

Meeting of:	Governance and Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 21 July 2025
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Draft Annual Governance Statement 2024-25
Purpose of Report:	To submit the draft Annual Governance Statement for review and to recommend its adoption by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive
Report Owner:	Head of Finance, Section 151 Officer
Responsible Officer:	Head of Finance, Section 151 Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Strategic Leadership Team
Policy Framework:	The proposals in this report are in accordance with the policy framework and budget
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council, as part of its arrangements for corporate governance, is required to undertake an annual review of internal control and governance; the resulting Annual Governance Statement (AGS) must be included within the Statement of Accounts. The AGS explains how the Council has complied with the terms of the Framework for the year ended 31st March 2025. It outlines what has changed, improved or been developed in year and identifies any areas for improvement to further strengthen the sound governance arrangements already in place. The AGS 2024-25 concludes that from the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken, 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. 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 2024-25. 	

Recommendations

1. That the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2024-25 be recommended for adoption by the Leader and Chief Executive.

Reasons for Recommendations

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 2025.

1. Background

- 1.1 Local authorities are accountable to the public and other stakeholders for ensuring they have a sound system of governance. The Council is required to demonstrate it has good and effective governance arrangements in place in line with the 7 principles of the CIPFA and SOLACE Framework - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 This Annual Governance Statement (AGS) explains how the Council has complied with the terms of the Framework for the year ended 31st March 2025. It outlines what has changed, improved or developed in year and identifies any areas for improvement to further strengthen the sound governance arrangements already in place.
- 1.4 The Council's Code of Corporate Governance forms part of its Constitution and details the governance framework arrangements it has in place to support the AGS.
- 1.5 The AGS will be included within the annual Statement of Accounts.
- 1.6 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 has embedded the five ways of working across its activities and in delivering its priorities from Vale 2030 it will maximise its 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.
- 2.2** 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.
- 2.3** A draft AGS has already been shared with Audit Wales but since sharing it the Corporate Complaints information has been updated to reflect the 2024-25 figures. These and any other changes will be shared with Audit Wales during the process.
- 2.4** The draft AGS for the 2024-25 financial year is attached at **Appendix A** and explains how the Council has complied with the 7 principles of the CIPFA and SOLACE Framework - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016 for the year ended 31st March 2025.
- 2.5** The AGS reviews 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 by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.
- 2.6** The actions taken to address the significant governance identified in the previous AGS, are included. These were financial pressure, management of major IT implementations and workforce pressure. In addition, the emerging risk of the social care system is included.
- 2.7** The AGS concludes that from the review, of the Council's governance arrangements and their effectiveness for 2024-25, no additional significant governance issues were identified. However, for each Principle, areas for development have been identified and listed with the AGS and these will be developed and improved on moving into 2025-26.
- 2.8** The draft 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 2023-24.

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. Climate Change and Nature Implications

4.1 None as a consequence of this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

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

Employment

5.2 None as a direct consequence of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.3 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.

6. Background Papers

Appendix A - Annual Governance Statement 2024-25



VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/25

DRAFT 30TH June 2025

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Executive Summary

The Council is required to demonstrate it has good and effective governance arrangements in place in line with the “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework” (CIPFA/SOLACE, 2016). This Annual Governance Statement (AGS) explains how the Council has complied with the terms of this Framework for the year ended 31st March 2025. It outlines what has changed, improved or developed in year and identifies any areas for improvement to further strengthen the sound governance arrangements already in place. The Council’s Code of Corporate Governance forms part of its Constitution and details the governance framework arrangements it has in place to support the AGS.

Generally, there are good governance arrangements at the Vale of Glamorgan Council. There is demonstrable evidence of compliance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016) and how the Council meets the requirements of Part 2 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2014.

Appropriate policies and procedures are in place to support good governance and a significant amount of relevant information is published on the Council’s website demonstrating transparency and openness.

Appropriate action was taken to address the Significant Governance Issues identified in 2023/24 (page 36) in order to improve the overall governance arrangements, although some issues are ongoing, are impacted by external influences and not totally within the control or capacity of the Council. Many of the issues identified are as a result of financial pressures on the Council.

Governance and risk issues for 2024/25 have been identified (page 37) and action will be taken to either improve the arrangements or minimise the risk during 2025/26.

What did we do well in terms of governance in 2024/25?

A Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) was undertaken in November 2024. This was a constructive exercise timed to fit with the development of the new Corporate Plan (Vale 2030). The PPA report and response were approved by Council in March 2025 and considered alongside the budget for 2025/26 and the new Corporate Plan for 2025-30, Vale 2030. The report has already led to a number of changes and action is underway to take forward the recommendations of the PPA report.

The Panel concluded that overall, the Council exercises its functions effectively... and there were no identified areas of concern, and that from the evidence they heard and within the current high levels of service demand and financial pressures faced by all local authorities across Wales the Council is using its resources effectively and efficiently. The Panel also concluded that the Council has effective governance arrangements in place but there are areas which could be further developed.

Key recommendations were made by the Panel in relation to the Council’s Governance arrangements, including:

- Reviewing and revising the cycle of formal democratic meetings and formal reporting requirements, exploring ways to better engage members in more proactive and cross chamber collaboration – in both formal and informal ways including reviewing the effectiveness of online meetings.
- Reviewing the balance between the internal corporate demands placed on members and their role as representatives of their constituents to deliver the Council's vision of place.
- Using the strong local politics as a force for good, whilst ensuring civility in public life is promoted and kept front and centre to encourage respectful and constructive debate including online and in-person meetings.
- Enhancing the effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny arrangements, specifically meetings, by assessing current practices to identify opportunities for improvement to make them more effective.

In response to this, the Council has undertaken a significant amount of engagement with elected Member, and embarked upon a journey of ["Reshaping Scrutiny"](#), which was agreed by Full Council in 2024/25 to be implemented in the 2025/26 municipal year.

What do we need to improve?

From a review of the Council's governance arrangements and their effectiveness for 2024/25, no significant governance issues were identified. However, for each Principle we have identified further areas we would like to develop and improve on moving into 2025/26; for ease of reference and to monitor their progress, they have been collated and shown at Appendix B.

The Council continues to operate in a challenging environment financially and in terms of service demands and expectations.

Introduction

The Council is required to demonstrate it has good and effective governance arrangements in place in line with the “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework” (CIPFA/SOLACE, 2016). This Annual Governance Statement (AGS) explains how the Council has complied with the terms of this Framework for the year ended 31st March 2025. It outlines what has changed, improved or developed in year and identifies any areas for improvement to further strengthen the sound governance arrangements already in place. The Council’s Code of Corporate Governance forms part of its Constitution and details the governance framework arrangements it has in place to support the AGS. The AGS is included within the annual Statement of Accounts.

The Council promotes a culture rooted in shared values, ethical principles, and good conduct. This culture shapes the implementation of the long-term vision and influences the day-to-day actions of members and officers. Its values are Ambitious, Open, Proud, Together.

The behaviour of elected members and officers is regulated by codes of conduct, which include a mandate for declaring any conflicts of interest. The roles and responsibilities of are outlined in procedural standing orders, delegation schemes, and contract and financial procedure rules. These Codes of Conduct set high ethical standards to ensure public business is conducted with fairness and integrity.

The Council’s Code of Conduct for Elected Members is based on the seven principles of public life. This leads to good, effective governance.

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 2025 and up to the date of the approval of the Statement of Accounts and is a continuous process.

The key internal controls that were in place in 2024/25 are shown at Appendix A.

The Council’s Code of Corporate Governance is the framework which 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.

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 it takes account of how its decisions may impact on future generations. The Council has embedded the five ways of working across its activities and in delivering its priorities from Vale 2030 it will maximise its 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. This is reflective of the duties under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act (2021), Part Six, also. The 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 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 7 principles of the CIPFA and SOLACE Framework - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016 are set below:

Governance Principles:

- 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.

The Council's detailed framework of its governance arrangements are set out in the Code of Corporate Governance, which forms part of our Constitution and is available on our website at [Code of Corporate Governance](#); in accordance with Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016.

The overarching governance framework in place for the Council is shown at Fig.1.

The important relationship between the Governance Principles and Internal Controls are shown at Fig.2.

Fig. 1.

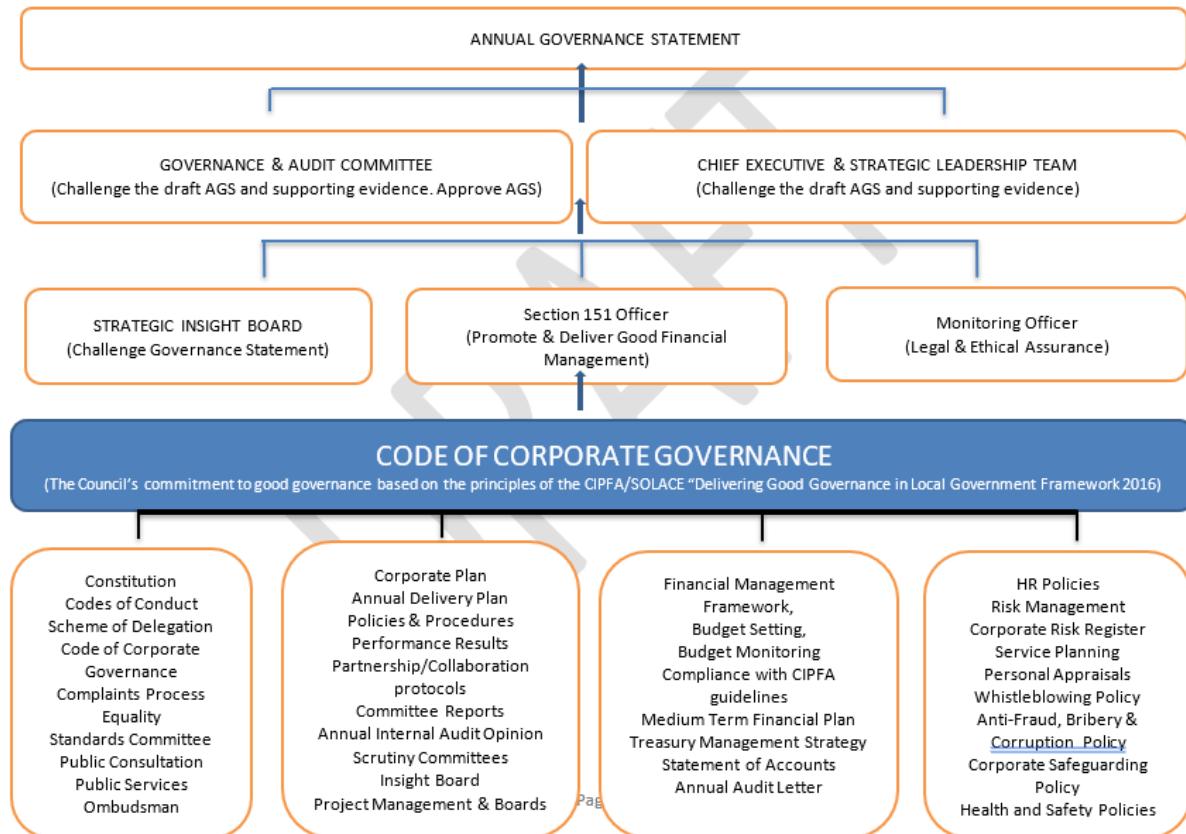
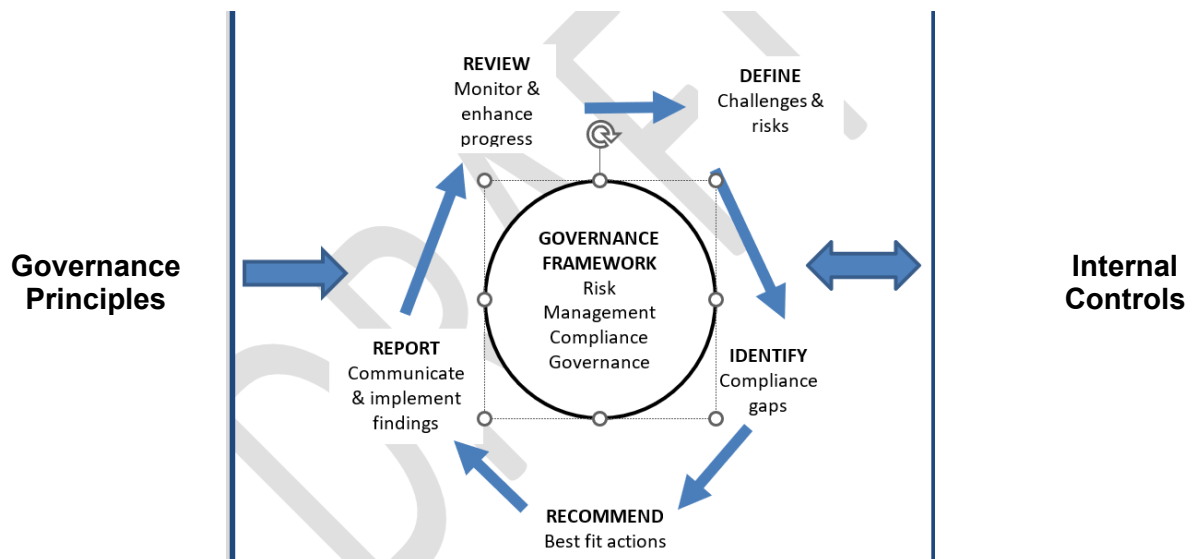


Fig.2

Relationship Between Governance Principles and Internal Controls



The following sets out for each of the Principles, the changes, improvements and developments in year and areas for improvement in 2025/26,

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law	
Changes, improvements or developments in year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council promotes shared values. The roles and responsibilities of Elected Members and officers, including adherence to Codes of Conduct and managing personal and conflict of interests are outlined in the Council's Constitution. • The Standards Committee, chaired by an independent co-opted member, oversees ethical standards, Member training, and complaints, while the Monitoring Officer (Head of Legal and Democratic Services) has statutory duties to report any illegal activities or maladministration. • During 2024/25, the Standards Committee met six times, reviewed reports with political Group Leaders, approved its Annual Report, and reviewed reports from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and the Adjudication Panel for Wales. • The Committee also received updates on the Civility in Public Life work programme and reinstated Independent Members' observation meetings of TCCs. • Members of the Standards Committee observed Full Council meetings on a cyclical basis and fed back to Members accordingly surrounding standards within the Council Chamber. • The Monitoring Officer received six complaints about Member conduct; four involved community councils and two involved Vale of Glamorgan Council members. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales found no evidence of a breach in two cases, is investigating one, considering another for investigation, and referred the remaining two to the Standards Committee for hearings in July and December.
Areas for Improvement 2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Local Dispute Resolution Procedure, procedures for hearing complaints, and refresher training, as well as section 19 of the Council's Constitution. • The Standards Committee will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – aim to broaden its representation – enhance Independent Members' observations of TCC meetings – improve access to e-learning and member briefings

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for Member development and induction ahead of the May 2027 elections, alongside a review of the Council's Constitution and the Whistleblowing Policy, with more outcome-focused reports to the G&A Committee. • Undertake further observations of Town and Community Council meetings across the Vale of Glamorgan to promote high standards of conduct by Town and Community Councillors.
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Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	
Changes, improvements or developments in year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is committed to understanding and learning from the views of the public. 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 has a Public Participation Strategy which explains how we will encourage and facilitate public participation in the Vale of Glamorgan. It also sets out how we will be diverse in our engagement methods, using social media platforms, community connectors and face-to-face engagement, to take an integrated approach to public participation. Our strategy seeks to provide as many stakeholders as possible the opportunity to participate and become involved in the decision-making process, enabling people to shape what we do and how we do it. • The Public Participation Strategy was approved in May 2022 and is split into three key workstreams which are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reach. Maximising opportunities for as many voices as possible to be heard, using variety of mechanisms. – Involve. Targeting activity to ensure different communities are offered different opportunities to participate. – Represent. Making sure the views gathered are presented to decision makers at the right level, and that elected members are effective advocates for participation and have skills and tools to fulfil their role in increasing involvement.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has always sought to develop the methods used to engage with stakeholders in a way that is accessible and convenient, seen during the year relating to the Corporate Plan and Place Making Plans. • The Council has also expanded its use of social media to include social media polls and encouraging residents to leave 'comments' expressing their views. Data from both the polls and comment section have then been used in reports such as the budget. We have also used social media to promote Council meetings, consultations, alongside bespoke videos to promote greater understanding of the issues in question. • The Council hosts face to-face engagement sessions where possible and provides consultation documents online. • Members of the public can ask questions at Full Council, with a number of questions being answered during the year. • The Council enables members of the public to speak at Scrutiny meetings and Planning Committee, to provide Members with the public's viewpoint surrounding any initiatives being undertaken. They can also make written representations to Committee. These opportunities were undertaken numerous times throughout the year, with a notable example being Environment and Regeneration Committee (28th January 2025). • Youth Voice is embedded within Scrutiny arrangements surrounding Learning and Skills, as representatives of Vale Youth Forum, regularly attended Learning and Skills Scrutiny Committee as a co-opted member and participated in discussions. • Since 2018 the Council has carried out Staff Surveys every two years, providing all staff with the opportunity to engage and rate on several factors, also providing the opportunity to pulse check staff wellbeing. Following the publication of the results, a corporate action plan is created to make improvements. • Staff Wellbeing Champions and Mental Health champions continued working together to organise virtual activities to support staff wellbeing, working in collaboration with the Health & Safety and occupational health teams to continue to develop the wellbeing offering. 2024/25 saw further development of stress risk assessments to support the mental wellbeing of our staff to stay in work and reduce absenteeism. This has been enhanced through the involvement of
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	<p>the Learning Café, which has seen the development of a number of key workstreams in 2024/25, including Wellbeing. This cross-functional group leads on a number of wellbeing themes across the year, including physical, emotional and financial wellbeing. In 2024/25 learning opportunities and courses included financial wellbeing, how to budget and plan, digital tools to support wellbeing and a wider campaign for Stress Awareness Month.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A revised reward offering 'My Vale Rewards', which included an employee wellbeing hub, was developed in 2024/25. • The Council also has a number of staff networks with whom Corporate Resources colleagues collaborates closely with to shape policy changes and foster an open dialogue. 2024/25 saw the newly formed group 'Abl', supporting employees with disabilities. Feedback is sought on matters impacting various groups within the council, ensuring an inclusive and responsive approach and the creation of inclusive workspaces where all staff feel safe to contribute, celebrate our differences and be the best the Council can be. 2024 has included the review of the Special Leave Policy, Recruitment and Retention Strategy and Hybrid Working arrangements. • Decisions made by the Council and/or Cabinet are documented in the public domain along with reasons for those decisions. • "Let's Talk about life in the Vale" was a survey exercise run in partnership with Data Cymru to understand residents' experiences of life in the Vale of Glamorgan and identify their priorities to inform future service delivery. This has featured in developing the Council's Financial Strategy and budget decision making. There were 4,009 responses to the survey. • The Council's Public Participation Strategy is now being refreshed and its actions reprioritised in line with the survey results. • The Council has engaged with Members across the Chamber on a frequent basis in shaping proposals surrounding the future of the Scrutiny functions, ensuring that all Members across the political divide had the opportunity to contribute to the Council's future direction.
Areas for Improvement 2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The e-petitions function is being reviewed in 2025/26 as to how best raise awareness, as the number of petitions received by the Council is minimal.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council regularly engages Members beyond Cabinet within its decision making and is seeking to enhance this further during 2025/26 because of the Reshaping Scrutiny workstream and revised Members' Communication Strategy. • As the Council seeks to embed Task and Finish as part of its new Scrutiny arrangements, it is exploring alternative means to encourage participation from the wider public. • Improvement in the completion rates of our performance appraisal process, a wider review on the reason for the decline in completion in 2024/25 will take place. • The Let's Talk About Life in the Vale survey will run again, making use of the standard question set (with some local additions) in collaboration with Data Cymru.
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Principle C : Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits	
Changes, improvements or developments in year	<p>Defining outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Corporate Plan (Vale 2030) is the Council's key strategic document and sets out how the Council's vision of Strong Communities with a Bright Future will be delivered. • Work was undertaken through 2024/25 to develop Vale 2030 which was approved by Council in March 2025. Vale 2030 details outcomes that will be delivered against each of the five new well-being objectives and this has framed conversations throughout the development of Vale 2030 focusing on what the Council is working to achieve and the outcomes that will be delivered. This builds on recent work with Audit Wales on more outcome focused performance reports and this approach has continued to be developed through the year in the 2024/25 performance reports and new Directorate Plans for 2025/26. <p>Sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits</p> <p><u>Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) 2024/25</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ADP 2024/25 was informed by what residents, partners, elected members and staff told us through various engagement and consultation activities including our residents' survey, Let's Talk. The ADP reflected the findings from the work of our regulators, our Annual Self-

	<p>Assessment Reports and the Council's performance in the national context. The 2024/25 ADP set out actions to deliver the final year of the Corporate Plan and detailed three critical challenges for the year. The critical challenges were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Organisational Resilience (our people, finances, assets and public engagement) – Cost of Living Crisis – Climate and Nature Emergencies <p><u>Developing new Objectives for Vale 2030</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vale 2030 is a further evolution of the previous Corporate Plan and the ADP. Achievements from the previous plan, local needs and available resources and the views of residents, partners, and staff informed the new Plan. The Council has embraced the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFGA), and Vale 2030 has been framed around five new Well-being Objectives that are aligned to the well-being goals of the WFGA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creating great places to live, work and visit – Respecting and celebrating the environment – Giving everyone a good start in life – Supporting and protecting those who need us – Being the best Council we can be • Vale 2030 is underpinned by a set of enabling strategies including the Asset Management Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan, People Strategy, Workforce Plan, Digital Strategy, Strategic Equalities Plan, Performance Management Framework and Risk Management Strategy and Register. • Throughout 2024/25 there was a strong emphasis on partnership working. Work was undertaken with Cwmpas to engage with external partners and council officers to explore how work could be enhanced to deliver better outcomes and respond to the Audit Wales recommendations; this has led to a strong emphasis on tackling poverty and the inclusion of a Partnership Statement in Vale 2030. Partners have been engaged throughout the development of Vale 2030 and there has been support for its direction. How the Council works in partnership
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	<p>was also explored as part of the PPA and led to a stronger emphasis in the final plan on the importance of partnership working to successfully deliver the outcomes detailed in Vale 2030.</p> <p><u>Annual Self-Assessment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act (2021) and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, place specific duties on objective setting, self-assessment and performance reporting. The Annual Self-Assessment Report is one of the most significant documents produced by the Council that is used to demonstrate effective accountability and transparency. • The Annual Self-Assessment Report presents a position statement on the Council's performance retrospectively over the past year in delivering the Council's priorities as set out in the ADP aligned to the Corporate Plan. The Council's self-assessment judgements and areas for improvement are subject to internal peer challenge via the Leader, Chief Executive, cabinet portfolio holders and relevant Scrutiny Chairs, followed by a moderation exercise to ensure consistency in approach. External challenge is sought via engagement with staff and key partners including the public. This ensures that improvement areas are reflective of emerging insight. Vale 2030 will be supported by annual Directorate Plans and associated performance targets as well as a published Annual Statement. • The draft Annual Self-Assessment 2024/25 will be considered by Cabinet in July 2025 before consultation is undertaken with the public and relevant committees including Governance and Audit Committee. It comprises three main judgements as listed below and has reached an initial judgement of 'good' against all three areas. This may change following consultation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How well is the Council performing? – How well is the Council using its resources? – How effective is the Council's governance? • The Annual Self-Assessment Report for the period 2024/25 represents the final year of the Corporate Plan 2020-2025 and will be published in Autumn 2025. <p><u>Panel Performance Assessment</u></p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E) requires the Council to arrange and respond to an independent Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) at least once during an electoral cycle. The PPA was undertaken in November 2024 by an independent peer panel which was supported by the WLGA. The Panel considered how well is the Council performing, how well is it using its resources and how effective is the Council's governance. The Panel concluded that overall, the Council exercises its functions effectively and there were no identified areas of concern, and that from the evidence they heard and within the current high levels of service demand and financial pressures faced by all local authorities across Wales the Council is using its resources effectively and efficiently. The Panel also concluded that the Council has effective governance arrangements in place but there are areas which could be further developed. • The Panel were also asked to look specifically at whether the Council's approach to developing the Corporate Plan and the associated performance arrangements set an ambitious but realistic vision for the Vale and enable the Council to demonstrate delivery of key outcomes. The PPA and the subsequent report are positive, and work is already underway in response to the recommendations. In their report the Panel describe the Corporate Plan as "ambitious" and that "the Council has been astute in timing the PPA to assist in the development of the draft corporate plan". The Panel conclude the Council "is at an early stage of demonstrating outcomes" and "whilst staff are behind the ambition in the Corporate Plan, some expressed concern about the capacity to deliver it. • The Panel made four recommendations relating to: Planning for Place, Signalling Change, building on existing strong partnerships and governance and using resources effectively. In response, a number of changes were made to Vale 2030 to help with communicating the vision and ambition and to emphasise the importance of partnership working. A Communications Plan was developed to support publication of the Corporate Plan both internally and externally including a stakeholder event with partners hosted by the Leader and Chief Executive. This formed part of the Signalling Change Plan which has been developed and includes activities around member development, Learning Cafes, performance reporting and scrutiny. Changes have also been made to scrutiny committees in response to the report and aligned to Vale 2030.
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	<p><u>Strategic Insight Board</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Strategic Insight Board is a cross-directorate management Board which provides a strategic focus on the key corporate issues being taken forward by the organisation and is chaired by the Chief Executive. The Board meets monthly, and its work supports integrated planning across the organisation. One of the roles of the Board is to track regulatory recommendations and ensure there is appropriate discussion and monitoring of our response to recommendations in local and national reports. The work of the Board is set out in a forward programme and reports into SLT. <p><u>Programmes and Projects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support the work of Cabinet and SLT and to take forward key projects within the organisation a number of boards exist. Some boards are Council wide and include elected Members. Examples of some of the established boards are the Information Governance Board, the Project Zero Board, the Barry Partnership, School Investment Board, Strategic Housing Board, Waste Management Project Board and the Families First Management Board. Some of these boards will be partnership boards and others will consist of Council officers. Cabinet and SLT form the Reshaping Board which maintains operational oversight of the delivery of the overall Reshaping Programme. A number of supporting programme boards and project teams have been established for specific workstreams and they will report to the Reshaping Board. Where projects are of particular interest to Scrutiny Committees, some have established work or groups or undertaken task and finish scrutiny to understand an area further and seek to develop a proposal or function via recommendations to Cabinet. Examples of this during 2024/25 include a Task and Finish group related to procurement to review the Council's approach (reflecting upon recently introduced legislation).
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	<p><u>Finance/Budget</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 published its Financial Strategy in July 2024 reviewing the Medium Term Financial Plan Assumptions as well as setting out the approach to budget setting alongside the Reshaping Transformation programme and development of the new Corporate Plan – Vale 2030. The Reshaping Prospectus was approved by Cabinet in October 2024 which is key to the move to sustainable finances and a fully populated five year Medium Term Financial Plan. • A further refresh of assumptions and update on funding was provided to Cabinet in November, relatively late due to the timing of the new Government’s first budget Statement. • The Council’s HRA Business Plan and Rent Setting report were subject to scrutiny ahead of being recommended through to Council by Cabinet in the first week of January. Despite the tight timeframe, the scrutiny process was judged to having added value. • The Council’s Budget for Consultation came forward to Cabinet in mid January allowing a four week period for public consultation and scrutiny before Cabinet reviewed the draft budget in late February for Council approval on 10 March ahead of the statutory deadline. The consultation was more meaningful than in previous years with Equality Impact Assessments in place for all of the savings proposals. The draft/final budget proposals included a clear vision for how the various Reshaping themes would combine to balance the budget over the medium term. • There was regular monitoring of the Council’s financial position in year through quarterly monitoring to Cabinet and Scrutiny and management through the Savings Tracker developed ahead of the start of the financial year. There were overspends in schools and social care and some shortfall in the delivery of savings.
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	<p>Improvements made in 2024/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of Vale 2030 involved partners and staff and was informed by public engagement and consultation and the PPA. • Detailed outcomes included in Vale 2030 set out what people can expect to be delivered. • Stronger emphasis on partnership working throughout Vale 2030, including a dedicated Partnership Statement. • A draft People Strategy has been developed and will be consulted on in the summer 2025 for ratification in the autumn. • Portfolio of Reshaping projects and programme management arrangements have been agreed. • A central Reshaping Transformation Team has been established in Corporate Resources to support services to deliver projects. • Guidance regarding terms of reference for Boards has been issued. • Equality Impact Assessments were in place for all budget proposals for public consultation and scrutiny. • A vision for the delivery of sustainable finances has been established through the Reshaping Programme's five themes.
<p>Areas for Improvement 2025/26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing communications about Vale 2030 as part of the Signalling Change plan and the development of a new Communications Strategy to raise awareness with residents, staff and partners about the priorities detailed in the new Corporate Plan. • Stronger emphasis on outcomes when reporting progress through 2025/26 both at Officer and Member level, and making connections with the new Communications Strategy. • Promotion of the partnership statement to partners and officers.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the approach to the Annual Self Assessment to reflect feedback and align to Vale 2030 and Directorate Plans. • Review of the Strategic Insight Board in light of developments across the Council, including through Reshaping. • It is anticipated that changes to Scrutiny ways of working will see an increase in the amount of task and finish activity during 2025/26. • Early budget decision making to ensure full delivery of savings programmes.
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Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes	
Changes, improvements or developments in year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 more. <p><u>Working in Partnership</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council fosters effective relationships, partnership and 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 Vale 2030. The Section 16 Forum is a good example of the Council working with partners to improve outcomes and commissioning arrangements within social care. • The Council participates in number of key partnerships including the Public Services Board and the Regional Partnership Board. An internal officer group within the Council ensures that

	<p>connections are made across these partnerships and information shared. In 2024/25 this group commenced work to map partnership activity, consider effectiveness and how the different partnerships could assist in delivering Vale 2030 priorities. Cabinet receives a six-monthly report on Strategic Collaborations to maintain oversight of these and there is a Strategic Partnerships Group of Officers in operation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the Council's key strengths is its ability to explore opportunities to work in partnership with others and it 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 several regional services, including the Shared Regulatory Service, Regional Adoption Service and the Regional Internal Audit Service. <p><u>Performance Management</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Corporate Plan continue to reflect the priorities for the Vale of Glamorgan. • The Annual Performance Calendar of activities is the Council's key means of complying with the WBFG Act and the Local Government & Election Act to demonstrate achievement of our Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives and contribution to the national well-being goals. The completion of the key activities outlined in the 2024/25 Annual Performance Calendar culminated in the approval and publication the Annual Delivery Plan and Service Plans in March 2024 for the period 2024/25 and the Council's third Self-Assessment under the LG&E Act (published in January 2025). • Engagement work with Elected Members, key partners, other stakeholders and council officers throughout the year (as part of a planned programme of collaboration) continues to help shape the key plans and activities within the performance calendar to further strengthen our approach to self-assessment and the evidence base/insight for identifying our improvement areas and ensuring appropriate and timely action is taken to address them. This process is reviewed annually at the start of the year to identify further enhancements to the approach that will further
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	<p>strengthen the extent to which the Council is meeting the performance requirements and contributing to the national well-being goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Throughout the life of the 2020-25 Corporate Plan the Council has undertaken annual Service Planning that is aligned to the commitments set out in the Annual Delivery Plan (ADP) 2024/25 and Corporate Plan. Service Plans have been the delivery arm of the ADP specific to each service area. Service plans include detailed actions and performance targets that contribute towards the achievement of Corporate Plan and ADP priorities and set out how resources will be used to support this work. Throughout 2024/25 Scrutiny Committees have reviewed the progress of Service Plans on a quarterly basis, including the achievement of set targets and actions. Performance has been presented as a singular report, by Well-being Objectives; this integrated and cross-cutting approach has enabled a more holistic approach to monitoring. Regular briefing sessions with Members on performance management enables them to further develop their skills and understanding, and to shape how performance is reported. During 2024/25, as part of the development of Vale 2030 performance arrangements have been reviewed; the above approach has been revised to further strengthen the arrangements that will support delivery of the commitments in Vale 2030. Additionally, performance reports are being streamlined, making them sharper and more outcome focussed. Work is underway with Members to develop a thematic scrutiny committee structure to further enhance accountability and transparency. <p>Improvements made in 2024/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replacement of the ADP and 15 service plans with an Annual Statement and 5 Directorate Plans for 2025/26.
Areas for Improvement 2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of new performance reports aligned to Vale 2030 and the new Directorate Plans and new scrutiny arrangements and reflecting Audit Wales recommendations regarding service user perspective, more outcome focused reports and alignment with financial information.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From April 2025/26, an Annual Statement will replace the current Annual Delivery Plan outlining some of the key outcomes to be achieved in the coming year informed by the ASA, resident voice and political priorities. Strategic annual Directorate Plans will replace existing Service Plans. • Progress work associated with the Partnership Statement in the delivery of Vale 2030.
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Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within	
Changes, improvements or developments in year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Strategic Leadership Team consists of the Chief Executive, five Corporate Directors, the Monitoring Officer, the Section 151 Officer, the Head of Digital and the Head of Human Resources. 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, this was reviewed for 2023, and further embedded considering feedback in 2024, with a revised process introducing greater touchpoints and more robust methods of reviewing performance including peer-to-peer review and 360° feedback. • The Chief Executive 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. • 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. Following the Local Government Elections Act 2021 a full comprehensive induction programme for Members, Co-opted Members and Lay Members was put in place with a number of elements of the training determined as mandatory training by the Council e.g. Code of Conduct. Work to review these arrangements commenced in parallel with Reshaping Scrutiny activity.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Member Development Strategy provides a framework for supporting Members in the numerous roles that they are required to undertake both within, and outside, the Council. This programme identifies a range of topics to support Members in their development based upon feedback received from Members during a Learning Needs Self-Assessment Exercise. This exercise resulted in a revised Development Programme being agreed in February 2025. Members are also able to reflect upon their training and knowledge needs during the personal development review process. • The Council operates an Executive decision-making system, with Scrutiny Committees being a key avenue of informing policy development within the Council. During 2024/25, the Council operated with five Committees, with their outcomes reported via a Scrutiny Committee Annual Report. Alongside this, the Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs group also regularly met to share best practice. • Alongside the Scrutiny Chair and Vice-Chairs Group, all Members were engaged during 2024/25 to co-produce work to enhance the scrutiny function, entitled Reshaping Scrutiny. This work was commissioned to address feedback, such as Audit Wales recommendations, resident and Member feedback, and most notably, the Council's Performance Panel Assessment. Changes were agreed by Full Council in April 2025. • Changes being introduced to enhance the role and functioning of Scrutiny will become effective in 2025/26. • Members continue to receive refresher training and support (including Co-opted / Lay Members and observers on Committees) on the use of virtual / hybrid meeting software. Democratic Services officers continue to support all Members and the public who are registered to speak on the use of the virtual /hybrid meeting platforms as required prior to and during meetings. A trouble shooting / quick guide and useful aide memoire has been made available to all Members and Co-opted/ Lay Members. • The Training following the Local Government Elections 2022 included both Mandatory and non-Mandatory training, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Finance - Induction Event
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethics and Standards - Equality and Diversity - Corporate Safeguarding - Rules of Debate - GDPR – e-learning on IDEV - Chairing skills – if a Chair of a Committee - Specific Training in respect of a Member’s role on a Committee e.g. Planning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cabinet receives an annual 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 transformational change agenda. • 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. • During 2024/25 the OD and Learning Team have taken further steps to support the development of the Council’s people by improving the scope and capacity of the Online Learning System, iDev. In 2023 the Learning Café was revamped and relaunched to provide more opportunities for staff to engage with development opportunities and focus on areas they are interested in developing further, this has continued in 2024 with the development of nine key channels for staff to engage, share best practice and develop these include Project Zero, Community Power, Digital, Leadership and Management, Wellbeing and Project Transformation. This year the Learning Café has held further ‘Ask the Chief Executive’ along with wider engagement sessions around the development of the new Corporate Plan (Vale 2030) and the Reshaping Programme. • The Council’s blended Onboarding and Induction Programme, continues to develop, providing all new starters with key information to ensure they feel welcomed and valued in the Council, whilst ensuring they have the core knowledge to reach competency. All new starters are enrolled from day one in the Council, ensuring they have access to mandatory learning, key information about the Council and access to sign up to our half day in-person induction session, “Welcome to the Vale”.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management development sessions were also held in the Autumn 2024 and Spring 2025 focusing on the development of senior staff and those with line management responsibility. The sessions focused on the development of Vale 2030 and the Signalling Change Plan, including information relating to new Tone of Voice Guidance and the draft 'Brilliant Basics Charter'. • Focus has also been given to enhancing the capability and competency of the Council through wider learning and training initiatives, such as Data Protection Bobi and Cyber security in addition to more robust safeguarding practice, leading to the development of further mechanisms to improve safeguarding awareness training across the Council.
Areas for Improvement 2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effectiveness of the revised Scrutiny arrangements will be evaluated at the end of the 2025/26 municipal year. • Further development of digital competence for Members and officers. • A Council wide Skills Mapping exercise as part of the new People Strategy and Target Operating Model, looking at the requirement for skills of the future, gaps identified and pathway to achieve and close the gaps. • Delivery of the Signalling Change Plan.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	
Changes, improvements or developments in year	Managing risk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk management is an important feature of the Council's governance arrangements, and 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 and provides essential input to the determination of Council priorities, targets and objectives. During 2024/25, the Council reviewed and revised its Risk Management Strategy as part of the development of Vale 2030.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a well-established risk management process in place for corporate and service risks which clarifies the process for escalation of operational risks to reflect the Council's risk appetite. The move to Directorate Plans in 2025/26 will ensure a focus on higher level directorate contributions on corporate themes such as risk and reduce duplication within its Plan. Consideration of corporate themes at DMT level will promote a more integrated and outcome focussed approach to working both within and across directorates. • A key feature of corporate risk management continues to be horizon scanning of emerging risks which are outlined quarterly in a Corporate Risk Summary Report. This supports the role of the Strategic Insight Board, Strategic Leadership Team, Cabinet and Governance 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. • The Corporate Risk Summary Report identifies a small number of risks on the register each quarter where a more detailed brief of the issues is highlighted. This gives both officers and Members a spotlight for discussion prompting more detailed scrutiny and analysis and enabling the identification of any further action where required. Quarterly monitoring of service risks identified through the service planning process enables risk owners to reduce, eliminate and manage their service risks. As part of quarterly monitoring emerging areas of concern specific to each scrutiny committee's remit is detailed enabling Members to have ongoing oversight of emerging issues, challenges and risk associated with well-being objectives. • Assurance is sought annually on a sample of corporate risks and corporate risk management oversight arrangements as part of the Annual Internal Audit Plan. Reasonable and Substantial audit opinions have been provided on our corporate risks and our risk management oversight arrangements over the past four years. A Substantial opinion was issued by Internal Audit during 2024/25 following implementation of the revised strategy. The review highlighted that the Council's corporate risks continue to be appropriately managed with progress effectively reported. During the audit, strengths and areas of good practice were identified as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The Corporate Risk Management Policy 2024 to 2028 clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of boards, committees, and staff at different levels. – Oversight and Governance at both a corporate level and individual risk level was in place.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is evidence of challenge from Governance and Audit Committee being responded to. - No recommendations were made indicating that the Council has sound systems/processes in place in terms of how those risks were being managed. <p>Managing performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are robust performance management arrangements, to monitor the Corporate Plan and annual commitments as outlined in the Annual Delivery Plan 2024/25. Reports are presented in a focused and accessible way that highlights performance by areas of exception thus promoting more effective scrutiny. Members can also influence the information they receive to support their scrutiny roles through Member workshops aligned to the annual performance calendar. Following a proof of concept using the existing Corporate Performance Framework of measures and actions, Power BI has been further developed to support performance reporting and feedback from Members over the year is informing future enhancements. • A self-reflective approach is taken by Directorates to reviewing their performance as part of corporate quarterly performance monitoring arrangements for the ADP culminating with an end of year position statement that dovetails with the Annual Directorate Self-Assessment. Key insights on performance, achievements, challenges and areas for improvement provide an evidence base that informs the Council's Annual Self-Assessment findings. That approach is reviewed every year to ensure the Council continues to improve and embed good practice across all service areas. The success of this approach has helped shape the move from service plans to directorate plans to provide more synergy and integrated activity within Directorates and opportunity for reflection and outcome focused thinking. <p>Robust internal control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has approved an Executive/Scrutiny model of decision making. Full Council sets the policy and budget framework. Within this framework, most key decisions are made by the Cabinet. Cabinet meetings are open to the public. The decision-making process was scrutinised by five Scrutiny Committees, which support the work of the Cabinet as Executive and the Council as a whole.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the key functions of internal Audit is to ensure there are robust and effective controls in place across the Council's governance, risk management and internal control arrangements. The Internal Audit Plan 2024/25 included broad coverage of key systems and services provided across all Directorates. As noted below, the overall level of assurance was <i>Reasonable</i>; no major issues identified. <p>Managing data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council's Digital Strategy 2023-28 has four key themes: Community and Involvement, Organisation and Processes, Digital People and Skills and Data and Insight. The Strategy sets out how digital progress will be monitored, through a series of indicators with regular progress reports being taken to the Digital Board and the Strategic Insight Board. In response to the Digital Strategy, a Data Strategy has been agreed to further support the development of data derived insight and evidence-based decision making. The Data Strategy was approved in June 2024 and sets out four key themes: Embedding a Data Culture, Taking Forward Insight and Analytics, Ensuring Robust Data Governance and Management and Designing Infrastructure for Data. Against these themes, commitments are set out to ensure delivery of the Data Strategy. Digital Innovation is one of the Reshaping themes and is key to how the Council transforms services and will include activity around payments as well as artificial intelligence. <p>Strong public financial management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Head of Finance/Section 151 Officer is responsible for the proper administration of all aspects of the Council's financial affairs. The Council's system of internal financial control is based on a framework of the Financial and Contract Procedure Rules in the Constitution. The Council has an integrated approach to its Corporate and Financial Planning and wider management. This has been particularly prevalent in 2024/25 with the development of Vale 2030 alongside the Reshaping Programme. the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan. The Council's self assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code was taken to Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee in April 2024. There was full compliance but the assessment also identified potential areas for further improvement via an action plan and reviewed progress to date on previous actions; it was felt that good progress had been made in demonstrating collective responsibility and transparency in budget setting. Building on the
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	<p>feedback from the previous Financial Management Code a review by Internal Audit was undertaken of elements provide an independent view.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. The Council investigates matches arising from the National Fraud Initiative and has a Fraud Strategy and Framework in place. • Fraud policies were revised and updated in 2024/25 and taken through Governance & Audit Committee and Cabinet. <p>Improvements made in 2024/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revised risk register and corporate risk strategy. • Identification of risks at Directorate level leading to a more focused and integrated approach to risk management. • Introduction of Directorate Plans. • Use of Power BI within performance reports.
Areas for Improvement 2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further integration of risks within Directorate Plans to reduce duplication. • Development of performance reporting in line with Vale 2030, feedback form Members and new scrutiny arrangements. • Development of ongoing Member briefings to address short term training needs alongside to compliment wider, more strategic Member Development Programme. • Delivery of the digital theme of Reshaping, aligned with the further use of data to inform strategic decision making.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability																												
Changes, improvements or developments in year	Complaints	<ul style="list-style-type: none">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 Governance and Audit Committee.																										
		<table><tr><th>Corporate Complaints:</th><th>2022/23</th><th>2023/24</th><th>2024/25</th></tr><tr><td>Complaints received</td><td>532</td><td>835</td><td>944</td></tr><tr><td>Resolved at Stage 1</td><td>94.7%</td><td>91%</td><td>95.3%</td></tr><tr><td>Complaints received by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales</td><td>49</td><td>77</td><td>63</td></tr><tr><td>Investigated by PSOW</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>0</td></tr><tr><td>Resolved through the early resolution process</td><td>15</td><td>19</td><td>16</td></tr></table>			Corporate Complaints:	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Complaints received	532	835	944	Resolved at Stage 1	94.7%	91%	95.3%	Complaints received by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales	49	77	63	Investigated by PSOW	0	0	0	Resolved through the early resolution process	15	19	16
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		Resolved through the early resolution process	15	19	16																							
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council remains committed to implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability. This is demonstrated by:																										
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Mechanisms which are in place for reporting progress against key regulatory recommendations / improvement proposals via the Strategic Insight Board, Governance & Audit Committee, all Scrutiny Committees, and Cabinet.																										
<ul style="list-style-type: none">All Committees have clear Terms of Reference and work programmes.																												
<ul style="list-style-type: none">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.																												
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Council reports at least annually on performance, value for money and stewardship of resources to stakeholders in a timely and understandable way.																												
<ul style="list-style-type: none">The Internal Audit Service is a key means of assurance. Since the 1st April 2019 the Council has hosted a Regional Internal Audit Service (RIAS). This has operated effectively throughout																												

	<p>the year and the service operated in compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). The Governance & Audit Committee reviewed the RIAS Internal Audit Charter and approved the 2024/25 Internal Audit Annual Plan in June 2024. Progress against the 2024/25 plan was reported quarterly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan outlined the assignments to be carried out to enable the Head of Internal Audit to form an annual opinion of the Council's overall control environment including, governance, risk management and internal control. • The work completed by the RIAS for the financial year was sufficient for the Head of Audit to be able to give an annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control for 2024/25: <p>“Reasonable Assurance”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opinion states that, based on the work completed by the RIAS, 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 • Of the 53 opinions issued by Internal Audit during 2024/25: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 50 (94%) were finalised with either <i>Substantial</i> or <i>Reasonable Assurance</i> opinion levels. – 3 (6%) of the assignments were given an opinion of <i>Limited Assurance</i>. • 85% of the Internal Audit Plan had been achieved against a target of 80%. • The recommendations made to improve governance, risk management and control have been accepted and are at various stages of implementation. • Every year schools not subject to an audit are sent a control risk self-assessment and a governance assurance statement by Internal Audit. For 2024/25 the return rate was 100%; the Headteacher and Chair of Governors of each school confirmed they were managing risks effectively, satisfied that statutory obligations have been met and that the overall governance arrangements of the school are satisfactory. • <i>Limited Assurance</i> audit opinions will be followed up in 2025/26.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council responds to the findings and recommendations of Internal Audit, External Audit and other inspection bodies. The Governance & Audit Committee is integral to overseeing independent and objective assurance and monitoring improvements in internal control and governance.
Areas for Improvement 2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the governance cycle for Audit Wales reports to minimise duplication between Scrutiny Committees and Governance and Audit Committee.

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 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 Service
- ✓ The Governance & Audit Committee provides the focus for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control and risk.
- ✓ 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 Monitoring Officer has a legal responsibility to look into matters of potential unlawfulness within the Council.

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

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 approach to Integrated Planning, via the Strategic Insight Board, is enabling services to effectively deliver transformational change in line with the Reshaping 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 service areas.

The Council's Annual Self-Assessment under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 informed the development of the Council's Annual Delivery Plan for 2024/25. The Council's Annual performance calendar (which includes key activities such as the Quarterly ADP Performance reports, the Annual Directorate Self-Assessments including Internal Peer Challenge and moderation of the DSAs) and the Council Annual Self-Assessment Report for the

period 2024/25 are significant documents used to demonstrate effective accountability and transparency and are key sources 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. During the year, a new approach to transformational change via the Reshaping Programme was agreed. This builds upon previous experience, including earlier Reshaping Services projects and the lessons learnt from the pandemic. Reshaping will be a core component of the Council's revenue budget in the coming years and to tackle critical issues for citizens and the organisation.

Panel Performance Assessment

The Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E) requires the Council to arrange and respond to an independent Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) at least once during an electoral cycle. The PPA was undertaken in November 2024 by an independent peer panel which was supported by the WLGA. The Panel considered how well is the Council performing, how well is it using its resources and how effective is the Council's governance. The Panel concluded that overall, the Council exercises its functions effectively and there were no identified areas of concern, and that from the evidence they heard and within the current high levels of service demand and financial pressures faced by all local authorities across Wales the Council is using its resources effectively and efficiently. The Panel also concluded that the Council has effective governance arrangements in place but there are areas which could be further developed.

Governance

This Annual Governance Statement and the Council's Code of Corporate Governance complies with the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016.

During the year, core financial and administrative systems were reviewed by Internal Audit through specific reviews across all directorates.

The Council's external auditors, Audit Wales, have advised that they have completed most of their planning work for the 2024/25 financial year. They have confirmed that there are no significant issues arising from their work to date.

Statement of Accounts 2023/24

In December 2024 the Council's External Auditor, Audit Wales, 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, governance arrangements and risk management process in place; an opinion of **Substantial Assurance** on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of risk management arrangements was given.

The Head of Audit's annual opinion report was presented to the Council's Governance & Audit Committee on 23rd June 2025. 94% of audit opinions were either *Substantial* or *Reasonable Assurance*. No significant or material concerns were identified through the work of Internal Audit.

Significant Governance Issues 2023/24

Action Taken / Planned

General Financial Position

The Council's finances will continue to be a significant issue beyond the current financial year and into the medium term. Whilst inflation is finally coming under control the heightened levels have persisted much longer than anticipated and the prolonged higher bank of England Base Rate has been a real drag on the economy. The prospects for improved final settlements for local settlements going forward are poor.

The Council's budget is coming under pressure in a number of key areas as well as the constraints on funding.

- Homelessness – the higher levels of homelessness driven by the change of regulations during Covid persist and despite the Council's various strategies in this area including the HRA development programme, the financial pressures are likely to continue.
- School deficits – the Council's schools remain collectively in surplus which is no longer the case across Wales. However, not all of the schools' pressures were addressed in the 2024/25 budget and agreeing balanced budget on a school by school basis is requiring significant energy from the Learning & Skills Team.
- Ongoing ALN/social care pressures – there was reduced intervention and engagement during Covid and the financial impact of this had been built into the 2023/24 and 2024/25 budgets but it remains an area of concern.

Management of Major IT implementations

The Council's Oracle Fusion implementation was delivered and the system is working well. However, it's cost was far in excess of the original business case. A comprehensive lessons learnt report was taken to Scrutiny, Governance & Audit Committee and Cabinet across spring 2024 and action plan has been developed and support improved project delivery in the future.

Workforce

Workforce continues to be a key risk for the Council and as such a multi-faceted approach has continued to be adopted. This includes policy and strategy development, for example the reward strategy and work underway in relation to the currently being developed People Strategy, Reshaping Programme, and recruitment and attraction strategy, in addition to the operational elements of absence and attendance management, with more focus on staff wellbeing.

Work continues to develop and evolve the Council's wellbeing strategy, enhanced stress risk assessment approach and the current review of attendance management.

In addition, in accordance with the Council's Learning Plan a refreshed Learning Café approach has been introduced, with a growing membership as part of a commitment to the development of a learning culture, succession plans and growth of apprenticeship opportunities.

Emerging issues

There were a number of emerging issues not picked up earlier in this Statement.

Social Care system – the platform for the Council's social care system is shortly to move out of support and there have been delays at Welsh Government level to agree the successor systems and funding. The Council is working at a regional level on a solution, but this is at financial risk to the Council with there still being no clarity on Government support. This is recognised on the Council's Corporate Risk Register.

Significant Governance Issues 2024/25

From a review of the Council's governance arrangements and their effectiveness for 2024/25, no significant governance issues were identified. However, for each Principle, areas for development have been identified and will be developed and improved on moving into 2025/26; for ease of reference and to monitor their progress, they have been collated and shown at Appendix B.

The Council continues to operate in a tough, challenging financial environment and in terms of service demands and expectations.

Conclusion

The 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement has comprehensively been updated to clearly demonstrate the Council continues to have good and effective governance arrangements in place and complies with its own Code of Corporate Governance across all 7 Principles. Examples have been given confirming it is in line with the "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework" (CIPFA/SOLACE, 2016), Part 2 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2014, Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

Approval of the Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

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	L. Burnett
<i>Chief Executive</i>	<i>Leader of the Council</i>
Date:	Date:

Internal Controls

Below are the key internal controls that were in place in 2024/25 some of these have subsequently been amended as part of work associated with Vale 2030 our new Corporate Plan and in response to the Panel Performance Assessment.

Leadership, Culture and Planning

Organisational priorities and outcomes
Corporate Plan & Annual Delivery Plan
Directorate and Service/Team plans
Performance Management Framework
Medium term financial plan

Policies and Procedures

Constitution, Codes of Conduct
Anti-fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy, Whistleblowing Policy
HR and OD Policies/Procedures, Corporate Safeguarding Policy, Health and Safety Policies and Procedures, Risk Management Strategy

People, Knowledge, Finance, Assets

Robust HR, Payroll and H&S practices
Information governance
Performance monitoring and improvement
Member Development Programme
Financial management and reporting
Ethical & legal practices

Scrutiny and Transparency

Information management requests including Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information (EIR) requests
Complaints procedure
Reports considered by Legal and Finance experts
Equality impact assessments

Partnership Working

Partnership Statement

Further Areas for Improvement in 2025/26

Principle A: <i>Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Local Dispute Resolution Procedure, procedures for hearing complaints, and refresher training, as well as section 19 of the Council's Constitution. • The Standards Committee will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – aim to broaden its representation – enhance Independent Members' observations of TCC meetings – improve access to e-learning and member briefings • Preparations for Member development and induction ahead of the May 2027 elections will begin, alongside a review of the Council's Constitution and the Whistleblowing Policy, with more outcome-focused reports to the G&A Committee. • Undertake further observations of Town and Community Council meetings across the Vale of Glamorgan to promote high standards of conduct by Town and Community Councillors.
Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The e-petitions function is being reviewed in 2025/26 as to how best raise awareness, as the number of petitions received by the Council is minimal. • The Council regularly engages members beyond Cabinet within its decision making and is seeking to enhance this further during 2025/26 because of the Reshaping Scrutiny workstream and revised Members Communication Strategy. • As the Council seeks to embed Task and Finish as part of its new Scrutiny arrangements, it is exploring alternative means to encourage participation from the wider public. • Improvement in the completion rates of our performance appraisal process, a wider review on the reason for the decline in completion in 2024/25 will take place.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

- Ongoing communications about Vale 2030 as part of the Signalling Change Programme to raise awareness with all partners about priorities detailed in the new Corporate Plan
- Stronger emphasis on outcomes when reporting progress through 2025/26
- Promotion of the partnership statement to partners and officers
- Review of the approach to the Annual Self Assessment to reflect feedback and align to Vale 2030 and Directorate Plans
- Review of the Strategic Insight Board
- It is anticipated that changes to Scrutiny ways of working will see an increase in the amount of task and finish activity during 2025/26
- Early budget decision making to ensure full delivery of savings programmes

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

- Development of new performance reports aligned to Vale 2030 and the new Directorate Plans and new scrutiny arrangements and reflecting Audit Wales recommendations regarding service user perspective, more outcome focused reports and alignment with financial information.
- From April 2025/26, an annual statement will replace the current Annual Delivery Plan outlining some of the key outcomes to be achieved in the coming year informed by the ASA, resident voice and political priorities. Strategic annual Directorate Plans will replace existing Service Plans.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The effectiveness of the revised Scrutiny arrangements will be evaluated at the end of the 2025/26 municipal year.• Further development of digital competence• A Council wide Skills Mapping exercise as part of the new People Strategy and Target Operating Model, looking at the requirement for skills of the future, gaps identified and pathway to achieve and close the gaps.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Further integration of risks within Directorate Plans to reduce duplication• Development of performance reporting in line with Vale 2030, feedback form members and new scrutiny arrangements• Development of ongoing Member briefings to address short term training needs alongside to compliment wider, more strategic Member Development Programme.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the governance cycle for Audit Wales reports to minimise duplication between Scrutiny Committees and Governance and Audit Committee.