

Meeting of:	Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	Wednesday, 29 July 2020
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Annual Governance Statement 2019/20
Purpose of Report:	To submit the Annual Governance Statement for review and to recommend its adoption by the Leader of the Council and the Managing Director
Report Owner:	Managing Director
Responsible Officer:	Head of the Regional Internal Audit Service
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Corporate Management Team
Policy Framework:	The proposals in this report are in accordance with the policy framework and budget.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <p>The Council, as part of its arrangements for corporate governance, is required to undertake an annual review of internal control and governance and the resulting Annual Governance Statement (AGS) must be included within the Statement of Accounts.</p> <p>The AGS therefore provides an assessment of the Council's corporate governance arrangements and an appraisal of the controls in place to manage the Council's key risks and identifies where improvements need to be made.</p> <p>The AGS concludes that from the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken that reasonable assurance can be given that the governance arrangements for the Vale of Glamorgan Council continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.</p> <p>The AGS will be reviewed as part of the external audit on the Statement of Accounts and should reflect any governance issues right up to the date that the Auditor General for Wales signs off the Statement of Accounts for 2019/2020. Therefore, the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic has been considered and is included within the AGS.</p>	

Recommendation

1. That the Annual Governance Statement for 2019/2020 be recommended for adoption by the Leader and Managing Director.

Reason for Recommendation

- 1.1 To provide for a review of the governance framework and the system of internal control, which has been in place within the Council for the year ended 31st March 2020.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014, as amended from time to time, requires each Local Authority to conduct a review, at least once a year, of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and the governance arrangements with its Annual Statement of Accounts.
- 1.2 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Recommended Practice (the code) states that the preparation and publication of an Annual Governance Statement in accordance with "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government" fulfils the statutory requirement regarding the production of a statement of internal control in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 1.3 In 2016, CIPFA published its new "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework", which positions the attainment of sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes as a key focus of governance processes and structures. The Guidance has considered the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and embedded the five ways of working into the CIPFA framework.
- 1.4 As with all the work undertaken by the Council, the AGS reflects the Council's responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Council recognises the need to ensure that in line with the sustainable development principle account of how our decisions may impact on future generations is taken. The Council has embedded the five ways of working across its activities and in delivering our priorities we will maximise or contribution to the seven national Well-being Goals.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 Good corporate governance requires the active participation of Members and Officers across the Council. These arrangements are reviewed on an annual basis and the findings used to update the AGS. This helps to ensure the continuous improvement of the Council's corporate governance culture. The inclusion of the

AGS within the Statement of Accounts provides an overall assessment of the Council's corporate governance arrangements and an appraisal of the controls in place to manage the Council's key risks and identifies where improvements need to be made.

- 2.2 The draft AGS for the 2019/20 financial year is attached at Appendix A. This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council has complied with the terms of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework (2016) for the year ended 31st March 2020.
- 2.3 The AGS concludes that from the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken that reasonable assurance can be given that the governance arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.
- 2.4 One of the main issues raised and highlighted over the last few years has been the ability of the Council to carry on meeting service objectives and delivering positive outcomes for its customers and clients whilst meeting the continuing challenges of year on year reductions in Council funding and the impact this has on the services delivered. The increased settlement for 2020/21 has enabled the Council to agree a budget that started to address some of the significant deficits services are reporting however the COVID19 pandemic will impact on the Council's financial position during 2020/21 and this will be monitored closely and is identified as a governance issue within the AGS.
- 2.5 The AGS will be reviewed as part of the external audit on the Statement of Accounts and should reflect any governance issues right up to the date that the Auditor General for Wales signs off the Statement of Accounts for 2019/2020. Hence the impact of COVID 19 pandemic has been included.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1 Providing this information helps to demonstrate how the Council ensures that laws & regulations are complied with including the Well-Being of Future Generations Act which sets out the 5 ways of working.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1 The AGS includes the requirement that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

Employment

4.2 None as a direct consequence of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

4.3 Production of the Annual Governance Statement is required under the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 as amended from time to time and supports the annual Statement of Accounts.

5. Background Papers

Appendix A - Annual Governance Statement 2019/20

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The Council's Governance Framework comprises all the systems and processes, culture and values, by which the Council directs and controls its activities, and how it leads, engages with and accounts to the community it serves.

A significant part of that framework is the Council's system of internal control. This helps to manage and control the business risks that the Council encounters in delivering its operations. Not all risks can be eliminated but they can be reduced and mitigated by implementing effective systems of control. This can only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of the effectiveness of the environment. The Council's Governance Framework, including the Council's system of internal control, has been in place for the year ended 31st March 2020 and up to the date of the approval of the Statement of Accounts and is a continuous process.

The Council's Code of Corporate Governance was reviewed in 2016/17, with the amendments made being based upon the "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework" (CIPFA/SOLACE, 2016). The Framework positions the attainment of sustainable economic, social, and environmental outcomes as a key focus of good governance processes and structures. The focus on sustainability and the links between governance and public financial management are crucial – local authorities must recognise the need to focus on the long term.

This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council has complied with the terms of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework (2016) for the year ended 31st March 2020.

As with all work undertaken by the Council, the Annual Governance Statement reflects the Council's responsibilities under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The Council recognises the need to ensure that in line with the sustainable development principle we take account of how our decisions may impact on future generations. The Council has embedded the five ways of working across its activities and in delivering our priorities we will maximise or contribution to the seven national Well-being Goals.

Scope of Responsibility

The Vale of Glamorgan Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money allocated to it is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Vale of Glamorgan Council sees Corporate Governance as doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. Strong, transparent and responsive governance enables the Vale of Glamorgan Council to put citizens first by pursuing its aims and priorities effectively, and by underpinning them with appropriate mechanisms for managing performance and risk. In order to maintain citizens confidence, these mechanisms must be sound and be seen to be sound.

The Council has approved and adopted a Code of Corporate Governance which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA and SOLACE Framework - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code.

The Code of Corporate Governance sets out the principles of good governance and describes the arrangements in place to meet each of these principles.

A copy of the Council's Code is available on our website at www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

A - Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.

B - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

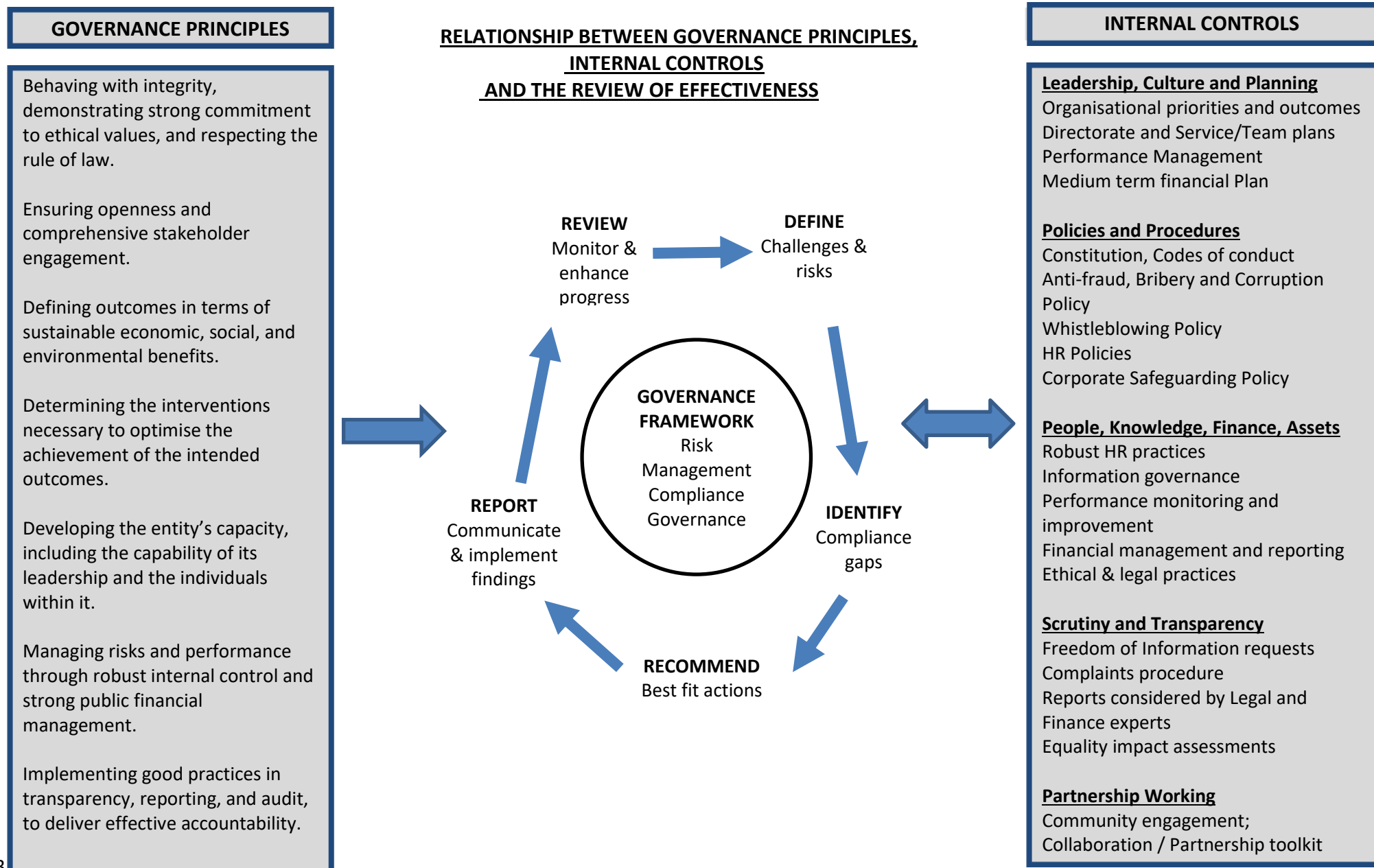
C - Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits.

D - Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

E - Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

F - Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

G - Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.



IMPACT OF COVID 19 PANDEMIC

The UK was put into lockdown on 23 March 2020 in an unprecedented step to attempt to limit the spread of coronavirus. This followed similar action in other countries across the world. The UK Government put into place a limited number of reasons for people to be allowed to leave their homes. As a consequence, many non-essential shops and businesses had to close, schools were closed and all non-key workers were required to work from home where possible. Initially the lockdown was for a period of 3 weeks but this was then extended a number of times with some easing of restrictions at various stages with different rules in different parts of the UK. The worldwide COVID 19 pandemic has, and will continue to have, an unprecedented impact upon society as a whole. This led to significant changes to the day-to-day management of the Council, and the nature and delivery of its operations.

The Council's response to the coronavirus pandemic was managed in line with the Council's emergency planning arrangements and followed three broad phases:

- i. Preparation
- ii. Response
- iii. Recovery

During the early months of 2020, efforts were made to prepare the organisation for the potential implications of a public health emergency. The most critical elements of this phase were the establishment of the Gold reporting structure, strategy and the identification of critical services and how these could be protected. However, due to the speed at which the pandemic spread across Europe, the work of the organisation quickly moved into the response phase. The Council made significant changes in response to the pandemic and associated government regulations and advice, including:

- i. Closure of schools and creation of hubs for key workers' children
- ii. Introduction free school meals vouchers for those eligible
- iii. Payment of thousands of grants to businesses
- ii. Closure of a significant number of services including libraries, parks and recycling centres
- iii. Changes to the operation of care homes, domiciliary care and social work.
- iv. Movement of a large proportion of the Council's staff to work from home.
- v. Establishment of a PPE distribution team.
- vi. Establishment of a Crisis Support Team, Vale Heroes and relationships with third sector support organisations.
- vii. The payment of an up lift in salary to nearly 500 front-line staff working in the most challenging circumstances.

As the country moved into lockdown, all formal meetings including Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny and Audit Committees were cancelled. The Remote Attendance at Council Meetings Statutory Guidance made under Section 4 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 requires that, even where remote access is permitted as part of a Council's constitution, any meeting with remote attendees is not quorate if there are less than 30% of those eligible to attend present at the main meeting place. As such, the Measure prevented any meeting of Council or its subcommittees to be quorate at the time of the Governments implementation of lockdown measures.

As a result of the need to suspend Council meetings it was necessary to ensure that the Council had robust governance arrangements in place to ensure business continuity as emergency legislation from Central Government and Regulations from Welsh Government were being issued.

The Council's Constitution provides that the Managing Director or in his absence the nominated Deputy has the delegated power to act, after consulting the appropriate Cabinet Member in respect of any matter which, in his opinion:

- a) requires immediate action, and
- b) does not justify holding a special meeting of the body which would ordinarily consider the matter or is of such urgency or emergency as not to allow for such a meeting, use of such delegated powers to be subsequently reported back to the Cabinet or Council as appropriate.

In the case of matters involving financial commitments, the Leader, Section 151 Officer and the appropriate Chief Officer must also be consulted.

To assist transparency, all decisions approved under the use of the Managing Director's Emergency Powers were recorded and reported by Democratic Services on a fortnightly basis by email to all Members of the Council and made available to the public for inspection on the Vale of Glamorgan Council website.

A detailed report on Coronavirus Preparations, Officer Delegations and Council Working / Business Continuity was presented to Cabinet on the 23rd March and the recommendations agreed.

The Council's Corporate Management Team held daily virtual meetings as a Gold Command using well established Emergency planning reporting mechanisms. This allowed consideration of urgent matters, a focus on strategic actions as well as those where decisions were required in a very short timescale. The meetings also focussed on key areas of risk to the organisation as well as the communities of the Vale of Glamorgan. The meetings were chaired by the Managing Director and also involved the Leader and Deputy Leader as well as the Council's Emergency Planning lead and Communications Manager. Any decisions taken that would normally require Cabinet or Council approval were made via the Managing Director's Emergency Powers and these were documented and reported.

Subsequently, on the 22nd April 2020 Welsh Government issued new regulations, the Local Authorities (Coronavirus) (Meetings) (Wales) Regulations 2020 which relaxed the quorum restrictions and allowed remote attendance at meetings.

Welsh Government provided a number of specific grants to meet the additional costs to Local Authorities, for costs in general and targeted at specific areas, such as adult social care and homelessness services. Costs were collated across the Council to enable these grants to be obtained. There is also the impact of lost income from fees and charges, which creates an additional pressure. At this stage it is unclear whether this additional funding will cover all of the Council's additional costs incurred as a result of the pandemic, but close monitoring is in place and all costs are subject to close scrutiny.

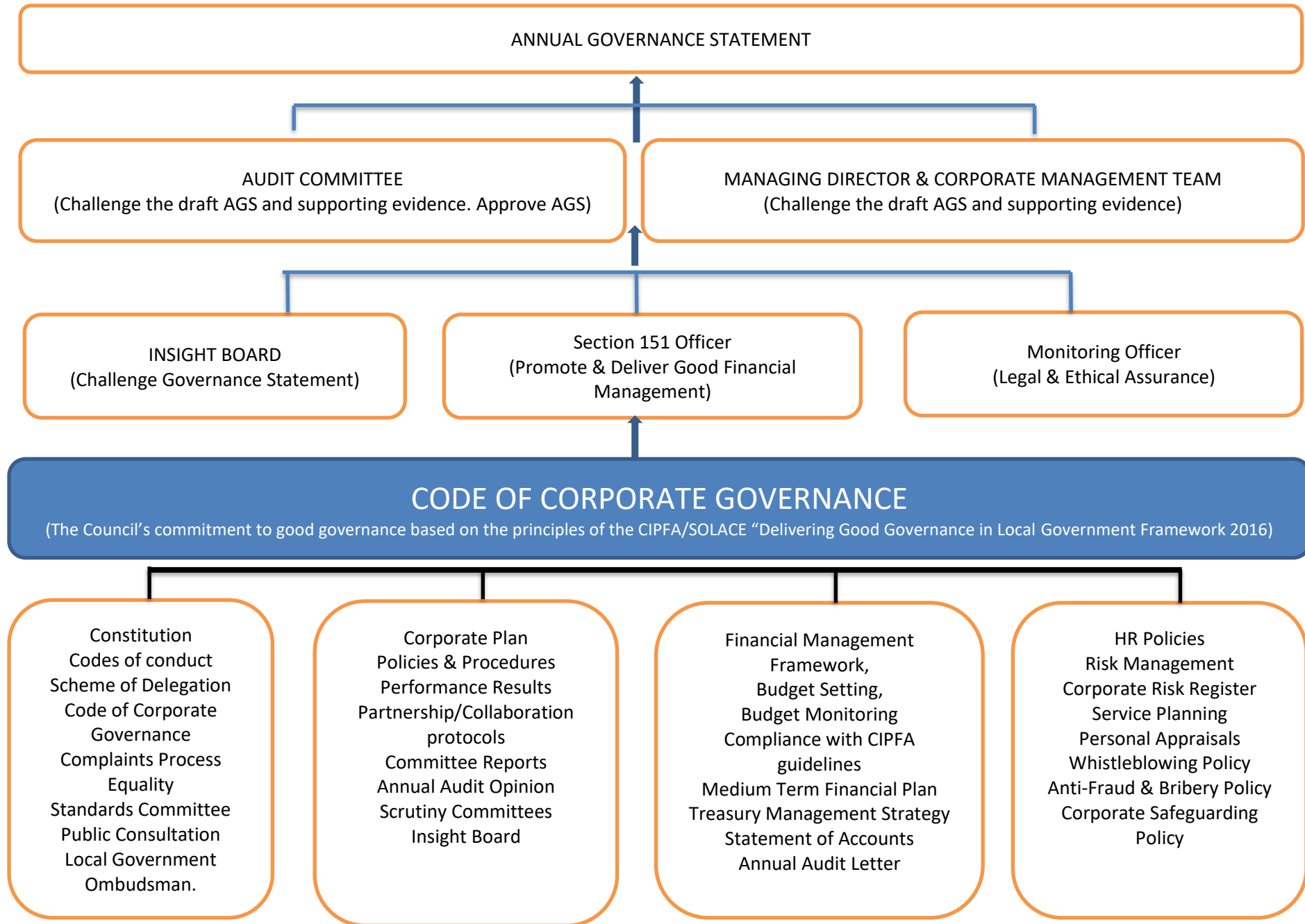
Recovery

A Recovery Strategy is being developed with the aim of establishing a council wide approach to the recovery of the organisation. The Recovery Strategy was developed in line with the Council's Emergency Planning procedures in managing the recovery phase. Key principles followed in the development of the strategy included:

- i. Recognise this is not 'recovery' to a previous state for all services;
- ii. Acknowledge the recovery process will take significant time and be influenced by a number of significant issues, and will not necessarily be linear ('lockdowns' or other regulations may be introduced that impact upon different services in different ways and at different times and at short notice);
- iii. Identify this as an opportunity unlike any other to fundamentally think about the way in which the Council operates.

The organisation has moved at a pace and scale to deliver change that has never been seen before. The learning from this is being harnessed and used to reshape the Council.

The longer-term consequences of the coronavirus pandemic are not yet known. However, it is inevitable that a number of businesses will find themselves in financial difficulties and maybe go out of business. There are also likely to be potential increases in levels of deprivation with associated demands placed upon Council services as a consequence of the increased number of families applying for universal credit and council tax support. Financially we expect there to be pressures on service costs, and reduced council tax and business rates income. In the short term it will be difficult to quantify the wider impacts, which will be understood once the peak of the pandemic has passed and life begins to return to some form of normality.



**Principle A –
Behaving with
integrity,
demonstrating
strong
commitment to
ethical values, and
respecting the rule
of law**

The Council supports a culture of behaviour based on shared values, ethical principles and good conduct. This guides how the long-term vision is put into effect and how members and officers behave in their day to day work. The behaviour of elected members and officers is governed by codes of conduct, which include a requirement for declarations of interest to be completed. The roles and responsibilities of elected members and officers and the processes to govern the conduct of the Council's business are defined in procedural standing orders, scheme of delegations, contract and financial procedure rules. Codes of Conduct are in place which define the high ethical values and standards of behaviour expected from Elected Members and officers to make sure that public business is conducted with fairness and integrity. The Council's Code of Conduct for its Elected Members builds on the seven principles of public life and the Council has arrangements in place to receive and investigate allegations of breaches of proper standards of conduct which are outlined within the Council's Constitution, including the Council's Local Dispute Resolution Procedures and the Protocol of Standards which support the Code of Conduct for Elected Members.

The Council's Monitoring Officer is responsible for ensuring that agreed procedures are followed and that all applicable statutes and regulations are complied with.

The Council seeks feedback from the public through its complaints procedure for both Corporate and Social Services areas, responding to the outcomes as appropriate and reporting the results at least annually to the Audit Committee. During 2019/2020 the Council received 525 complaints, 68% of which were dealt with within corporate target timescales. The percentage of complaints being resolved at Stage 1 was 93.3% and 6.7% at Stage 2. A slightly higher percentage of complaints have been resolved at Stage 1 than in the previous year.

The Council also has a clear Whistleblowing Policy and arrangements in place for staff. During 2019/20, 3 concerns were raised, 1 of the concerns were not upheld and 2 issues remain under investigation. The policy was reviewed and updated in 2019/20 and is awaiting approval.

**Principle A –
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The Constitution is at the heart of the Council's business. It provides an important means of enabling councillors, officers, citizens and stakeholders to understand how the Council makes decisions and who is responsible for those decisions. It also regulates the behaviour of individuals and groups through the codes of conduct, protocols and standing orders. Through the Council's Constitution, the Council has created the conditions necessary to ensure that the statutory Chief Officers, other key post holders, Members and where appropriate statutory committees are able to fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements.

Although safeguarding maintains its medium/low status on the Corporate Risk Register, it continues to be a high priority across the Council. The Corporate Safeguarding Group ensures that arrangements reflect corporate leadership, scrutiny and assurance and that there are effective policies, training and safe recruitment processes in place. This group takes responsibility for ensuring that the safeguarding agenda is known, understood and adhered to consistently across the Council and highlighting that it is a collective responsibility.

The Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014 sets out a number of statutory functions of local authorities. Since its enactment there has been service wide development and awareness raising to ensure that safeguarding statutory responsibilities for employees in relation to their "duty to report" where it is recognised and understood as 'everyone's responsibility'.

Our core focus during 2019/20 has been on developing a single set of Safeguarding procedures for the whole of Wales, that can be adopted and used by all practitioners. This will ensure a more consistent approach to safeguarding policy and practice across the nation as a whole. This piece of work was led by the Vale of Glamorgan's Director of Social Services. The new Safeguarding Procedures were agreed and formally launched in November 2019 as part of National Safeguarding Week. To support this work, a digital app was developed containing these procedures for use by practitioners.

**Principle B –
Ensuring
openness and
comprehensive
stakeholder
engagement**

The Council is committed to understanding and learning from the views of the public. Engagement is the process by which views of stakeholders are able to inform and influence policy and service delivery. The Council's planning and decision-making processes are designed to include consultation with stakeholders and the submission of views by local people.

The Council's Public Engagement Framework details public engagement activities which are undertaken by the Council. During 2019/20 the Council has undertaken a number of consultation and engagement projects. These included the following:

- The Future of Council services – Budget 2020/21 Consultation
- Arts Consultation
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- School Admissions Policy
- Corporate Plan 2020-25
- Annual Delivery Plan
- Strategic Equality Plan
- School Transport Fayres
- S106 – Dinas Powys Open Spaces
- Penarth Cardiff Barrage Sustainable Transport Study
- Cowbridge Primary Provision
- Cosmeston Play Area
- Rhoose Sustainable Transport S106 Scheme
- Commercial Waste Services
- Social Services Performance Measures Consultation

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In 2019/20 following the Staff Survey 2018 results, Local Engagement and Innovation Groups were established in all directorates to allow Heads of Service and local Engagement leads to drive forward the staff survey results and innovation ideas in a localised setting, and allow all staff to share views and ideas with local Engagement Champions. Following this all areas will have Local Engagement Action Plans that will work in conjunction with the Corporate Action Plan to drive forward engagement and innovation.

In 2019/20 the CMT/Engagement Forum was reviewed and relaunched as the Engagement and Innovation Forum, with a new intake of Engagement Champions and a new focus to make tangible changes that directly impact the Engagement Index within Survey, starting with the review of the Staff Charter, which will launch in 2020/21.

Decisions made by the Council and/or Cabinet are documented in the public domain, unless confidential along with reasons for those decisions. The impact and consequences of all decisions are clearly set out.

A range of methods are used to gather Vale residents' views. These range from traditional methods such as quantitative surveys and focus groups to engagement events involving the use of participative methods of interactive workshops. A new Public Engagement Database has been developed and implemented which further enhances the current arrangements already in place.

Effective stakeholder engagement can be reinforced by the following:

- Public Opinion Survey carried out between January and February 2019 showed that the overall satisfaction with Council services had reduced from 92% to 87%.
- 98% of residents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the Vale of Glamorgan as a place to live.
- However, public understanding of the financial context in which the Council is working (e.g. budget) was found to be limited. When prompted with detail about the extent of the budget cuts only 14% were fully aware of the extent of the savings required.

**Principle B –
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In September 2019, as part of the Council's budget consultation for 2020/21, residents were invited for the first time to have their say on the level at which Council Tax should be set for the coming financial year. To support this a video was published explaining the Council's current financial situation including where the Council's money comes from, how it is spent, the savings achieved to date and the savings required in the next three years. The video also provided context as to how Council Tax levels in the Vale compare to other local authority areas in Wales.

The consultation process was promoted across the Council's social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter, the local press and the Council's Leader responded to questions on local radio. Council officers attended local events to engage face to face with residents and ran a series of roadshow drop-in events at Libraries throughout the Vale of Glamorgan.

The public consultation response indicates that only 38% of respondents were fully aware of the financial shortfalls the Council faced over the next three years, with a further 38% reporting that they were not fully aware of the extent of the shortfall and 24% were not aware of the shortfall.

The consultation respondents were also asked to indicate what approach the Council should take to address the shortfall.

The responses showed a split in opinion. Around half of respondents were happy for Council Tax to be increased to the Welsh average or just above in order to protect services from further cuts, and the other half wanted to see council tax kept below the Welsh average, even if this meant cuts to services.

**Principle C –
Defining
outcomes in
terms of
sustainable
economic,
social, and
environmental
benefits.**

“Strong Communities with a Bright Future” was the vision for the Vale of Glamorgan and the Corporate Plan 2016-20 set out how the Council intended to work towards the delivery of this vision and the promotion of well-being. The Plan set out the activities to be undertaken to ensure the best possible outlook for Vale citizens and communities.

In delivering this vision, the Council was mindful of the short, medium and long term challenges and the need to work with partners and the local community. In developing the Council’s Corporate Plan for 2016-20, consideration was given to the achievements from the previous plan, local needs and available resources and has incorporated the views of residents, partners and staff to inform the Council’s key priorities going forward. The Council was keen to embrace the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA) and did so ahead of the statutory timetable. The Corporate Plan had a more outcome focused approach and was based on four Well-being Outcomes with eight associated Well-being Objectives that are aligned to the well-being goals of the WFGA. These Well-being Outcomes were:

- An Inclusive and Safe Vale;
- An Environmentally Responsible and Prosperous Vale;
- An Aspirational and Culturally Vibrant Vale, and
- An Active and Healthy Vale.

The Corporate Plan 2016/20 was underpinned by a set of enabling strategies (these were the Asset Management Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan, Human Resources Strategy, Workforce Plan, ICT Strategy, Customer Relations Strategy, Performance Management Framework and Risk Management Strategy and Register) which together formed the Council’s overall policy framework supporting improvement.

An integrated model of working was introduced to look at all aspects of corporate governance and planning arrangements to ensure that they are inter-related, complementary, consistent and no longer undertaken in isolation. This ensured that the Council’s integrated processes and policies become an enabling force for the delivery of the Corporate Plan’s vision and the Well-being Outcomes.

Having reviewed the Council’s progress made to date in relation to delivering the Corporate Plan Well-being Outcomes and corresponding Objectives, the Council remains assured that the priorities set in April 2019 to deliver the final year of the Corporate Plan 2016/20, continued to be relevant priorities for 2019/20.

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A significant piece of work was undertaken during 2019/20 to develop and consult on a new Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan was approved by Council on 26th February 2020 and sets out the Council's priorities for the next five years (2020-2025), commencing from 1st April 2020. Work also started on developing an Annual Delivery Plan 2020/2021. The ADP sets out the key activities that will be undertaken by the Council in year to deliver on the commitments in the Corporate Plan and will be published each Spring.

Both the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, place specific duties on objective setting and reporting. The retrospective aspect of this duty involves undertaking an annual self- assessment. This is one of the most significant documents produced by the Council that is used to demonstrate effective accountability and transparency. During the latter part of 2019/20, the Council undertook a self-assessment process which was published in October 2019.

The Annual Report presents a position statement on the Council's performance over the past year in delivering the Council's priorities (also referred to as the Part 2 Improvement Plan). Self-assessment of performance is an important way for the Council to identify the capacity and ability to deliver continuous improvement by identifying areas of strength and those requiring particular focus in coming years. The challenges and achievements from the Annual Report are used to identify the actions required to be undertaken in future years and progressed through the service plans. The assessment undertaken as part the 2018/19 Annual report informed the "forward-looking" element of this which is documented in the 2019/20 Well-being Objectives and Improvement Plan Part 1 which (along with service plans and associated targets) was published in April 2019.

The "forward-looking" element for 2020/21 will be documented slightly differently to previous years, as 2020/21 marks the beginning of a new Corporate Plan. Therefore, the document previously called the Improvement Plan Part 1 will now be presented as the Annual Delivery Plan (which along with service plans and associated targets) was approved in May 2020 and published in June 2020. This is later than usual, due to the lockdown introduced because of the COVID 19 pandemic which has meant that it has not been possible for the ADP to be considered by any of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and Council in March/April 2020 as originally planned.

**Principle C –
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Monthly reviews and monitoring of corporate improvement priorities are undertaken to ensure actions are completed, reported and closed down in a timely manner. An annual review of regulatory recommendations / proposals for improvement also form part of the Council's Annual Self-assessment process enabling the Council the ability to demonstrate progress on implementation of these in line with the Council's duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and Audit Committee receives a six months progress report.

The Insight Board continues to enhance and streamline the corporate governance arrangements relating to integrated planning activities and reports to CMT and Cabinet.

This focused approach is contributing to more integrated business planning practices, staff development opportunities, continued promotion of "One Council" working and has significantly reduced the overall amount of officer time spent in meetings.

With corporate improvement and performance a key aspect of the remit of the Board, monthly reviews and monitoring of corporate improvement priorities are undertaken to ensure actions are completed, reported and closed down in a timely manner.

Membership of the Insight Board has recently been reviewed and a new approach has been developed to enhance monitoring and reporting of progress against key priorities. The new action tracker also includes a range of actions agreed in response to the simple changes developed and promoted by the Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner.

An annual review of regulatory recommendations / proposals for improvement also forms part of the Council's annual self-assessment process enabling the Council to demonstrate progress on implementation of these in line with the Council's duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and Audit Committee receives a six months progress report.

**Principle C –
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The Council has a successful track record of delivering a balanced budget made possible by its robust approach to managing finances which incorporates an effective corporate framework for financial planning, financial management and control. These arrangements enable the Council to regularly review and challenge financial performance and monitor spend against budgets.

The Council's revenue position at year end was breakeven, after a transfer into reserves of £2.5m however there were areas experiencing financial pressures mainly in Education and Waste Management. £53.1m was spent through the capital programme during 2019/20, with £20.6m relating to Schools.

The Council received an increase in its revenue settlement from Welsh Government for 2020/21 of 4.29% (after adjustments). This was the first increase for many years. The Council was therefore able to set an efficiency target of £247k for 2020/21 which is significantly lower than the targets that had been set in previous years, with no reduction in funding for Schools.

The financial challenges facing the Council could still be significant depending on future settlements from Welsh Government. This has become more uncertain due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the position will need to be assessed when further information becomes available. The possibility of future reductions in funding needs to be considered.

**Principle D –
Determining the
interventions
necessary to
optimise the
achievement of
the intended
outcomes**

The Council achieves its intended outcomes by providing a mixture of legal, regulatory and practical interventions. Determining the right mix of these courses of action is a critically important strategic choice that the Council has to make to ensure intended outcomes are achieved. The Council must have robust decision-making mechanisms in place to ensure that their defined outcomes can be achieved in a way that provides the best trade-off between the various types of resource inputs while still enabling effective and efficient operations. The Council recognises that informed decision making is a fundamental part of good governance. Decision makers receive objective analysis of a variety of options indicating how intended outcomes would be achieved together with the risks associated with those options. In determining how services and other courses of action should be planned and delivered the Council is increasingly engaging with internal and external stakeholders.

The Council fosters effective relationships, collaborative working and contractual arrangements with other public, private and voluntary organisations in delivering services that meet the needs of the local community as stated in the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Council is a major partner in the Public Services Board, with the Leader chairing this partnership which works to deliver the Vale Well-being Plan. The Regional Integrated Health and Social Care Partnership brings together the two regional local authorities with health and others, to focus on delivering joined-up services across health, social care and housing.

One of the Council's key strengths is its ability to explore opportunities to work in partnership with others and the Council has developed a robust approach to collaborative working to enable it to maximise benefits for its customers and residents. The Council has developed and hosts a number of regional services, including the Shared Regulatory Service and the Regional Internal Audit Service.

**Principle D –
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The Council aims to deliver high quality services that provide value for money and which are aligned to the needs and priorities of the local community. The Council is committed to ensuring that the relevance of the Well-being Objectives in the new Corporate Plan 2020-25 continue to reflect the priorities for the Vale of Glamorgan. The Council will also ensure that its new Well-being Objectives in the Corporate Plan are aligned to the Public Service Board’s Wellbeing Objectives and priorities.

The Council undertakes annual Service Planning through which regular self-assessment takes place as a means of achieving continuous improvement across both corporate and service-related functions. This informs and is informed by the Corporate Plan, the Council’s Improvement Plan as well as a Performance Audit Programme which is produced in conjunction with the Council’s external regulators.

The Council’s vision and priorities as set out in the Corporate Plan 2016/20 were reflected in Service Plans and informed the development of detailed actions and performance targets which contribute towards the achievement of Corporate Plan priorities. Scrutiny Committees review the Service Plans on a quarterly basis, including the achievement of set targets and actions through performance reporting.

**Principle E –
Developing the
entity’s capacity,
including the
capability of its
leadership and
the individuals
within it.**

The Council aims to ensure that members and officers of the Council have the skills, knowledge and capacity they need to discharge their responsibilities and recognises the value of well-trained and competent people in effective service delivery. All new members and staff undertake an induction to familiarise them with protocols, procedures, values and aims of the Council. There is a Member Development Strategy, which provides a framework for supporting elected members in the numerous roles that they are required to undertake both within, and outside, the Council.

The Corporate Management structure consists of the Managing Director, three Corporate Directors, the Council’s Monitoring Officer, the Council’s Section 151 Officer, the Head of Human Resources and the Head of Performance and Development. The roles and responsibility of Corporate Officers are defined in agreed job profiles and set out in the Council’s Constitution. Chief Officer Performance is reviewed on an annual basis in accordance with the Chief Officer Appraisal process.

The Managing Director is responsible and accountable to the Council for all aspects of management including promoting sound governance, providing quality information / support to inform decision-making and scrutiny, supporting other statutory officers, and building relationships with all Councillors. Members are offered training on key issues as the need arises. In December 2018, the first Member Development Expo was held to which all 47 members were invited. The next session of the Expo series was held in July 2019, focusing on the theme of navigating future change. The session provided:

- An update on the key issues facing the authority;
- An overview of the Reshaping Services Programme, including the staff engagement activities associate with “Big Conversation 2”.
- An introduction to the development of the new Corporate Plan for 2020-2025.
- An opportunity to discuss Reshaping Services projects underway within directorates
- The opportunity to feed into and influence the development of the next phase of the Reshaping Services programme.

**Principle E –
Developing the
entity’s capacity,
including the
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the individuals
within it.**

Through the established workforce planning and staff engagement processes, the Council continues to maintain a highly skilled and resilient workforce that is responsive to the constantly changing environment. The Council has continued to make good progress in delivering the 15 commitments within the Staff Charter, which details the expectations of staff and managers in a “reshaped” working environment.

During 2019/20 the Core Competency Framework was launched for all staff and the Management Competency Framework for all Managers and Leaders, linked to the annual #Itsaboutme process and providing a framework around behavioural expectations. The #Itsaboutme process also moved online for staff with IT access, allowing for easier reporting and monitoring.

In line with the Management Competency Framework the bi-annual Management Development Sessions for Chief Officers and all managers continue to be delivered.

In 2019/20 the onboarding and induction process has been enhanced, engaging with new staff from the time they sign contracts, ensuring a more robust and shorter time to competency. The ongoing development of the online learning catalogue provides all staff with the opportunity to take charge of their development.

One of the Council’s key strengths has been the ability to explore opportunities to work in partnership with others and the Council has developed a robust approach to collaborative working. In addition, Cabinet receives a quarterly report providing an update on progress being made with strategic collaborative working initiatives. The Council continues to work proactively with a range of partners to transform how services will be delivered as well as considering new and innovative models of delivery in line with the Council’s Reshaping agenda.

The Council has developed and implemented a protocol for managing information and the interface between Cabinet and Scrutiny.

**Principle F –
Managing risks
and performance
through robust
internal control
and strong public
financial
management.**

The Council, which has overall responsibility for directing and controlling the organisation, has approved an Executive / Scrutiny model of decision making. Full Council sets the policy and budget framework. Within this framework, the majority of key decisions are made by the Cabinet (as Executive). Cabinet meetings are open to the public (except where items are exempt under the Access to Information Act). The decision-making process is scrutinised by five Scrutiny Committees, which support the work of the Cabinet as Executive and the Council as a whole.

Risk management is an important feature of the Council's governance arrangements and it is recognised that successful risk management relies on a corporate approach to ensure that all risks are identified and managed systematically and consistently across the Council. The Risk Management Strategy sets out the approach to the identification of and responses to strategic and operational risks. The Council's Risk Management Strategy also provides essential input to the determination of Council priorities, targets and objectives. The Risk Management Strategy was last presented to the Council's Audit Committee on 1st May 2018 but will be refreshed during 2020 to reflect the new Corporate Plan 2020/25.

The Council has a well-established risk management process in place for corporate and service risks. This has been further enhanced by the Council's focused corporate approach to integrated planning via the Insight Board and revised corporate performance reporting arrangements. The Insight Board provides a strategic focus for the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and the Well-being of Future Generations Act, ensuring that the seven well-being goals and our five ways of working are grounded in our robust corporate governance and providing an integrated approach to corporate planning. The Council has continued to hone its approach to corporate risk management using a reporting format which reflects the different needs of the various audiences. This provides a holistic overview of all risks to enable the identification of any trends or themes within the risks impacting on the Council, as well as the robust management of individual risks by risk owners, the Insight Board and Audit Committee.

A more recent development with Corporate Risk Management has been the horizon scanning of emerging risks which are outlined within the Corporate Risk Summary Report. This supports the role of the Insight Board, Corporate Management Team, Cabinet and Audit Committee by providing them with an overview of any issues associated with emerging risks and provides an opportunity to scrutinise potential risks in greater detail.

**Principle F –
Managing risks
and performance
through robust
internal control
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financial
management.**

In addition to this, the Corporate Risk Summary Report also highlights a small number of risks on the register each quarter where a more detailed brief of the issues are highlighted. This gives both officers and Members a spotlight for discussion where issues surrounding those risks can prompt more detailed scrutiny and analysis and enable the identification of any further action where required. The monitoring of service risks identified through our service planning process continue to be monitored quarterly to enable risk owners to reduce, eliminate and manage their service risks.

The Council has put in place robust performance management arrangements, to monitor the Corporate Plan 2016/20. Currently, reports are presented in a focused and accessible way that highlights performance by areas of exception thus promoting more effective scrutiny. During 2019/20 there has also been a greater emphasis on strengthening our performance reporting arrangements by further developing our partnering approach to enhance performance accountability in service areas to ensure success.

During 2019/20 work also commenced on developing a new approach to monitoring and reporting performance against the new Corporate Plan 2020-25 to provide a reflection of the holistic and cross-cutting nature of the plan and a strong evidence base for how we are contributing to the new wellbeing objectives, the Plan's new priorities and the national Well-being Goals.

The new Corporate Plan and Annual Delivery Plan is intended to provide an opportunity to further enhance the scrutiny function. For example, alternative forms of scrutiny and a focus on case studies and cross-cutting themes will be developed during the course of the first year of the Plan. This will take forward the work already underway in response to the report from the Wales Audit Office which identified areas for development for the Council in relation to the Scrutiny function. An action plan has been devised and agreed by the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee - Corporate Performance and Resources with work now being undertaken to address the issues and ongoing monitoring taking place

Working with Sponsoring Directors and Elected Members via a member led working group a new style of performance reporting was developed. It is anticipated that this new style of reporting aligned to the Corporate Plan 2020/25 will be presented for use during 2020.

**Principle F –
Managing risks
and performance
through robust
internal control
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financial
management.**

The Head of Finance / Section 151 Officer is responsible for the proper administration of all aspects of the Council's financial affairs including ensuring appropriate advice is given to Cabinet and the Council on all financial matters. The Council's system of internal financial control is based on a framework of financial / contract procedure rules and notes, regular management information, administrative procedures (including segregation of duties), management supervision and a system of delegation of accountability.

The financial management of the Council is conducted in accordance with all relevant legislation and its Constitution. Through the Council's focus on integrated planning it has been able to take a more holistic approach to corporate planning arrangements that include risk management, financial and asset management, workforce planning, performance management and information management. As a consequence, corporate arrangements are now better co-ordinated and complementary to each other which puts the Council in a stronger position to secure continuous improvement. The Council has a successful track record of delivering a balanced budget made possible by its robust approach to managing finances which incorporates an effective corporate framework for financial planning, financial management and control.

The Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan clearly links to the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan to ensure they are financially viable and that the MTFP is closely aligned with the business planning cycle.

The Council has a proactive, holistic approach to tackling fraud, bribery, theft, corruption and crime, as an integral part of protecting public finances, safeguarding assets, and delivering services effectively and sustainably. A new policy was agreed during 2018/2019. The Council has been successful in investigating matches arising from the National Fraud Initiative.

**Principle G –
Implementing
good practices in
transparency,
reporting, and
audit, to deliver
effective
accountability**

The Council remains committed to implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability. This is demonstrated by:

- Mechanisms which are in place for reporting progress against key regulatory recommendations / improvement proposals via the Insight Board, Audit Committee, all Scrutiny committees and Cabinet.
- All Committees have clear Terms of Reference and work programme;
- Procedures are in place for sign-off of Cabinet Reports ensuring legal and financial implications have been appropriately assessed and are consistent with corporate policy

The Council reports at least annually on performance, value for money and stewardship of resources to stakeholders in a timely and understandable way.

The Internal Audit Service is a key means of assurance. From 1 April 2019 the Council hosted an expanded Regional Internal Audit Shared Service (RIASS) partnering with Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Merthyr Tydfil Councils. This has operated effectively throughout the year and the service operated to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The Audit Committee approved the Internal Audit Charter for the Regional Internal Audit Shared Service in April 2019. The Audit Committee also approve the Internal Audit Annual Plan and receives progress updates at every Audit Committee.

The Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control for 2019-20 is:

“Reasonable Assurance”

The opinion states that, based on the work completed by the Regional Internal Audit Shared Service for the financial year and the contribution to the Audit Plan made by the SWAP Internal Audit Services, no significant cross-cutting control issues have been identified that would impact on the Council's overall control environment. The weaknesses that have been identified are service specific.

The recommendations made to improve the overall control environment have been accepted and are being/will be implemented.

**Principle G –
Implementing
good practices in
transparency,
reporting, and
audit, to deliver
effective
accountability**

An issue for the Regional Internal Audit Shared Service has been the number of vacant posts carried by the Service. As a consequence, SWAP Internal Audit Services were commissioned to help address the shortfall and deliver elements of the Plan. The COVID 19 outbreak has had little impact on the delivery of the internal audit plan for 2019/20 as relevant testing in all but one review had been completed prior to the lockdown coming into force allowing final reports to be issued. The Internal Audit coverage was still sufficient for the Head of Audit to be able to give an opinion.

A new staffing structure has been developed for the Service and it is planned to commence recruitment when the restrictions around the pandemic allow.

The Council responds to the findings and recommendations of Internal Audit, External Audit and other inspection bodies. The Audit Committee is integral to overseeing independent and objective assurance and monitoring improvements in internal control and governance.

Review of Effectiveness

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. The review of the effectiveness is informed by the work of Internal Audit and Chief Officers within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control environment, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

The review of effectiveness is informed by:

- ✓ The Annual Internal Audit Assurance opinion, as provided by the Regional Internal Audit Shared Service
- ✓ The Audit Committee provides the focus for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control.
- ✓ The Cabinet (as Executive) is responsible for considering overall financial and performance management and receive comprehensive reports on a regular basis. The Cabinet is also responsible for the decisions and for initiating corrective action in relation to risk and internal control issues.
- ✓ The Scrutiny function which holds the Cabinet to account.

The Council's Senior Managers, together with Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors have completed assurance statements for each of their areas of control, acknowledging responsibility for risk management and internal control, and identifying any significant governance issues if appropriate.

The Council's Monitoring Officer has a legal responsibility to look into matters of potential unlawfulness within the Council.

The Standards Committee has monitored standards of conduct

During 2019/2020 the Council received 525 complaints, 68% of which were dealt with within corporate target timescales. The percentage of complaints being resolved at Stage 1 was 93.3% and 6.7% at Stage 2.

The Performance Framework has operated effectively during the year. Monitoring of key areas of performance has been regularly provided to Cabinet and Scrutiny.

Review of Effectiveness

In relation to Corporate Health, the Council continues to perform well in the context of supporting Council services in the delivery of the Corporate Plan Well-being Outcomes. The improved approach to Integrated Planning, via the established Insight Board, is enabling services to effectively deliver transformational change in line with the Reshaping Services agenda and the Council's duties under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Integrated Planning enables the Council to take a more holistic approach to their corporate planning arrangements that include risk management, financial management, workforce planning, performance management and information management. The Council has developed a robust approach to collaborative working, has a successful track record of delivering a balance budget and generally performing well in performance indicators across all service areas.

During the latter part of 2019/20 an annual self-assessment of the Council's performance over the past year in delivering the Council's priorities relating to the Corporate Plan was undertaken as part of the Annual Report 2018/19. This Annual Report is a fundamental document and a key source of information supporting this Annual Governance Statement.

The Council is dedicated to ensuring that its resources are utilised in the most effective and efficient manner whilst delivering continuous improvement. The Council introduced a strategy for transformational change called "Reshaping Services". Through effective management of the Council's Reshaping Services Programme, transformational change is being delivered in line with the Council's Corporate well-being outcomes and duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. In 2019/20, the Reshaping Services Programme had a total savings target of £2.56m of the total Council savings required of £3.02m. The Reshaping Services Programme forecast end of year position is that savings of £1.923m will be delivered which represents 75% of the Programme's target.

Review of Effectiveness

Insight Board
considers corporate priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan including:
Financial Planning;
Workforce planning,
Partnership & collaborations;
Communication;
Risk and Asset Management, and
Governance.

Working Groups / Projects
Staff Engagement Forum;
Information Governance Group;
Space Project;
Income Generation;
Digital Champions Programme;
Housing Forums;

Governance
The Code of Corporate Governance has been updated to reflect the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016.

Key Developments
Implementation of the Management Competency Framework;
Revised staff appraisal #itsaboutme;
New report formats designed to make it easier to assess overall progress in each Well-being objective.

During the year, core financial and administrative systems were reviewed by Internal Audit either through specific reviews (e.g. Council Tax, Treasury Management, Creditor Payments etc.) or generally in the reviews undertaken in respect of directorate systems.

Review of Effectiveness

The Council's External Auditors have advised that their work for the 2019/20 Financial Year is well on track and that they have completed the majority of their planning work and interim testing. This includes:

- A high level assurance of the financial systems and the wider control environment – this work is designed to detect any material risk to the accounts;
- Testing of the income and expenditure transactions made by the Council during 2019/20.

Whilst their work is continuing, to-date, there are no significant issues arising from their work.

In addition, the Managing Director, each of the Corporate Directors, the Monitoring Officer and the Council's Section 151 Officer have completed an Annual Assurance Statement for 2019/20, as have Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors. All their responses have been considered when forming the Head of Audit's annual opinion. Furthermore, the detailed Council's Annual Self-Assessment dated March 2019 has been a key reference document to support the assurance statement.

Code of Corporate Governance (COCG)

The Council's COCG has been reviewed, amended and approved to reflect the 2016 Governance Framework.

Statement of Accounts 2018/19

In September 2019, the Council's External Auditor (WAO) provided the Council with an unqualified opinion on the Council's accounts within their Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

Internal Audit Opinion

Based on the assurance, work undertaken by Internal Audit, the Head of Audit has provided an overall **reasonable assurance opinion** on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's control environment.

Review of Effectiveness

Of the 62 opinions given by Internal Audit during 2019/20:

- 49 (79%) have been closed with either substantial or reasonable assurance opinion levels.
- 13 (21%) of the assignments were given an opinion of limited assurance due to weaknesses in the internal control environment .

The areas where control issues were identified during the year have tended to relate to specific service areas rather than an across the board breakdown in controls. The relevant managers have agreed with and are working toward implementing the recommendations made to address the weaknesses identified. Internal Audit will follow up on these issues during 2020-21 to ensure that progress is being made.

The COVID 19 outbreak has had little impact on the delivery of the internal audit plan for 2019/20 as relevant testing in all but one review had been completed prior to the lockdown coming into force allowing final reports to be issued.

As well as financial work, the WAO also completed performance audits on various services of the Council. These provide useful and timely feedback to the Council through which an action plan is agreed with the WAO for any matters to be addressed.

The Head of Audit's annual opinion report will be presented to the Council's next planned Audit Committee.

The Head of Audit provided an overall opinion of “**Reasonable Assurance**” on the Council's **internal control environment** based on the work undertaken during the year by Internal Audit.

In addition, by considering other sources of assurance e.g. the responses to the Annual Assurance Statements completed by Corporate Management Team for 2019/20, the Annual Assurance Statements completed by Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors and the detail as contained within the Council's Annual Self-Assessment. the Head of Audit provided an opinion of “**Reasonable Assurance**” on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of **governance, risk management and control**.

**Significant
Governance
Issues**

COVID 19. The initial impact of the COVID 19 pandemic is detailed earlier in this document and the Council has worked hard to ensure that services to the most vulnerable people in our neighbourhoods has continued. Decisions have had to be made quickly. Whilst the governance arrangements have been agreed for this period, they will need to be reviewed as the Council moves to the recovery stage of managing this emergency. From a financial perspective, whilst funding has been made available by Welsh Government to support the Authority, it is anticipated that the financial impact on the Council will continue throughout 2020/21 and beyond. The funding streams are only in place for the first three months of 2020/21 and work will be done within the Council to determine the full impact of this but it remains an area of risk for the Authority.

One of the main issues raised and highlighted over the last few years has been the ability of the Council to carry on meeting its service objectives and delivering positive outcomes for its customers and clients in the light of continued reductions in Welsh Government Funding. The Council has faced unprecedented challenges due to year on year reductions in Council funding and the impact this has on the services delivered. At the same time the Council is dealing with increasing expectations and demands on services. The Council has already identified approaching £55 million in savings since 2010 yet, the challenges continue. The settlement for the Council for 2020/21 was a 4.9% increase which has been the first year of growth for a number of years. This enabled the Council to agree a budget that started to address some of the significant funding deficits that services had been reporting. The efficiency requirements for 2020/21 are only £247,000. However, the COVID 19 pandemic will impact on the Council's financial position during 2020/21 and the financial position will be monitored very closely.

**Significant
Governance
Issues**

The Council underwent a period of political change at the end of 2018/2019 which resulted in a change in overall administration. A new Leader and Cabinet was put in place at the AGM on 20th May 2019 and the AGM did not take place in May 2020 due to COVID 19.

**Approval of the
Annual
Governance
Statement
2019-20**

Good governance is about running things properly. It is the means by which the Council shows it is taking decisions for the good of the people of the area, in a fair, equitable and open way. It also requires standards of behaviour that support good decision making – collective and individual integrity, openness and honesty. It is the foundation for the delivery of good quality services that meet local people’s needs. It is fundamental to showing public money is well spent. Without good governance councils will struggle to improve services.

From the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken we have reached the opinion that reasonable assurance can be given that the governance arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

We can confirm to the best of our knowledge and belief, this statement provides an accurate and fair view.

D.R. Thomas
Managing Director
Date:

N. Moore
Leader of the Council
Date: