economy and Environment Committee on the proposed car parking charges. Elected members and members of the public can also suggest a topic for scrutiny to consider.
- 42 Minutes, agendas and reports of Council, Cabinet and Committee meetings are available on the Council's website. Forward Work Programmes for the Cabinet and the Council's Scrutiny Committees are also available on the Council's website, although details of items to be considered is limited and there is scope to include more details on the purpose and nature of forthcoming items to improve the transparency of arrangements. The availability of this information and mechanisms that support public engagement should have a positive impact on decision-making on service change.

The Council's governance arrangements make clear provision for monitoring the impact of significant service changes and, if applied systematically, should help to ensure that monitoring is transparent and is consistently built into service changes

- 43 The Council has clearly set out arrangements for monitoring the impact of some service changes. For example, the Council has put Service Level Agreements in place with the transferred libraries; they include performance standards and what the Council can expect to see delivered, linked to the Welsh libraries standards. The Council has set out arrangements for monitoring impact through the Social Services Budget Programme Board in relation to service changes in social services. The Cabinet has also undertaken, or intends to undertake, monitoring of the impact of some service changes including in relation to car parking, libraries and street lighting. Scrutiny has reviewed the impact of some service changes following their implementation, such as changes to street lighting. However, monitoring arrangements and measures have not always set out at the point of decision.
- 44 The Council's RSP Business Case Guidance establishes a more systematic basis for monitoring the impact of significant service changes. It sets out when monitoring arrangements are intended to be agreed and seeks to ensure that

anticipated benefits can be monitored and risks managed. It states that the monitoring stage of service changes should include a benefits realisation plan that takes the benefits identified in the strategic business case, establishes targets for each and assigns actions and responsibilities for achieving them. The Council's Collaborative Working Guide for Managers states that project management documentation should be created and maintained by the designated Project Manager in order to manage projects and ensure they deliver the anticipated benefits.

- 45 The Council's RSP Business Case Guidance also sets clear responsibility and accountability on the Council's scrutiny function at appropriate stages in the deliberation of service change, including benefits realisation.
- 46 In our Corporate Assessment report (August 2016) we reported on the changes the Council was making to its scrutiny arrangements. The Council re-designated the remits of the five scrutiny committees to reflect the Council's four wellbeing outcomes, while maintaining a single Corporate Performance and Resources and Scrutiny Committee (see [paragraph 14](#)). The changes demonstrate the Council's emphasis on ensuring scrutiny activity is focused on outcomes and that a wider range of cross-cutting information is considered. The new arrangements provide an opportunity to focus on the impact of and outcomes be achieved through service changes.
- 47 The Council has also put in place transition arrangements when implementing the service change relating to libraries. A training programme has been run for volunteers on running a library covering issues such as health and safety and using management systems, and on-line support is also available at the Council's main library. The Council has also supported the transferred libraries to develop business cases and is also working with them to identify opportunities to access additional funding.

The Council is learning from the experience of its recent service changes and is improving its associated governance arrangements as a result

- 48 The Council undertook a comprehensive review of its governance arrangements in 2015 and began implementing subsequent changes during 2016. This included a reduction in the number of Cabinet posts and re-structuring of the Council's scrutiny committees (see [paragraph 42](#)).
- 49 The Council's corporate and service planning is also now aligned with its revised corporate objectives that take into account the requirements of the WFG Act. Embedding sustainable development and applying the Act's sustainable development principle has the potential to further strengthen arrangements for determining significant service change.

50 Awareness of the Equality Impact Assessment process has been heightened in the Council following a judicial review challenge to a Cabinet decision taken in March 2015 regarding the Council's Community Library Review. Following this the Council has provided training to staff to improve their understanding of the process. The Council has also reviewed its Equality Impact Assessment process and has asked its Internal Audit function to input into this review (see [paragraph 23](#)). Processes for developing Equality Impact Assessments now require officers in departments to make contact with the equalities team when they are being developed. The corporate equality officers have also revised the Equality Impact Assessment forms. They hope to amend the equalities section of the Cabinet report proforma to ensure information from Equality Impact Assessments is referenced within the main report. We noted that there are examples of reports drawing members' attention to equality considerations. For example, the report setting out a proposal to change respite care for adults with learning disabilities included the following:

'Members will be aware of their duty to pay due regard to the impact that any proposed changes may have had on protected characteristic groups when reaching a decision'¹².

Such action will help to ensure that equalities is an explicit consideration within decisions on service change, helping the Council demonstrate it is complying with its statutory responsibilities.

51 The Council has sought to improve its annual consultation on the corporate plan and budget proposals by improving the quality of information it provides to respondents (notwithstanding the points in [paragraph 35](#)). The Council included the following question in the 2016-17 consultation to support that process of development:

'do you think the Council provides enough information, for example via its website, about how the budget is set and about the issues that have to be taken into account?'

39% of respondents felt that the Council did provide sufficient information, while 61% felt it they did not. The Council has identified that it should do more to inform residents throughout the year and ensure they are able to provide an informed response to the annual consultation.

52 At the time of this review, the Council was updating its Public Engagement Framework. The revised version is intended to emphasise the need for the Council to make better use of the information it already holds (see [paragraph 32](#)).

¹² **Report of the Director of Social Services: Reshaping Services - Review of Respite Care for Adults with Learning Disabilities** 22nd November 2016, Vale of Glamorgan Council

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