

To: Members of the Governance and  
Audit Committee

Date: 3 June 2021

Direct Dial: 01824706204

e-mail: democratic@denbighshire.gov.uk

Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE** to be held at **9.30 am** on **WEDNESDAY, 9 JUNE 2021** in **BY VIDEO CONFERENCE**.

Yours sincerely

G. Williams  
Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services

## **AGENDA**

### **1 APOLOGIES**

### **2 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

To appoint a Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee for the ensuring year.

### **3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR**

To appoint a Vice Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee for the ensuring year.

### **4 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (Pages 5 - 6)**

Members to declare any personal or prejudicial interests in any business identified to be considered at this meeting.

### **5 URGENT MATTERS**

Notice of items, which in the opinion of the Chair should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**6 MINUTES (Pages 7 - 16)**

To receive the minutes of the Governance and Audit Committee meeting held on 28 April 2021 (copy enclosed).

**7 RIPA INSPECTION 2021 (Pages 17 - 22)**

To receive a report (copy enclosed) on the inspection carried out by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) in relation to the Authorities activities carried out under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

**8 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2020 TO 2021 (Pages 23 - 150)**

To receive a report (copy enclosed) to accompany the council's draft Annual Performance Review for 2020 to 2021 (attached at appendix 1), providing our quarterly and end of year analysis, and highlighting specific projects and action for delivery in 2021 to 2022.

**9 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020-21 (Pages 151 - 180)**

To consider a report by the Chief Internal Auditor (copy enclosed) on the Annual Governance Statement 2020-21.

**10 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2020-21 (Pages 181 - 210)**

To consider a report by the Chief Internal Auditor (Copy enclosed) on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk and control during the year that informs the 'annual governance statement'.

**11 DIRECT PAYMENTS FOR CHILDREN - INTERNAL AUDIT FOLLOW UP REPORT (Pages 211 - 224)**

To receive (copy enclosed) an update on progress implementing the action plan that accompanied the Internal Audit report on Direct Payments for Children dated November 2020 which was presented to this committee in November 2020.

**12 GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Pages 225 - 226)**

To consider the committee's forward work programme (copy enclosed).

**MEMBERSHIP**

**Councillors**

Mabon ap Gwynfor

Barry Mellor

Tony Flynn  
Martyn Holland

Joe Welch

**Lay Member**

Paul Whitham

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

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### Code of Conduct for Members

### DISCLOSURE AND REGISTRATION OF INTERESTS

I, ( <i>name</i> )	<input type="text"/>
a *member/co-opted member of <i>(*please delete as appropriate)</i>	<b>Denbighshire County Council</b>
<b>CONFIRM</b> that I have declared a <b>*personal / personal and prejudicial</b> interest not previously declared in accordance with the provisions of Part III of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members, in respect of the following:- <i>(*please delete as appropriate)</i>	
Date of Disclosure:	<input type="text"/>
Committee <i>(please specify)</i> :	<input type="text"/>
Agenda Item No.	<input type="text"/>
Subject Matter:	<input type="text"/>
Nature of Interest: <i>(See the note below)*</i>	<input type="text"/>
Signed	<input type="text"/>
Date	<input type="text"/>

\*Note: Please provide sufficient detail e.g. 'I am the owner of land adjacent to the application for planning permission made by Mr Jones', or 'My husband / wife is an employee of the company which has made an application for financial assistance'.

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## GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held in Via ZOOM on Wednesday, 28 April 2021 at 9.30 am.

### PRESENT

Councillors Tony Flynn, Martyn Holland (Vice-Chair), Alan James and Barry Mellor (Chair)

Lay Member – Paul Whitham

**Cabinet Members** - Councillor Julian Thompson-Hill Lead Member for Finance and Efficiency and Councillor Bobby Feeley Lead member for well-being and independence.

**Observer-** Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies.

### ALSO PRESENT

Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services - Monitoring Officer (GW), Head of Finance and Property Services (Section 151 Officer) (SG), Chief Internal Auditor (LL), Senior Auditor (LH), Legal Services Manager (LJ), Head of Community Support Services (PG), Framework Manager (TS), Lead Officer – Community Housing (GD), Principal Manager (DS) Democratic Services Manager (SP) and Committee administrator (SJ).

Wales Audit Office Representative David Williams had also been in attendance.

#### 1 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from councillor Joe Welch.

#### 2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

No declarations of interest were raised.

#### 3 URGENT MATTERS

None.

#### 4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee meeting held on the 14 March 2021 were submitted.

Matters of accuracy – Page 11 – Item 11 – Audit Wales Audit’ Plan 2021-22 – Should read ‘queries from electors and members of the public’.

Matters arising - None

**RESOLVED** that subject to the above, the minutes of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee be received and approved as a correct record.

## **5 PROCURING WELL-BEING IN WALES**

The Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance and Efficiency presented to members the report (previously circulated). It was explained the report provided the Committee with the external report by the Future Generations Commissioner’s Office in respect of their review into procuring Well-being in Wales. The Commissioners’ report was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The actions being taken, or to be taken, to address the issues raised by the Commissioner had been included as Appendix 3. It was confirmed this would be updated, following consultation on a revised procurement strategy.

The Monitoring Officer (MO) emphasised the authority had been involved in the review. The themes that have been noted in the report had been national themes. It was stressed that procurement was processed driven and highly regulated.

Members stressed the importance of outcomes. The process to receive an outcome had to be sound and robust. The need to make sure our processes and procedures were robust was stressed.

During the discussion, officers expanded upon the following-

- The term ‘light touch’ referred to a more flexible approach to each procurement application. The MO informed members the light touch regime relates to the authority with Social care contracts, certain categories of contracts do not have the full weight of the procurement regulations.
- The Socio-economic duty was a new duty that each local authority had regard to when making any decision.
- Procurement was highly represented in the authority, the Deputy Leader was lead and the MO was the Head of Service for the department. Both the MO and deputy Monitoring Officer had involvement with the procurement team. It was also confirmed a procurement board had been established which oversees the joint procurement work. Both Lead members of Flintshire County Council and Denbighshire County Council sat on the board along with both MO from each authority.
- The Commissioning form appendix 2 (previously circulated) included the timescales as a process by which a contract begins. Work on a central registration of contracts had begun. Duration would be a key part of the registration so we know when contracts are due to end.
- A lot of work on the process of procurement and the joint service had been completed. The community benefits hub had been established to engage with services to support with the procurement process and monitoring.

The Chair thanked the officers and Lead Member for the response to member's questions.

Following the discussion, it was

**RESOLVED** that, the committee note the detail within the report and the actions being taken, and to be taken, in order to address the recommendations.

## **6 BUDGET UPDATE - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (MTFP) AND BUDGET PROCESS**

The Lead Member for Finance and Efficiency introduced the report (previously circulated) providing members with an update on the latest projections included in the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the plans for the Budget Process for 2022/23 and beyond.

Members were informed the report consisted of two elements – first the financial projections included in the Medium Term Financial Plan (appendix A) and secondly the proposed Budget Process (appendix B).

The Lead Member provided further information on each appendix. Members heard that appendix A sets out the current financial projections included in the Medium Term Financial Plan. A breakdown of the information contained within the appendix was provided. This included:

- initial financial assumptions following review by the Budget Board
- Changes / Decision Log – this itemised and reconciles the current version of the MTFP with that presented to Council in January
- Sensitivity Analysis of possible levels of the Revenue Support Grant ('the settlement')
- Sensitivity Analysis of the impact of different levels of Council Tax

Appendix B, the proposed Budget Process included additional information on the proposed approach to:

- Pressures
- Short and longer term savings
- Invest to save scheme
- Consultation and engagement

Confirmation that an all member workshop would be scheduled later in the year to provide information on the process, capital strategy and other elements. Workshops would be scheduled if members needed to be informed of any changes or updates.

The Head of Finance and Property Services (HFPS) confirmed the report was the annual report presented to members on the budget process. It was explained last year due to Covid-19 pandemic the report was presented in the autumn.

An update report would be presented at a meeting later in the year.

The three building blocks remained the same, thus being approach to pressures, revenue support grant settlement prediction and the council tax increase prediction. It was confirmed at present no indication to what the revenue support grant from Welsh Government would be. It was hoped further information would be provided over the summer.

The HFPS confirmed some changes to the Budget Process had been included in the report. The first change included was the new process around intelligence gathering on potential pressures. Looking at small pressures services are experiencing. Another change noted was the change in tact and strategy to move away from an annual cycle of issuing large saving targets. The aim was to have a 5year plan, meetings with services on the budget would be held in the autumn to discuss potential big savings. An investor save fund would be set up to allow services cash to fund prime projects. During the year there would be three deadlines for proposals for projects would be set. It was hoped this information would set out the plan for the next 3-5 years to ascertain the savings that can be expected and from what projects. There would still be an expectation for services to review budgets to assess any savings that could be made.

In response to members questions the following points were raised:

- Welsh funding had been received for loss of earnings for all four quarter payments. The payments for additional costs had in majority been received. The funding was claimed in arrears so an application for February had been submitted.
- The budget member workshops would be held remotely unless Welsh Government guidelines were reviewed.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

**RESOLVED** that members note the contents of the report.

**At this juncture it was agreed to vary the order of the Agenda.**

## **7 INTERNAL AUDIT SUPPORT BUDGETS AND DIRECT PAYMENTS**

The Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) guided members through the follow up report (previously circulated). The report provided members with an update on the progress in implementing the action plan that accompanied the Internal Audit report on Support Budgets & Direct Payments dated August 2019 which was presented to this committee in September 2019.

It was confirmed that 5 issues had been raised from the initial audit. 2 of which had been major risk issues and 3 moderate risk. It was then the responsibility of the service to propose actions to address the risks raised. In this report 28 action points were raised. Confirmation that 22 of the 28 agreed actions had been completed. The CIA stated she was pleased with the work that had completed.

The Senior Auditor (SA) explained to members the provision of support budgets and direct payments had been in a transitional period at the time of our original review. Members were guided through the action points and further information was provided.

Members noted the substantial progress that had been made following the internal audit. They thanked the officers for the work to improve the process. Members were

in agreement that a further follow up plan would provide further assurance to the committee.

The Head of Community Support Services agreed that a number of the actions agreed were still outstanding. It was confirmed work was ongoing to complete those remaining. He stated he would be happy to return with a follow up report on progress made.

The Lead Member for Well-being and Independence confirmed she was pleased with the progress that had been made. She emphasised the new system had taken time to embed within the team. In her opinion the new system would be a beneficial to staff and residents.

The CIA stated a follow up audit for the service had been scheduled for July 2021. It was advised a follow up report be presented in September 2021.

It was;

**RESOLVED** that the committee note the follow up report and a further follow up report on Support Budgets and Direct Payments be included on the FWP for September 2021.

## **8 INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER & STRATEGY 2021-22**

The Chief Internal Audit (CIA) presented the Internal Audit Charter and Strategy to the committee report provided the Committee with the Internal Audit Charter and Strategy for 2021-22. The Charter defined the Internal Audit's purpose, authority and responsibility in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Strategy provided details of the proposed Internal Audit projects for the year that would enable the CIA to provide an 'opinion' on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk and control during the year.

The CIA guided members to the main changes to the Internal Audit Charter included in Appendix 1. The changes had been included in the 'Positioning & Reporting Lines' section. It noted the CIA had taken on a temporary role to manage the Project Management Team within the Business Improvement and Modernisation Service, this concluded in March 2021.

It was confirmed that Internal Audit independence had been reinstated. The CIA had included within the Charter it confirmed the Senior Auditors would continue to undertake the responsibility for audits relating to the project management team.

The CIA stated the change in the name of the Committee to read Governance and Audit Committee had been included within the Charter.

Members were guide to appendix 2 which contained details on the Internal Audit Strategy 2021-22. The CIA highlighted the Audit Plan 2021/22 took into account the:

- Council's corporate and service risk registers;
- corporate assurance requirements, including the Annual Governance Statement;
- the outcome of previous audits and those of other assurance providers,
- discussions with service management teams.
- Planned work deferred from 2020-21

An update on the counter fraud work had been included within the Strategy. It was confirmed that Internal Audit would continue to investigate instances of potential fraud and irregularities referred to it by management.

It was confirmed Audit Wales facilitated a national data matching exercise (National Fraud Initiative – NFI) every two years. The 2020/21 exercise had recently commenced. Progress would be reported to Governance & Audit Committee periodically as part of the Internal Audit Update report.

Members noted the list of Internal Audit priority projects for 2021-22 that has been agreed between the CIA and each service management team and directors. It was highlighted a number of Audits had been deferred from 2020-21. The Audit plan was a flexible plan and could change if needed.

It was confirmed that all actions from the external assessment carried out in 2017-18 by Gwynedd County Council had been completed. The next External assessment organised through the Welsh Chief Auditors Group would be due to take place in 2022/23.

It was;

**RESOLVED** that members approve the Internal Audit Charter and the Internal Audit Strategy 2021-22.

## **9 INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

The Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) introduced the report (previously circulated) updating members on the Internal Audit Team's progress in terms of its service delivery, assurance provision, reviews completed, performance and effectiveness in driving improvement. It had also included an update on progress with the CIPFA Good Practice for Audit Committees.

The report provided information on work carried out by Internal Audit since the last committee meeting. It allowed the committee to monitor Internal Audit's performance and progress as well as providing summaries of Internal Audit reports.

Confirmation that 2 Audits and 3 follow up reviews had been completed since the last committee meeting. Members were reminded details of each of the audits had been included as appendix 1 to the report. A brief background of each audit was presented to the committee.

The CIA confirmed Internal Audit had been focusing on completing priority audits from the Audit Strategy 2020-21 and no new projects are currently planned until the Audit Strategy for 2021-22 was agreed. Details of all the planned work was provided to members.

Confirmation that the Internal Audit Annual Report will be presented to Governance & Audit Committee in June 2021.

Information was provided on the progress with counter fraud work. Members were guided through the work that had been completed since the last internal audit update. It was noted that the current performance percentage of audit agreed actions that had been implemented by services was 62% below the target of 75%. The two lowest

rates of completion by services had been seen in Community Support Services and Highways & Environment Services. It was noted that these services had been under a lot of pressure due to Covid-19 Pandemic. Work to support these services to complete actions continued.

During the discussion-

- The CIA confirmed settlement agreements were a different name for compromise agreements. A review was carried out periodically to ensure the correct process had been followed and if any lessons could be learnt. The Monitoring Officer stated a robust process was in place for approval. A number of services had to be involved in the process. The Monitoring Officer confirmed he would be able to provide to members the number of these agreements currently in place.
- Members heard the Rhyl Regeneration programme had assigned an interim programme manager to ensure work continued.
- The scam regarding the school fund certificate had been identified in Gwynedd County Council. We notified all schools of the potential scam to be vigilant and cancel any trial programmes to ensure no costs.
- Members noted the structure of the Internal Audit team. Confirmation a senior auditor had been seconded until at least September 2021. The Internal Audit had been impacted due to the reduced resources and had adapted well to those changes.

Members thanked the Monitoring Officer and the CIA for the detailed response to member's questions. It was therefore

**RESOLVED** that members,

- *The committee note the Internal Audit's progress and performance and,*
- *Details on the figure of settlement agreements be made available to members.*

## **10 INTERNAL AUDIT HOUSING TENANCY**

Members were guided through the follow up internal audit report on Housing Tenancy (previously circulated). The Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) informed members the report provided an update on the progress in implementing the action plan that accompanied the Internal Audit report on Housing Tenancy dated November 2019 which was presented to this committee in January 2020.

The CIA introduced the Senior Auditor to present the findings from the report. It was noted that 9 of the 15 actions had been implemented and completed. The remaining actions to be completed had been included in the report. Following the follow up audit the reviewed assurance had been medium risk.

The Lead Officer – Community housing thanked the Internal Audit for the work and support that had been provided to the service. He was pleased to note the assurance had moved from low to medium. It was acknowledged work was still required to complete all actions raised. Work to be proactive with tenants to support and complete ID checks was on going. Members heard it was felt the risk of tenancy fraud had potentially increased due to Covid-19. It was hoped that knowledge of tenants by officers and community vigilance to prevent fraud had increased.

The use of photos within the housing sector was not widely used. The risk of cuckooing of an individual forcing tenants out of property, was still apparent. The vigilance of the local community and housing officer's knowledge would reduce this risk. The use of the housing rent system to monitor rent patterns had aided prevention of cuckooing and tenancy fraud. Tenancy visits would also aid the prevention of fraud. Confirmation that a new I.T system in housing had been implemented recently. It had taken time for officers to learn and adapt to the new system and use efficiently. In response to questions raised, the Housing Officer emphasised the vital importance of Local Member knowledge to aid and support officers with monitoring tenants in the community. It would be difficult to supply a list of tenants too Councillors in line with information sharing regulations.

Members thanked the Housing Officer and the Internal Audit team for the follow up report.

It was

**RESOLVED** that members noted the report and a further follow up report be added to the FWP for November 2021.

## **11 INTERNAL AUDIT PAYMENT CARD INDUSTRY DATA SECURITY STANDARDS (PCI-DSS)**

The Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) presented to members the progress report (previously circulated) on the implementation of the action plan that accompanied the Internal Audit report on Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI-DSS) dated November 2019 which was presented to committee in January 2020.

The CIA explained a number of the actions had been implemented as detailed in the follow up report – appendix 1. A consultant had been appointed to support the authority to address the implementation of the PCI – DSS standards. It was explained that due to the pandemic some of the actions had been delayed.

It was confirmed 3 of the 8 agreed actions had been completed. The follow up report had also been reported to SLT to encourage corporate buy in. Members were also informed a cross service task and finish group had been created to arrange a programme to implement all the compliance requirements. The contract with Denbighshire Leisure also included the company to be DCI- DCC compliant.

In response to members concerns the CIA expanded upon the difference between phone payments and card payments. The Phone payments had a separate system to terminal card payments. The company that provided the system for phone payments ensured the authority compliance to the PCI- DSS regulations were adhered. Training had been provided for staff when receiving phone payments.

It was confirmed that card terminals and contactless payments had been increased during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The report focused on the robust arrangements were in place in accordance with regulations.

The Chair thanked the CIA for the update report and detailed explanation.

It was,

**RESOLVED** that members note the report and a further follow up report be received following the Internal Audit report in October.

## **12 GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Governance and Audit Committee's Forward Work Programme (FWP) was presented for consideration (previously circulated).

It was agreed to amend the FWP as following:

9<sup>th</sup> June 2021 –

- Annual Performance Review 2021-22
- Constitution Update- Name of committee
- RIPA report – following inspection
- Internal Audit- Follow up Report- Direct Payments to Children's services
- Audit enquires to those charged with governance and management- Annual Return

**RESOLVED** that Governance and Audit Committee's forward work programme be noted.

**The meeting concluded at 11.37 a.m.**

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<b>Report to</b>	Governance and Audit Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	9 <sup>th</sup> June 2021
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Gary Williams, Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services RIPA Senior Responsible Officer.
<b>Report author</b>	Lisa Jones, Legal Services Manager
<b>Title</b>	RIPA Inspection 2021

## 1. What is the report about?

The Council is inspected by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) approximately once every three years in relation to its activities carried out under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

## 2. What is the reason for making this report?

The Committee receives all external regulatory reports.

## 3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee receives and acknowledges the report and provides comments on the recommendations contained therein.

## 4. Report details

4.1. The Council was inspected by one of the Commissioner's Inspectors, Graham Wright in February and March 2021. A copy of the desktop report is attached as Appendix 1. The findings confirmed that no physical inspection was required.

4.2. The Committee is familiar with the Annual Report on RIPA that is brought to Members where a summary of activity and governance arrangements around this area is provided to Members.

- 4.3. The level of RIPA activity, which relates only to 'covert' surveillance, rather than 'overt' surveillance, has reduced dramatically over the past ten years. The Council will utilise its RIPA powers only as a very last resort and this means where all other means of gathering the evidence has been considered and explored. In the event of a RIPA application being taken forward there are legal hurdles in which to overcome before the surveillance can take place which includes a detailed application form completed by the applicant, a face to face meeting with one of the Council's Authorising Officers, and then attendance for formal approval from the Magistrates Court. Irrespective of the process, one of the reasons for a reduction in this activity is that the Council has other transparent methods in place in a world where public bodies share more data than they may have done previously as a way of combatting fraud and crime.
- 4.4. Over the past inspection period, there has been no covert surveillance activity conducted, and this is a trend that is the same throughout all local authorities.
- 4.5. The two main areas where the Council is more likely to require a RIPA authorisation is in respect of underage sales and fly tipping.
- 4.6. In respect of the Inspectors' recommendations all actions emanating from the inspection in 2018 have been completed to the Commissioners' satisfaction.
- 4.7. The findings also highlighted a reminder of the need to continue with officer training, for new staff and existing, which has been heeded with a date set in September 2021 to deliver this in house. The Inspector was provided with the training materials and the RIPA working group is updating the practical scenarios and to reflect how RIPA can impact any surveillance on social media or marketplace sites. Legal colleagues have met with the Interim Head of Children's Services and agreed that some awareness training is to be delivered to the management team.
- 4.8. The Data Assurance observations followed a communication from the IPCO in September 2020 in respect of ensuring that the following details were made available to the Inspector when they visited, namely safeguarding data policies, retention and disposal schedules, access to any systems used to store data, and reviewing any systems used to store the 'product' of any investigation, with corresponding destruction time periods.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

This area of practice supports cleaner and safer places to live and visit and the Councils environmental ambitions and priorities. Fraudulent activity, which can impact on Councils' revenue and budgets, may necessitate taking surveillance action.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

The costs are met within existing resources, including the training events, as this is prepared and delivered to our in house standards, in a bespoke manner based on Heads of Service requirements.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

A well being impact assessment is not required for this report and decision.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

The Council's RIPA working group have been consulted and sighted on the report and are progressing with the recommendations.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

Not required.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

A Council that has a robust policy and supporting governance framework around the policy is less likely to fall foul of RIPA and the right to respect for one's private and family life. Evidence gathered in a compliant manner can be used in court proceedings and may not be relied upon if not obtained lawfully. It is therefore essential that council staff follow advice and policy in this area.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and related Codes of Practice.

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Investigatory Powers  
Commissioner's Office

PO Box 29105, London  
SW1V 1ZU

Ms Judith Greenhalgh  
Chief Executive  
Denbighshire County Council  
PO Box 62  
Ruthin  
Denbighshire  
LL15 9AZ

19 March 2021

Dear Ms. Greenhalgh,

### **IPCO Surveillance and CHIS Inspection of Denbighshire County Council**

Your Council was recently the subject of a remote inspection by one of my Inspectors, Graham Wright, who looked at your use of powers and procedures in relation to directed surveillance and CHIS. This was facilitated through Gary Williams (Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services and Senior Responsible Officer for RIPA) as well as Lisa Jones (Legal Services Manager and RIPA Monitoring Officer), who provided information during professional discussion.

The information provided has demonstrated a level of compliance that removes, for the present, the requirement for a physical inspection. Your Council has suitably discharged the recommendations made in the previous inspection of 2018 and there have been no authorisations granted since then.

My Inspector has reviewed your Council's RIPA Policy. This provides very accurate, complete and practical advice and guidance to practitioners. The advice regarding use of covert online activity has been added as a result of a recommendation made in the previous inspection.

Although your Council has not exercised its powers since October 2018, the SRO was reminded of the importance of ensuring that the designated authorising officers maintain their level of training. The last training was delivered on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019 to key officers with RIPA oversight responsibilities and it was intended that the knowledge gained from that course would be used to update inhouse training planned for 2020. The pandemic prevented this training from taking place. The RIPA Working Group is due to discuss the issue of training in the near future. It is intended that further training will take place in 2021.

The Council owns town centre CCTV systems and the SRO has stated that these have not been used covertly since the date of the last inspection. There is a protocol agreed with North Wales Police regarding their usage of the system and the need for an authorisation under RIPA if that usage is covert.

In accordance with section 4.47 of the Home Office Covert Surveillance and Property Interference Code of Practice, the SRO has confirmed that you provide Elected Members on the Corporate Governance Committee with an annual report sufficient to enable them to determine that the Council's policy remains fit for purpose, together with regular reports on RIPA activity (or inactivity).

In relation to Data Assurance safeguards; the Council already has a Data Protection Act policy and Information Asset Register, and the RIPA policy gives clear advice regarding the secure management and retention of surveillance material. However, the RIPA Working Group will seek to carry out further assurance work in order to address fully the six action points in the letter that I sent in September 2020 regarding this issue.

In conclusion, it must be emphasised that although your Council has not exercised its RIPA powers since 2018, it is vital that the relevant staff are appropriately trained should the need to authorise covert activity arise. It is also important that officers engaged in investigatory areas where RIPA considerations are not so immediately apparent (for example Children's Services), maintain their levels of knowledge and know whom to approach for guidance. The SRO has given assurances to the Inspector that the integrity of your Council's processes and governance procedures will be maintained to ensure that high standards of compliance with the Act and relevant codes of practice are achieved.

I hope that this telephone-based inspection has proved to be a worthwhile exercise. My Office is available to you should you have any queries following the recent inspection, or at any point in the future. Contact details are provided at the foot of this letter.

I shall be grateful if you would acknowledge receipt of this letter within two months.

Yours sincerely,



**The Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Leveson**  
The Investigatory Powers Commissioner

*Please be aware that IPCO is not a "public authority" for the purpose of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and therefore falls outside the reach of the FOIA. It is appreciated that local authorities are subject to the FOIA and that they may receive requests for disclosure of our reports. In the first instance the SRO should bring the matter to the attention of the IPCO Data Protection Officer (at: [info@ipco.org.uk](mailto:info@ipco.org.uk)), before making any disclosure. This is also the case if you wish to make the content of this letter publicly available.*

<b>Report to</b>	Corporate Governance and Audit Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	June 9, 2021
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Cllr Julian Thompson-Hill, Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Strategic Assets / Alan Smith, Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation
<b>Report author</b>	Nicola Kneale, Strategic Planning Team Manager / Iolo McGregor, Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader
<b>Title</b>	Annual Performance Review 2020 to 2021

## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1. This report accompanies the council's draft Annual Performance Review for 2020 to 2021 (attached at appendix 1), providing our quarterly and end of year analysis, and highlighting specific projects and action for delivery in 2021 to 2022.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1. To provide information regarding the council's progress in delivering Corporate Plan outcomes as at quarter 4, 2020 to 2021, meeting our statutory obligation to publish an annual report on performance by October 31 under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. It also responds to our duty around equality monitoring (under the Equality Act 2010 and Wales Measure 2011, which includes the new Socio Economic Duty); our contributions to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; and for the first time, responds to the requirement to self-assess under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 2.2. To inform members about Corporate Plan projects planned for delivery in 2021 to 2022, which the council is required to publish to meet its improvement duty under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

- 2.3. Regular reporting is an essential monitoring requirement of the council's performance management framework. We monitor our performance regularly, taking quarterly reports to Scrutiny and Cabinet meetings, and produce an Annual Performance Review to evaluate progress.
- 2.4. Feedback from the Corporate Governance and Audit committee on the content of this Annual Performance Review will be required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 going forward, before its final approval by Council.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1. It is recommended that the committee reviews and approves the draft report, considering any changes required to conclusions or actions that the council intends to take.
- 3.2. Should the committee offer recommendations for change, the report must be amended before submission to Cabinet and Council. If a change is not adopted, the final report must explain the reason why.

### **4. Report details**

- 4.1. The council's Corporate Plan 2017 to 2022 sets the strategic direction for the council and its priorities for the five-year period. The detail about what the council intends to do each year to help deliver these priorities is set out in annual service plans. The projects originate from Service and Programme Plans. Progress will be reported to Performance Scrutiny, Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team through our Quarterly Performance Reports.
- 4.2. This annual performance report provides a retrospective evaluation of the council's success in delivering against these plans during 2020 to 2021, and whether the council has successfully fulfilled its obligation to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It also looks ahead to what will be delivered in 2021 to 2022.
- 4.3. It includes for the first time a new 'pilot' chapter to satisfy the need to self-assess under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It focuses on seven key governance areas. Drawing on available published evidence from internal and external sources, and looking at data agreed by Senior Managers, the chapter paints

a wider picture about the context in which the council is operating when delivering its performance objectives. It also seeks to draw out any key actions to improve performance going forward. The report has been drafted in this way following independent advice received through the WLGA, and we are assured that, combined with our usual evaluation of performance against our corporate priorities, it will meet the new requirement to produce an annual self-assessment under the Act.

- 4.4. In addition to our new chapter on Corporate Health, appendix 1 contains narrative on progress in delivering our corporate priorities, including the current status and programme progress. Within each corporate priority subsection there are also Well-being and Equality sections that capture our contributions to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; and the Equality Act 2010 and Wales Measure 2011 (which includes the socio-economic duty). In addition to Equality and Diversity, we also evaluate our contributions to Welsh Language and Sustainable Development, and draw out any key messages from our regulators and nationally published data. The Corporate Project Register and Corporate Risk Register can also be found at the back of the document.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

- 5.1. The Annual Performance Review includes an evaluation of the council's success in delivering against its corporate priorities.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

- 6.1. There is no cost associated with this report.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

- 7.1. A Well-being Impact Assessment (WIA) is not required for this report. A WIA was undertaken on the Corporate Plan itself, and was presented to County Council when the plan was approved in October 2017. Individual projects / programmes of work within the Corporate Plan will subsequently have been individually assessed, as any new actions will be going forward.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. The report has been developed by the Strategic Planning Team, in consultation with other council services. Feedback has already been sought on the report from SLT. Following input from the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee (required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021), the report will be presented to Performance Scrutiny on June 10 and Cabinet on June 29, prior to being submitted finally to County Council for approval on July 6, 2021.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. There are no significant financial implications arising from the report.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. Failure to publish the Annual Review by the October 31 deadline would be likely to result in statutory recommendations from the Wales Audit Office, with significant implications for the reputation of the council.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. The Corporate Plan and the Annual Performance Review are key elements of the Wales Programme for Improvement (2010), which is underpinned by the statutory requirements of the Local Government Act 1999 and Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. Going forward, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act will apply.

# Annual Performance Review 2020 to 2021

This document presents the council's performance against its priorities in 2020 to 2021, including the Public Sector Equality Duty; outlines our plans for Corporate Plan delivery in 2021 to 2022; shows the progress of council projects; and highlights the council's progress in managing its risks. It is also our pilot Self-Assessment, as required under the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

This document is also available in Welsh, and may be available in other formats on request.

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**For more information, or to let us know what you think about anything in this report, contact us:**

**By EMAIL:** [strategicplanningteam@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:strategicplanningteam@denbighshire.gov.uk)

**By TELEPHONE:** 01824 706291

Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg / We welcome telephone calls in Welsh.

**By POST:**

Strategic Planning and Performance Team,

Denbighshire County Council,

PO Box 62,

Ruthin,

LL15 9AZ

We welcome correspondence in Welsh. There will be no delay in responding to correspondence received in Welsh.

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## Introduction

This review of our performance comes very shortly after our last annual report published in October 2020, which covered 2019 to 2020. Usually published in the summer, that report had been delayed because of the impact of Covid-19 on the council and covered some of the period that this report is concerned with. However, we hope that this report will still bring some new and engaging information about our performance in the last year, cataloguing the council's progress in its, and our communities' ongoing recovery efforts in response to Covid-19; our position with the [Corporate Plan](#) in its penultimate year; and also some key performance insights with regards to our governance.

Our staff, many of whom took up new roles this year to aid our response to the virus, continue to work tirelessly to keep communities safe and ensure that our service operations continue, albeit in a different way. We continue to be thankful to all of our staff, partners and providers who are working so hard to make sure Denbighshire residents have the essential services that they need.

Every year we review our performance to evaluate our success in delivering benefits for our communities, and this year is no different. 2020 to 2021 represents the fourth year of our ambitious five-year Corporate Plan, which seeks to build on strengths and opportunities, but also address the very real challenges and risks faced by our communities. The Plan can only be delivered through working in partnership with residents, public sector partners, not-for-profit sector colleagues and the private sector; and this report evaluates our progress so far. It also, for the first time, seeks to capture the council's performance against key aspects of 'Corporate Health', in response to the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

We are proud to say that the council continues to make good progress with its priorities, having for the most-part recovered timescales that were impacted by Covid-19, or adapted delivery to continue to secure the benefits that we want for our communities. Our hope remains that the projects we deliver will help to support our residents to live independent and fulfilled lives here in Denbighshire, particularly as we look ahead, together, to recovery after the impact of Covid-19.

## Finance

The council sets a revenue budget each year. This is a budget that it will provide for services in the year, which is paid for by service users, Welsh Government Grants, Council Tax and Business Rate payers. The council's net revenue budget for 2020 to 2021 was £208.302m. The final position on service and corporate budgets (including schools underspend of £7.058m) is an underspend of £9.457m, which is 4.5% of the net revenue budget.

The 2020 to 2021 budget identified service savings and efficiencies of £4.448m as detailed below:

- Corporate savings identified relating to the triennial actuarial review of the Clwyd Pension Fund (£2m)
- Schools savings of 1% (£0.692m)
- Service efficiencies and savings (£1.756m)

The corporate savings have already been achieved, and the schools' savings are delegated to the governing bodies to monitor and deliver. On top of this, £1.086m of the service savings had originally been designated as savings that have already been implemented.

The table below shows council spend across its services:

<b>Services</b>	<b>Budget (£'000)</b>	<b>Outturn (£'000)</b>	<b>Variance (£'000)</b>
Communities and Customer Services	3,403	3,093	(310)
Education and Children's Service	17,160	17,738	577
Business Improvement and Modernisation	4,329	4,329	0

<b>Services</b>	<b>Budget (£'000)</b>	<b>Outturn (£'000)</b>	<b>Variance (£'000)</b>
Legal, HR and Democratic Services	2,454	2,366	(88)
Finance and Property Services	3,888	3,442	(446)
Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services	17,029	16,657	(372)
Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services	9,755	9,294	(462)
Community Support Services	38,104	38,104	0
Denbighshire Leisure Ltd	3,488	3,758	270
<b>Total Service Budgets</b>	<b>99,612</b>	<b>98,781</b>	<b>(831)</b>

The table below shows council spend for schools:

<b>Schools:</b>	<b>Budget (£'000)</b>	<b>Outturn (£'000)</b>	<b>Variance (£'000)</b>
Schools Delegated	78,772	71,714	(7,058)
Schools Non-delegated	(5,011)	(5,096)	(85)
<b>Total Schools Budgets</b>	<b>73,761</b>	<b>66,618</b>	<b>(6,973)</b>

The table below shows council spend across its corporate budgets. Please note that 'Levies' refers to the levy paid to the Fire Service; and Capital Financing is the annual loan repayment and interest costs of council debt incurred to fund capital expenditure.

<b>Corporate Budgets:</b>	<b>Budget (£'000)</b>	<b>Outturn (£'000)</b>	<b>Variance (£'000)</b>
Corporate	16,176	14,302	(1,874)
Capital Financing / Investment Interest	13,854	13,854	None
Levies	4,899	4,899	None
<b>Total Corporate Budget</b>	<b>34,929</b>	<b>33,055</b>	<b>(1,874)</b>

The table below shows our total spend across services, schools and corporate budgets:

<b>Services, Schools and Corporate Budgets</b>	<b>Budget (£'000)</b>	<b>Outturn (£'000)</b>	<b>Variance (£'000)</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>208,302</b>	<b>198,454</b>	<b>(9,848)</b>

The table below shows the funding that we received:

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Budget (£'000)</b>	<b>Outturn (£'000)</b>	<b>Variance (£'000)</b>
Welsh Government Funding	151,932	151,932	None
Council Tax and Balances	56,370	55,979	391

<b>Total Funding</b>	<b>208,302</b>	<b>207,911</b>	<b>391</b>
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## Funding the Corporate Plan

Some projects that support our Corporate Plan priorities require significant capital investment, whereas others are revenue funded, and some may be delivered at no additional cost. The total cost of the plan was initially estimated at £135m, and this has changed as proposals have developed. To pay for the capital investment identified, we will need to commit revenue budget and cash to the priorities. During 2017 to 2018 we identified £0.5m of our revenue budget for 2018 to 2019, and £1m cash to support corporate priorities. A further revenue contribution of £0.5m was secured through the 2019 to 2020 budget process. Further annual budget allocations will be required, but it is recognised that this will be difficult to achieve as the council's total budget reduces.

## Capital Expenditure

The table below shows the total capital expenditure across council service areas for 2020 to 2021:

<b>Expenditure</b>	<b>£'000</b>
Legal, HR and Democratic Services	67
Finance and Property Services	3,544
Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services	24,531
Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services	2,656
Community Support Services	581
Communities and Customer Services	0

Business Improvement and Modernisation	383
Education and Children's Services	5,751
Housing Revenue Account	9,734
<b>Total</b>	<b>47,247</b>

## Responding to Covid-19

Throughout 2020 to 2021 the council has continued its efforts to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, carefully monitoring and managing its impact on the community, staff capacity, delays to project timescales, and crucially, budget. By now we have broadly seen a return to business as usual activity (where it is safe to do so), or at least a continuation of service delivery albeit in slightly different ways. Below are just some of the performance highlights and innovations that we have seen from the year:

- The establishment of hub schools to support key workers.
- Administering [support grants for businesses](#), and free school meal payments direct to eligible families.
- Establishing our redeployment bureau to ensure critical services, in particular care services, could continue, supported by a new PPE process.
- Community calls to assist the most vulnerable and those advised to shield.
- Working with schools to support their reopening and the well-being of pupils.
- Working with businesses to ensure that they are able to operate safely and follow the guidelines.
- Establishing a new team and processes to support Test, Trace and Protect (TTP).
- Moving all public committee and council meetings online.
- Supporting the majority of office-based staff to work from home.
- Pro-active communications through our website and communications team.

## **What are we doing in 2021 to 2022?**

The pandemic still being with us, we will continue with the above activity where it is still required, and work hard in the year ahead to support the recovery of the county in the wake of Covid-19. Our activities will be co-ordinated by our Business Recovery Group going forward, which includes representation from North Wales Police and the private sector.

With further changes to Covid-19 restrictions taking place in Wales, the council has developed a Destination Management Plan to ensure that key sites and facilities are ready to welcome visitors, and that local residents will feel safe and well-informed.

Denbighshire's Destination Management Plan has been developed in partnership with the tourism businesses across the county and seeks to co-ordinate activity over the coming months to ensure a positive and safe experience for visitors, residents and business. According to latest figures, Tourism contributes £552m to Denbighshire's economy, so it is critical that the county is well placed to maximise tourism opportunities and welcome people not just this summer, but year after year.

With many people planning to holiday in the UK this year we are excited to welcome visitors back to Denbighshire after this long period of lockdown, but we ask that visitors act responsibly and help us keep Denbighshire a safe and clean place for everyone to enjoy. With a noticeable increase in camper vans staying overnight at some beauty spots in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This can cause issues for our staff with littering, fire damage, and human waste to clear up, especially where no facilities exist. Visiting campers will be asked to take all waste with them and encouraged to use private campsites with facilities to minimise the pressures on the landscape and the people who work hard to look after it. In particular, visitors will be asked not to have BBQ's, camping stoves or campfires on the moorland areas of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) because of the significant risk of fire. Denbighshire's Countryside Rangers will be putting up fire risk signs at key areas and will be asking visitors to extinguish any fires or BBQ's that they come across.

## Summary position for our Corporate Plan

The measures evaluation for each priority has been determined through the performance management framework that we have in place. The projects evaluation has been determined by the status of our projects.

**Housing:** Everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs

Measures: Good

Projects: Good

**Connected Communities:** Communities are connected and have access to goods and services locally, online and through good transport links

Measures: Priority for improvement

Projects: Good

**Resilient Communities:** The council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: Good

**Environment:** Attractive and protected, supporting well-being and economic prosperity

Measures: Good

Projects: Excellent

**Young People:** A place where younger people will want to live and work and have the skills to do so

Measures: Priority for improvement

Projects: Good

## **A Note on Measuring Performance**

In Denbighshire, our default approach to setting performance thresholds is to take the upper-quartile (best performing) from nationally comparable information as the point where performance is considered 'Excellent'. The 'Priority for Improvement' threshold is usually the median. Midway between these two values determines the threshold between 'Acceptable' and 'Good' performance.

If no data is available that we can compare ourselves with (either nationally or by comparable grouping), then we will take a local view on what we feel reasonably determines 'Excellent' and 'Priority for Improvement' performance. This should represent our ambition.

For more information on how we manage performance, view the [Performance Management Guide on our website](#).

## **Housing: Everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs**

Measures: Good

Projects: Good

### **Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Measures Update**

As at the end of March 2021, there were 2,139 people registered on the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) waiting list, continuing a steadily increasing trend that we have seen since the same period last year. To understand the reasons for the increase in these figures we have set up a task and finish group that includes colleagues from Housing Strategy, Homelessness and Housing Support. Part of this review will be looking at increasing understanding of the reasons households are in need, other options they could be signposted to, and identifying those people who may no longer have a housing need following a thorough review of their application. As the current measure for the SARTH waiting list is a count only, to give some context to our efforts we have now included a second measure in our framework that considers the number of people housed from the register into either council stock or a Denbighshire Registered Social Landlord property. As at the end of March 2021 the cumulative annual total of people housed from the SARTH register was 219.

Within this priority we set a target to create 170 new council homes by 2022, and early 2021 finally saw works get underway on eighteen two-bedroom and four four-bedroom semi-detached houses on land above Tan y Sgubor, Denbigh; and four one-bedroom apartments on the site of the former Bodnant School canteen on Caradoc Road, Prestatyn. In 2020 to 2021 we achieved a total of 10 new council homes, which matches the total provided in 2019 to 2020. The target of providing 170 additional council homes will still be achieved, but because of the social distancing measures that have been imposed to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic, not all of these will now be completed by March 2022.

A total of 435 additional homes have been provided in Denbighshire during 2020 to 2021. This has increased from 242 the previous year. In particular, 165 affordable dwellings have been brought forward, including in Rhyl, Rhuddlan, Llanfair DC, Llangollen and Denbigh.

Combined with previous years, 379 additional affordable homes have now been delivered, exceeding our original Corporate Plan target of 260.

At the start of our Corporate Plan we set out to bring 500 empty properties back into use by 2022. During 2020 to 2021, 148 were brought back into use, which means we have successfully met our target, returning a total of 659 to use since the start of the Corporate Plan.

Five people who were on the Complex Disabilities Specialist Housing Needs Register have secured supported housing in 2020 to 2021; this compares with 9 the previous year. The reason for the reduction is due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions meaning we were unable to introduce residents to placements from March 2020 to the end of September 2020.

Our measure around the number of private sector homes improved in standard and quality has fallen significantly below our usual standard due to Covid-19 restrictions on work. 415 homes were improved during 2020 to 2021, down from 810 the previous year.

Our fourth bi-annual survey for Denbighshire housing tenants was planned for early 2020, but due to Covid-19 this was postponed until late 2020. This survey has been an opportunity for us to gather better intelligence from our tenants, which will allow us to address issues that are important to them and assist us to deliver value for money, as well as knowing our strengths and identifying areas for improvement. We will use this information to identify any service improvements, new developments, and inform us of tenant perception, which we could potentially influence through better communication. A total of 3,277 surveys were mailed out with a return of 381 (11.6%). A draft report is due at the end of May 2021, and we will carry out the next survey in early 2022.

We are still awaiting final figures for two measures in our framework around the percentage of households successfully prevented from homelessness (Section 66 duty); and the percentage of households successfully relieved from homelessness (Section 73 duty). These are Welsh Government driven measures that were temporarily suspended due to the pandemic, but the data will be available in **June**.

Finally, there are two further measures in our measures framework that pertain to the Residents' Survey. We have no new data to share on these, the next survey being run in the autumn, 2021.

## **Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Project Update**

### **Extra Care Housing**

Building works have recommenced at Denbigh extra care housing following delays due to Covid-19. Denbighshire residents have been invited to take a virtual look at the new extra care facility, Awel y Dyffryn, in Denbigh. The facility, which promotes comfortable homes and independence is set to welcome its first residents in the autumn, 2021. A virtual open day is set to take place over Zoom and there will be an opportunity to go on a 'journey' around one of the flats, see a video of the kind of resources offered, and an opportunity to ask questions of Grŵp Cynefin staff about the scheme. Grŵp Cynefin are meeting with the contractor, RL Davies, on a weekly basis to keep the scheme on track. Meanwhile, Ruthin extra care housing is also progressing following substantial delays due to the pandemic. A short-term lease has been agreed and pre-demolishment works have commenced on site. Procurement for a builder had gone out to tender; however, due to such a high specification this was unsuccessful. It has now been re-advertised with a slightly lower specification in the hope that more interest will be received.

People living in Denbighshire, aged 60 and over, will be given priority status at the scheme and these will be those with protected characteristics specifically, **Age** and **Disability** and those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

### **Additional Council Homes**

There has been a lot of progress with this project in 2020 to 2021. In the Rhyl area, the planning application for the renovation of the former Granite and Next stores in Rhyl High Street and the conversion of the upper storeys to provide apartments was approved, and contractors were appointed to demolish the nearby auction rooms to provide off street parking for the development. Architects were appointed to design a renovation scheme for a former salon in Queen Street, which will also deliver apartments on the upper storeys.

Developments in the Prestatyn area include the approval of a planning application for the proposed redevelopment of the former library in Prestatyn to provide apartments. In

addition to this, work has started on the construction of four Passivhaus apartments in Caradoc Road, Prestatyn. Tenders have also been sought for the construction of apartments on land off The Dell in Prestatyn.

Finally, offers were invited for the land adjacent to Ysgol Pendref in Denbigh, with a requirement that 20% of the homes built on the development will be offered to the council; and the purchase of a former council house in Rhuddlan was also completed.

There is confidence that the programme can still be deliver 170 more council homes by 2022, despite the pandemic. However, there will be a schedule over-run because developments are taking longer than envisaged as a consequence of the imposition of social distancing measures in the construction sector.

This project directly benefits those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

### **Affordable Housing**

Denbighshire County Council has been recognised as the top performing North Wales authority for affordable housing for 2019 to 2020. Statistics released in March 2021 by the Welsh Government on affordable housing provision between April 2019 to March 2020 placed Denbighshire at the top for affordable housing provision in North Wales and 11th nationally in Wales.

Mortgage lending criteria are easing with mortgage lenders beginning to offer 10% deposits again. However, the pool of lenders willing to deal with first time buyers remains very small. Planning obligations, also known as Section 106 agreements, are being challenged by Shared Equity property owners if sales are withdrawn or fail. We are looking into options as to how this can be addressed in the future.

This project will directly benefit those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, while also supporting the protected characteristics of **Age**.

### **Empty Homes Back into Use**

The Empty Homes Matching Scheme was launched in October 2020, which is a pilot scheme that connects owners of empty properties in Denbighshire with investors that want to turn them into lived-in homes. There are currently 15 parties registered (13 potential investors and 2 empty home owners), with ongoing further efforts being made to advertise.

In total there have been 12 matches, but no successful outcomes to date. Empty home owners have been in receipt of an annual survey for many years, which has now been updated to include advertisement of the matching scheme. The people that have been involved in the scheme so far are very happy that Denbighshire County Council is making a proactive effort to match empty homeowners and potential investors.

This project will directly benefit those at a **socio-economic disadvantage** by providing more liveable homes within the community. It also would benefit the protected characteristic of **Age**.

## Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	Status
The number of people who were on the Complex Disabilities Specialist Housing Needs Register for whom supported housing has been secured – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	9	5	Acceptable
The additional supply of council houses provided	10	10	Does not apply Count only
Number of additional homes provided in Denbighshire – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	242	435	Excellent
Number of empty properties brought back into use (old definition) – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	179	148	Excellent
The number of private sector homes improved in standard and quality due to intervention from the council – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	810	415	Good
The additional supply of affordable housing, including social housing, provided during the year – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	139	165	Excellent
Percentage of households successfully prevented from homelessness (Section 66 duty) – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	57	Data due in June	Priority for improvement
Percentage of households successfully relieved from homelessness (Section 73 duty) – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	30	Data due in June	Priority for improvement

2020 to 2021 data for the following two measures is not expected until the Residents' Survey is run in the autumn, 2021.

Measure	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	Status
The percentage of residents reporting they felt satisfied with the availability of housing in their area – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	42	Does not apply No Survey	Priority for improvement
The percentage of residents reporting they are satisfied with the standard of housing in their area – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	52	Does not apply No Survey	Acceptable

Our measure concerning additional Extra Care Homes supported by the council will not be reported until those schemes are completed.

### Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Measure	Quarter 4 2019 to 2020	Quarter 1 2020 to 2021	Quarter 2 2020 to 2021	Quarter 3 2020 to 2021	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Status
Number of people on SARTH waiting list – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	1,152	1,508	1,791	1,937	2,139	Priority for improvement
Cumulative number of people house from the SARTH register	387	40	140	237	328	Does not apply Count only

### Project Progress

The following projects are on target:

- Additional affordable homes

- 500 empty properties back into use
- Denbigh extra care housing
- Ruthin extra care housing

The following projects are experiencing obstacles:

- Additional council housing

## Well-being and Equality

This priority applies the five ways of working and directly supports Wales' Well-being Goals around **prosperity**, environmental **resilience**, **health**, **equality**, **cohesive communities**, and a **globally responsible** Wales with a **vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language**. Below are some further highlights from the last year of work that we have undertaken in support of the Well-being Goals and the Sustainable Development Principle; but also benefiting those with protected characteristics or who are at a socio-economic disadvantage:

### Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme

Denbighshire have successfully resettled 20 Syrian families since April 2016, with the most recent family being resettled in January 2021. The Home Office has now brought this scheme to an end and has replaced it with a new and wider UK Resettlement Scheme, with the priority now focusing on 'cancelled cases' and 'family connections'. At Cabinet in January 2020, it was agreed to continue to support the settlement of refugees in Denbighshire through the Global Resettlement Scheme.

This new scheme aims to support the **long-term** integration of resettled refugees by making it simpler to operate and for the public to understand, **preventing** any refugees from being excluded. As well as focusing on the most vulnerable refugees who are likely to be at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, it will also benefit those with the protected characteristics of **Race, Age, Religion or Belief**. To ensure this scheme works well a **collaborative** approach has been taken with Denbighshire County Council and the

Department for Work and Pensions attending a weekly drop in to resolve any queries and to answer questions.

### **Rapid Rehousing Grant Scheme**

In June 2020 the Welsh Government released its planning guidance for homelessness and housing related support services, launching the Rapid Rehousing Recovery Model. Denbighshire applied to the Welsh Government for capital money to purchase a property to provide good quality family emergency accommodation. We have recently completed on the purchase of a property, which will provide eight units of family accommodation, as well as being able to purchase four units of permanent family accommodation. We are now in phase 3 of the planning stage, which is implementing the Rapid Rehousing Model with the development of a Multi-Disciplinary Team to provide the relevant support to households at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

The needs of those at a **socio-economic disadvantage** are addressed within this scheme by taking an **integrated** and **collaborative** approach with partners to tackle homelessness within Denbighshire. Thinking **long-term** is a high priority in this scheme, aiming to help those at risk of, or experiencing homelessness to find and sustain permanent accommodation and **prevent** problems re-occurring.

### **Denbighshire Housing**

After careful consideration, a decision was made in February 2021 to increase Denbighshire Housing rents by 1.5%. Prior to this decision being approved, we had to demonstrate that we are using our resources efficiently, provide value for money, and consider the affordability of our rents. The change is in accordance with Welsh Government policy for social housing rents and will come into effect from April 5, 2021. For Denbighshire tenants this will mean an average weekly rent increase of £1.38. In a survey, 89% of council tenants said their rent provides value for money, while rents are the lowest on average for social housing landlords in Denbighshire.

To manage and maintain our £300 million worth of housing stock for the benefit of our residents, we carefully invest the rents from our tenants and maximise opportunities to leverage in grant funding to make longer term improvements. The housing budget has been calculated to ensure we can deliver our services, maintain the quality standard of our homes, and develop our new build programme. Over the last five years Denbighshire

Housing has installed 1,100 new heating systems, 465 new roofs, 325 new windows, 125 air source heat pumps, 775 kitchens and bathrooms. 2,550 properties have also been externally painted, £2 million has been spent on disabled adaptations, and £1.9 million has been invested on estate and neighbourhood improvements, including 17 new play areas.

This approach has a **long-term** vision for residents by carefully investing and aiming to **prevent** any problems in the future. By continuing to providing value for money, Denbighshire Housing aims to support those residents who may be at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, directly benefiting those who may have protected characteristics such as **Age** and **Disability**.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation**

In 2021, a new needs assessment for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller accommodation will be set up by Denbighshire County Council. The announcement follows the setting up of a number of unauthorised temporary encampments across the region in May 2021. The review will assess the current accommodation needs within the community and does not include looking for locations for sites. The council has a legal duty to undertake a new Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) every five years as a requirement of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, and is also a requirement for the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP). During 2021 to 2022, we will also be looking to recruit a designated Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Liaison Officer to the council to help manage our relationship with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community.

The council has a positive working relationship with Traveling Ahead, Wales' Gypsy, Roma and Traveller advice and advocacy service. We will work **collaboratively**, **involving** key stakeholders, and **integrating** with Welsh Government's ambitions, to support the travelling community wherever possible. This supports the protected characteristic of **Race, Religion and Belief**, and **socio-economic disadvantage**.

### **What are we doing in 2021 to 2022?**

We will continue to deliver against the projects that support this priority in 2021 to 2022:

**Extra Care Housing:** We will work to keep the Denbigh Extra Care Housing Scheme on track to meet the estimated completion date of July 2021, and to open in the autumn, 2021. We will also contract a builder to begin works on the Ruthin site.

**Additional Council Homes:** The council will continue with its developments on Queen Street and St Helen's Place, Rhyl. We also hope to successfully tender for the construction of apartments at The Dell, Prestatyn.

**Affordable Housing:** Providing more affordable homes in our communities is part of our ongoing work to ensure we can retain more young people in Denbighshire. We are still awaiting confirmation on several RSL private finance deals and Rent to Own schemes, which once completed will continue to exceed our Corporate Plan target.

**Empty Homes back into use:** Our aim for 2021 to 2022 is to continue to raise awareness of our empty home / contractor matching scheme and successfully bring back empty homes to use as a result. Going forward we are looking to increase the number of registered home owners or potential investors to at least 20.

**Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Needs Assessment:** We will complete an assessment of the current accommodation needs within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community, and appoint a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Liaison Officer.

## **Connected Communities: Communities are connected and have access to goods and services locally, online and through good transport links**

Measures: Priority for improvement

Projects: Good

### **Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Measures Update**

As at March 2021, the coverage of superfast broadband (>30mbps) in Denbighshire was at 92.23%; a small increase of 1.13% since the previous period. It remains a priority for improvement.

As at March 2021, 4.45% of premises had broadband of 10mbps or below. This is a 0.26% improvement on the previous period; however, we have not seen significant improvements in performance in this area since January 2020 and it remains a priority for improvement for us. The Wales figure is at 2.45%.

The latest data for the availability of 4G signal from all operators being available on Denbighshire's A and B roads is still pending. As at December 2020, 49.8% of roads had 4G signal from all operators. Our ambition at this stage was to have 60% availability as a minimum. Performance remains a priority for improvement.

Labour Force Survey data published by the Office for National Statistics on the use of the internet by adults in Denbighshire and Conwy has recently been published. 89.8% of adults had used the internet in the last three months as at January to March 2020, compared to 87.7% for the same period in 2019. We were anticipating an increase in internet use for the year 2020 to 2021, but we will still prioritise support for those at risk of becoming (or remaining) digitally excluded in our communities, and those experiencing socio economic disadvantage.

50% of transactions were undertaken via the web during January to March 2021, compared to the total number of transactions undertaken using all access channels. This is a 4% increase from the same period in 2019 (up from 46%), although 2% less than the first lockdown during April to June 2020.

During 2020 to 2021 a total of 173 of damaged roads and pavements were reported, with 151 being made safe within the timescale of 7 working days (87%). This is a 2.7%

decrease on the same period the previous year. 2020 to 2021 data for the condition of A, B and C roads is also anticipated in **June**. Previous data for these measures showed a slight decline in the condition of A (from 3.4% to 3.6%) and B (from 4.7% to 5.3%) roads during 2019 to 2020, with C roads staying the same (8.2%). Our measure around a six monthly road condition score for C roads and unclassified roads has proven too difficult to provide data for, and is proposed for removal from this framework.

There is no new data for the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation from what was reported in our last Annual Performance Review. The next release of this data is not anticipated until 2023 at the earliest.

## **Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update**

### **Superfast Broadband and Mobile Networks**

Work on our community pilot is continuing, which is in one of the worst areas for digital exclusion in the county (Nantglyn and the surrounding villages). The aim of the pilot is to find a solution to poor broadband on a community scale, making use of Government-backed funding support. We have a database of local residents interested in a community broadband scheme. Openreach has been provided with all of the information they need and we are urging them to provide a quote to progress the scheme as soon as possible.

During 2020 to 2021, we have provided a range of support to 63 individuals and 33 businesses. We have also supported our own staff to resolve poor connectivity or to source new equipment while working from home.

Only one of our Community Fibre Partnerships (CFP) received their final quote from BT in time to apply for the previous edition of the Gigabit vouchers. Groesffordd Marli has since formed a Community Interest Company (a legal entity required by Openreach) and is awaiting news of the voucher they will be awarded. Two further CFPs have received quotes within the previous voucher allowance, and are waiting to hear what the new voucher allowance will be. Finally, another two CFPs have received final quotes that far exceed the previous voucher allowance and further funding is being sought, pending news on the new voucher scheme.

This project directly benefits those who are at a **socio economic disadvantage**. The benefits of improved connectivity and access to services will also benefit the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**.

### **Digital Exclusion**

Despite Covid-19 and the restrictions imposed on us, some small positive outcomes were achieved during 2020 to 2021. 44 staff were trained in digital skills and 5 digital volunteers, known as Denbighshire Buddies, are available to help residents with simple digital problems. We have also upgraded and adapted technological kit – such as iPads - and resources to ensure our assets and services at Denbighshire libraries and residential care settings are digitally inclusive. In September 2020, we reviewed the scope of the project and identified the economically vulnerable as a priority to help, particularly those digitally impacted by job losses. ‘Solo digital spaces’ for interviews are being created in libraries, and Working Denbighshire are planning to use virtual reality technology to develop interview skills. Fibre speed connection is now installed at Cysgod y Gaer, one of our residential care settings, and all IT kit is in place and connected. Connectivity at Cysgod y Gaer is one step to developing an intergenerational event with Caer Drewyn school in Corwen, but due to Covid-19 restrictions in residential settings and schools the event is yet to happen.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristics of **Age**, **Disability**, and those who are at a **socio economic disadvantage**.

### **Infrastructure for Events**

This project is focussed on improving infrastructure to make it easier to stage events. It has two key elements: better support for community-run events (through provision of a mobile equipment hire scheme and a targeted support package for a selected number of localities); and better support for large-to-major events (through a large-to-major events process and through better engagement with promoters).

Following a period where little activity was taking place due to Covid-19, three of the four workstreams are now back in operation. The majority of equipment for the mobile equipment hire scheme has been ordered and is in secure storage whilst systems and processes are being developed to support the running of the scheme. The targeted support package has been developed as a one-off grant fund totalling £128k, which will be

shared by a limited number of selected applicants to provide improved infrastructure in communities that host and organise community events in Denbighshire. Project proposal forms and selection criteria have been agreed, and the scheme will be launched soon. The council's website now directs major events promoters and organisers to a named contact, to discuss the opportunities available in Denbighshire to stage events.

The mobile equipment hire scheme and the targeted support package are open to communities across the whole of Denbighshire, with the targeted support package being allocated on the basis that the events will be able to provide an enhanced experience for all. This includes those individuals that may currently experience difficulties accessing events in their community because of their protected characteristics, for example **Disability**. The project may also be particularly valued by communities that are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, that may currently not have access to the infrastructure or equipment they need to run events for the benefit of their community.

### **Travel to Work, Education and Services**

Our approach to improving travel connectivity has shifted. Since the Corporate Plan was approved, Denbighshire County Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in July 2019. Since then, we have developed plans to become a net carbon zero and ecologically positive council by 2030, and it was agreed by the Corporate Plan Programme Board that this project should adapt to support the carbon reduction agenda.

Furthermore, between 2019 to 2020, we worked with other North Wales Public Service Boards to procure research to better understand travel barriers to work. The research has been valuable, and it has demonstrated that people's barriers are often linked to poverty, inequality and socio-economic exclusion. Resolving barriers to transport – in rural areas in particular – are complex, and often unsustainable (from a service provision and financial point of view).

As a result of these two developments, we are proposing to develop a 'Sustainable Transport Plan'. The Plan will set a long-term vision for sustainable transport in Denbighshire and will probably include a range of existing and new interventions to encourage greater use of greener and healthier forms of transport, including reducing the need to travel wherever possible.

This project will directly benefit the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability** and those who are at a **socio economic disadvantage**.

### **Access to Information and Services**

The council's new website went live on September 16, 2020. A closure report for this project has been approved by the Corporate Plan Programme Board. What went well included engagement with internal and external digital and digital accessibility experts, to ensure the new platform would be fully accessible; a 'multi-disciplinary team' approach to procurement was particularly effective; teams supporting people with learning difficulties and also the visual impairment teams were involved in the procurement process for the screen reader software. Lessons learned included commencing procurement of a replacement website well before the expiry of the current contract; the value of adequate project management being in place as early as possible; the importance of clarity around project roles and expectations, and working with those affected by the changes early on in the process. The project report concluded by saying "it is important when making operational decisions about a project to consider the long-term resource implications attached to those actions beyond the lifetime of the project". This project clearly demonstrates the sustainable development principles at work. We will continue to monitor web-based transactions.

This project will directly benefit the protected characteristics of **Disability** and **Age** and those who are at a **socio economic disadvantage**.

### **Roads and Bridges**

2020 to 2021 proved a challenging year for the structures team because of Covid-19 restrictions, but also because of a vacancy that occurred half-way through the year that proved hard to recruit to. Additionally, the delivery window for most bridge related projects is narrow (due to the risk of high river levels), and hence most work is usually done in the summer months to reduce the access risk. As a result of these factors, less than a third of the work that was intended for year 4 of our 10-year maintenance programme could be completed. The floods of February 2020 and January 2021 also brought considerable damage of course, not least the destruction of the Llanerch Bridge, so the team has been busy trying to ensure that the repair funds received from WG (£1.753m) has been spent.

All improvement works to highway assets will assess accessibility, considering in particular the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**. We want to make sure that no one is disadvantaged in accessing goods and services. In the case of the Llanerch Bridge, which is an important local route, the council has committed to its replacement as soon as possible to ensure that residents are not disadvantaged in the long-term by its loss.

## Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	Status
The percentage of principle A roads that are in overall poor condition – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	3.6	Data due in June	Acceptable
The percentage of non-principal/classified B roads that are in overall poor condition – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	5.3	Data due in June	Priority for improvement
The percentage of non-principal/classified C roads that are in overall poor condition – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	8.2	Data due in June	Good
The percentage of adults (aged 16 or over) who have used the internet within the last 3 months (Conwy and Denbighshire) – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	87.7	89.8	Acceptable

Measure	2014	2019	Status
Percentage of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in Denbighshire in the 10% most deprived in Wales in terms of Access to Services (Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation - WIMD)	14	14	Does not apply Count only

## Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Measure	Quarter 4 2019 to 2020	Quarter 1 2020 to 2021	Quarter 2 2020 to 2021	Quarter 3 2020 to 2021	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Status
The percentage of Superfast Coverage in Denbighshire (>30 Mbps) – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	91.29	92	91.83	91.87	92.23	Priority for improvement
The percentage of premises with Broadband of 10 Mbps or below – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	4.93	4.63	4.76	4.71	4.45	Priority for improvement
The percentage of transactions undertaken via the web, compared to the total number of transactions undertaken using all access channels	46	52	48	50	50	Does not apply Count only
The percentage of mobile 4G road signal (all operators) – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	45.31	45.48	Data pending	49.8	Data pending	Priority for improvement
Percentage of damaged roads and pavements made safe within target time (CAT1 - Category 1 defects dealt within timescale) – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	89.7	No data due to Covid-19	No data due to Covid-19	No data due to Covid-19	87	Priority for improvement

Measure	Quarter 4 2019 to 2020	Quarter 1 2020 to 2021	Quarter 2 2020 to 2021	Quarter 3 2020 to 2021	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Status
6 monthly Road Condition Score for around 75% of the remaining network (some C roads and almost all unclassified roads)	Does not apply 6 monthly	No data due to Covid-19	Does not apply 6 monthly	No data due to Covid-19	No data Propose removal	Does not apply Baseline year

## Project Progress

The following projects are on target:

- Superfast broadband and mobile network
- Digital exclusion
- Infrastructure for events

The following project was pushed back to project brief stage:

- Sustainable Transport Plan (formerly Travel to work, education and services)

The following project is closed:

- Access to information and services

## Well-being and Equality

This priority applies the five ways of working and directly supports Wales' Well-being Goals around **prosperity**, environmental **resilience**, **health**, **equality**, **cohesiveness**, **global responsibility**, and a **vibrant culture with a thriving Welsh language**. Below are some further highlights from the last year of work that we have undertaken in support of the Well-being Goals and the Sustainable Development Principle; but also benefiting those with protected characteristics or who are at a socio-economic disadvantage:

## North East Wales Archives Service

The council has worked in partnership with Flintshire County Council to create a new North East Wales Archives service. The service is working towards the building of a new co-located facility, and in developing its designs have engaged extensively with a variety of stakeholders, including seldom-heard groups, and those from the LGBTQ community. These discussions have significantly influenced the design and use of the proposed building, for which a bid is currently pending with the National Lottery Heritage Horizon Award. Further information about our bid may be found [here](#).

It is hoped that the new building will directly benefit those with the protected characteristics of **Disability**, **Gender Reassignment** and **Sex**. The project is a great **collaborative, long-term** initiative that has extensively **involved** stakeholders, and will **prevent** harm to our historic collections. The bid also **integrates** with the ambitions of our partners in Flintshire to grow the offer at Theatre Clwyd as a sustainable cultural hub in the area.

## Rural Walks and Community Miles

Walking doesn't all have to be about long distance challenges. Accessible (to **Age** and **Disability**) short walks that will only take an hour or so are sometimes all we need to boost our well-being. These walks often link communities and explore some of our most special places. The [Denbighshire Rural Walks](#) series presents the best of walking in our rural area in one booklet with a range of walks to choose from – from the short and very easy, to the more strenuous. Our [Community Miles](#) series link villages and other places of interest. Walks are free, they can have little to no negative impact on our environment and can **prevent** health problems and protect well-being over the **long term**. This is particularly important for areas that are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

## What are we doing in 2021 to 2022?

We will continue to deliver against the projects that support this priority:

**Superfast Broadband and Mobile Networks:** We will progress talks with partners across North Wales to maximise the benefits for Denbighshire on regional digital infrastructure projects (Local Full Fibre Network and the North Wales Growth Deal). We will prepare a plan for tackling the remaining 'white' properties in the county (those without, or with very,

poor connectivity), and continue to support Nantglyn to progress a community broadband solution.

**Digital Exclusion:** We will continue to train staff and volunteers from April 2021 onwards. We will promote the Denbighshire Digital Buddies scheme. We will plan an intergenerational event to take place during 2021, and work to support those experiencing socio economic disadvantage will commence, with a focus on digital skills and employment.

**Infrastructure for events:** We hope to launch the mobile equipment hire scheme in the spring, 2022. We will encourage use of the equipment through proactive publicity. Information about the targeted support package scheme will also be shared with Member Area Groups and City, Town and Community Councils prior to publication and launch of the scheme in July 2021. It is envisaged that the 'bidding window' for project proposals will be open between July and September 2021, and funding award decisions will be communicated by the end of the year. Proactive engagement with promoters will commence in the autumn, 2021, in preparation for the summer season of 2022. Whilst this work will extend beyond the timescales of the current Corporate Plan, the aim is to embed a more structured and coherent approach to events that will continue for years to come.

**Sustainable Transport Plan:** A project brief to produce a Sustainable Transport Plan for Denbighshire will be discussed by the Corporate Plan Programme Board in July 2021. Once approval is confirmed, a business case to take the project forward will be developed.

## **Resilient Communities: The council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience**

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: Good

### **Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Measures Update**

As a whole, North Wales saw an 5.8% increase in domestic crime in 2020 to 2021.

Domestic crime in Denbighshire has increased in the past twelve months; in terms of the overall trends, the levels in the county fluctuates on a weekly basis.

There has been an increase in the cumulative number of repeat victims of domestic violence being identified in Denbighshire, from 517 to 555. This increase is 7.6% on the previous year. Repeat victims are people who have been a victim of crime three or more occasions in 12 months; therefore, the value for each month is a snapshot of the previous 12 months. Covid-19 restrictions are likely to have had an effect on domestic crime, with intra-familial tensions being raised due to lockdowns and travel restrictions.

Repeat offenders are people who have committed a domestic abuse offence on three or more occasions in 12 months; therefore, the value for each month is a snapshot of the previous 12 months. The number of repeat offenders of domestic abuse has increased in Denbighshire over the past twelve months, rising from 97 to 108 for the same period this year. This is an increase of 11.3%. The overall picture for North Wales for 2020 to 2021 shows the percentage of repeat offenders of domestic abuse has decreased by -2.2%.

Within the national Dewis Cymru website (a platform for sharing information on organisations and services that may be beneficial to people's well-being) the number of resources for Denbighshire stands at 623 at the end of March 2021. This is an increase of 16% on the figures we saw for the same period the previous year. The council encourages all services and service users to look to this platform for community information, and it is possible that the Covid-19 pandemic has led people and service providers to use this platform more regularly. At the end of March 2021, there were 11,059 resources for Wales on Dewis Cymru, and 2,799 for North Wales.

The number of carer assessments that took place during 2020 to 2021 totalled 878. However, for the same reporting period the previous year, the number of assessments

was higher at 1,224. We are not clear yet why there is a reduction in these figures, for a year where we know more people took on caring responsibilities during the pandemic. Support for carers has continued and community support has been available regardless of whether carers have received an assessment. Third Sector / Community Support during the crisis has been reaching carers and helping them to continue their caring responsibilities, and it is possible that this has made a difference. Working patterns have also changed and more people are working from home or furloughed, and some people have declined or cancelled formal support because they didn't want home visits to protect the vulnerable people that they care for. Carers themselves continue to show amazing resilience and maybe have been managing through their own creativity instead of seeking formal assistance. Carer Assessors have continued to find remote telephone and online support, and last summer were able to offer garden visits.

Data for 2020 to 2021 for the average length of time adults (aged 65 or over) are supported in residential care homes shows a steady increase to 1,053 days, rising from 970 for the same time the previous year. It is likely that the increased figure is due to the Covid-19 pandemic guidelines around isolating and shielding of vulnerable residents. Although our figures remain high in relation to the Wales average (800), it is understood that Denbighshire has a high average age population. We are still below our target of 1,200 days.

There are five remaining measures in our framework that relate to the council's carers' and residents' surveys. There is no new data to present for these, but they are next anticipated to run in late-summer and the autumn respectively.

## **Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update**

### **Involvement in shaping and improving services**

Confidence in the ability to deliver this project remains high; however, confidence in the ability to deliver the project as originally planned (focussed on building strong face-to-face engagement opportunities and fostering this culture within the council and its communities) is compromised due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Engagement Champions have recently met to discuss year one findings by ONEDAY Ltd, a research consortium commissioned to carry out our street survey work. The sustainability of new ways of working as a result of Covid-19 were also discussed and are anticipated to have a longer-term impact on the

draft engagement policy and supporting framework for the council. Further research work was undertaken in February and March 2021, devising a draft plan offering various options moving forward, dependent upon Covid-19 restrictions; findings will be reported when available. The spend profile for the project is under review and will be offered to the Corporate Plan Programme Board in July 2021 to ensure funding is maximised.

The engagement portal is now available on the council's [website](#).

This project indirectly benefits people from all protected characteristics, carers and those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage** in that the source information is very varied and is in an accessible format for all.

### **Supporting Carers**

On 26 November 2020, Carers Rights Day, the council launched its Carers' Charter. The charter, produced in consultation with local adult and young carers and the Denbighshire Carer's Strategy Group, is our public statement of commitment to carers. We hope local businesses, third sector and community organisations will sign-up and make copies available in their workspaces and offices to ensure the role of informal, unpaid, carers is recognised. It sets out the council's pledge for carers to have the right to be treated with courtesy, respect and dignity, as well as the right to an individual assessment separate from the person for whom they are caring, so that their voice is also heard.

The Supporting Carers Project Team has continued to meet regularly to discuss progress and to plan for next steps and Covid-19 recovery. The Denbighshire Carers Strategy Group has also continued to meet and share information throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. It is recognised that some services have transferred well to virtual delivery and are likely to continue in this way because of convenience and being able to reach a wider audience. It is, however, equally acknowledged that digital exclusion is an issue and there is a need for on-going training and support for residents who are unable or unwilling to engage remotely with local carer services.

Community Support Services are continuing to review the carer referral process to ensure a seamless carer journey and improved data collection. Business systems are contributing to this work to ensure that Denbighshire's recording methods are consistent with other local authorities and prepared to collect data against the Welsh Government's improved performance framework (introduced in April 2020).

Support with contingency planning is available and discussed with carers as part of the What Matters / Assessment process. Third sector partners co-ordinated the Carers Support Grant, recently launched by Welsh Government, to support carers who experienced hardship during the winter. Application forms are available from [Carers Trust Crossroads](#) and [NEWCIS](#) for additional financial support and / or equipment to help carers in their caring role.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristics of **Age, Disability, Sex, Marriage and Civil Partnership** (particularly for unpaid carers looking after family members, spouse, partner etc.), and those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

### **Community Resource Teams (CRT)**

In December 2020 the Regional Transformation Board closed the CRT project and moved it to 'business as usual' under the Community Support Services' monthly Integrated Health and Social Care Localities Meeting. Community Support Services and partners continue to offer seamless health and care provision in locality hubs and throughout the county.

This continued work for Community Support Services directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**, and also those with characteristics that mean that they are most likely to struggle with health issues requiring our support, which would include **Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief**, or who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

### **Community Planning, Windfarms**

The Community Development Team continues to support Windfarm fund processes for the four major schemes covering Denbighshire, whilst also supporting communities to develop project ideas and identify funding opportunities from a range of sources. The team also deliver a broad range of other outcomes, which include, but are not limited to, administering other grant funding, developing internal and external networks to promote good practice, planning and publishing of community development related news, and co-ordinating corporate endorsement of community projects where appropriate.

The Community Development Team creates a bridge between what is happening in local communities and corporately within the council. This provides unique opportunity to

facilitate collaboration between communities and council services, whilst also providing valuable insight into current priorities for communities across the county.

It is our hope that in supporting our communities through this work, projects that they deliver will in turn benefit all protected characteristics, including the socio-economic duty.

### **Reduce Domestic Abuse**

We continue to develop a county-wide approach to raising awareness on how to reduce domestic abuse against women and men as part of this Corporate Plan, as well as supporting the North Wales strategy to tackle all aspects of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. The council project aims to contribute to the reduction of domestic abuse across the county by raising awareness of domestic abuse with staff and service users; providing training and development for staff to recognise the signs of domestic abuse, and offering the provision of support for children affected by domestic abuse. The project remains on target to achieve these original aims, with progress in particular being made on the Ask and Act training for frontline practitioners. This training was developed with survivors of violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, and informed by lived experience. Level 2 training took place in March and April and 33 individuals are now trained as 'trainers' for Ask and Act; five staff were trained at Level 3 in April.

The Covid-19 lockdown has impacted start times on Spectrum training in schools and also on early domestic abuse intervention programmes for children. However, these impacts should be short-term and the goals still achievable by the end of the Corporate Plan in 2022.

As part of the project, the council supported White Ribbon Day on 25 November 2020 by lighting up two of our landmarks white, the Rhyl Pavilion and Rhyl Sky Tower. White Ribbon Day works to raise awareness of violence against women, encourage men to support women's groups, and raise awareness in schools and workplaces of violence against women.

This project directly benefits those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage** and also those with characteristics that mean that they are most likely to experience domestic abuse, including **Marriage and Civil Partnerships, Religion, Sex and Sexual Orientation**.

## **Working towards becoming a Dementia friendly council**

The project team has recently submitted its first annual self-assessment to the Alzheimer's Society to confirm the activities and actions that have been undertaken to raise awareness of Dementia. Within the past twelve months, the project has continued, despite Covid-19 restrictions and the inability to meet face-to-face with people living with Dementia and the carers of those people living with Dementia. Work has included development of an intranet page to share with staff useful information, including what is available to assist people and their families living with Dementia. Staff were asked to share the information amongst colleagues and to contribute anything that they were aware of locally that could help improve its usefulness, such as Dementia Friendly locations and groups.

Dementia awareness / Friends training has been provided for staff and councillors and the Team is currently seeking ways to continue this through on-line sessions. Currently Dementia Champion training from the Alzheimer's Society is unavailable, but the project team will seek to offer this in the future.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**.

## **Rhyl Community Development**

As part of the Safer Streets Programme between Denbighshire County Council, North Wales Police and Clwyd Alyn Housing, Countryside Services have almost completed work on a new community food garden, bringing a disused and unsightly piece of land back into use for local residents to enjoy. This garden will offer communities opportunity to grow their own food, and to use new fixtures to sit, relax and socialise. The Garden will be fully accessible and will be used at no cost to residents who are part of the West Rhyl Community Champions initiative. The gardens are a way of saying thank you to residents, for being involved with the work of statutory organisations and the creation of activities to benefit West Rhyl communities.

Over the past two years, residents have voiced concerns over the way vehicles park fully on pavements and across junctions around the Gerddi Heulwen Park. These vehicles are a safety hazard for both pedestrians and road users, as they're causing obstructions which present a serious risk to the community. As part of the Safer Street Programme, a consultation was carried out earlier this year with residents living on Gronant Street, Abbey Street and John Street, seeking to offer potential options to rectify the issues. As a result

of the consultation, contractors were appointed and 105 stainless steel bollards were installed along pavement edgings during March. These are in keeping with the already installed posts around the park and, as requested by a number of residents during the consultation process, they are more aesthetically pleasing than black bollards. The options of resident parking permits and double yellow lines are still under discussion; further consultation with residents is required for this.

In terms of Capital Investment Projects and Community Benefits, the Rhyl Community Development Board met earlier this year and discussed the significant Regeneration Projects currently taking place and planned for Rhyl. An action arose from the meeting to map out employment and training opportunities being created for local residents as part of the projects, to include paid job roles, apprenticeships, work experience placements, and required skills and training. The Public Sector projects currently being mapped are the Queens Market Redevelopment, East Rhyl Sea Defences, Royal Alexander Hospital, Engineering School of Excellence, and Edward Henry Street Housing Development. Working closely with the various project managers and contractors is beneficial for Working Denbighshire and the Department of Work and Pensions, as they're able to prepare local people to take up the opportunities. Meetings and discussions are ongoing and findings will be presented at the next Community Development Board meeting.

This programme directly benefits those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

### **County wide Community Development**

For the financial year 2020 to 2021 there were 205 groups / projects supported by the Community Development Team. The work included support to strengthen the council's working relationship with foodbanks across the county, hosting two virtual Foodbank Network meetings from January to March, providing a platform to share best practices, highlight common concerns, and invite guest speakers from Citizen's Advice Denbighshire.

During January to March there were 28 applications received for the Open Spaces Commuted Sums resulting in 25 projects being allocated funding to deliver their projects.

It is our hope that in supporting our communities through this work, projects that they deliver will in turn benefit all protected characteristics, including the socio-economic duty.

## Annual or Biennial Measures

2020 to 2021 data for the following measures is not expected until the carers' and residents' surveys are run in late-summer and autumn respectively.

Measure	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	Status
The percentage of people reporting they have received the right information or advice when they needed it – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	88	No data due to Covid-19	Acceptable
The percentage of carers reporting they feel supported to continue in their caring role – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	55	No data due to Covid-19	Priority for improvement
The percentage of people reporting that they know who to contact about their care and support – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	84	No data due to Covid-19	Acceptable
The percentage of people who agree "my local area is a place where people will pull together to improve the local area" – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	59	Does not apply No Survey	Acceptable
The percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	27	Does not apply No Survey	Priority for improvement

## Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Measure	Quarter 4 2019 to 2020	Quarter 1 2020 to 2021	Quarter 2 2020 to 2021	Quarter 3 2020 to 2021	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Status
The cumulative (year to date) number of repeat victims of	517	126	247	371	555	Does not apply Count only

Domestic Abuse including non-crime occurrences (3 or more in 12 months, measured as year to date)						
The cumulative (year to date) number of repeat offenders of Domestic Abuse (3 or more in 12 months)	97	23	43	70	108	Does not apply Count only
The number of live resources on the Dewis Cymru Platform – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	536	470	543	562	623	Excellent
The number of assessments of need for support for carers undertaken during the year	1224	111	320	404	878	Does not apply Count only
The average length of time adults (aged 65 or over) are supported in residential care homes – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	970	984	1,028	1,046	1,053	Priority for improvement

## Project Progress

The following projects are all on target for completion:

- Working towards becoming a Dementia Friendly Council
- Act to reduce domestic abuse

The following projects are experiencing obstacles:

- People are involved in shaping and improving services
- Supporting carers

The following project is now closed:

- Community Resource Teams
- Community Planning and Development Resource
- Community planning, Windfarms
- Provide easily accessible information that supports people's independence and resilience

## **Well-being and Equality**

This priority applies the five ways of working and directly supports Wales' Well-being Goals around **prosperity, health, equality, cohesiveness, global responsibility**, and a **vibrant culture with a thriving Welsh language**. Below are some further highlights from the last twelve months' work that we have undertaken in support of the Well-being Goals and the Sustainable Development Principle, and benefiting those with protected characteristics or who are at a socio-economic disadvantage.

### **Memory Bags**

In March 2021, Denbighshire Libraries were delighted to be able to offer a new collection of Memory Bags that are available to borrow from local libraries. These Memory bags contain a collection of books, poems, artefacts and smells that are designed to stimulate the senses and promote reminiscence and discussion. They have been themed around the 'Pictures to Share' books, which are designed specifically for people living with Dementia, and are part of the Reading Well for Dementia Scheme. The Memory Bags have been created by Denbighshire Libraries in partnership with Life Story Network CIC and Denbighshire Leisure Ltd, and funded by the Dementia Aware Community Led Grant Programme 2019 to 2020.

This work supports the protected characteristic of **Age**. It is an excellent example of **collaboration** that seeks to immerse and **involve** people living with Dementia, their families and their carers in opportunities and experiences that will help and motivate them in the **long-term**.

### **Resident Well-being**

In January of 2021, a virtual singing event gave residents in Denbighshire the chance to socialise online from their own homes. Residents were encouraged to get involved and sign up to 'Sing from your Home', an event hosted by Denbighshire Leisure Ltd, in partnership with Denbighshire County Council, and funded by the Arts Council of Wales. Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias Music Centre also partnered up to help organise the event, which involved multiple 'sing-along' sessions being hosted on Zoom in both Welsh and English, and giving residents the opportunity to either take part in the sessions, or to attend, sit back and listen to the virtual choir. The event was part of a Denbighshire Leisure Active Communities team arts activity project, to help create opportunities for residents in Denbighshire regardless of experience, ability, age or background. Welsh and English sessions were hosted via smart phone, tablet or computer, with additional support available for anyone who needed help setting up the event on Zoom.

This project directly supports the protected characteristics of **Age**, providing a social opportunity for people to support their own well-being needs. This **collaborative** offer gives an opportunity for community members to be **involved** and may encourage further community **engagement** and **long-term** benefits.

### **Ageing Well in Denbighshire**

The Ageing Well in Denbighshire multi-agency group forum works to support intergenerational activities within the county. Whilst member organisations have been very involved in meeting community needs during the Covid-19 pandemic, background work has continued to monitor all the work and to maintain an Action Plan for 2020 to 2024. This Action Plan has developed from the requirements of the Welsh Government's Phase 3 of The Strategy for Older People in Wales 'Living Longer, Ageing Well (2013 to 2023)'. It also incorporates activities that are aligned to the Older People's Commissioner for Wales' Strategy, [Making Wales the best place in the world to grow older](#) 2019 to 2022, and the Commissioner's Work Programme for 2019 to 2020. Furthermore, the Plan aligns with

priorities and outcomes within the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Our work is based upon the themes of age friendly communities, falls prevention, Dementia supportive communities, opportunities for employment and learning, new skills, and tackling loneliness and isolation.

In September 2020, the Older People's Commissioner for Wales was invited to Denbighshire to meet members of the Ageing Well in Denbighshire Group and the Dementia Friendly Council team, with the invitation being extended to community members. We were given an opportunity to learn more about the Commissioner's "[Leave No-one Behind – Action for an Age Friendly Recovery](#)" report and to discuss with her the ways that our work would contribute to this. The Commissioner praised the work of both groups on their intergenerational approach within the county and suggested our good practice and experiences may support other counties.

This forum directly supports the protected characteristic of **Age**; it helps support and **involve** all age groups with their well-being and shares good practice amongst member organisations in a **collaborative** way, securing our ability to meet intergenerational needs in the **long-term**. Our **integration** of regulatory and statutory requirements within our Action Plan contribute to regional and national work.

## **Library Services**

The Welsh Government has praised Denbighshire Library Services in the Welsh Public Library Standards assessment report for 2019 to 2020, saying it has a 'strong commitment to health and well-being' while its 'intention to focus on the development of staff should enable Denbighshire libraries to remain at the heart of their communities and continue to deliver services effectively'. Covering the period before the coronavirus pandemic, it found the service met all twelve core entitlements, including being free to join and open to all; providing free access to resources, facilities and services, with friendly, knowledgeable staff; as well as achieving seven of the nine quality indicator targets in full. These included support for individual development, support for health and well-being, location of service points, Welsh language resources, online access, supply of requests and opening hours per capita. The service was the best performing in Wales for the number of Welsh books borrowed per capita, and was ranked fifth for the number of active borrowers and for the number of virtual visits per capita.

During the last year the service has introduced an order and collect service and expanded its digital offer for downloadable books, newspapers and magazines which was strengthened by a £250,000 investment from Welsh Government to increase the range of stock across Wales to meet increasing demand. The Bookstart team switched its service to online immediately in mid-March 2020 and has delivered to date 33 weekly live 'Rhymetime' sessions, 30 weekly YouTube videos, and 12 Siarad Babi videos to support parents. Library staff have been making calls to local residents to check on their welfares and explain about the range of service and support available locally.

The library service provision supports all the protected characteristics in that it is fully accessible to all our community members. It is now nationally recognised as an excellent service, which provides the prospect of **involving** all our communities. The vast wealth of information available opens opportunities and experiences to help and motivate users in the **long-term**.

## **What are we doing in 2021 to 2022?**

We will continue to deliver against the projects that support this priority in 2021 to 2022:

**Involvement in shaping and improving services:** We will continue to work towards finalising our engagement policy and to embed our engagement activities, enhancing our work with people to improve services.

**Supporting carers:** We will promote the Young Carers Identity Card and work with focus groups of young carers to develop publicity materials and ideas. We will also be tendering for our Carers Assessor Contract, due for renewal at the end of March 2022. The council will also continue to contribute local information and feedback to inform regional and national planning for carers and the Welsh Government's Strategy for Unpaid Carers. There is more information available about this strategy on the [Welsh Government website](#).

**Act to reduce domestic abuse:** We will continue our county-wide approach to raising awareness of domestic abuse, and identifying sources of support. Some of the elements of the project work will include early intervention for children, including Spectrum training in schools from September; signing-off and implementing from June the Make a Stand housing policy for domestic abuse; continuing work on the council's safeguarding process

to determine the changes required to incorporate domestic abuse concerns and incidents; and finalising our domestic abuse policy for the council by September 2021.

**Community Development:** In addition to our continued support of community projects and promoting awareness of funding opportunities, the council will invite bids for the new [UK Community Renewal Fund](#). The deadline for submission to the council is May 31, 2021. We will also continue to nurture our new relationships with Foodbank organisers to enhance support for those needing to use these.

**Working towards becoming a Dementia Friendly Council:** We will continue to raise awareness of Dementia within the council, and to work further on our action plan for the Alzheimer's Society accreditation, encouraging community members to share their lived experiences with us, and to offer an opportunity to share good practice.

**Ageing Well in Denbighshire:** Member organisations will be working together to support people to rethink how they can re-join their intergenerational communities with Covid-19 recovery.

## Environment: Attractive and protected, supporting well-being and economic prosperity

Measures: Good

Projects: Excellent

### Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Measures Update

Our measures framework for this priority is entirely concerned with annual data. Three measures are derived from our Residents' Survey, which is next due in the autumn, 2021; and two further measures, highlighted in the table below, are not yet ready to report on.

The council's Climate and Ecological Change Strategy, 2021 to 2030, has been approved, and four measures important to the success of the programme have now replaced the existing carbon emissions measure in this priority. They are:

- Total carbon tonnage emitted through staff commuting – reduced from 1,848 to X,XXX tonnes during 2020 to 2021.
- Total carbon tonnage emitted through business travel – reduced from 550 to XXX tonnes during 2020 to 2021.
- Total carbon tonnage emitted through supply chains – reduced from 22,710 to X,XXX tonnes during 2020 to 2021.
- Percentage of council owned and operated land in the highest categories of species richness – increased from 38 to XX percent during 2020 to 2021.

These are further broken down at a service level within Service Plans to capture the contribution needed by individual services for the council to achieve Net Carbon Zero by 2030.

The latest published figures (2019) for the indicator for STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) showed strong growth in the economic impact of tourism, with a 6.6% increase on the previous year's (2018) figure from £509 million to £552 million.

Unfortunately, a very different picture will apply to 2020 to 2021 should data be released for this year.

During the last year the council increased the percentage of its housing stock with EPC (Energy) rating of C or above from 40% to 46%. The increase would likely have been higher but for Covid-19 restrictions limiting the work that could take place. It is still the aim that the council will achieve 70% within the term of the Corporate Plan.

Finally, despite Covid-19, the council managed to maintain, and slightly increase its tree planting output during 2020 to 2021, planting 4,400 trees (up from 4,300). This exceeded our target for the year. A total of 14,500 have now been planted during the term of this current Corporate Plan.

## **Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update**

### **Climate and Ecological Change**

Since declaring a Climate and Ecological Emergency in July 2019, we have in February 2021 agreed and published our plans to become a net carbon zero and ecologically positive council by 2030. Our [Climate and Ecological Change Strategy \(2021 to 2030\)](#) is available to view on our website.

Our Strategy outlines our net carbon zero and ecologically positive goals for the council, along with the changes and actions we have identified so far that we will endeavour to deliver between now and 2030.

We are proud to be one of the first councils in Wales to have tackling climate and ecological change as a guiding principle in its decision making process, formally changing our [Constitution](#) in October 2020.

We now look forward to build on our strong track record on reducing carbon and improving biodiversity, most recently delivered under this Environment priority. Protecting our environment for future generations will of course directly benefit the protected characteristics of **Age**. There are also ecological, economic and educational benefits that will come from our strategy that will benefit areas that are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

## **Tree Planting**

The Project remains 'on target' and the next planting season will commence in the autumn, 2021. The tree planting in Rhyl for 2020 to 2021 has been completed, and the risk from illegal access by off-road motorbikes was reduced significantly through a project to secure the boundaries at Glan Morfa, funded by the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board, that was completed in April 2021. The funding also improved the access points to the site and encouraged increased usage by residents who live in Rhyl West.

A community orchard has been planted in Upper Denbigh, where the Vale of Clwyd and Denbigh Plum feature strongly. The intention is to extend the size of the orchard going forward. There was a risk to the full allocation of tree planting in Upper Denbigh being delivered due to the lack of suitable land. To help mitigate against this we actively pursued opportunities for planting, which included landscaping at the extension to the allotment site and further highway verge planting.

Projects such as these are important in areas of **socio-economic disadvantage** that have been deprived of tree canopy and biodiversity.

## **East Rhyl Coastal Defence**

The East Rhyl flood defence construction remains on target with work continuing on rock revetment work, as well as work to complete the beach access steps. In March 2021 shore side work on the promenades and sea defence wall commenced. The financial spend remains on target with 59.8% of the project budget now spent.

This work benefits an area of **socio-economic disadvantage** with a slightly older population than the Wales average, but also with a few young people living there. The project, including enhanced beach access points, will benefit the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**.

## **Improving Biodiversity and Nature Corridor**

With the onset of spring and a new financial year, the project is moving onwards and upwards. Community engagement will have a phased return following the easing of restrictions, and has already begun with the help of the Little Tern colony set up by the Little Tern Group volunteers. In the upcoming weeks small scale sessions will begin, such

as at the allotment site with Syrian families and North Wales Training; marram grass planting at Horton's Nose; walking groups and health groups; and the regular volunteering sessions linked with the Nature for Health project. Discussions are now being held between staff and external groups and organisations to plan activity for the season. There is much hope that it will be a full and successful year.

Projects such as these directly benefit those areas at a **socio-economic disadvantage**. Our nature corridor in particular seeks to link deprived communities through a large habitat corridor

### **Moorland Management and Living Assets**

Two joint training days were recently hosted on Moel Famau with North Wales Fire and Rescue Service around wildfire management and containment. The restoration works of Llantysilio mountain fire damage are now underway, with transportation of heather brash and seed harvested from a donor site being prepared to move the damaged areas. A contractor has been engaged to complete the heli-lifting.

Our two Tree Inspectors have continued their work throughout 2020 to 2021, including the completion of surveying the gritting network. To date over 1,200 trees have been mapped and inspected. The Tree and Woodland Strategy is anticipated to be drafted for December 2021. Areas of Denbighshire land is being explored for potential tree planting or natural regeneration of woodland habitat.

Our work in these important areas strongly link with our ambition for Denbighshire to become carbon neutral and ecologically positive, as well as preserving important asset for the enjoyment of future generations.

### **Energy Efficient Council Homes**

In October 2020 work started on 22 new council homes that will be built to the energy efficient Passivhaus standard using a modular construction method, and they will incorporate additional features to minimise carbon emission such as ground source heat pumps and photovoltaic arrays. In January 2021 work started on the construction of four apartments in Prestatyn, which will also be built to the Passivhaus standard, but using a more traditional masonry method. All 26 new homes are expected to be ready for occupation in the autumn, 2021.

This project will directly benefit the protected characteristics of **Age**, and those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, being better for health and well-being (as well as for the environment).

## Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	Status
Percentage reduction in carbon emissions (tonnes) from council assets – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	15.69	Replace with four below	Excellent
Total carbon tonnage emitted through staff commuting – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	1,848 tonnes	Data due in June	TBC
Total carbon tonnage emitted through business travel – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	550 tonnes	Data due in June	TBC
Total carbon tonnage emitted through supply chains – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	22,710 tonnes	Data due in June	TBC
Percentage of council owned and operated land in the highest categories of species richness – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	38	Data due in June	TBC
STEAM - Total Economic Impact of Tourism (£ million) – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	552.35	Data pending	Excellent
The percentage of existing and acquired council housing stock (1st April 2017 baseline) achieving an EPC (Energy) rating of C or above – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	40	46	Priority for improvement
The annual number of trees planted to increase canopy cover in Rhyl and Denbigh – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	4300	4400	Excellent

2020 to 2021 data for the following three measures is not expected until the Residents' Survey is run in the autumn, 2021.

Measure	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	Status
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How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? – Countryside – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	87	Does not apply No Survey	Excellent
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? – Beaches – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	70	Does not apply No Survey	Good
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? – Parks – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	64	Does not apply No Survey	Good

Our measure around the number of properties with a reduced risk of flooding (1,000s) will not be reported until the completion of identified flood schemes, which started in 2020.

### **Quarterly or Biannual Measures**

Our measure on the percentage of all new build council housing achieving an EPC (Energy) rating of A will not be reported until the completion of new builds in 2021.

### **Progress on projects**

The following projects are on target:

- Climate and ecological change programme
- East Rhyl coastal defence
- Urban tree planting
- Protect and enhance Denbighshire’s ‘living assets’
- Moorland management and wildfire prevention

- ENRaW Nature Corridor

The following projects are experiencing obstacles:

- Improving biodiversity

The following project is at risk:

- Improving energy efficiency in council houses

The following project has now been closed

- Reduce the council's use of plastics (Phase 2)

## **Well-being and Equality**

This priority applies the five ways of working and directly supports Wales' Well-being Goals around environmental **resilience, prosperity, health, equality, cohesiveness, global responsibility**, and a **vibrant culture with a thriving Welsh language**. Below are some further highlights from the last year of work that we have undertaken in support of the Well-being Goals and the Sustainable Development Principle; but also benefiting those with protected characteristics or who are at a socio-economic disadvantage.

### **Well-being Impact Assessment**

In January 2021 we launched an updated version of our Well-being Impact Assessment. The changes were slight, but they will ensure we pay due regard to some really important issues following the council's declaration of a climate and ecological emergency.

It is important that the council assesses all of its decisions in the context of climate impact, as now required by our Constitution. In this way we ensure that we give due consideration to the sustainable development principle and the five-ways of working, and all protected characteristics, including socio-economic disadvantage.

## Picturesque Landscape Bus Service

Our Picturesque Landscape Bus Service is a public transport service to key destination sites around the Dee Valley during the summer months, and whilst unable to run last year, it is now due to run every Saturday from 15th May 2021 to 30th October 2021. The aim of the project is to relieve vehicle congestion at key sites by providing an alternative to visiting by car, enable those without their own transport to access the sites, and disperse visitors along the Dee Valley corridor by encouraging people to explore the wider area away from the main hubs. Certain key sites are under great pressure and have seen a doubling of visitor numbers within the past 5 years, with associated parking problems, erosion, litter and anti-social behaviour (such as fires) increasing.

This work directly benefits those with the protected characteristic of **Disability**, and those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**. By **collaborating** and **integrating** goals with our partners in the area, and **involving** visitors to the area, it is hoped that this is a **long-term** solution that **prevents** harm to our natural and physical assets.

## Allotments

At the beginning of the year the number of allotment spaces in Denbighshire totalled 242. During 2020 to 2021 a grant was secured from the Open Space Commuted Sum, which funded the delivery of an additional 30 fully serviced plots as part of an extension to the existing allotment site at Maes Glas, Denbigh. This exceeded our target and has met the current waiting list in Denbigh. The council has allotment sites in Corwen, Ruthin, Llangollen, Denbigh, Rhyl and Prestatyn. A traditional allotment costs just £52 a year, or £26 for a raised bed allotment.

These affordable allotment sites give all our residents, of all protected characteristics, access to an open space to call their own. This is particularly important in areas of **socio-economic disadvantage**; they are good for well-being, for community cohesion, and for the environment. The provision of such sites supports the council's commitment to the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working. For more information on allotments in Denbighshire, [visit our website](#).

## What are we doing in 2021 to 2022?

We will continue to deliver against the projects that support this priority throughout 2021 to 2022:

**Climate and Ecological Change:** In the first full year of our new strategy, we will establish a tree nursery, growing 5,000 trees a year for county-wide planting projects. We will complete the roll out of Carbon Literacy training for councillors and managers, and an e-learning module for all staff. We will also complete our 7 year LED Street lighting project.

**Tree Planting:** We will finish our programme to plant 18,000 trees by the end of 2022.

**East Rhyl Coastal Defence:** Our contractor will continue the work on this project, which is anticipated to be completed by December 2022.

**Improving Biodiversity and Nature Corridor:** We will add 41 sites to the Biodiversity Verge Pilot, bringing the total number of sites to 62. Visits will be made to each of the new sites to identify the most appropriate locations for the placement of the Bee Friendly and Meadow Creation signs. Sites will be monitored on a monthly basis throughout the year.

**Living Assets:** Our two tree officers will continue their work to map trees in our ownership, progressing with the Tree and Woodland Strategy, which is anticipated to be drafted for December 2021. We will also aim to understand better the threat and liabilities arising from Ash Tree Dieback.

**Energy Efficient Council Homes:** We will continue our programme of energy efficiency improvements to our council stock during 2021 to 2022.

**Tourism Strategy:** 2021 to 2022 will see the continuation of our Tourism Ambassador Scheme, which includes a website with training modules and resources on the area's natural and cultural assets. The Tourism Team have developed [a video](#) highlighting the scheme. You can find details of the scheme [on our website](#).

**Waste and recycling Service:** The council will progress its plans for the weekly recycling service, along with a four-weekly residual waste collection, which will be implemented during 2023, following the completion of a new centralised waste depot on the Colomendy Industrial Estate in Denbigh. Construction is set to start this summer.

## **Young People: A place where younger people will want to live and work and have the skills to do so**

Measures: Priority for improvement

Projects: Good

### **Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Measures Update**

The pandemic's impact on the delivery of services naturally has implications on a wide variety of measures that we collect. This is especially true within education where there have of course been significant ongoing challenges during this period. Attendance has been adversely affected as class cohorts self-isolate or schools were made to close; and attainment data of course is no longer comparable, being based on teacher assessment and not examination results. There will be a temporary suspension therefore of our measures for attendance and attainment, but we will seek to report any relevant data that may be published in the meantime, and resume all measures when it is appropriate to do so. Naturally this poses a real challenge to the council in understanding how our schools are performing, but we will continue to work with our School Improvement partners in GwE to ensure that the very best outcomes are being achieved by our pupils. A comprehensive report on the learning offer and support for schools during the pandemic was taken to [Performance Scrutiny in January](#).

Public Health Wales have not yet published data for the Childhood Measurement Programme for 2019 to 2020. The last data, previously reported, is for 2017 to 2018 and showed that 67% of children aged 4-5 years were a healthy weight or underweight. This placed us 2nd worst in Wales (15.4% below the Wales median), with 343 children measuring as overweight or obese.

There are three measures with new data in this report. Firstly, 2020 to 2021 data for the number of schools providing education through suitability and condition categories C and D shows a decrease from 30 to 27. Band B of the 21st Century Schools Programme of course will reduce this figure further.

Secondly, 87% of pupils responded positively in the Pupil Attitudes to Self and School Survey when asked of their feelings about school. Interestingly, this was a 1% improvement on the previous survey that was conducted prior to the pandemic.

Finally, the 18 to 24 work related claimant count remains a significant area of concern for us. 2020 to 2021 has seen Denbighshire's claimant count increase from 6.9% to 13.9%. We remain well behind the Wales average, which is now at 8.7%. Prior to the pandemic, Denbighshire was 2% behind the Wales average. However, for the first time, the UK claimant count average has risen beyond Wales, now at 9.1%. It is a situation that we will continue to monitor, but it underlines the importance of all our recovery efforts and support for businesses.

Within our measures framework for this priority there are three further measures that pertain to the Residents' Survey. We have no new data to share on these, the next survey being due in the autumn, 2021.

## **Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update**

### **Modernising Education**

Following Cabinet approval in September 2020 for the revisions to Band B of our Modernising Education Programme, confirmation of approval was received from Welsh Government in November. This will allow feasibility and design works to be commenced during 2021 to 2022. This is excellent news for our continued work delivering modern education facilities for our Young People. In the meantime, work has continued to deliver improved facilities for both childcare and Welsh Language provision in the county.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**. **Disability** will also benefit where access improvements are put in place through our new builds, or existing buildings that are modernised.

### **Childcare Settings**

Following Planning's approval of the extension of the Oak Tree Centre in July, approval and confirmation was received from the Welsh Government in November for the application to vary its funding. Subsequently the Strategic Investment Group (SIG) has scrutinised and approved the proposal, and the project has been out to tender. However, a lack of bids from the North Wales Construction Framework meant that we had to go out to tender again during April and May. This has caused a delay to the project and will push its completion beyond March 2022.

Ysgol Twm o'r Nant's childcare facility is now awaiting a decision from the council's planning committee, following the relevant approvals received from Welsh Government and SIG in November.

Both projects directly benefit the protected characteristics of **Age**, and **Pregnancy and Maternity**.

### **Welsh Language Centre**

The construction phase of the project was completed in September 2020. However, as yet it has not been possible for the project to realise its full benefits due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions, which have prevented the building from being used to its potential. We are, however, optimistic that the facility will start to see some use from the summer term, with one room being used by Cylch Meithrin Llanelwy; another by Ysgol Glan Clwyd for year 6 'trochi / immersion' students; and the final room being used for a post 16 childcare course delivered by Mudiad Meithrin.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristics of **Age**, and **Pregnancy and Maternity**. It also supports the council's commitment to ensuring that Welsh is a thriving language in Denbighshire.

### **School Nutrition Project**

Year 2 of our pioneering School Nutrition Project has obviously been adversely impacted by the pandemic and subsequent school closures. Nonetheless, the project has done great work in partnership with the Health Board to adapt resources and delivery to allow for training to continue virtually. We have also developed a new online platform for sharing resources with schools. Despite everything, we successfully recruited six schools and twelve members of staff during 2020 to 2021. The level 2 qualification in Community Food and Nutrition Skills started in January 2021, and was completed in April. Nine year 1 schools also continue to be engaged and deliver what is appropriate and safe to do so during Covid-19 restrictions.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**, and those who are at a **socio economic disadvantage**.

## **Support for Parents**

Positive progress has been made during 2020 to 2021 with the review of our Parenting Strategy, including the information and advice that is held on our website and through social media. The progression of the workstream has been impacted by Covid-19, but the work we did to implement the Solihull Parenting Programme has been particularly beneficial in the last year, seeing a strong uptake in our online course. We have also changed the way we deliver support, instead offering a telephone service in place of face-to-face parenting groups. It is another great example of flexibility being shown by our projects. In partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) the Solihull course has been made available online for parents until November 2022.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristics of **Age**, and **Pregnancy and Maternity**.

## **Entrepreneur Space**

Work on transforming the former Costigan's pub in Rhyl into a co-working hub for entrepreneurs was completed towards the end of 2020, and handed over to start-up and co-working experts, TownSq, in January. Denbighshire County Council used £312,000 of funding through the European Regional Development Fund and the Welsh Government to create the office accommodation at the semi-derelict Costigan's building on Bodfor Street, Rhyl. The building will support new businesses, create jobs and grow the local economy. There is room to accommodate around 20 start-up business in flexible accommodation, with space to host events and a coffee shop on site.

This project directly benefits those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

## **TechZone**

This project has been on hold for a significant period of time, waiting for external funding to be identified. The Corporate Plan Board has now agreed to close the project; however, the project may be restarted should funding be identified in future, or if the need for the project changes.

## **Young Person Employment Bursary**

The pandemic has significantly affected take-up of our Young People Bursary, receiving only 14 applications during 2020 to 2021, compared to 53 the previous year. Ongoing restrictions has meant that potential applicants are unable to leave their home to undertake training / assessments, etc. It has also been a year of readjustment for training providers of course, having to re-develop their content to deliver courses through different mediums. Nonetheless, the council remains committed to the offer of the bursary, particularly at a time when economic recovery is so important, and we be looking this April at broadening the application criteria to support more people and businesses. Information on the bursary is available on [our website](#).

This project directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**, and those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

## **Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS)**

Due to the onset of the pandemic, the PASS survey that ordinarily would have taken place in the summer term was suspended. But as we began to reopen schools from September, we felt that it was important to continue to offer the opportunity to access the survey during the remainder of 2020, so that the well-being of pupils could be monitored and appropriate interventions identified as necessary. Because of the circumstances, schools were of course given more time during the autumn term to complete the survey, running up until the Christmas period. The results have been covered in the measures analysis above and the tables below, but the survey has continued to be valuable tool in these difficult times, and greatly appreciated by schools.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**, but also those with characteristics that mean that they are most likely to face barriers in education, including **Disability, Race, Religion and Belief**, or who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

## **Working Start**

Working Start has faced a number of obstacles during 2020 to 2021, not least from the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on businesses, but also the long-term secondment of a Placement Officer to the Test, Trace and Protect Team. There has consequently been a decrease in the number of candidate applications to the scheme. Nonetheless, the project

has adapted to a new model of delivery and has successfully sourced 24 placements (20 paid and 4 unpaid placements), recruiting to 12 of these. The remaining 12 placements are currently at recruitment stage. Placements have been extended to micro and small businesses to help recovery in Denbighshire, and they are all advertised through our [denjobs.org](https://denjobs.org) platform and our wider partnership networks.

This project directly benefits those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

### **Working Denbighshire Ready for Work**

Our Ready for Work project has largely been paused during 2020 to 2021 due to Covid-19 restrictions. We are now working towards the delivery of a virtual careers event, which it is hoped will enable us to reach a larger cohort of students. At these times, it is vitally important that we support pupils in career planning and raised their aspirations, especially when choosing GCSE options. We are working closely with Jobcentre Plus, Careers Wales, local employers and schools to ensure that the event, which we anticipate running in May 2021, is well supported.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**.

### **Community Benefits Hub**

It has been a successful year for our Hub, which continues to expand its benefits across council procurement. During 2020 to 2021 the team have engaged well with staff through an outreach drive to increase awareness of its aims. Training sessions have also been provided for teams on community benefits awareness and the application of benefits to projects. As a result, a number of significant projects have engaged support from the Hub at an early stage, and 12% of Denbighshire contracts over £25k and under £1,000k have contained community benefits in 2020 to 2021. The Hub has also launched its new iShare portal to monitor development and trigger points as set out in S106 agreements / permission.

This project will only indirectly benefit those with protected characteristics or who are at a socio-economic disadvantage. There will be direct benefits to those groups arising from different contracts that the Hub supports.

## Volunteering

We have completed work on the development of a new volunteering policy for the council, approved by Cabinet in March 2021. Since then a [‘One Stop Shop’ webpage](#) has been created and hosts current volunteering opportunities and guidance for the benefit of volunteers and managers. In addition to this, the Internal Volunteer Network Meeting has reconvened.

This project directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**. Depending on the opportunities available, other protected characteristics or those who are at a socio-economic disadvantage may also benefit.

## Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	Status
Percentage of pupil attendance in primary schools – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	94.9	No data due to Covid-19	Acceptable
Percentage of pupil attendance in secondary schools – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	93.4	No data due to Covid-19	Priority for improvement
The percentage of children aged 4-5 years who are a healthy weight or underweight (reported one year in arrears) – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	Data pending	Data pending	Priority for improvement (based on 2018 data – 67.7%)
Local Authority Points Score Average - KS4 Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate Indicator – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	33.8	No data due to Covid-19	Priority for improvement
The percentage of children achieving 5 GCSEs A*-C (Level 2, Key Stage 4), including English or Welsh (1st language), Maths and English Literature, by the end of secondary school, against the percentage that achieved the expected standard at the end of primary school (Level 4, Key Stage 2) – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	50.9	No data due to Covid-19	Priority for improvement

<b>Measure</b>	<b>2019 to 2020</b>	<b>2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Status</b>
The number of schools providing education through suitability and condition categories C and D – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	30	27	Priority for improvement

2020 to 2021 data for the following three measures is not expected until the Residents' Survey is run in the autumn, 2021.

<b>Measure</b>	<b>2018 to 2019</b>	<b>2019 to 2020</b>	<b>Status</b>
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are job opportunities for young people at the start of their career – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	19	Does not apply No survey	Priority for improvement
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are opportunities for young people to develop their skills – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	28	Does not apply No survey	Priority for improvement
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are leisure opportunities that appeal to young people – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	50	Does not apply No survey	Acceptable

### Quarterly or Biannual Measures

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2019 to 2020</b>	<b>Quarter 1 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 2 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 3 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Status</b>
Percentage of the population aged 18 to 24 claiming Job Seekers Allowance – <b>Benchmarked Nationally</b>	6.9	13.6	13.2	13.4	13.9	Priority for improvement

The percentage of pupils (using Pupil Attitudes to Self and School - PASS) who respond positively against pupils' feelings about school – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	Does not apply Bi-annual	No data due to Covid-19	Does not apply Bi-annual	87.2	Does not apply Bi-annual	Good
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## Project Progress

The following projects are on target:

- Entrepreneur space, Rhyl
- Pupil Attitude to Self and School Survey
- School Nutrition Project
- Community Benefits Hub

The following projects are experiencing obstacles:

- Working Denbighshire Ready for Work
- Modernising Education Programme
- TechZone
- Supporting Parents
- The Denbighshire Working Start Scheme

The following project is at risk:

- Young Person Employment Bursary

## Well-being and Equality

This priority applies the five ways of working and directly supports Wales' Well-being Goals around **prosperity, health, equality, cohesiveness, global responsibility**, and a **vibrant culture with a thriving Welsh language**. Below are some further highlights from the last year of work that we have undertaken in support of the Well-being Goals and the Sustainable Development Principle; but also benefiting those with protected characteristics or who are at a socio-economic disadvantage:

### North Wales Growth Deal

In December, a significant milestone was achieved with Denbighshire signing up to the North Wales Growth Deal, which aims to create up to 4,200 new jobs by 2036, and support an uplift of over £2 billion for the economy over that same period. UK and Welsh governments have pledged £240m to the Deal with the ambition that this will secure over £1bn in investment through match funding from private investors. The first tranche of money aims to sell the region to investors, funds being released at the end of the financial year with three initial projects identified to kick-start investment in the region.

Strengthening the economy will support those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, also targeting the protected characteristic of **Age** by providing more work opportunities for young and old alike. We are doing so in **collaboration** with regional partners, **integrating** with their ambitions for the area, and securing our ability to meet our needs in the **long-term**. This investment may also **prevent** any rise in deprivation in the region.

### Mind of My Own

Over the year, Education and Children's Services have undertaken a piece of work to improve the involvement of children and young people, launching a new app-led digital platform called Mind of My Own, which makes it easier for children and young people (who are working with the service) to express their views, wishes and feelings on number of aspects of their life. Children and young people can use the app independently or alongside their Education and Children's Services Worker. Implementing this new platform

virtually during the pandemic has been significant, as it has allowed children and young people to make contact with their social worker should they wish to share good news, or have any questions or concerns that they wish to raise.

This project directly supports the protected characteristic of **Age**. It helps to **involve** young people better with determining their own care needs, and will help **prevent** problems escalating. The app is a sustainable and **collaborative** solution that helps improve service delivery for the **long-term**, also **integrating** with personal, professional and legislative needs, not least the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

### **Curriculum Enrichment**

Denbighshire's unique and inspiring Curriculum Engagement programme has not failed to disappoint during this difficult year, hosting a variety of competitions and challenges that children, young people and families could get involved with and flex their creativity. In February, the service teamed up with Denbighshire Library Services to celebrate Michael Morpurgo Month. Children aged 5 to 14 were encouraged to read and take inspiration from Morpurgo's books and put pen to paper and enter a story writing challenge. Elsie Croft (Ysgol Frongoch) took the first place prize, with Gwen Hayes (Ysgol Frongoch) coming second. Highly commended were Ella Hayes (Ysgol Frongoch), Oliver Hayes (Ysgol Frongoch), and Elin Wilcox-Jones (Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch).

For St David's Day, an exciting cooking challenge was held, where children, young people and their families could demonstrate their skills and their passion for cooking by using ingredients that are local and healthy. Using their imagination and their knowledge of Welsh and local produce, children were asked to create a dish that they thought St David would enjoy eating. The overall winners were Sophie Thompson (Ysgol Borthyn) and William Parkes (Ysgol Llywelyn). Also highly commended were Grace Longley (Bodnant Community School), Kimmi-Leigh Hughes (Ysgol Melyd), Max Thompson (Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn), and Tomos Longley (Bodnant Community School).

The winning stories and recipes have been published on the [Denbighshire Curriculum Enrichment website](#).

Our Curriculum Engagement work directly supports the protected characteristic of **Age**, but also helps those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**. It is a wonderful

example of **collaboration** that seeks to immerse and **involve** children, young people and their families in opportunities and experiences that will inspire them in the **long-term**.

### **Period Poverty**

The council has launched a subscription to end period poverty and prevent periods being a barrier to education. The council, through the Welsh Government 2020 to 2021 Period Deprivation Grant, has secured a subscription service for young people in Denbighshire until March 2022, working in conjunction with social enterprise Hey Girls. The service provides a package of re-usable period products, or a monthly delivery of eco-friendly disposable products directly to subscribers' homes. Those eligible must be enrolled at either a primary or secondary school in Denbighshire. Free menstrual products have always been available in schools, and they have continued to be provided to pupils during the pandemic, including at home during lockdowns. Hey Girls is also supporting Denbighshire by providing educational resources for primary and secondary aged pupils, covering periods and menstrual health, and guides on how to use period products. By encouraging open conversations about menstruation in schools, pupils can address taboos, stigma and shame in a safe space and better understand how menstrual health affects themselves and others around them. To check eligibility for the service, contact [DCCHG@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:DCCHG@denbighshire.gov.uk).

This great initiative supports the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Sex**, and helps those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**. It is a great **collaborative** project, that **prevents** disadvantage, and by **involving** young people early in those open conversations about menstruation, we hope that there will be **long-term** benefits to them and society.

### **Award Winning School Catering**

Denbighshire County Council is proud that its school catering service has been recognised as one of the top 6 best performing Services in the UK by The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE). This recognition is based upon comparisons with other School Meals Services from across the UK and takes into account things such as food purchasing initiatives, school meal uptake, management costs, staff training and absence levels, and communication with customers. The service has worked hard to maintain the quality of service provided across the county, never more so over the last 13 months during the

pandemic. APSE will include a case study about the council's service in their best practice studies publication, which will be produced during summer 2021.

The service directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**, and benefits those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**. By ensuring that children in our schools receive balanced, healthy and nutritious meals, we are benefiting their **long-term** development, well-being, and **preventing** mal-nourishment. This **integrates** with public health goals. **Collaborating** with schools, Welsh Government and Public Health Wales, the service always strives to **involve** parents and pupils in the design of the service.

## **What are we doing in 2021 to 2022?**

In the absence of firm attainment data and continued disruption to physical attendances at school caused by the ongoing pandemic, it is an absolute priority for the council to work closely with schools and GwE, as our improvement partner, to comprehensively understand and support the learning experience of young people in Denbighshire, and to make sure that they are at all times safeguarded from harm. We will continue to do so throughout 2021 to 2022.

We will also continue to deliver against the projects that support this priority:

**Modernising Education:** We will continue to deliver on the 21st Century Schools programme, modernising our school facilities to ensure that our children have a learning environment that supports their education. Specifically, this will involve work on developing Band B of the programme, focusing on Llangollen, Denbigh and Rhyl. 2021 to 2022 will also see our new Welsh Language Centre finally be put to its intended use; and (pending successful tender) work will begin on the extension of the Oak Tree Centre.

**School Nutrition Project:** We will continue to recruit schools for the final year of the project, and deliver training and support virtually as appropriate. A further 10 schools will hopefully be recruited.

**Support for Parents:** We will complete our review of advice and support available to parents, including what's published on our website and through social media. We will also continue to promote the availability of the Solihull parenting programme.

**Young Person Employment Bursary:** From April we will revise the criteria for our Young People Bursary to allow more people and small businesses to access much needed support in the recovery period.

**Pupil Attitude to Self and School (PASS):** Our contract for PASS is coming to an end and we must in 2021 to 2022 consider options beyond the closure of this project, which hopefully include an appropriate tool to support our understanding of pupil well-being.

**Working Start and Ready for Work:** We will recruit to the twelve further placements that we have and look for further placement opportunities for the future. We will also host a virtual careers event for schools in May 2021.

**Communities Benefit Hub:** We will continue to expand Community Benefits within the council's procurement processes and monitor the implementation of our new online portal.

**Volunteering:** In April, 2021, we will officially launch our volunteering 'One Stop Shop' web pages to coincide with National Volunteers Week. Our internal Volunteers Network will revise their Terms and Reference and recruit where there are services not represented. As Covid-19 restrictions allow, council services will start to publicise volunteering opportunities again.

## **Corporate Health: The council is efficient, well-managed and environmentally sustainable**

Measures: Acceptable

Governance Areas: Good

### **Corporate Health Performance Framework: Measures Update**

This is the first report to present the set of measures detailed in the tables below, responding to the new duty, under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, for the council to self-assess its performance. Specifically, the statutory guidance requires us to evaluate our performance against seven governance areas (see headings below), which these measures support. There are 21 of them, so the evaluation here will be brief. Please see the tables below for the current outturn and past performance, where the information is available. A performance status has been applied against each measure based on a local determination of excellent performance and reflecting our ambition for the council.

The first measure is concerned with overall resident satisfaction with the council. The data presented (40%) is based on the last Residents' Survey in 2018, and takes the average from four questions that asked the public whether the council provides good value for money; is efficient and well run; acts on the concerns of residents; and treats everyone fairly. The new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 will require the council to ask stakeholders of their views on council performance annually from now on. The Residents' Survey will next be run in the autumn, 2021.

Another measure that considers perceptions about the council looks at negative news stories as a percentage of all news stories written about the council. Unfortunately, we have seen an increase during 2021 to 2022, our annual average rising from 4% to 11%. Most recently during January to March 2022 there were 44 negative stories written about the council, as opposed to 142 positive stories.

Measures on the mean hourly rate of pay for women shows an improvement in 2019 to 2020 (data for 2020 to 2021 has not yet been verified), when compared with the previous year, meaning that women are on average now paid more than men per hour. We will need to keep an eye on this to establish whether or not a trend is beginning. However,

79% of the lowest paid jobs that the council offers continue to be occupied by women (down only 0.3% on the previous year).

We have also seen improvement in our measure for equal appointments. This is a complex measure and looks at the protected characteristics for which we readily have data (based on what people have declared). The protected characteristics that we particularly look at here are Race, Disability, Sexuality and Gender Reassignment. Based on data for 2019 to 2020 (again, data for 2020 to 2021 has not yet been verified), we see an improvement in equal appointments, up from 7% to 15%. We also compare more favourably when looking at those that do not have these characteristic, where only 11% were successfully appointed (down from 13% the previous year).

Member attendance at meetings (89%) has improved during 2020 to 2021, up 10% on the previous year. This could be as a result of introducing virtual meetings in response to the pandemic, which allows more flexibility for attendance and less travel. It could also be because there were fewer meetings held during the year, a number being cancelled as the authority responded to the pandemic and put arrangements in place to conduct its business more virtually.

A significant commitment by the council in this next decade is to reduce the carbon impact of the assets that it owns. To this end, our assets key measure, which considers carbon output and absorption and tracks our progress towards becoming a net zero carbon output authority by 2030, will feature here within our assessment of corporate health. It requires the concerted effort of all staff from across the council to achieve this ambitious goal, securing at least a reduction of 1,833 tonnes every year. During 2020 to 2021 we successfully reduced our output by XXXX (data due in June) tonnes.

Based on the annual average for 2020 to 2021, 34% of all contracts awarded by the council were awarded to local suppliers; and 12% of Denbighshire contracts worth over £25k and under £1 million contained community benefits.

With this report, 49% of our Corporate Plan measures currently present as a priority for improvement, which justifies their inclusion in our Plan. One of our corporate projects is currently presenting as 'compromised' (see chapter below on [Project Register](#) for full details), and 94% are being regularly updated by project managers. 55% of our Corporate Risks are currently inconsistent with our risk appetite, but these are being addressed by

senior managers and cabinet, and justify their inclusion in our Corporate Risk Register as the most serious risks faced by the council. We have also received no formal recommendations for improvement from external regulators (Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales and Audit Wales). Four areas of work have been given a low assurance rating by Internal Audit, and improvement plans are in place to address identified risks. The four reports were:

- [Provision of Homeless Accommodation](#)
- [Queen's Buildings](#)
- [Children's Direct Payments](#)
- [Contract Management](#)

In amidst its response to the pandemic, the council has this year fought against significant budget pressures and income loss. Our measure on budget variance (i.e. what we have and receive versus what we are spending) tracked a difference of £7,393k as at June 2020, which we have steadily reduced to a positive position by March 2021 (-£718k). The council's reserves currently stand at £7.135m.

As at the end of 2020 to 2021, 57% of external complaints received by the council were upheld (27 out of 47). Complaints reports are produced every quarter and shared with Performance Scrutiny members for their information. The inclusion of this measure within this report (and subsequent quarterly reports) will give broader sight of this information to staff and elected members.

We have seen a significant improvement in staff absences over the last year, down from 8 to 6.47 days. This is consistent with national trends and may reflect the benefits to well-being brought about from changes to ways of working, but most significantly of course less common cold / flu viruses being transmitted among staff due to the restrictions that have been in place for face-to-face contact.

During 2020 to 2021 we moved away from our system on annual performance appraisals in favour of more regular one-to-one meetings being held between staff and managers. This was a common practice already of course, but our new approach has formalised this a little more, there now being a form for employees to complete that covers a variety of topics, including objectives, training and development, and attendance. Our target is that

all staff should receive at least 3 one-to-one meetings annually. However, data for our first year shows that only 45% of staff received three meetings. HR Business Partners will work with management teams to improve this.

Our final measure considers the council's efforts to support residents into work, including through placements that we ourselves offer within the council. During 2020 to 2021 we successfully supported 36 individuals, which is an improvement on the previous year.

## **Corporate Health Self-Assessment: Governance Areas**

The following is our self-assessment against the seven key governance areas outlined in the statutory guidance for the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. A significant aspect of the performance requirements within the new Act is that we base our self-assessment on stakeholder feedback. To do this well will require considerable work, and unfortunately the timescales for this 'trial-run' report have not allowed this to happen. It is therefore our first improvement action, to have a new annual process in place to gather feedback on performance in time to inform the first required self-assessment report (anticipated in June 2022). We plan to use this autumn's Residents' Survey as the vehicle this year, but from March 2022 onwards we hope to use more qualitative methods of engagement through a combination of social media, the [County Conversation Portal](#), and [Y Panel](#).

The assessment below seeks to answer questions around how well the council is performing now, how we know that (linking to evidence where it is available), and consider what we can do to improve.

## **Corporate Planning**

2020 to 2021 was a year that significantly tested our business continuity arrangements as a council. Service Plans with our improvement activity for the year ahead had to be temporarily paused as the council responded rapidly to the pandemic and had to adapt service delivery to meet the immediate needs of the community. The Strategic Emergency Management Team (SEMT) was stepped up to tactically coordinate the council's resources effectively, efficiently and economically in response to the emergency. They met frequently throughout the year (three times a week at the start of the pandemic), comprising of senior managers (including HR and ICT), lead cabinet members, and

supported by the Regional Emergency Planning Team. Throughout this time the council has worked closely with regional partners, coordinating on four key themes for recovery that covered Test, Trace and Protect; health and social care; the economy and businesses; and community resilience. The council itself identified 17 recovery themes for its business, each of which were designated a lead officer and lead member from SEMT, and were scrutinised by the council's Scrutiny committees. Papers may be viewed through our committees page on [modern.gov](https://www.modern.gov).

The immediate impact of the pandemic's restrictions on the council's Corporate Plan was that a number of project milestones were unable to progress as intended. It wasn't until later in the Summer of 2020 that we were able to evaluate where we were with things, and it was at that time that a Tranche Review was held with the Corporate Plan Programme Board. At this meeting, the Board reaffirmed its commitment to our existing Corporate Plan priorities and projects, which were still felt to be relevant despite Covid-19. It was particularly noted how well many of our projects had adapted to deliver their benefits in different ways; a number also put the council in a stronger position to respond to community needs at the outbreak of the pandemic, such as our work with carers, or the Support for Parenting project.

Although Senior Managers and Cabinet continued to meet throughout the pandemic, it wasn't really until September 2020 that Council and other committees were able to restart their meetings. We have by now recovered our usual cycle of council meetings, all of which are conducted virtually. We are pleased also to have been able to resume our webcasting of public meetings, which is important for the openness and transparency of the council; particularly as we now look ahead to the development of a new Corporate Plan for 2022 to 2027. Considerable work has already taken place in anticipation of the new plan, updating our assessment of Well-being for the county, and planning a comprehensive programme of stakeholder engagement over the summer and beyond. Both these elements are critical to informing the content of the next Plan. We anticipate having the next Corporate Plan approved by the new Council in October 2022.

There are a number of other challenges facing the council in the year ahead, not least the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). In the meantime, interim arrangements are in place, with both Corporate Directors picking up CEO responsibilities.

The Corporate Executive Team (CET) has also been reintroduced to share and assist oversight.

We will also as a local authority need to respond to requirements of the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, performance duties already being applicable from April. There will be other implications on democracy, governance and assessment that need to be planned in the year ahead, and a member / officer working group will be convened to plan and monitor this.

We continue to monitor the potential impacts of Brexit on the council and the county, but they have largely been masked by Covid-19 restrictions on businesses. We can anticipate that certain sectors of Denbighshire's economy will be more adversely affected than others, but until the economy opens up fully again, it is difficult to have any certainty around the implications. We also need to prepare for the changing role of Local Government in Wales as we look ahead to new regulations and replacements for EU funding.

Another area of work is to ensure that the council's newly adopted [Climate and Ecological Change Strategy](#) is fully embedded in our day-to-day business. The strategy represents a considerable risk to the council as it strives to become a net carbon zero authority by 2030; but a great deal of work has already taken place during 2020 to 2021 to ensure that the implications of the plan are well understood and that rigorous monitoring processes are in place.

The final area of challenge for us as a council is a fundamental one around how we work as an organisation. We have all of us felt the benefits and draw-backs of home working during 2020 to 2021, and it is likely that the council will move towards a model that encourages more home working from its staff. But we need to understand how things would work in practice and the implications of this on our communities, particularly as we try to support Denbighshire's recovery in the wake of Covid-19.

## **Financial Planning**

Audit Wales published a [Financial Sustainability Assessment report](#) in March 2020 which found that Denbighshire County Council is in a relatively strong financial position, but

needs to strengthen its Medium Term Financial Strategy and control some service overspending to support future financial sustainability.

Although the council has a strong track record of identifying strategic pressures over recent years, which is reflected in the financial outturn of the council, feedback received from services for a number of years have questioned what the process was to recognise smaller scale budget flaws and pressures. In previous years, exercises have been undertaken in-year, when service savings have not been achievable or when issues are raised by politicians, for example. There is a risk that this can lead to unbalanced decisions and disruption to the budget process and its integrity. The final proposals to balance the 2021 to 2022 budget are shown in the [Medium Term Financial Plan \(MTFP\)](#).

The most significant risk and issue facing councils and the wider public sector during 2020 to 2021 is the Covid-19 pandemic. It is welcome that the [Covid-19 Financial Recovery Strategy](#), approved by Cabinet in May 2020, has provided a robust plan for the council's response. By the end of the financial year direct financial help received from Welsh Government exceeded £21.7m, which is a testament to the value of partnership working between Local Authorities and Welsh Government. It also means that the council is in a healthy position to face the financial challenges that undoubtedly lie ahead.

The proposals set out in the [Budget 2021 to 2022 – Final Proposals](#) report offers a balanced approach that takes into account the following principles:

- Aim to recognise and remedy in year and forecast service pressures as much as possible in order to build in resilience.
- Ensure services are challenged to deliver efficient services, but to try and minimise the impact of proposals on services users and staff.
- Keep Council Tax increases as low as practicable.
- Limit the use of Cash which only delays the need to identify savings.
- Maintain funding for corporate priorities.

The aim of the budget process is to ensure that the council delivers a balanced budget. The impact of the pandemic and the uncertainty over the level and timing of financial settlements again this year has made financial planning even more challenging. However, the draft settlement when it was finally issued continued a welcome return to positive settlements, which hopefully recognise the important work Local Government delivers and the pressures that it faces.

The full Capital Plan was last reported to [Council in February 2021](#). Monthly updates are presented to Cabinet. The Estimated Capital Plan is now £42.36m. The plan has been updated since being reported to Cabinet on 16 February 2021. Included in the Capital Plan is the Capital Strategy, which is a new report introduced in 2019 to 2020, giving a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services, along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability.

In 2021 to 2022, the council is planning capital expenditure of £76.7m, as summarised below:

<b>Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>2020 to 21 Approved (£000)</b>	<b>2020 to 21 Revised (£000)</b>	<b>2021 to 22 Estimate (£000)</b>	<b>2022 to 23 Estimate (£000)</b>	<b>2023 to 24 Estimate (£000)</b>
<b>Council Fund</b>	41,648	42,364	54,475	18,580	7,507
<b>Band B – 21 C Schools</b>	2,020	27	1,556	9,752	29,745
<b>HRA</b>	19,172	14,876	20,663	18,245	15,468
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,840</b>	<b>57,267</b>	<b>76,694</b>	<b>46,577</b>	<b>52,720</b>

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is a ring-fenced account, which ensures that council housing does not subsidise, or is itself subsidised, by other local services. HRA capital

expenditure is therefore recorded separately. Details of the Housing Capital Budgets can be found in the [Housing Rent Setting and Housing Revenue and Capital Budgets Report](#) to Cabinet on 19 January 2021.

The Strategic Investment Group (SIG) provides an independent review of all business case proposals for capital investment regardless of value and has delegated authority to approve bids to the value of £1 million. It will also recommend schemes to either Cabinet or Council if the value of the Application is above £1m, or if for other reasons it is more appropriate for Cabinet or Council to approve. Annually, SIG invite bids from the Heads of Service and meet to review the bids and recommend the proposed allocation of the funding to Cabinet and Council. The recommendations for 2021 to 2022 are included in appendix 5 of the Capital Plan Report. A Summary of the council's Capital Plan is included in the monthly Finance Report to Cabinet. It shows the approved Capital Plan against spend to date. Also an update on the major projects is included in the overall Capital Plan.

The Capital Plan is dependent for part of its funding on capital receipts generated by the sale of council assets. The table below shows those gross receipts achieved in 2020 to 2021. In addition, a number of potential disposals are also currently in development.

<b>Asset</b>	<b>2020 to 2021 (£000)</b>
Bodelwyddan Castle	700
Former Donkey Field, Rhyl	90
Four Crosses Farm, Glanrafon	515
Lletty Farm, Llandyrnog	480
Land at Meliden	57
Barn, Ty'n Celyn, Glanrafon	15

<b>Total</b>	<b>1,857</b>
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Each year the council sets Prudential Indicators that determine prudent limits on its borrowing. The council's outstanding debt is currently £241.8m. This is within the Operational Boundary (£265m) and Authorised Limit (£270m) and is less than the forecast Capital Financing Requirement (£296m). This means the council is adhering to the Prudential Code of Capital Finance and is not borrowing in excess of its capital needs.

The ratio of financing costs to the net revenue stream for 2020 to 2021 is 6.64%. This ratio is an indicator of affordability and highlights the revenue implications of existing and proposed capital expenditure by identifying the proportion of the revenue budget required to meet borrowing costs.

## **Performance Management**

Our own Internal Audit completed a review of the council's performance management arrangements in March 2020, giving a high assurance rating and concluding that the performance management framework within the council is managed well and appropriate support is available. The council's performance management strategy, '[Improving Services for our Communities](#)', gives detailed guidance on ensuring adequate measures and controls are in place to monitor performance. Two risk issues were identified from the Internal Audit report:

- 1. A reliance on external providers to supply performance data without checks over its integrity or accuracy.** Subsequently the council has strengthened its contract management arrangements, and now prompts services during annual service planning to consider key performance indicators of any partnerships delivering services on its behalf.
- 2. Performance management reports and finance reports are produced and presented separately with no clear link between the two.** This is a challenge under existing systems and processes, but the council's quarterly and annual performance reports have a focus on our Corporate Plan projects, which are robustly underpinned by a very clear financial strategy, monitored regularly by the

Corporate Plan Board. Services are also able to review their own performance results and consider this in conjunction with finance should they require.

A summary of our internal audit work for 2019 to 2020 may be viewed [here](#). The annual internal audit report for 2020 to 2021 is anticipated in June 2021.

There have been challenges to the council's performance management arrangements during 2020 to 2021. The onset of the pandemic meant that the Strategic Planning and Performance Team, responsible for corporate reporting, was entirely redeployed to other critical functions to support services and the community. This naturally had implications on our reporting timetable. No separate 'quarter one' (April to June) report was produced as a consequence in 2020, and our [Annual Performance Report for 2019 to 2020](#) was delayed by four months (though still published within the legal deadline). Nonetheless, we took the opportunity to include quarter one updates in our Annual Report as far as was possible, to ensure that the report was as current and relevant as possible for elected members and the public by the time of its publication in October. We have by now recovered our usual reporting routine, though there will be some data gaps that persist due to the impact of Covid-19 on services; a particular concern being around the monitoring of pupil attainment (as highlighted in our Young People priority earlier).

Our Service Challenge programme (which is an important arm of our Performance Management Framework) for 2019 to 2020 was also disrupted by the pandemic, seeing the cancellation of challenges for Finance and Property, Legal, HR and Democratic Services (though the papers for both were produced and circulated); and finally Highways, Facilities and Environmental Services. Service Challenges did not take place during 2020 to 2021 while services focused on recovery; however, a more concentrated programme is in place for every service to be seen during June and July 2021 to discuss Covid-19 recovery and plans for improvement.

Another development worth noting is that the council, facing the end of its current contract, has reviewed and tendered for a performance management system. The conclusion was that we remain with the same provider. This will give continuity for existing processes that work well for the council.

Audit Wales audited both the council's assessment of its performance in 2019 to 2020 and our plans for improvement for 2020 to 2021, concluding that we had discharged our legal

duties under section 15 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, and acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance sufficiently to discharge our duties. A document summarising Audit Wales' work in Denbighshire may be found [here](#), which confirms that the council has arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement. We meet the same legal requirements through the publication of this report, whilst also looking ahead proactively with the inclusion of this Corporate Health section to new requirements to self-assess our governance arrangements, as required by the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. We will look in 2021 to 2022 at putting new arrangements in place to gather stakeholder feedback on our performance, which we will report on in this report going forward.

Care Inspectorate Wales evaluated in its [annual letter](#) the performance of our Social Services during 2019 to 2020. The annual report by our Director of Social Services also evaluates our performance and may be read [here](#).

## **Risk Management**

Risk Management was last reviewed by our Internal Audit team in January 2019, giving our process a medium assurance rating and concluding that the risk management framework, comprising leadership and management, and policy and strategy, was robust with good processes in place. Our risk Management guidance, '[Managing risk for better service delivery](#)', clearly sets out the council's risk management approach and specifies the roles and responsibilities of relevant persons. Five risk issues were then identified from the Internal Audit report.

1. **The council had not articulated what its risk appetite was.** Consequently, the council has developed a risk appetite statement, which was adopted in [September 2019](#), and further reviewed and revised in [September 2020](#) (introducing a separate appetite statement for safeguarding, and, following feedback from staff, clarifying the relationship between risk appetite and risk severity). Risk appetite is a complex subject and it will take time for the organisation to understand its application better. Nonetheless, its introduction has so far added value to our conversations both with risk owners and at committee, and our next Corporate Risk Review will give a particular focus to reducing the larger gaps between some of our more severe risks and our appetite.

2. **Staff at all levels should be clear about their responsibilities with regard to risk management.** Following the Internal Audit report, risk management training sessions were delivered directly by the Strategic Planning and Performance Team to management teams, and staff drop-in sessions were held. The risk guide also clearly articulated the roles and responsibilities of all staff and elected members at every level.
3. **Risk management arrangements for Alternative Service Delivery Models was unclear.** The council has developed, agreed and published a [new toolkit](#) to support the management of Alternative Service Delivery Models. This includes a chapter on the effective management of risk.
4. **Communication of risk at all levels could be improved.** Following updates from risk owners, the register is tabled for discussion with SLT every six months; and following input at Cabinet Briefing and Performance Scrutiny, it is shared with Corporate Governance and Audit committee members. It is also tabled with Corporate Governance and Audit at least once annually to give assurance that our process is robust. Services are also reminded on a quarterly basis by the Strategic Planning and Performance Team to review their register.
5. **Linking risk to performance management.** Our risk register includes a detailed narrative within each update that explains how risks have manifested or been changed. Our Annual Performance Report also now includes key highlights and learning points from our risk management in the last year.

Internal Audit will be conducting another review of the council's approach to Risk Management during 2021 to 2022.

Our last risk review (February 2021) may be found [here](#), and the current Corporate Risk Register is attached to this report in appendix 2. During 2020 to 2021, we did not experience any unforeseen risks and none of our risks developed into an adverse issue. Our risk which is concerned with the council's ability to respond to such emergencies as a public health event (i.e. Covid-19) actually stood the test of the virus outbreak as we continued to maintain statutory services and more as we responded to the crisis. The virus

has also of course increased the likelihood of a number of our other risks occurring, specifically the risk of a downturn in the economy and increase financial liabilities. Our Corporate Risk reviews in September 2020 and February 2021 reflect these increased pressures.

Only one new risk was identified for the Corporate Risk Register during 2021 to 2022, but was later de-escalated to the Service Risk Register for Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services, following updated guidance from Welsh Government that lessened its likelihood. The risk was concerned with the potential failure to progress the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) to adoption, because of the impact of Covid-19 on staff capacity.

Risks concerning Ash Die-back, Brexit and The North Wales Growth Deal have come more within our control as work on these areas has progressed or become better understood through the year. Risk severity for both Brexit and the Growth Deal has reduced slightly. Ash Die-Back, however, remains one of our most severe risks and an area that considerable work is being done to try to better understand. It is currently far away from our preferred minimalist risk appetite when it comes to safeguarding the public. It is not, however, alone in its misalignment with our risk appetite, being one of 11 risks (out of 20 in total) that are inconsistent with our risk appetite. These have all been carefully reviewed in discussions with risk owners, but their current scorings have been agreed as appropriate. Such a discrepancy justifies the inclusion of these risks to be monitored as corporate risks, which means they receive the attention of the most senior management and political levels of the council. However, as mentioned, our next review (in September 2021) will try to give special focus to reducing the larger gaps between our most severe risks and our risk appetite, whilst also hopefully helping develop the organisation's understanding of risk appetite better.

## **Workforce Planning**

The council employs in excess of 4,000 people. It is a significant employer in our local area. Every year we produce a [Public Sector Duty Report](#). The report explains how the council is compliant with the Equality Act 2010 general duty across our employment functions. Sensitive data for many employees had not been declared (52%), making it difficult to determine, across all variables, the extent to which our workforce is representative of the communities it serves, or to ensure that staff or people applying for

jobs are not treated less favourably than others. We have committed to putting in place better management information about staff applying for and being declined training. We are encouraging our staff to provide equality data about themselves and have launched a more user friendly way of collecting this information via our Employee Self-Service webpages. It has not been possible to determine whether inconsistencies exist at the shortlisting stage of recruitment. We are hoping to overcome this for future reporting by developing a solution between Human Resources and School Administration teams.

Our [Gender pay report 2018 to 2019](#) found that female employees were more likely to be in lower paid roles, a trend experienced by most organisations. This is referred to as 'occupational segregation', which means there is an uneven distribution of males and females in stereotypical career choices. For example, health and social care roles are typically regarded as female roles and construction roles as male. We have put in place a range of actions to help close the gap. In summary, we will:

- Develop and maintain our Equal Opportunities in Employment policy for employees.
- Ensure consistency and fairness in pay and recruitment and selection practices, and continue to monitor these processes looking at protected characteristics.
- Improve equality monitoring and analysis across different functions, for example, training and development, exit interviews and so on.
- Encourage the use of our flexible working policies and home working policy where possible to actively assist in addressing equality issues.
- Ensure that a Gender Pay Report is conducted annually and ensure any improvement plans are actioned and updated.
- Support managers with equalities through training and e-learning.

We are collating and analysing information now for our next Gender Pay Report (the deadline nationally has been extended until October 2021).

A recent [internal audit review of recruitment and retention](#) gave an overall 'high assurance', which means that risks and controls are well managed and objectives are being achieved. Two minor actions were agreed as a result to ensure an ongoing dialogue with services on recruitment and retention and to ensure robust record keeping is in place.

We complete an annual workforce planning review with all services between October and December each year. The purpose of these reviews is to provide a detailed picture of how effectively the workforce in each service is being supported and managed, the diversity of the service, and to highlight challenges in relation to retaining staff, or indeed challenges that could arise from key personnel moving on from their role. The reviews are provided in a spreadsheet format with equalities data for staff employed in each service, training undertaken (or not), anticipated changes (such as staff leaving, secondments, maternity etc.), staff turnover, compliance with appraisals, employment practices (including employee relations cases), and attendance at work. We will improve the format and delivery of these reviews over the next year.

The main workforce-related issues experienced by services between 2020 to 2021 was staffing resources: from recruitment, to retention, to redeployment. Staff have been redeployed across the council to assist in service provision for front facing roles such as care and environmental health. New resources have been required to manage emerging pressures ranging from Test, Trace and Protect; Covid-19 testing for staff and families; and administration of Welsh government financial support schemes. Office-based staff have been directed to work from home for this period and this has required a cultural change in normal management arrangements.

Some council post holders have had the technical capability to 'work from anywhere' for some time. Pivoting to home working was a relatively smooth transition for those Denbighshire staff that had already been using IT equipment (so long as they had the connectivity at home). Other staff, however, experienced some problems, particularly where they had been redeployed to new roles with different technology and systems. We had tested our resilience to office / server failures before during emergency planning tests, and had learned valuable lessons from those tests. For example, ensuring sufficient licences were in place enabling all staff to be able to access our secure network at the same time.

Our aim is for all staff to have at least 3 one-to-one meetings in every year. During 2020 to 2021, 45% of staff had at least 3 meetings with their line manager, or other designated person. Clearly, this last year has made one-to-one meetings for all staff harder, particularly front line staff. Furthermore, many staff have been redeployed into new roles as part of our Covid-19 response. For office based staff though, one-to-one meetings should, in the most part, be able to continue virtually. We continue to monitor completion of one-to-one meetings as we would like to see at least 95% of all staff receiving them.

Following the pressures of the last year, from a work and home perspective, there is an emerging issue surrounding mental health. The council is committed to supporting staff with their health and well-being through the [Time to Change mental health campaign](#). We will be signing our Time to Change Wales Pledge on May 13, 2021, in the presence of our elected members, senior leaders and unions. As part of this Pledge, we will deliver an action plan and launch our new mental health strategy, together with guidance for managers and extensive training to support employees. We have a number of Mental Health First Aiders already in place, but we will train more throughout this next year. We will also be launching a Mental Health Awareness e-Learning module that will become mandatory for all staff, which will help raise awareness and sign post employees to the support we have available. We have put in place an Employee Assistance Programme for all employees. The service is free of charge and employees do not need to for their manager's permission to use the service, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, accessible by phone or online. Our intranet and [website include resources and links to support on a range of topics](#). With many staff working from home for their whole working week, we put in place virtual training with an external provider to support staff to build their personal resilience. Over the last year, we have trained 52 staff across ten sessions in Building Personal Resilience. A further 32 members of staff have received training in managing stress in the workplace, and 14 in secondary and vicarious trauma.

Sickness absence is a good indicator of the health and well-being of Denbighshire's workforce. During the year 2020 to 2021, the rolling average number of working days / shifts per full time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence was around 2% lower than for the previous year. As at March 2021, sickness absence stood at 6.47 days, compared to 8.02 the previous year. This is likely to reflect the greater flexibility and work life balance achieved by home working during the pandemic, and

potentially less illness due to no or very limited social mixing. It should be noted that some data for the year is missing due to changing personnel across services in the council. As in previous years, we determine what acceptable sickness absence looks like by comparing our levels of sickness absence to those across all sectors (using data published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development). We were not able to update our thresholds for the year 2020 to 2021 and continued to use the previous year's. On this basis, our sickness absence levels are considered to be good.

We have continued to develop our learning and development programme to support and embed the council's leadership strategy. Training and development for new and established managers is progressing using a variety of resources and approaches, and many of these have been provided virtually during the last year, including:

- Institute of Leadership and Management qualifications with Coleg Cambria and Coleg Llandrillo.
- Professional development 'bite-size' courses in specific specialties such as Project Management.
- Soft skills courses, such as the bespoke course 'Aspiring Managers'.
- E-learning courses have been developed and are continuing to be developed in soft skills, for example 'Difficult Conversations'.
- HR support to develop coaching and mentoring skills.
- HR Specialists guidance and support with policy and process.
- Leadership Conference for middle and senior managers.

The council ran a survey between August and September 2020 to find out how staff were coping with the new ways of working, and to seek their views on what an ideal future way of working could look like. We have also taken from our surveying of staff some important learning for the redeployment process that we established, particularly around supporting staff in new roles by understanding their duties and putting in place appropriate training

and support. Respondents had generally adapted well to home working, and found that they were enjoying the advantages of working from home (such as work-life balance, no commute), as well as disadvantages (connectivity issues, no dedicated office space, missing colleagues). The majority of respondents (86%) stated that they would like to see homeworking being part of their future arrangements, alongside some time in an office / work environment, and they shared ideas about how this could be more effective. The results of the survey are being used as part of our considerations for how the council will work in the future, how office space will be used (including the possibility of staff accessing other public sector offices that may be closer home), and how carbon emissions can be kept to a minimum. The challenge for us over the next year will be to develop a new way of working that is effective for our communities, service users, elected members, partners and staff. We will review our support package for staff, including staff conditions and training and development, as our plans develop.

## **Assets**

The council's management of its assets can have a significant impact the delivery of our services and financial standing. The effective and efficient management of our property portfolio and physical assets (including ICT resources) helps ensure that the council is:

- not wasting money on assets that are not required to meet service needs or are unnecessarily costly to run;
- serving the public well with assets that are of good physical quality and make services easy to access; or
- not missing opportunities to share assets with other public agencies, which would increase customer convenience.

Throughout 2020 to 2021, the council's ICT support and resourcing has been critical. Many of the council's functions have been delivered successfully through virtual working during the pandemic. Use of the CAG system, where users access the council's systems virtually, has risen during this period from around 200 per day up to nearly 1600. Nearly all meetings – operational and democratic - are currently 'virtual'.

As the 'new ways of working' work stream looks at the future for the workforce of Denbighshire, it is evident that we will maintain this model of virtual working even when social distancing is no longer required. A key milestone for this workstream is to ensure that the council has the ICT tools for sustained virtual working and that officers and elected members have the right equipment to do their work wherever they are.

Denbighshire County Council has approximately 1000 highway assets. Bridges and Structures is a term which encompasses bridges, culverts and retaining walls. The timescales within which risk based inspections should be carried out of these assets is set out in the National Code of Practice for Bridges:

- Principal Inspections (PI) are carried out every 6 years to 12 years.
- General Inspections (GI) every 2 years.

From these inspections, the maintenance and repair programme is prioritised. The maintenance of bridges is financed primarily through capital funding which is approved through the Strategic Investment Group (SIG).

A 2019 Internal Audit report found that inspections, both Principal Inspections and General Inspections, are carried out within the timescales as set out in the National Code of Practice for Bridges, the results of which inform the prioritisation of the maintenance programme.

Overall, the report found that there is a good system in place for prioritising bridge maintenance repair, and no roads are closed due to bridge conditions, which contributes to the corporate priority of Connected Communities. However, the team's weak procurement practice, lack of internal guidelines, and need to include bridges in the Highways Asset Management Plan meant that the report gave a medium assurance rating, which is minor weaknesses in management of risks and / or controls, but no risk to achievement of objectives.

The council has established the role of Corporate Landlord. The key principle that underlines this approach is that the council owns all assets, with the services making use of them as tenants. All land and property used in the delivery of services is either owned or

leased by the council and not by the services. Services occupy property only to provide a service on behalf of the council.

The concept of treating property as a corporate resource strengthens the Corporate Landlord's strategic control of the council's property assets, providing a corporate and collaborative approach to review and change of use, integrated and shared use of premises, facilities management and maintenance, development and refurbishment. The objective being to provide property assets that are fit for purpose and supportive of service delivery. This in turn will free up services to focus upon the operational aspects of service delivery. The Asset Management Group has been established to support the role of the Corporate Landlord in making strategic decisions in relation to the council's property assets, and to provide the necessary oversight and scrutiny of this role.

The council currently has an adopted Asset Management Strategy that guides our asset management activity and supports the delivery of our corporate priorities. The strategy is due for review during 2021 to 2022, and the revised document will reflect new and emerging priorities for land and building assets such as Band B school building programme, the council's target to become Net Carbon Zero and Ecologically Positive by 2030, and the changes that will be needed in our office portfolio to support new ways of working.

To ensure that capital assets continue to be of long-term use, the council Asset Management Group (AMG) meets quarterly to provide strategic direction for all matters relating to the effective use of council owned land and building assets within the county, including (but not exclusively): Land and Property disposal, Land and property acquisition, Strategic property planning (including consideration of Asset Management Plans), Innovative land and property usage / utilisation.

## **Procurement**

Denbighshire's procurement is overseen by a collaborative Board between Denbighshire and Flintshire councils. The Board has been in place for a number of years, and was the subject of an [internal audit review in May 2018](#). The review concluded with 'some / low assurance', which meant that significant weaknesses in risk management were found to be present. Since then, the joint team and Board have been strengthening governance arrangements through more regular reporting to council committees, has been working on

updating procurement processes, and had planned for staff contract management training (though temporarily suspended due to Covid-19). A number of actions to address the cause of Internal Audit's concerns are still underway, including the development of a new [procurement strategy](#).

During 2020 to 2021, 12% (9 of 73) of Denbighshire contracts worth over £25k and under £1 million contained community benefits. While the number is still lower than our acceptable level (20%), 7 of the 9 contracts came to fruition between January and March 2021, which could reflect the impact of the new Community Benefits Hub. However, across the year, far fewer contracts contained community benefits than the total, 34% (14 of 41 contracts), for 2019 to 2020. We are exploring the reasons for this.

During the year, four collaborative procurement activities were undertaken. Notable examples include the Blue Badge Software Licensing and Additional Learning Needs ICT System. Both activities were a collaboration between Denbighshire and Flintshire councils. Denbighshire also monitors the number of missed collaborative procurement activities. During 2020 to 2021, five opportunities were missed. The reasons for this were due to technical differences and difference in requirements. It is also worth noting that the majority of procurements during 2020 to 2021 did not lend themselves to collaboration. For example, building maintenance works in schools or works required in specific council buildings and properties.

Across the year, 34% of procurement spend (over £49 million) was with suppliers based within Denbighshire (compared to 25% during 2019 to 2020). Our ambition is for 40% of all our procurement spend to be with local suppliers in Denbighshire. There are a range of reasons for this falling below our ambition; some of which are outside of our control. For example, we may purchase goods and services from suppliers within Denbighshire that are not included in this figure because the invoice is paid to a regional or head office outside of the county. During the year, 56% of the council's spend was with suppliers based in Wales, which supports the globally responsible principle of sustainable development.

During the year, the Community Benefits Hub was established; funded as a Corporate Plan project. The purpose of the Hub is to maximise benefits for our communities through our procurement and supply chain. The Hub is already making a difference by building

benefits into our contracts. Its new model of themed community benefits meetings is best practice that we hope to apply all future projects. Examples include:

1. Brenig Construction, the contractor building the council's social housing, together with Working Denbighshire and other partners is supporting 4 trainees to be 'work ready', with each of the trainees receiving training and mentoring in construction.
2. The Hub is working with Denbigh Town Council and Denbigh in Bloom to secure place-based benefits that will add value to the local community in Denbigh.
3. The Hub has been supporting the Rhyl East Sea Defences project to bring about some retrospective benefits, such as access to training placements, engagement with schools, support for local food bank, and help with a Countryside Services project by moving and re-siting dredged materials. Support for schools will include outreach on STEM subjects including access to the Balfour Beatty Academy which contains a range of teaching resources supported by a STEM Ambassador.
4. The Hub supported the Queen's Market demolition project to secure 3 paid work placements, 1 paid training place, and an expectation that the contractor works closely with the Working Denbighshire team, which has created and delivered a bespoke training package to appropriately upskill clients. In addition, a community benefit to oblige the contractor to safely retrieve, and store, any identified architectural artefacts of historical or social history importance – for potential use as decorative features in any new build on the site – has been secured.

We will continue to develop our procurement processes and engage with local businesses, in particular to increase community and environmental benefits. While good progress has been made to embed community benefits into our procurements, we would like to see more contracts containing community benefits. A refreshed procurement strategy will take account of our new approach to community benefits.

## Annual or Biennial Measures

Title	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	Status
Overall satisfaction with the council – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	40	No data Survey due in autumn	Priority for Improvement
Percentage difference in the mean hourly rate of pay for women – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	7.7	-9.7	Excellent
Percentage of the lowest paid salaries (bottom quarter) that are women – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	79.4	79.1	Priority for Improvement
The percentage of new appointees from applications where it was disclosed that they are either from a racial or religious minority group, have a disability, are gay or bi-sexual, or had their gender reassigned – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	7	15	Does not apply Count only

Title	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	Status
Member attendance (expected and present), year to date – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	79	89	Good
Carbon tonnage emitted and absorbed through council assets (excluding supply chain) – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	16,948	Data due in June	Priority for Improvement

The percentage of staff who have had at least 3 one-to-one meetings in the last 12 months – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	No data New to 2020 to 2021	45	Priority for Improvement
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### Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Title	Quarter 4 2019 to 2020	Quarter 1 2020 to 2021	Quarter 2 2020 to 2021	Quarter 3 2020 to 2021	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Status
Negative news stories as a percentage of all news stories about the council – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	3	5	4	12	24	Priority for Improvement
Local procurement spend as a percentage of total procurement spend – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	No data New to 2020 to 2021	30	36	34	36	Good
Percentage of Denbighshire contracts over £25k and under £1,000k containing	100	0	12	0	28	Acceptable  The annual average is considered to

<b>Title</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2019 to 2020</b>	<b>Quarter 1 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 2 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 3 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Status</b>
community benefits – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>						be a priority for improvement
Percentage of Corporate Plan Measures showing as ‘Priority for Improvement’ – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	47	No data due to Covid- 19	47	49	49	Acceptable
No. of projects on the project register showing as ‘compromised’ – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	0	0	2	0	1	Good
The percentage of projects whose delivery confidence was updated in the last three months – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	No data  New to quarter 3	No data  New to quarter 3	No data  New to quarter 3	90	94	Good

<b>Title</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2019 to 2020</b>	<b>Quarter 1 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 2 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 3 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Status</b>
Percentage of corporate risks inconsistent with the council's risk appetite statement – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	No data  New to quarter 2	No data  New to quarter 2	52	No data  Six-monthly	55	Priority for Improvement
The number of negative reports from external regulators – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	0	0	0	0	0	Excellent
No. of Internal Audit low assurance reports, financial year to date – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	7	1	2	4	4	Acceptable
Corporate and Service Budget Variance (£k)	1,483	7,393	5,107	2,242	-718	Does not apply  Count only

<b>Title</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2019 to 2020</b>	<b>Quarter 1 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 2 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 3 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Quarter 4 2020 to 2021</b>	<b>Status</b>
Council reserves (£m)	£7.135	£7.135	£7.135	£7.135	£7.135	Does not apply  Count only
The percentage of external complaints upheld or partly upheld over the last quarter – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	58	67	63	52	57	Acceptable
The rolling average number of working days / shifts per full time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence – <b>Benchmarked Locally</b>	8.02	No data due to Covid-19	6.57	6.61	6.47	Good
The cumulative number of work experience	28	28	28	28	36	Does not apply

Title	Quarter 4 2019 to 2020	Quarter 1 2020 to 2021	Quarter 2 2020 to 2021	Quarter 3 2020 to 2021	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Status
placements offered within the council						Count only

## What are we doing in 2021 to 2022?

We will deliver the following improvement actions in support of the council's Corporate Health in 2021 to 2022:

- Implement annual process for stakeholder engagement on council performance.
- Appoint a new Chief Executive Officer.
- Plan for new replacement EU funding arrangements.
- Agree and implement a whole council approach to New Ways of Working.
- Develop a new Corporate Plan by October 2022.
- Respond to the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- Service Challenge Programme re-established for the summer of 2021, giving a particular focus on the strategic direction of services and their recovery post-Covid-19.
- Next formal Risk Review in September to give a particular focus to risk appetite to help improve the organisation's understanding of its application.
- Complementing New Ways of Working, we will review training, development and mental-health needs for staff.

- Improve the information we have about our workforce, including equality information, to support more detailed analyses in future Public Sector Duty Reports.
- Improve our workforce planning programme and consider how best to plan for posts requiring a specific level of Welsh above Level 1.
- Integrate biodiversity protection and improvement into our procurement processes and drive through community benefits that improve the environment. We will work with businesses and suppliers in Denbighshire to encourage lower carbon practice. We will also develop a new procurement strategy.

## Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is embedded in the way that we do things at Denbighshire County Council. Our [Well-being Impact Assessment \(WIA\) website](#), which is well-used by staff and referenced by councillors to better enable informed decision-making, checks the extent to which the Sustainable Development principles have been applied for any given project, as well as the likely impact (positive or otherwise) within the context of the seven well-being goals. We have also updated our WIA this year to take account of our new commitment to carbon reduction and positive ecological improvement.

The Council amended its [constitution](#) in October 2020 to include the requirement that climate and ecological considerations are a guiding principle within our decision making and policy. The change should affect decisions at every level in the council. Carbon Literacy training has also been provided to 27 councillors and 207 key staff across the council, looking ahead to a more widely available e-module being made available.

The council took a significant step forward in February 2021 with the publication of its [Climate and Ecological Change Strategy](#), which will see the council become a net carbon zero authority by 2030. This is our response to the climate emergency that the Council declared in July 2019. It is an ambitious plan, but rigorous performance management arrangements are in place. Progress will be overseen by the Corporate Plan Programme Board, and reported quarterly through our quarterly performance reports to Cabinet, the Senior Leadership Team, and Scrutiny; and annually to Council through this report.

## Equality and Diversity

Our Corporate Plan adopts an approach that we believe equips the council to deliver significant progress for all, by reducing current inequalities. The principles of equality are embedded throughout the council's functions and services. Through the projects that we deliver, our Corporate Plan commits the council to:

- Engage, where appropriate, with groups that represent people with protected characteristics.

- Consider limitations to physical access, in particular with new builds, but also with regard to access to information and services.
- Consider the appropriateness of the facilities that we have available within the council's estate for use by those people with protected characteristics.
- Engage, challenge and, where possible, remove barriers to opportunities (including work) for those with protected characteristics.
- Condemn hate related bullying and harassment.

Our project and programme management processes, which support the delivery of all projects in the Corporate Plan, enforce these principles; and in particular the council's approach to [Well-being Impact Assessments](#) of all projects, plans and policies requiring decision is well embedded and understood by staff and councillors. We have recently tailored our Well-being Impact Assessment Tool to take account of socio-economic disadvantage, in line with the introduction this year of the Socio-economic Duty for Wales (under the Equality Act 2010). The overall aim of the duty is to deliver better outcomes for those who experience socio-economic disadvantage, taking account of evidence and potential impact, through consultation and engagement, understanding the views and needs of those impacted by a decision. The Duty welcomes challenge and scrutiny in our decision making, driving a change in the way that we evidence our decision making and ensuring that we have a clear audit trail for those decisions.

Our [Equality and Diversity pages](#) on our website also celebrate diversity and promote equality in everything that we do to improve the quality of life for everyone living, working and visiting Denbighshire. Denbighshire County Council has pledged its support to the Zero Racism Wales initiative. The pledge states the council is not willing to tolerate racism in any form and supports Zero Racism Wales' calls for all organisations and individuals to promote racial harmony and implement commitments within the workplace and in their day to day lives. You can find more information on the Zero Racism Wales website at [zeroracismwales.co.uk](http://zeroracismwales.co.uk).

## **Other actions in support of our Public Sector Equality Duty include:**

### **Training**

We provide equality training for staff via an online equality e-learning module. This training is provided for all new employees, and is mandatory for all personnel. For 2021, the equality training module has been updated to incorporate the Socio-economic Duty for Wales. Training materials and sessions were given to cabinet members, Senior Leadership Team members, Chairs and Vice Chairs for Scrutiny Committees, and personnel during February and March. Furthermore, the Strategic Planning Team briefed decision makers within the main council function areas, such as procurement, planning, internal audit, legal, finance and the Tackling Poverty Group on the requirements of the new Duty and the requirement to evidence how socio-economic disadvantage is considered for all strategic decisions within the organisation.

### **Engagement**

Our County Conversation Portal is used to find out what's most important to our communities and helps us to make sure we focus on the right areas. All the work undertaken previously on our County Conversation included contact with groups from protected characteristics. You can find out more about the [County Conversation Portal](#) on the Denbighshire County Council website.

The council is also a member of the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network (NWPSSEN), which is a valued forum for sharing best practice and learning around equality issues that the public sector is facing. NWPSSEN membership includes the Equality and Human Rights Commission and Welsh Government. The forward work plan for NWPSSEN may soon focus on undertaking work to strengthen engagement opportunities within North Wales with protected characteristic groups, along with the continuation of discussions around how the Socio-economic Duty and partnership work can be embedded further in our member organisations.

### **Equality Reporting Elsewhere**

Each year we are required, as a Local Authority, to publish reports detailing our commitment and compliance with equality legislation, and to regularly report on pay systems and assess the equality of pay.

At Denbighshire County Council we support the principle of diversity and equality as we need people from diverse backgrounds to ensure that we are representative of the County. We are committed to providing equal pay for work of equal value and aim to provide an equitable pay structure.

We have produced the Public Sector Equality Duty report for 2019 to 2020 detailing our commitment and compliance with this legislation. We have also created a Gender Pay Report 2018 to 2019 reviewing the average earnings between men and women within the council. [Click here](#) to view the most recent reports on the council's website pages for equality and diversity. Additional analysis may also be found in our assessment of [Workforce Planning](#), earlier in this document.

## **Welsh Language**

Denbighshire County Council is fully committed to responding positively to the Welsh language standards, and this has been reflected in our 5-year Welsh Language Strategy. That commitment has not changed and we continue to play our part towards national efforts to increase the number of Welsh speakers to a million by 2050. The duties arising from the standards mean that the council should not treat the Welsh language less favourably than English, as well as promoting and facilitating the use of the Welsh language (making it easier for people to use their Welsh language skills in everyday life).

Each service within the council has a Welsh Language Champion who regularly monitors progress with the standards, shares best practice, and acts as a 'critical friend'. They carry out 'mystery shopper' checks and arrange awareness sessions and activity for colleagues and learners.

The council recently held its third Eisteddfod as part of St David's Day celebrations. The event is part of the council's efforts to raise the profile and gain a better understanding of the language, and to celebrate the culture of Wales. It comes at a time when there is significant attention on the Welsh language and the fact that the Urdd Eisteddfod is due to return to the county in May 2022. This year, as a result of Covid-19 and the majority of staff working from home, we had to be a little more creative, and so the Eisteddfod went digital. We used our private staff facebook page as a location to hold the Eisteddfod and promoted various categories for staff to compete in by uploading a picture to go with each category. The response and support received exceeded our expectations and there was a

lot of engagement from staff. The digital Eisteddfod was very successful with 163 entries and over 700 votes.

We want to support employees on their language journey. We encourage employees to practice, and we arrange various informal opportunities throughout the year including:

**Tea and Talk:** Informal sessions to increase staff confidence in speaking Welsh. The majority of staff are work from home at present therefore the sessions are being held virtually.

**'Mae gen i hawl' (I have rights) campaign:** A campaign to celebrate the Welsh language services that Denbighshire offers, and the rights that people have to use Welsh when dealing with them. It was an opportunity to promote Welsh language services and to try to increase the number choosing to use them. The marketing campaign mentions some of the rights held by the public as well as council staff.

**Promotion of the Welsh language standards:** We've created documents to promote the Welsh language standards to share on Denbighshire Today, LINC, Visiontime and the staff Facebook page. It's a form of checklist for staff to ensure they comply with the standards. We have already promoted the standards for answering the phone, arranging meetings and correspondence.

**Promotional videos:** We've created videos to help Welsh learners with their Welsh language skills, such as a video on how to pronounce the names of some of the villages and towns of Denbighshire, useful sentences to use at meetings, and Welsh word of the day. We've also created documents with relevant Welsh words to celebrate various national days (such as Pancake Day, St Dwynwens' Day, Mother's Day) and the phonetics to help Welsh learners.

**Celebrating Wales' national events:** Organise activities to celebrate events such as St Dwynwen's Day, St David's Day, Owain Glyndŵr, Shwmae Su'mae, Welsh language Music day, and many more.

**Welsh Lessons:** We encourage staff to improve their Welsh language skills by promoting the various 10 hour online courses for various sectors through the Work Welsh scheme.

All services are also required to produce an annual workforce plan which must consider the number of Welsh speakers employed within services. All Heads of Service are asked to consider whether they have enough Welsh speakers to provide a fully bilingual service to the public.

We have introduced a new framework for staff to self-assess their language skills based on the types of communication tasks (reading, writing, speaking and understanding) they could undertake through the medium of Welsh. This is an effective way of being able to monitor what level of skills are needed for the job, and what course employees need to move to the next level. We have also assessed each post within the council, following the same framework, in terms of what level of Welsh is required for that specific job. No post will be advertised as Welsh desirable as each person will need at least level 1 in Welsh language skills for the post. So in a way Welsh is "essential" for all jobs. If the person does not have the Welsh language skills required for the post, then they are obliged to attend training and reach that level within 6 months, which is the probation period (subject to the situation), with support from our Welsh Language Officer. The Welsh language skills of each service will be monitored every month, and managers will also receive information about the Welsh language ability of employees within their service.

The council is an active partner of the Welsh language partnership. The forum is made up of a number of organisations, both local and national, working towards the promotion and strategic development of the Welsh language here in Denbighshire.

Our vision is for greater opportunities for the use of the Welsh language in the workplace, with more emphasis on including specific Welsh language requirements for new posts through:

- Supporting staff to further develop their skills in order to be able to work naturally bilingually, and to encourage and support staff without Welsh language skills to learn the language over a period of time.
- Adopting a recruitment policy that will enable the council to normalise the use of the Welsh language in its daily administration and the services it provides. As a priority, it will focus on the departments that offer a front-line service to customers.

- The strategy will need to be reviewed this year so that it is operational by 2022; therefore, our priority is to deliver a strategy for the next 5 years that will set an ambitious goal and targets to ensure that Denbighshire is a county where Welsh culture and heritage is alive and the Welsh language thrives. We will be working with partners on setting a target and an action plan.

## Project Register

Every six months the council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) receives an update on all corporate projects that are underway in Denbighshire. The Project Register (appendix I) provides the most recent status information extracted from Project Highlight Reports, written by the Project Manager, and approved by the Project Executive.

Currently one project on the register shows a 'compromised' position:

- **Denbighshire and Flintshire Joint Archive Project:** Even if funding is secured, there is a significant shortfall due largely to inflationary costs associated with the construction of the proposed building.

Currently four projects on the register show an 'at risk' position:

- **Young Person Employment Bursary:** Take up of the Bursary continues to be slow as the Covid-19 lockdown begins to ease. Some training providers are not able to run courses as they would like at present, so potentially limiting courses that are available.
- **Improving Energy Efficiency in Council Houses:** Delivery confidence continues to be at risk, the pandemic having impacted upon the schedule of works
- **Marketing:** At risk due to the lack of capacity for this project.
- **Remodelling Waste Service Operations:** Slippage in the programme linked to delivery of the new depot, which has been delayed due to the impact of Covid-19 and delays around completing on the purchase of the site.

## External Regulators

The work of all councils in Wales is scrutinised by external regulators to ensure that we use public money efficiently and effectively to deliver benefits for our communities.

### Audit Wales

In April 2021, Audit Wales published their [audit summary for Denbighshire County Council](#). This shows the work completed since the last Annual Improvement Report, which was issued in June 2019, and forms part of the Auditor General for Wales duties. In summary:

#### Audit of Denbighshire County Council's 2019 to 2020 Accounts

The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the council's financial statements on September 15, 2020, in line with the statutory deadline. The auditor's report also included an emphasis of matter, describing material valuation uncertainty clauses in valuation reports on the council's property and on Pooled Property Funds held by the Clwyd Pension Fund caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The council's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance. They were also consistent with the financial statements prepared by the council and Audit Wales knowledge of the council.

The quality of the draft statements presented for audit on June 15, 2020 was good. This was a significant achievement given the unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of changes were made to the council's financial statements arising from Audit Wales work, which were reported to the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee in Audit Wales Financial Statements Report on [September 9, 2020](#).

The Auditor General issued the certificate confirming that the audit of accounts for 2019 to 2020 had been completed on September 16, 2020. In addition to the Auditor General's responsibilities for auditing the council's financial statements, he also has responsibility for the certification of a number of grant claims and returns. Audit Wales work to date has not identified any significant issues. Key facts and figures from the 2019 to 2020 financial statements can be [accessed here](#).

## **Well-being of Future Generations Examination – Household waste collection (November 2019)**

The examination that Audit Wales undertook in 2019 to 2020 considered the extent to which the council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when taking steps to revise household waste collection, supporting the well-being objective of delivering an attractive and protected environment. Audit Wales concluded that the council has started to apply the sustainable development principle in developing these steps and in taking actions to deliver it. However, there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working into its decision making and planning. [The report can be viewed here.](#)

### **Continuous Improvement**

The Auditor General certified that the council has met its legal duties for improvement planning and reporting and believes that it is likely to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 during 2020 to 2021.

### **Financial Sustainability (March 2020)**

During 2019 to 2020, Audit Wales examined the financial sustainability of each council in Wales. In Denbighshire they concluded the council is in a relatively strong financial position but needs to strengthen its Medium-Term Financial Strategy and control some service overspending to support future financial sustainability. [The report can be viewed here.](#)

### **National Fraud Initiative**

In October 2020, the Auditor General published his report on the findings of the latest National Fraud Initiative (NFI) data-matching exercise in Wales. The exercise helped public bodies in Wales, including the 22 unitary authorities, identify fraud and overpayments amounting to £8 million. [The report can be accessed here.](#) NFI continues to be developed and in the forthcoming NFI exercise (NFI 2020 to 2022) local authorities will have access to matches designed to help identify potential fraudulent applications for Covid-19 business support grants.

## **Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding (August 2019)**

During 2019 to 2020, Audit Wales examined corporate arrangements for the safeguarding of children and adults in Denbighshire. The report concluded that the council has effective arrangements for safeguarding, but it needs to improve monitoring and performance reporting. [The report can be viewed here.](#)

## **Social services budgetary pressures (August 2020)**

During 2019 to 2020, Audit Wales examined partnership working in the commissioning and funding of residential care and nursing home accommodation for older people in Denbighshire. The report concluded that the council has been unable to maximise the potential benefits of partnership working when commissioning and administering.

## **Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Estyn**

In May 2019, CIW, as part of a national review of how well local authorities and health boards promote independence and prevent escalating needs and in collaboration with Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW), led an inspection of the council's older adult services. [The report may be viewed here.](#) In July 2020, CIW issued a local authority [annual performance review letter 2019 to 2020](#) for Denbighshire County Council. This letter summarises CIW's evaluation of performance of social services (adults and children's services) during 2019 to 2020.

There were no other Denbighshire County Council inspections in this period, but as usual Estyn inspected local schools, and services that are registered with CIW in Denbighshire were subject to regular review.

## **Planned work for 2020 to 2021**

Audit Wales also look at the key challenges and opportunities facing the council. These risks could have an effect on the council's ability to meet its legal obligations in relation to the sustainable development principle, the use of its resources, and continuous improvement. The most significant risk and issue facing councils and the wider public sector during 2020 to 2021 is the Covid-19 pandemic. Audit Wales have shaped their work to provide assurance and challenge in a way that helps to support the council through this period. Audit Wales' work plan for 2020 to 2021 includes:

- Recovery planning in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Covid-19 learning project – helping to identify and share learning from the way in which public bodies have responded to the pandemic.
- Assurance and risk assessment.
- A review of the council's financial sustainability.
- A review of the council's delivery of its environmental ambitions.
- North Wales Economic Ambition Board.
- Commissioning Older People's Care Home Placements (North Wales councils and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board).

## **National Data Collections**

### **Public Accountability Measures**

The decision was made by WG Government and Data Cymru at an early stage of the pandemic to suspend national collection of the Public Accountability Measures (PAMS) to allow Local Authorities to better concentrate on responding to the pandemic. This has affected collections for 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021. It is not yet clear what the process for the coming year will look like.

### **Code of Practice: Performance and improvement of Social Services in Wales**

The Code of Practice came into force in March 2020. Due to unprecedented challenges facing local authorities, the decision was made that there would be no requirement to submit data for 2019 to 2020. The Welsh Government have now confirmed that local authorities must now prepare to submit the data for 2020 to 2021 within the next reporting period. There is still some consideration given to the impact of the disruption caused and the challenges local authorities have faced within 2020 to 2021, which they recognise may impact upon some of the data collection.

## Appendix 1: Project Register (May 2021)

Project Name	Delivery Confidence
Young Person Employment Bursary	At risk
Working Denbighshire Ready for Work	Experiencing obstacles
The Denbighshire Working Start Scheme	Experiencing obstacles
Deliver a co-working space for new enterprises at the former Costigan's building	On target
Denbigh Extra Care Housing	On target
East Rhyl Coastal Defence Scheme	On target
New build- Christ the Word 3-16 Catholic school in Rhyl	On target
Ruthin Review - New School for Llanfair DC	On target
Ruthin Extra Care Housing (Phase 2)	Experiencing obstacles

Project Name	Delivery Confidence
PLANT Project : Urban Tree Planting	On target
Improving biodiversity in Denbighshire	Experiencing obstacles
Monitoring and supporting positive pupil attitudes to self and school / well-being	On target
Additional Council Housing Developments	Experiencing obstacles
Target those most likely to be digitally excluded so they have the skills and means to use digital services	On target
Supporting Parents in Denbighshire	Experiencing obstacles
People are involved in shaping and improving services	Experiencing obstacles
Work with RSLs and the private sector to deliver additional affordable homes	On target
Bring 500 Empty Homes back into use	On target
Supporting Carers in Denbighshire	Experiencing obstacles

Project Name	Delivery Confidence
Make superfast broadband and mobile networks available to everyone	On target
Improve infrastructure to make it easier to stage events	On target
Improving Energy Efficiency in Council Houses	At risk
Community Benefits Hub	On target
Health and Well-being - Nutrition and Cooking Skills	On target
To maintain, enhance, protect and preserve Denbighshire's 'living assets' for future generations	On target
Working towards becoming a Dementia Friendly Council	On target
ENRaW Well Connected Providing Opportunities for All	Experiencing obstacles
Moorland Management and Wildfire Prevention Project	On target
Act to Reduce Domestic Abuse	On target

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Delivery Confidence</b>
Marketing	At risk
Remodelling Waste Service Operations	At risk
Corporate Support Services Review	Experiencing obstacles
Implementation of an ADMC	On target
Queen's Buildings- Rhyl	Experiencing obstacles
Rhyl Public Realm Strategy	Experiencing obstacles
Develop design to reconnect the top of the high street with the beach, Rhyl	Experiencing obstacles
West Rhyl Neighbourhood Management	On target
Rhyl Town Centre Focussed Enforcement	Experiencing obstacles
Edward Henry Street	Experiencing obstacles

Project Name	Delivery Confidence
Traffic modelling and design traffic improvement works	Experiencing obstacles
Victorian Post Office	On target
Rhyl Green Infrastructure	On target
Centralised Mailroom Project	Experiencing obstacles
Commercialisation of the Digital Records Bureau	Experiencing obstacles
Denbighshire and Flintshire Joint Archive Project	Compromised
Welsh Language Centre	Experiencing obstacles
Oaktree Centre Extension	On target
Childcare Facility at Ysgol Twm o'r Nant	On target
Eclipse system implementation for ALN	None

Project Name	Delivery Confidence
Capita Regional MIS	Experiencing obstacles
Universal Credit in Denbighshire	On target
Former North Wales Hospital	Experiencing obstacles

## Appendix 2: Corporate Risk Register (February 2021)

Risk Description	Inherent Risk	Residual Risk	Risk exposure (score) consistent with the council's Risk Appetite
The risk of a serious safeguarding error where the council has responsibility, resulting in serious harm or death	<b>B2</b> Critical Risk, Likely / High Impact	<b>D2</b> Major Risk, Unlikely / High Impact	No. This is considered to be a major risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a minor risk.
The risk that the economic and financial environment worsens beyond current expectations, leading to additional demand on services and reduced income	<b>B1</b> Critical Risk, Likely / Very High Impact	<b>B2</b> Critical Risk, Likely / High Impact	No. Critical risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk of an ineffective response to a serious event, such as severe weather, contamination, public safety (including cyber-attack), or a public health event (such as Covid-19)	<b>A2</b> Critical Risk: Almost Certain / High impact	<b>C3</b> Moderate risk: Possible / Medium Impact	Yes

<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Inherent Risk</b>	<b>Residual Risk</b>	<b>Risk exposure (score) consistent with the council's Risk Appetite</b>
The risk of a significantly negative report(s) from external regulators	<b>C2 Major Risk,</b> Possible / High Impact	<b>D3 Moderate Risk,</b> Unlikely / Medium Impact	Yes
The risk of significant liabilities resulting from alternative models of service delivery	<b>B2 Critical Risk,</b> Likely / High Impact	<b>C2 Major Risk,</b> Possible / High Impact	No. Critical risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk of a health and safety incident resulting in serious injury or the loss of life. (Where Health and Safety is referred to, this incorporates fire safety)	<b>C2 Major Risk,</b> Possible / High Impact	<b>D2 Major Risk,</b> Unlikely / High Impact	No. Major risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a minor risk.
The risk that the impact of welfare reform (Universal Credit) is more significant than anticipated by the council	<b>B2 Critical Risk,</b> Likely / High Impact	<b>D3 Moderate Risk,</b> Unlikely / Medium Impact	Yes.

<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Inherent Risk</b>	<b>Residual Risk</b>	<b>Risk exposure (score) consistent with the council's Risk Appetite</b>
The risk that programme and project benefits are not fully realised	<b>B2</b> Critical Risk, Likely / High Impact	<b>D2</b> Major Risk, Unlikely / High Impact	Yes
The risk that effective partnerships and interfaces between Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB) and Denbighshire County Council (DCC) do not develop, leading to significant misalignment between the strategic and operational direction of BCUHB and DCC	<b>A1</b> Critical Risk, Almost Certain / Very High Impact	<b>C2</b> Major Risk, Possible / High Impact	No. Major risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk that even if the settlement is as anticipated, decisions that are necessary to identify and deliver the savings programme and enable a balanced budget are not taken or implemented quickly enough	<b>B1</b> Critical Risk, Likely / Very High Impact	<b>C2</b> Major Risk, Possible / High Impact	No. Major risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk that senior leadership capacity and skills to sustain service and corporate performance is not available	<b>C3</b> Moderate Risk, Possible /	<b>D3</b> Moderate Risk, Unlikely / Medium Impact	Yes

Risk Description	Inherent Risk	Residual Risk	Risk exposure (score) consistent with the council's Risk Appetite
	Medium Impact		
The risk of fraud and corruption resulting in financial and reputational loss and possibly impacting on service delivery	<b>C2</b> Major Risk, Possible / High Impact	<b>E2</b> Moderate Risk, Rare / High Impact	Yes
The risk that the cost of care is outstripping the council's resource	<b>B1</b> Critical Risk, Likely / Very High Impact	<b>C2</b> Major Risk, Possible / High Impact	No. Major risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk that demand for specialist care cannot be met locally	<b>B2</b> Critical Risk, Likely / High Impact	<b>C2</b> Major Risk, Possible / High Impact	No. Major risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk that the return on investment that Denbighshire receives from the	<b>C2</b> Major Risk,	<b>D3</b> Moderate Risk, Unlikely	Yes

Risk Description	Inherent Risk	Residual Risk	Risk exposure (score) consistent with the council's Risk Appetite
Regional Growth Deal is disproportionate	Possible / High Impact	/ Medium Impact	
The risk that any negative impacts of leaving the European Union cannot be mitigated by the council	<b>B1</b> Critical Risk, Likely / Very High Impact	<b>B2</b> Critical Risk, Likely / High Impact	No. Critical risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk that partners don't have the resources, matching priorities or commitment to support delivery of shared plans and priorities	<b>B1</b> Critical Risk, Likely / Very High Impact	<b>C2</b> Major Risk, Possible / High Impact	No. Major risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk that the council does not have the funds or resources to meet its statutory obligations under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018	<b>B2 –</b> Critical Risk: Likely / High Impact	<b>D3 –</b> Moderate Risk: Unlikely / Medium Impact	Yes

<b>Risk Description</b>	<b>Inherent Risk</b>	<b>Residual Risk</b>	<b>Risk exposure (score) consistent with the council's Risk Appetite</b>
The risk of Ash Dieback Disease (ADB) in Denbighshire leading to significant health and safety issues that represent a potential risk to life	<b>A1 – Critical Risk: Almost Certain / Very High Impact</b>	<b>A2 – Critical Risk: Almost Certain / High Impact</b>	No. Critical risk. Risk Appetite suggests that this should be at most a moderate risk.
The risk that the council is unable to deliver the agenda of Council and external organisations within existing resources	<b>A3 – Major Risk: Almost Certain / Medium Impact</b>	<b>C4 – Moderate Risk: Possible / Low Impact</b>	Yes

<b>Report to</b>	Corporate Governance & Audit Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	9 June 2021
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Cllr Hugh Evans - Leader / Alan Smith – Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation
<b>Report author</b>	Lisa Lovegrove – Chief Internal Auditor
<b>Title</b>	Annual Governance Statement 2020-21

## 1. What is the report about?

1.1. To demonstrate good governance, the Council must show that it is complying with the core principles set out in the Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (Wales) 2016 edition. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is prepared using a self-assessment and reports on the council's governance and improvement arrangements for 2020-21, along with progress in addressing the improvement actions contained within the AGS 2019-20. The AGS is reported as part of the final Statement of Accounts.

## 2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. The Council has a statutory duty to publish an AGS in compliance with the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 as amended by the Accounts & Audit (Wales)(Amendment) Regulations 2018. The report provides the committee with the opportunity to comment on this year's annual governance statement separately to the Statement of accounts so that it may be given due consideration.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1. The committee reviews and approves the draft annual governance statement for 2020-21 (Appendix 1) and monitors the progress made on the action plan from 2019-20.

### **4. Report details**

- 4.1. The Annual Governance Statement 2020-21 (Appendix 1) was developed by performing a self-assessment of the Council's governance arrangements against the Framework for Delivering Good Governance in Local Governance (Wales) 2016 edition. This was conducted by an officers group representing the key governance functions from across the Council. The AGS referenced various evidence sources and assurance sources such as the Internal Audit Annual Report, Annual Performance Report, External Audit reports, and risk registers.
- 4.2. A summary of the impact of Covid-19 on governance arrangements and considerations with regards to leaving the European Union is included. This year also includes a statement on compliance with the Financial Management Code which is a new requirement. Actions arising from the review against the code are included within the improvement action plan.
- 4.3. The AGS highlights any areas for improvement to governance arrangements in an action plan. Progress against the previous year's improvement plan shows good progress and any actions which are ongoing have been carried forward into the current year's improvement plan.

### **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

- 5.1. While the AGS does not directly contribute to the corporate priorities. It provides an assessment and assurance on the delivery of the corporate plan, the council's operational and financial performance, governance arrangements, community engagement etc. that are all directed towards delivering the corporate priorities.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. There are no direct costs associated with this report.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. Not applicable.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. The AGS was produced with input from key governance officers. It has been presented to the Senior Leadership Team and will be reviewed by Audit Wales (previously Wales Audit Office) as part of the financial accounts audit.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. Not applicable.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. If the Improvement Plan is not implemented, weaknesses will remain in the council's governance arrangements, which could lead to:

- Adverse regulatory reports;
- Poor use of public money;
- Failure to improve key corporate and service areas;
- Loss of stakeholder confidence; and
- An adverse impact on the council's reputation.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Not applicable.

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# **Annual Governance Statement 2020 - 2021**

# Annual Governance Statement

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# Annual Governance Statement

## Introduction

Denbighshire County Council (the Council) is responsible for making sure that its business is carried out in accordance with the law and proper standards. The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 (as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018) require the Council to conduct a review on the effectiveness of its system of internal control and include an Annual Governance Statement reporting on the review with the Statement of Accounts.

The statement has been prepared in accordance with the guidance produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) – ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework’ (2016). This is to show that the Council:

- Conducts its business in accordance with relevant laws and regulations;
- Properly accounts for and safeguards public money;
- Uses its resources economically, efficiently and effectively to achieve agreed priorities that benefit local people.

The Council has adopted the ‘Core Principles’ which underpin the CIPFA / SOLACE framework to form its Corporate Governance Framework. The seven core principles are set out below:

- A. Behave with integrity
- B. Engage with stakeholders
- C. Define outcomes
- D. Ensure planned outcomes are achieved
- E. Develop capacity, capability and leadership
- F. Manage risks and performance effectively
- G. Demonstrate transparency and accountability

The review against the CIPFA/SOLACE framework highlights if there are opportunities to improve the Council’s arrangements. Where this is the case, an action plan is included to ensure that the necessary action is taken.

# **Annual Governance Statement**

## **The Governance Framework**

### **Principle A - Behaving with integrity, with commitment to ethical values, and respect for the rule of law**

The Council's Constitution includes the Codes of Conduct for members and officers and demand a high standard of behaviour. Mandatory training for officers has been deployed to ensure that staff are aware of the code of conduct and other key policies. These are supported by more detailed guidance such as the Strategy for the Prevention and Detection of Fraud, Corruption and Bribery, Whistleblowing Policy, Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules. The Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) and Head of Finance & Property Services (Section 151 Officer) both have responsibilities to ensure that Council decisions meet legal requirements.

An internal audit review of Ethical Culture resulted in an agreed action plan to address areas where improvement was required to include the updating of the Officer's Code of Conduct.

### **Principle B - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**

The Council engages with stakeholders and partners through joint working arrangements, partnership boards and representation on external bodies' governing boards. Stakeholder engagement in response to Covid-19 has developed to ensure coordinated response involving multiple organisations and agencies. The resident survey informs community engagement strategies as well as service.

Stakeholder engagement is due to be expanded to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to inform the Council's performance self-assessment.

The Council publishes information on the website and all Council meetings are now webcast. Online meetings have been set up to maintain social distancing in response to Covid-19 and all council meetings are now held virtually.

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Communication channels involve press releases and online releases through social media channels (Facebook and Twitter) and the County Conversation portal.

Proactive shielding calls were introduced early in the year to persons vulnerable to Covid-19. The council is preparing to formulate the next corporate plan and focusing on engagement at this stage.

## **Principle C - Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits**

The strategic vision for Denbighshire is set out in its Corporate Plan. Within it, the Council defines specific priorities and outcomes to be achieved and this is overseen by the Corporate Plan Programme Board.

While corporate projects were affected early in 2020-21, most of their delivery continued in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the Summer 2020, the Corporate Plan Programme Board reaffirmed its commitment to the existing Corporate Plan priorities and projects, which were still deemed relevant despite Covid-19. A separate programme board is focused on ensuring the Council's finances and services are sustainable.

A Wellbeing Impact Assessment is completed to inform significant decisions this has been updated to consider impact on Climate Change and Socio-economic equality duty.

Transaction are increasingly made available online with a superfast broadband project in progress to increase the availability to Denbighshire households and businesses.

The Council's Climate and Ecological Change Strategy sets out how the Council will achieve its ambition of becoming a net carbon zero authority by 2030. Work is underway to ensure that this is embedded throughout the council's decision making processes and systems.

## **Principle D - Determining the intervention necessary to achieve intended outcomes**

Quarterly Performance reports track the performance of all Council activities in terms of key performance indicators and delivery of key outcomes. This process was disrupted due

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to staff redeployment to support critical service in response to Covid-19 and the quarter one performance report was not completed as a result. Arrangements have since resumed to business as usual and reports highlight remedial actions being taken where slippage does occur.

Senior Management and Members (via Scrutiny committees and the Governance & Audit Committee), ensure the Council remains focussed on achieving its objectives and priorities. The Corporate Executive Team (CET) has been re-established and supports the two Corporate Directors who are covering the Chief Executive duties on an interim basis until a new Chief Executive Officer is appointed. CET and Corporate Plan maintains oversight over the projects and delivery of the major change activities which the Council is investing in.

Despite Covid-19 pandemic's impact in March 2020, service business plans were completed with the annual performance report produced. While the service challenge process was suspended during the year while service focused on the pandemic and then on recovery, this will be reintroduced in the Summer 2021.

The Annual Performance Report for 2020-21 is being drafted to encompass a review of Corporate Health and to fulfil the new requirement of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 which comes into effect in May 2022.

Some activity was suspended during the Council's initial response to the Covid-19 outbreak; the council then initiated its recovery plans comprising 17 recovery themes to restore services to the public in a Covid-secure manner and to support staff, communities and businesses through what has been a very challenging period.

## **Principle E - Developing capacity, including the capability of leadership and individuals within the Council**

Development is directed by the leadership strategy, apprenticeship schemes and an e-learning portal is used to develop staff at all levels.

The Council also works across a broad set of partnerships and collaborative arrangements, and uses commissioning and procurement processes to maximise capacity

# Annual Governance Statement

by delivering services in the most effective and efficient way. A partnership (Alternative Service Delivery model) toolkit has been approved to set out key requirements and tools for ensuring partnerships are managed effectively.

A redeployment bureau was established quickly during the Covid-19 pandemic to reallocate staffing resource to services experiencing capacity shortages.

Workforce planning was suspended during the period and due to be reintroduced to ensure suitable arrangements are in place where there are capacity shortages or resilience concerns.

A New Ways of Working Project is underway with an element focusing on improving arrangements for home and remote workers and supporting staff with future working patterns.

Training for members is also being arranged to cover ICT literacy and awareness of key policies.

## **Principle F - Managing risks and performance through strong internal control and financial management**

Corporate risk registers are updated twice yearly, with significant risks brought to the attention of senior management and members. Risk Appetite statement has been defined and reviewed with members and senior management to ensure acceptable level of risk is being taken and recently updated to set the risk appetite for safeguarding and environmental risk. Internal Audit assess the overall quality of risk management, governance and internal control and agree actions for improvement as necessary.

The Council has a strong track record in financial management, delivering services within budget and timely production of the accounts in response to the early closure requirements. Despite the pandemic, the Council managed to close its accounts for 2019/20 in keeping with the original deadline.

The Covid-19 response, including increased expenditure (e.g. PPE) and loss of income (leisure, parking etc) has caused significant pressure on the Council's financial situation, with administration of Welsh Government grants relating to business rates, social care

# Annual Governance Statement

bonus payments and free school meals at speed. A Covid-19 Financial Strategy was produced in May 2020 providing a planned response to the emergency situation. Welsh Government support has enabled the council to continue its essential services and, in doing so, support its communities and businesses. The council undertook a review against the Financial Management Code to meet new requirements.

While information governance was considered to be sound overall; the pandemic has exposed instances of weaknesses caused in part by different working practices (e.g. majority of staff working from home) that previously were not considered a concern; revised Data Protection e-learning training has been deployed to refresh staff awareness.

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

The external assessment of Internal Audit confirms it conforms to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. External regulators provide independent assessments, notably: Audit Wales, Care Inspectorate Wales, Estyn and Ombudsman for Wales; overall positive results with no significant issues raised.

The Council provides clear and accurate information, and has developed both its website and the format of Council reports to improve transparency and accessibility. The website has been updated to meet Accessibility Standards. Minutes of meetings and key decisions are published on the Council's website.

At the end of March 2020, Council meetings were suspended until it was safe to resume and online meetings were established during the course of the year which are now made available to the public in accordance with legislative requirements.

## **Covid-19 Impact on Governance**

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant impact to the Council and our residents, requiring us to adapt the way we deliver services to our residents as well as creation of new services. The Council had a significant role in responding to the pandemic under the

## Annual Governance Statement

Civil Contingencies Act. This resulted in temporary changes to governance arrangements, including postponement of some council meetings, and prioritisation of service delivery to cope with changing demand. The Council continues to work in partnership with Welsh Government, NHS Wales and Public Health Wales to take necessary action in containing and delaying the spread of the virus. The Council established the Strategic Emergency Management Team (SEMT) comprising senior management, HR, ICT and Lead Members to monitor and respond to the emergency situation.

As reported in last year's Annual Governance Statement:

“Social distancing requirements mean that all Council meetings had to be suspended until online meetings were established in line with legislative requirements and the Local Authorities (Coronavirus)(Meetings)(Wales) Regulations 2020 under powers granted to Welsh Government under the Coronavirus Act 2020. Cabinet continued to meet informally with decisions delegated to the Leader on a temporary basis until provision was in place allowing Cabinet to formally make decisions. The law provides that the Leader may exercise all of the functions of the Cabinet that are not otherwise delegated. (s15(4) Local Government Act 2000) and this is reflected in section 6.5.3 of the Constitution. The Monitoring Officer provided a briefing on revised meeting arrangements to all Members to maintain transparency”.

As indicated in last year's Annual Governance Statement, alternative arrangements were initially introduced as agreed between Cabinet and Group Leaders to ensure proactive engagement of the wider elected membership. Group Leaders met remotely with the Chief Executive, Leader, Monitoring Officer and s151 Officer met on a weekly basis for a briefing on the management of the crisis and proposals for recovery. Group Leaders could then brief their respective groups and call upon Lead Members and Lead Officers to attend Group Leaders' meetings or Group meetings where further information or discussion is required. Formal call-in arrangements were also available should the requisite number of members wish to challenge a decision. All council formal meetings were re-introduced virtually by September 2020 and the interim arrangements were no longer required.

The Council's remote meeting system was unable to accommodate simultaneous translation until January 2021. The Council was therefore unable to allow public access to

# Annual Governance Statement

its formal meetings until it addressed the issue. The Local Democracy Reporter was invited to all formal meetings to ensure that there was some external representative of the public in attendance. All meetings are now webcast increasing transparency and openness.

The council's response also included the following:

- The Council implemented, with some adaptation, its emergency management processes and was represented on the regional emergency infrastructure.
- Enactment of business continuity processes through identification of essential services and redeployment of staff from non-critical services to support where there were capacity shortages.
- Delivery of core services continued during the emergency response phase where it was safe to do so.
- Following government lockdown announcement in March 2020, a majority of the workforce were able to work from home with ICT equipment and software quickly deployed to those who required it. During the period, all members and many employees have been able to work from home safely and securely.
- The Council implemented measures to ensure only key employees would be authorised to work from a council office. The Council also implemented shielding arrangements for employees classed as high risk.
- Communications arrangements put in place to support providing public health advice and information and council service and support to reach key audiences e.g. residents and businesses.
- A Covid-19 Financial Recovery Strategy covering the council's response to the significant financial pressures caused by Covid-19.
- Implementing processes at speed in response to Welsh Government grants for financial support to small businesses, and those in retail, hospitality and leisure sectors. Also, social care bonus payments, free school meal payments.
- Communications and support to staff with health messages to ensure that health and wellbeing was actively considered and managed.

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The impact that Covid-19 has had on our communities including businesses will continue to be reviewed as the economy re-opens and restrictions are lifted. The Council is committed to ensuring it responds appropriately to the opportunities, challenges and issues Covid-19 presents.

## Impact of EU Exit on Governance

The United Kingdom's (UK) left the European Union (EU) on 31 January 2021 following a period of transition. This has brought about widespread changes for British businesses and citizens. A Brexit risk register is maintained and reported to Senior Management and Cabinet. Attendance at WLGA Advisory Panel to share government guidance, risk and issues. As most EU rules and laws have or will be converted to UK law, there are other changes for the council, such as: regulatory, possible changes to data governance and UK migration rules which have a bearing on recruitment processes. We also await the outcome of a review of EU procurement law. In line with Government guidance, the Council has provided information about the EU Settlement Scheme for EU Citizens living in the area with guidance for employees affected to encourage them to register.

Advice and guidance targeting local businesses trading with the EU and ensuring that businesses have the necessary support to remain legally compliant.

# Annual Governance Statement

## Key contributors to developing and maintaining the Governance Framework

Key Contributors	Contribution
Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approves the Corporate Plan</li> <li>• Endorses the Constitution</li> <li>• Approves the policy and financial frameworks</li> </ul>
Cabinet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary decision making body of the Council</li> <li>• Comprises of the Leader of the Council and Cabinet members who have responsibility for specific portfolios</li> </ul>
Governance & Audit Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help raise the profile of internal control, risk management and financial reporting issues within the Council, as well as providing a forum for the discussion of issues raised by internal and external auditors</li> </ul>
Standards Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards Committee promotes high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members and monitors the operation of the Members' Code of conduct</li> </ul>
Programme & Project Boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track efficiencies, highlighting risk and mitigating actions to achievement</li> <li>• Consider the robustness of efficiency planning and forecasting and consider resourcing of planned delivery</li> <li>• Plan communication and engagement activity</li> </ul>
Scrutiny Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and scrutinise the decisions and performance of Council, Cabinet, and Committees</li> <li>• Review and scrutinise the decisions and performance of other public bodies including partnerships</li> </ul>
Licensing and Planning Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Licensing Committee considers issues relating to taxis, entertainment, alcohol, food premises and miscellaneous licensing functions.</li> <li>• Planning Committee makes decisions on development control issues, including applications for planning permissions.</li> </ul>
Corporate Executive Team, Senior Leadership Team & Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsible for developing, maintaining and implementing the Council's governance, risk and control framework</li> </ul>

## Annual Governance Statement

Key Contributors	Contribution
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council</li> </ul>
Internal Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control, risk management and governance arrangements</li> <li>• Delivers a programme of risk based audits, including counter fraud and investigation</li> <li>• Identifies areas for improvement in the management of risk</li> </ul>
External Audit	<p>Audit and report on the Council's financial statements (including the Annual Governance Statement), providing an opinion on the accounts and use of resources, concluding on the arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources</p>

[Caption; Key contributors to developing and maintaining the Governance Framework]

The Governance Framework above was adversely impacted by the Coronavirus Pandemic. Emergency provision contained within the Constitution along with Schedule of Delegations enabled the Council to continue to operate and take key decisions while alternative arrangements were established to enable council meetings to take place remotely. Cabinet met informally at the start of the financial year and members indicated how they would vote which was then reflected in a delegated decision taken by the Leader. From June 2020 onwards, council meetings were gradually reinstated as soon as technology capabilities permitted with all democratic meetings resuming by September 2020.

# Annual Governance Statement

## Review of Effectiveness

The effectiveness of governance arrangements is measured in several ways, and in 2020/21, the first year in which the Council has prepared group accounts, the Council has considered its relationship with its group entities, i.e. Denbighshire Leisure Limited, in conducting its review.

The Corporate Governance Officer's Group reviewed the Council's arrangements against the CIPFA/Solace Framework in March and April 2021 and confirmed that governance arrangements such as the Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations, and other corporate processes have broadly operated as intended during the year; there were instances of non-compliance as highlighted by Internal Audit reviews. The Corporate Governance Framework is updated to reflect the current arrangements and will continue to be updated to reflect developments and any further implications due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Internal Sources of Assurance

The [Annual Performance Report 2020-21](#) is the first report to present information responding to the new duty, under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, for the council to self-assess its performance. This summarises performance against seven governance areas: Corporate Planning, Financial Planning, Performance Management, Risk Management, Workforce Planning, Assets, and Procurement.

## Internal Audit Annual Opinion

One of the key assurance statements, in reviewing effectiveness, is the annual report and opinion of the Chief Internal Auditor. Internal Audit operates a flexible audit plan which enables it to refocus on changing priorities during the year. The focus of Internal Audit work in 2020/21 was to audit areas considered to be a higher risk due to the pandemic and the resultant changes to control processes. The Chief Internal Auditor's opinion is that the council's governance, risk management and internal control arrangements in the areas audited continue to operate satisfactorily. While the scope of assurance work was reduced due to the pandemic and redeployment of audit staff, reasonable assurance can be given that there have been no major weaknesses noted in relation to the internal control systems operating within the Council. Improvement in the following areas were recommended:

## Annual Governance Statement

Internal Audit Low Assurance Reports Issued in 2020/21	Agreed actions relating to significant risks/issues
Provision of Homeless Accommodation	<p>Improvements to strategic corporate oversight.</p> <p>Action plan to reduce reliance on the long term use of unsuitable emergency and temporary accommodation with oversight by the Strategic Homelessness and Housing Group</p> <p>Introduce arrangements to ensure effective property management</p> <p>Develop and embed performance and quality monitoring.</p>
Queens Buildings	<p>Review and update Project Management guidance and stage review group process</p> <p>Revised business case to detail more realistic costings.</p> <p>Protocol to be developed to detail how and when Legal Services should be engaged.</p>
Direct Payments for Children	<p>Joint working group to commission Direct Payment support service provider.</p> <p>Improve recording of direct payment information to enable effective monitoring through development of procedures and guidance and, where possible, IT system enhancements.</p> <p>Carry out quality assurance reviews to ensure recording standards are being complied with.</p>
Contract Management	<p>Senior Management to review contract management arrangements within their own services to ensure consistency and compliance with Contract Procedure Rules</p> <p>Training to be rolled out across the council to all staff who are involved in contract management.</p> <p>Ensure contracts are included on the central contracts register.</p> <p>Improve arrangements for monitoring contract performance and managing contract related risks.</p>

[Caption; Issues identified by internal Audit 2020/21 and agreed actions to mitigate the issues.]

# Annual Governance Statement

## Chief Finance Officer Statement on Compliance with the Financial Management Code

The CIPFA Financial Management Code (CIPFA FM Code) is designed to support good practice in financial management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. The CIPFA FM Code therefore sets the standards of financial management for local authorities.

The Code is based on a series of principles supported by specific standards and statements of practice which are considered necessary to provide the strong foundation to:

- Financially manage the short, medium- and long-term finances of a local authority;
- manage financial resilience to meet foreseen demands on services; and
- financially manage unexpected shocks in their financial circumstances.

Each local authority must demonstrate that the requirements of the Code are being satisfied.

As Section 151 Officer I have the Statutory Responsibility (supported by the Corporate Leadership Team and Elected Members) for ensuring compliance with the FM Code. I have carried out a full assessment Denbighshire's compliance the FM Code, as part of the annual review of the Annual Governance Statement and I can confirm that in my opinion Denbighshire is compliant with the code in the majority of areas. However, areas of improvement have been identified, many of which are already underway, including:

- Review and document complete Capital Process including SIG Terms of Reference, clear decision making, accounting and project management processes.
- Development a clear long-term capital strategy.
- Monitor on-going impact of Covid on services.
- Develop and implement a new Budget Process for 2022/23 and beyond which hopes to embed long term decision-making and consultation as core principles
- We will continue to lobby for multi-year indicative settlement figures from Welsh Government.
- Complete the annual review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- Include Unearmarked Reserves figure in the Corporate Dashboard to compliment the annual outturn projections.

# Annual Governance Statement

## Key indicators

The adequacy of governance arrangements can also be gauged using several key outcome indicators:

Key performance indicators	Outcomes 2020/21
Statutory reports issued by the Monitoring Officer (Section 5 - Local Government and Housing Act 1989)	None issued
Proven frauds by councillors or members of staff	None in 2020/21
Ombudsman referrals 2020/21	No complaints upheld
Internal audit reports	4 low assurance reviews
Complaints about elected members	3 in 2020/21
Number of negative reports from our External Regulators	None in 2020/21

## Assurances from External Regulators:

### Audit Wales

The Council's external auditor, Audit Wales, provides assurance on the accuracy of the year-end Statement of Accounts and the overall adequacy of arrangements for securing and improving value for money. The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the council's financial statements on 15 September 2020.

Annual Audit Summary Report 2020 provided a summary of their audit work which included:

- Well-being of Future Generations Examination – Household Waste Collection (November 2019) concluded that the council has started to apply the sustainable development principle in developing these steps and in taking actions to deliver it. However, there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working into its decision making and planning

# Annual Governance Statement

- Financial Sustainability (March 2020) concluded that the council is in a relatively strong financial position but needs to strengthen its Medium-Term Financial Strategy and control some service overspending to support future financial sustainability.
- Corporate Arrangements for Safeguarding (August 2019) concluded that the council has effective arrangements for safeguarding, but it needs to improve monitoring and performance reporting.
- Social Services Budgetary Pressures (August 2020) concluded that the council has been unable to maximise the potential benefits of partnership working when commissioning and administering funding of residential care and nursing home accommodation for older people in Denbighshire

## Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales

The Council is subject to Statutory External Inspections from various bodies including ESTYN and Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). Recent work is summarised below:

- In collaboration with Health Inspectorate Wales (HIW), CIW performed an inspection of the council's older adult services.
- CIW's Annual performance review letter 2019-20 (published July 2020) summarised the council's performance relating to adults and children's social services.
- Estyn published a report on 'Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to Covid-19' in January 2021. It gave an overview of how local authorities and regional consortia have worked with schools and pupils referral units (PRUs) to promote learning and support vulnerable pupils during the COVID-19 period between June and November 2020, that is the period after the initial lockdown when schools were reopening. Although it is a national report, it references Denbighshire County Council's work during the pandemic.

# Annual Governance Statement

## Action Taken in Response to 2019/20 Annual Governance Statement

Last year's Annual Governance Statement highlighted five areas for improvement. The table below sets out the action taken to address these issues during 2020/21:

Improvement areas identified in 2019/20	Progress to date
Review, update and promote the Strategy for the Prevention of Fraud, Corruption & Bribery. <i>Ongoing from 2018/19</i>	A Revised Strategy and Fraud Response Plan was presented to Senior Leadership Team in April 2021 and is due to go to Governance & Audit Committee in July 2021 for approval.
Financial sustainability of the Council is under substantial pressure due to Covid-19 costs and loss of income.	<p>Emergency Financial Strategy reported to Cabinet in May 2020 with action to review and produce a Medium Term Financial Strategy and Plan.</p> <p>Financial position is reported monthly to Cabinet. WG announcement of funding on 17th August and subsequent statements provided further assurance of WG financial support for the rest of 2020/21.</p>
Finalise and promote the Partnership Framework.	Alternative Service Delivery Model toolkit was approved by Governance & Audit Committee in March 2021.
Ongoing work to promote the officer's code of conduct, declaration of interest, gifts and hospitality and whistleblowing policy.	<p>Mandatory e-learning modules rolled out to all staff and HR monitors completion.</p> <p>Presentations to service management meetings began before the lockdown and put on hold.</p> <p>Internal audit of Ethical Culture with an agreed action plan which includes updating the Officer's code of conduct and improving systems for declaration of interests and gifts and hospitality.</p>
Online meetings for council, scrutiny and Governance & Audit Committee to be established that is available for the public to attend (e.g. live streaming, webcast).	Remote meetings are now in place for all council democratic meetings using 'Zoom' as it provides simultaneous translations. Since January 2021, these meetings are all broadcasted live to the public and made available via the council's website.

## Annual Governance Statement

Improvement areas identified in 2019/20	Progress to date
Covid-19 impact on services (including education and social services) and future provision.	<p>Recovery themes agreed and managed by SLT and relevant Lead Member. Oversight provided by the scrutiny committees and Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</p> <p>SLT and SEMT meetings also provides oversight over arrangements.</p>
Newly formed alternative delivery vehicle 'Denbighshire Leisure Limited' – review effectiveness of governance arrangements, including management of potential conflicts of interest, and impact of covid-19.	<p>Internal Audit of Denbighshire Leisure Limited at draft award stage and provisionally awarded a medium assurance rating.</p> <p>A summary from the review will be included in the next Internal Audit Update report to Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</p>
Address contract management weaknesses highlighted by Internal Audit.	<p>Revised action plan agreed for contract management as reported to Governance &amp; Audit Committee in January 2021. Internal Audit will review progress in implementing agreed actions in June 2021 with results due to be reported to Governance &amp; Audit committee in July 2021.</p>

[Caption; Areas of improvements for 2020/21 and progress to date]

# Annual Governance Statement

## Improvement Actions Arising from 2020-21 Annual Governance Statement

Looking ahead, the following areas for improvement have been identified to be addressed in 2021/22. This takes into consideration the continued impact of the coronavirus pandemic on governance:

Improvement areas identified for 2021/22	Agreed action
<p>Review and update Officers' code of conduct and the process for capturing and response taken to declaration of interest, gifts and hospitality.</p>	<p>Develop policy &amp; guidance for managers to ensure employees are prompted to declare conflicts of interest, gifts and hospitality and appropriate response taken.</p> <p>Revised system to capture officer declaration of interests and gifts and hospitality</p> <p>Strategic HR Manager by 31/03/2022</p>
<p>Continuing budget pressures and uncertainty over funding. Also, address any actions arising from the review of the Financial Management Code</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and document complete Capital Process including SIG Terms of Reference, clear decision making, accounting and project management processes.</li> <li>• Development a clear long-term capital strategy.</li> <li>• Monitor on-going impact of Covid on services.</li> <li>• Develop and implement a new Budget Process for 2022/23 and beyond which hopes to embed long term decision-making and consultation as core principles</li> <li>• We will continue to lobby for multi-year indicative settlement figures from Welsh Government.</li> <li>• Complete the annual review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.</li> <li>• Include Unearmarked Reserves figure in the Corporate Dashboard to compliment the annual outturn projections.</li> </ul> <p>Head of Finance &amp; Property Services by 31/03/2022</p>

# Annual Governance Statement

Improvement areas identified for 2021/22	Agreed action
<p>Address contract management weaknesses highlighted by Internal Audit.</p>	<p>Implement revised action plan, as reported to Governance &amp; Audit Committee in January 2021.</p> <p>Head of Legal, HR &amp; Democratic Services and Head of Finance &amp; Property Services by 31/07/2021.</p> <p>Internal Audit to follow up progress in implementing agreed actions.</p> <p>Chief Internal Auditor by 31/07/2021.</p>
<p>Implement requirements of the Local Government &amp; Elections (Wales) Act 2021.</p>	<p>Convene a Member/Officer Working Group to ensure requirements are met. To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes to Governance &amp; Audit Committee composition</li> <li>• Annual Performance Review and Peer Assessment</li> <li>• Establish Corporate Joint Committees</li> </ul> <p>Head of Legal, HR &amp; Democratic Services and Strategic Planning &amp; Performance Manager by 31/07/2021</p>
<p>Workforce capacity and resilience and reliance on key positions</p>	<p>Recruit vacant Senior Management Team positions i.e. Chief Executive and Head of Education &amp; Children Services. Also, ensure formal induction and on boarding for the new appointees.</p> <p>CET / Strategic HR Manager, Leader &amp; Director Communities by 31/12/2021</p> <p>Review and update the workforce plan and coordinate an assessment with services.</p> <p>Strategic HR Manager by 31/3/2022</p> <p>Internal Audit review of workforce planning process.</p> <p>Chief Internal Auditor by 31/3/2022</p>

## Annual Governance Statement

Improvement areas identified for 2021/22	Agreed action
	<p>New Ways of Working Project includes a work-stream developing new HR policies to support future work patterns</p> <p>Head of Business Improvement &amp; Modernisation / Head of Legal, HR &amp; Democratic Services by 31/10/2021</p>
Review the Whistleblowing Policy	<p>Update the policy capturing lessons learned from recent concerns raised.</p> <p>Head of Legal, HR &amp; Democratic Services by 31/03/2022</p>
Uncertainty over future funding arrangements following EU Exit.	<p>Resources and processes to be put in place to ensure that the Council maximises the opportunities in relation to the new UK Funding Initiatives including the UK Levelling Up Fund, UK Community Renewal Fund and the forthcoming UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Also, ensure coordination with other funding streams e.g. WG Transforming Towns Fund.</p> <p>CET / Corporate Director: Economy &amp; Public Realm (Lead) by 31/10/2021</p>

[Caption; Areas of improvements for 2021/22 and agreed actions]

The areas for improvement that we have identified will be monitored by the Governance & Audit Committee and the Corporate Governance Officers Group. This plan also includes any issues raised in last year's action plan that have not yet been fully addressed.

# Annual Governance Statement

## Certification

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the issues identified in our Governance Improvement Action Plan to enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

**Name** Cllr Hugh Evans, Leader of the Council

**Signed**

**Dated**

**Name** xxxx, Corporate Director xxx / Acting Chief Executive

**Signed**

**Dated**

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<b>Report to</b>	Governance & Audit Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	9 June 2021
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Cllr Julian Thompson Hill / Lisa Lovegrove, Chief Internal Auditor
<b>Report author</b>	Lisa Lovegrove, Chief Internal Auditor
<b>Title</b>	Internal Audit Report 2020-21

## 1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report provides the Committee with the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2020-21 that provides the Chief Internal Auditor's overall opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk and control during the year that informs the 'annual governance statement'.

## 2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require the 'chief audit executive' to deliver an annual internal audit opinion and report that the organisation can use to inform its annual governance statement. This Committee's terms of reference require it to consider the annual report of the internal auditors.

2.2. The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 require the review of governance arrangements to be reported within the authority, in the Council's case the Governance & Audit Committee, and externally with the published accounts of the authority. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is an annual review of the systems of internal control and gathers assurance from various sources to support it. Internal Audit is a key contributor and the Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) should provide a written annual report to those charged with governance to support the AGS.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1. The Committee considers and comments on the Chief Internal Auditor's annual report and overall opinion.

### **4. Report details**

- 4.1. The Internal Audit Strategy 2020-21 was agreed by the Committee on 8th July 2020. Appendix 1 details the position with audits contained in the 2020/21 audit strategy and those carried forward from 2019/20. Internal Audit operates a flexible plan so that areas of highest perceived risk are prioritised for a review. Governance & Audit Committee are informed of any changes during the year as part of the Internal Audit Update Report.
- 4.2. The 2020/21 Internal Audit Strategy was based on the Internal Audit team being fully staffed during the year. However, Internal Audit's resources have been constrained due in part to Covid-19 and the retirement of an Auditor in September 2020.
- 4.3. Sufficient work was completed during the year, or was sufficiently advanced by the year end, on which to base the conclusion drawn in the Internal Audit Annual Report. This is supplemented by a review of relevant documentation and discussions as part of the review and assessment of the Corporate Governance Framework which informed the production of the Annual Governance Statement.
- 4.4. The volume of work carried out in 2020/21 is less than previous years, due to the impact of covid-19 on the resources and capacity of the Internal Audit team and of council services being audited. While this reduces the sources of assurance available to form an opinion, reliance has been placed on the previous body of work completed by Internal Audit and reported progress with management implementation of agreed Internal Audit actions. Consideration has been given as to whether this constitutes to a limitation of the scope of Internal Audit activities, and it is my opinion that for 2020-21 a one off reduction in the number of completed audits will not have a material impact. Should the situation extend to significantly impact work planned in 2021/22 and beyond, further consideration will be given to the level of assurance which Internal Audit can provide.

4.5. Internal Audit's annual opinion is attached as Appendix 1 and concludes that reasonable assurance can be placed upon the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1. Internal Audit's role is to provide assurance regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and internal control. Each of these areas helps ensure that the council can deliver on all corporate priorities as identified in its corporate plan

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. There are no additional costs associated with this report. Actions to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and Council policies are taken within existing budgets.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. Consultation with officers, and Audit Wales was conducted in drafting the Internal Audit Strategy.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. An inadequate and operationally ineffective internal control system can have adverse impact on the Council's risk management processes and wider corporate governance, and, therefore, the quality of service provided.

10.2. The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards require Internal Audit to evaluate the effectiveness of risk management and contribute to the improvement of risk

management processes. Where risks are identified as part of the Internal Audit process, action plans are agreed and monitored in order to mitigate these risks

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report.

# **Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21**

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

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# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

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# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Introduction and background

This report outlines the internal audit work that Internal Audit has carried out for the financial year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 require the review of governance arrangements to be reported within the authority, in the Council's case the Governance & Audit Committee, and externally with the published accounts of the authority. The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is an annual review of the systems of internal control and gathers assurance from various sources to support it. Internal Audit is a key contributor and the Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) should provide a written annual report to those charged with governance to support the AGS.

The Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) require the 'chief audit executive', in the Council's case the Chief Internal Auditor (CIA), to deliver an annual internal audit opinion and report that the organisation can use to inform its Annual Governance Statement.

This is achieved through a risk-based plan of work, agreed with management and the Governance & Audit Committee. The opinion does not imply that Internal Audit has reviewed all risks relating to the Council.

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Internal Audit Opinion 2020-21

The CIA has based her 2020-21 opinion on the following:

1. The scope and outcome of Internal Audit's work during the year;
2. Any follow up action taken in respect of audits from previous periods;
3. Internal Audit report opinions and assurance ratings;
4. The issues and risks that Internal Audit has raised during the year;
5. The effectiveness of management's response to the issues and risks that Internal Audit has raised;
6. Assurances received from external regulators and other sources;
7. The outcome of the Council's review of its Corporate Governance Framework and governance arrangements 2020-21.

This year's annual opinion needs to consider a number of key factors: The coronavirus pandemic has disrupted the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan for 2020-21, prompting a refocusing of the plan on areas of greatest priority to the council which can be delivered within the resources available to Internal Audit.

At the start of the financial year, internal audit assignments were temporarily put on hold as services directed resources to attend to the crisis and ensured that vital services could be delivered. During this time, Internal Audit focused on providing advice and support and a number of staff were redeployed to directly support other service areas to respond to the pandemic emergency. Internal Audit was able to resume its activities, albeit remotely, from September 2020 onwards.

My opinion is largely based on the completion of the risk based internal plan, see Appendix 1 for a list of audit results and assurance ratings definitions. One audit during the year has received 'Low' assurance, the others being awarded 'High' or 'Medium' Assurance ratings. Where significant issues have been identified, overall these have been appropriately addressed, which confirms that management is responsive to our work.

Internal Audit has completed six items of advisory work during the year which demonstrates that management is willing to engage with Internal Audit to establish good risk and control environments. Although an assurance rating is not given for this work, the

## **Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21**

outcome is used to inform our overall opinion on the adequacy of governance, risk management and control arrangements.

Our work has highlighted some areas of weakness in management of risks and/or controls which may put achievement of objectives at risk. Improvements are required to address such areas so that the framework of governance, risk management and control is adequate.

For the purpose of this Annual Report, sufficient audit work was carried out, including the assignments that have been concluded but not yet finalised, which has enabled me to form the Annual Internal Audit Opinion for 2020/21. Appendix 3 provides an assessment of our audit coverage against corporate risks in recent years.

In reaching my opinion, I have considered the balance of the results of our audit work against this environment and concluded that the major risk issues and low assurance opinions are not significant in aggregate to the system of internal control. When considering the balance of audit work carried out in 2020/21 and the assurance ratings given, regard is also placed on the response from senior management. Internal Audit has not reviewed all risks and assurances relating to Denbighshire County Council and, therefore, I cannot provide absolute assurance on the internal control environment.

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Summary of audit work 2020/21

The Internal Audit Strategy is produced to concentrate on key risks facing the Council. The Internal Audit Strategy 2020-21 was agreed with the Governance & Audit Committee in July 2020; and it has been updated throughout the year to ensure that Internal Audit focuses its resources in areas of greatest priority and risk at the time and provides assurance in the areas where it is most needed. Progress and changes are reported to the Governance & Audit Committee as part of the Internal Audit Update Report.

The Schedule in Appendix 1 contains a list of all audits agreed in the Audit Strategy 2020/21 and the final outturn for the financial year. The table below shows a summary of the audit opinions provided during the year, categorised as follows:

Assurance Rating	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
High Assurance ●	13	14	8	12	5
Medium Assurance ●	13	13	17	9	10
Low Assurance ●	1	4	5	7	1
No Assurance ●	0	0	0	0	0
Advisory ●	0	0	2	4	6
	27	31	30	32	22

The majority of assurance opinions were either 'high' or 'medium' this year (94%).

Low assurance reviews are reported to the Governance & Audit Committee with a representative from the service attending to confirm that the agreed improvements will be implemented and responding to any challenge from members. Three of the low assurance reports that featured in 2019-20 Internal Audit Annual Opinion were at draft stage, these were reported to Governance & Audit Committee during this financial year after they were finalised. While these have not been included in this year's summary; the table does include the results of follow up audits of areas previously awarded a low assurance and the reassessed assurance rating which takes into account the improvement made.

Projects which are at draft stage but are yet to be finalised are listed in Appendix 1. There are six assurance reports with a provisional assurance rating of medium or high, which are at draft stage. The Audit Strategy 2020-21 listed 13 audits which were either cancelled or

## Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

deferred to 2021-22 (shown in Appendix 1). This was due to the reduced capacity of the Internal Audit team during the year, but also reflecting the change in focus of internal audit activity in response to changing priorities such as Covid-19 grants and Community Living Schemes.

As in previous years, there were no reports with 'No Assurance' rating issued during the year.

The number of advisory work has increased to six, which mainly relates to Internal Audit advice and support with Welsh Government grants to businesses, families and social care workers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Internal Audit Opinion considers the number of no and low assurance reports, particularly the issues raised and the overall impact on the control environment. Where no or low assurance reviews have been followed up during the year, consideration is given to the management response and progress made with implementing the agreed action plan. All of the low assurance reports followed up during 2020-21 were reassessed to give a medium assurance rating after the first follow up review<sup>1</sup>.

Other than the Government enforced lockdown since March 2020, there were no known impairments or restrictions to internal audit's scope affecting the projects undertaken during the year. Internal Audit has adjusted well to auditing remotely; however, there are instances where site visits have not been possible e.g. Community Living Schemes, and so some testing could not be carried out as conventionally it would have been. Where this is the case, the scope limitation is made clear in the internal audit report.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the updated opinion for follow up audits is based on the assumption that systems and controls as previously identified during the original audit remain in operation and are being complied with in practice. The purpose of the follow up exercise is not to retest the operation of controls which have already been assessed, but to review how management has responded to the action plans following our initial work

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Counter fraud summary

Counter-fraud arrangements are vital to the Council with the aim of protecting public funds and accountability. The responsibility for managing the risk of fraud lies with management; however, Internal Audit is involved in evaluating the risk of fraud and the manner in which it is managed by the council.

## National Fraud Initiative (NFI)

Work on the 2018/19 exercise is complete and the 2020/21 exercise is underway with matches relating to the Covid Business Rates grants recently released. The table below summarises the main results achieved in recent exercises; the 2020/21 exercise is still ongoing:

NFI Results	2016/17	2018/19	2020/21
Housing Benefit	£17,663	£24,989	£12,830
VAT	£85	-	-
Council Tax Single Persons Discount	£9,771	£665,027	£811
Council Tax rising 18s	£964	£3,039	£15,001
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	£3,302	£8,118	£13,535
<b>Total</b>	<b>£31,784</b>	<b>£701,173</b>	<b>£42,177</b>

Last year, the Revenues and Benefits team (Civica) focused on council tax single persons discounts that were awarded incorrectly which resulted in the identification of a significant number paid incorrectly as part of the 2018/19 NFI exercise. This was mostly attributed to the council not being notified of changes in circumstances. This year's exercise is ongoing.

## Irregularities

During the 2020/21 financial year, Internal Audit has been informed of four allegations of fraud. Internal Audit carried out, or assisted with two investigations. A summary of the

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

outcomes is shown in the table below. While two are showing as no further action, suggestions for improvements to existing controls were made.

Outcome of Investigations	2020/21
Dismissal / contract terminations	0
Resignations accepted after investigation	0
Written warnings issued	0
No further action	2
Investigations pending outcomes	2
Prosecutions	0

## Proactive exercises

The Internal Audit team has undertaken proactive exercises which were included in the Internal Audit Strategy. This includes reviewing direct payments and the Covid related grants which the Council administered on behalf of Welsh Government e.g. Business Rates Grants, Discretionary Business Support Grants, Free School Meal Payments, Social Care Bonus Payments. Outcomes and updates are regularly reported to Governance & Audit Committee as part of the Internal Audit Update Report.

## Other counter fraud activity

A revised Strategy for the Prevention and Detection of Fraud, Corruption & Bribery has been drafted to align with the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally Strategy for Local Government. The Fraud Response Plan has also been updated as part of this exercise. These will be presented to Governance & Audit Committee in July 2021 for their consideration and approval.

Audit Wales performed a review of Local Government's fraud arrangements for the Public Accounts Committee, and a separate review of the council's local arrangements. The latter concluded that the council has good arrangements in place and recommended areas for improvements which are in the process of being addressed. This includes: revising the Counter Fraud Strategy, introducing a case management system to track fraud cases and training a member of staff to become an accredited counter fraud investigator.

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Added value

In addition to providing risk-rated assurance reports, Internal Audit has strived to add value wherever possible i.e. going beyond the standard expected and providing something “more” without any added costs.

## Corporate Governance Working Group

Internal Audit is a lead participant in the Corporate Governance Working Group to review governance arrangements and update the Corporate Governance Framework and the Annual Governance Statement.

## Collaborative Working

The North and Mid-Wales Internal Audit Partnership meetings attended by Chief Audit Executives from all North Wales councils and Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board facilitates collaboration, sharing ideas and improving efficiency and effectiveness of our services. The Chief Internal Auditor also attends the Welsh Chief Auditors Group (WCAG) that coordinates a peer review of conformance against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

The WCAG coordinated an Audit Chair Network Event in November 2019 and November 2020 with sessions from Audit Wales and CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance Associates).

## Assurance Advisory Support

Internal Audit has provided advisory support on a number of Boards, projects and other requests, including:

1. Information Governance Group
2. Business Rates Support Grants
3. Social Care Bonus Payments

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Summary Reports

Summary reports and presentations are provided to Schools to highlight improvement areas identified during thematic reviews which helps them to identify potential areas of risk or opportunities. Also, we assist the Governing Body to better understand the need for appropriate oversight; and feedback to the Council the level of support and guidance required for schools where concerns have been identified.

## Agile Auditing

The concept of 'Agile Auditing' has been introduced to our audit process. With increased collaboration and a joint commitment with the service under review, it is possible to complete audits faster and more efficiently. While it was difficult to apply this approach at the start of the year, we were able to use it to complete a number of audits at the end of the year and have had positive feedback from the senior managers working with us on these reviews.

## Data Analysis

We continue to apply Computer Assisted Auditing Techniques to analyse data as part of our auditing wherever possible. This allows us the opportunity to test whole populations of data, or where this is not possible or appropriate, to target our testing in a more effective manner. We have provided demonstrations and guidance on using data analysis software (Active Data for Excel) to neighbouring Councils across North Wales and the North West.

## Assurance Mapping

Internal Audit performs an annual assurance mapping exercise to map out the key activities performed by the Council and how these are assured. This informs the Internal Audit Strategy so that it focusses on areas of greatest risk and maximise the value from Internal Audit. The assurance map is updated during the year to reflect key changes to risk or the control environment and, where appropriate, the list of audit priority projects is updated. The Chief Internal Auditor meets with Audit Wales officers regularly throughout the year to coordinate audit work and minimise duplication.

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Internal Audit performance

There are no national performance indicators for Internal Audit, so we measure performance by benchmarking with other Councils' Internal Audit Services via the Welsh Chief Auditor's Group. The table below shows Internal Audit's performance for the year.

Performance Target	Target	Current Performance
Discuss, agree and issue scope for each audit	100%	100%
Draft report issued within 10 working days of the closing meeting	Avg. days >10	8
Final report issued within 5 working days of agreeing the draft report and action plan	Avg. days > 5	7
Implementation of Agreed actions	75%	72%

Performance against the indicators has been reasonable over the year. Implementation of agreed action relies on management and performance was below target at the start of the year as services have had to focus its resources on responding to the emergency situation. As business as usual has resumed and services have adapted to working remotely, several agreed actions have been implemented. By the end of the year, performance has improved to 72% of actions implemented. The Chief Internal Auditor prompts service management to complete agreed actions and the Governance & Audit Committee monitor the completion of improvement actions arising from low assurance reports through Internal Audit's follow up reviews and may invite service representatives to explain if there is insufficient progress.

Final reports were issued within an average of 7 days and did not meet the target. This was mainly due to the redeployment of internal audit staff to support services during the initial phase of the emergency response to the pandemic.

A customer satisfaction survey to recipients of internal audit reviews in 2020/21 allows feedback on our performance - rated as either: "Not at all"; "Limited", "Satisfactory", "Good" or "Very Good". The percentage of scores marked as satisfactory or above are shown below. In total, 10 (out of total 26) completed the survey. The survey is anonymous to encourage honest feedback.

## Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

Customer Survey Question	Target	Current Performance
Consulted/made aware on the objectives and/or scope of the audit?	100%	100%
Level of consultation throughout the audit?	100%	100%
Professional and approachable auditor?	100%	100%
Results and conclusions of the review explained?	100%	100%
Accurate report that addressed the key issues?	100%	100%
Did you have an opportunity to comment on the results of the review?	100%	100%
Auditor took your views into account?	100%	75%
Was the audit constructive and did it add value overall?	100%	87.5%

Performance relating to consultation with service has improved compared to last year's survey results. Two responses indicated that the Auditor did not take views into account and one respondent felt that the audit was not constructive or did not add value.

Here are a few examples of the comments received:

*“Not all feedback was accepted and taken on board by the auditor. The responses did not take into account other factors impacting on the subject or actions which the auditors were made aware of and too much credence was given to the comments of one service manager over the collective response of the service manager responsible, Head of Service and Director”.*

*“Comprehensive and useful audit and outputs have played an important role in service improvement”*

*“I think the audits have been conducted very well in the past, occasionally the timing of the audit has been during busy times within the department but the auditors have always allowed extra time for reports to be provided to avoid delays in our processing. Overall very pleased”.*

*“The process was carried out efficiently considering the Covid 19 situation”.*

We consider all feedback to ensure we continue to meet our stakeholders' needs.

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Conformance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 require the Council to perform an annual review of the effectiveness of its internal audit function. The PSIAS mandates that Internal Audit maintains a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP).

The results of the QAIP which includes the internal self-assessment by Internal Audit confirms that Denbighshire Internal Audit Service generally conforms to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) for its internal audit activity. The one partial conformance relates to Standard 1130 – Impairment to Independence of Objectivity. During the year, the Chief Internal Auditor temporarily managed the Project Management Team; however, this arrangement has since come to an end. Assurance engagements in areas where the Chief Internal Auditor had operational activity was managed by Senior Auditors and involved oversight by the S151 Officer where practicable.

Performance of internal audit was consistent with the Internal Audit Charter which sets out the purpose, authority and responsibility of the internal audit activity consistent with the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics and the Standards. Our Internal Audit charter was submitted to Governance & Audit Committee for approval in March 2020. The meeting was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic and the Internal Audit Charter was presented to the July 2020 virtual meeting for approval.

The Chief Internal Auditor maintains a quality assessment process which includes reviews of all audit work. The quality assessment process and staff improvement is supported by a performance and development reviews and guidance within the internal audit manual.

### Quality Assessment

An external assessment of our service against the PSIAS in March 2018 stated “Internal Audit is operating in conformance with the standards” and the result was reported to Governance & Audit Committee in November 2018. The External Assessment provides independent assurance against the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) and appendix 4 shows progress with implementing the improvement actions identified. An external assessment must be carried out every five years. The Welsh Chief Auditors Group is coordinating the next round of this exercise and has allocated Ceredigion County Council’s

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

Chief Audit Executive (CAE) as the external assessor for Denbighshire Internal Audit Service, to be conducted in 2022-23. The CAE for Denbighshire will perform the external assessment for Gwynedd County Council.

## Improvement Programme

A quality improvement programme is in place which consists of all recommendations from the external assessment; all improvement actions arising from the external assessment have since been implemented (see Appendix 4). Additional improvement actions resulting from this year's annual internal self-assessment include:

- To minimise the risk of overfamiliarity with areas of ongoing assurance engagements, rotate lead for the next review of Revenues and Benefits (Standard 1130)
- Update the assurance planning document to include the agreed corporate risk appetite (Standard 2010)
- Update the Audit Manual to provide greater coverage of consulting arrangements (Standard 2220)

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Appendix 1- Summary of Internal Audit Work 2020-21

The following table provides an overview of Internal Audit work conducted during the year, including the overall Assurance Ratings and the number of risks/issues raised in the action plans (where applicable).

Report Title	Status of Project	Assurance Rating	Risks/Issues Raised		
			Critical	Major	Moderate
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Grant	Complete	High ●	0	0	0
Pupil Development Grant	Complete	High ●	0	0	1
Supply Chain Risk	Complete	Advisory ●	-	-	-
Housing Support Grant	Complete	High ●	0	0	0
Rhyl Regeneration Programme	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Project Management – Queens Buildings	Complete	Low ●	0	2	2
St Asaph VP School Follow Up	Complete	Medium ●	-	-	-
Business Rates Grants	Complete	Advisory ●	-	-	-
Discretionary Business Grants	Complete	Advisory ●	-	-	-
Free School Meals Direct Payments	Complete	Advisory ●	-	-	-
Social Care Workers Bonus Payments	Complete	Advisory ●	-	-	-
Direct Payments for Children - Follow Up	Complete	Medium ●	-	-	-
Health & Safety Enforcement	Complete	High ●	0	0	4
Transport Complaint	Complete	Advisory ●	-	-	-

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

Report Title	Status of Project	Assurance Rating	Risks/Issues Raised		
			Critical	Major	Moderate
Revenues & Benefits 2020-21: - Partnership arrangements, - Benefits, - Council Tax, - Business Rates, and - Sundry Debtors.	Complete	High ●	0	0	0
Capital Management	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Treasury Management	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Community Living Schemes	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Data Protection & Freedom of Information	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Housing Tenancy - Follow Up	Complete	Medium ●	-	-	-
Payment Card Industry – Data Security Standards - Follow Up	Complete	Medium ●	-	-	-
Support Budgets & Direct Payments - Follow Up	Complete	Medium ●	-	-	-
National Fraud Initiative 2018-19	Complete	N/a	-	-	-
Corporate Governance Framework	Complete	N/a			

## 2020-21 Audits – Reporting stage

Report Title	Status of Project	Comment
Denbighshire Leisure Limited	Draft	Medium* ●*

## Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

ICT Capacity & Resilience	Draft	Medium* ●*
Risk Management	Draft	Medium* ●*
Financial Services 2020-21: - Accounts Payable, - Payroll, and - Purchasing Cards.	Draft	High* ●
Project Management – SC2	Draft	Medium* ●
Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch	Draft	Medium* ●

\* Reports are not yet finalised and so assurance rating have not been formally agreed with the respective customers.

### 2020-21 Audits Cancelled or Deferred

Report Title	Status of Project	Comment
Community Mental Health Team	On hold	Joint audit - BCUHB (lead) focusing on other priorities
Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards	Planned for 2021-22	
Adoption Service	Planned for 2021-22	
Youth Service	Planned for 2021-22	
Works in Default	Cancelled	No longer a priority
Workforce Development	Cancelled	Workforce Planning audit planned for 2021-22
School Audits	Planned for 2021-22	
Heritage Services	Cancelled	Asset Management audit planned for 2021-22
Additional Learning Needs	Planned for 2021-22	
Empty Homes	Cancelled	No longer a priority
Commercial Waste	Planned for 2021-22	

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

Exceptions and Exemptions from CPRs	Planned for 2021-22	
Equalities / Wellbeing Impact Assessment	Planned for 2021-22	Included as separate reviews.

## Appendix 2 – Recent Audit Coverage by Corporate Risk

Corporate Risk	Coverage	Assurance Rating
CRR00001 The risk of a serious safeguarding error where the council has responsibility resulting in serious harm or death	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00006 The risk that the economic and financial environment worsens beyond current expectations, leading to additional demand on services and reduced income	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00011 The risk of an ineffective response to a serious event, such as severe weather, contamination, public safety (including cyber-attack) or a public health event (such as Covid-19).	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00012 The risk of a significantly negative report(s) from external regulators	No recent coverage	N/a
CRR00013 The risk of significant liabilities resulting from alternative models of service delivery	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00014 The risk of a health and safety incident resulting in serious injury or the loss of life (where H&S is referred to, this incorporates fire safety)	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00016 The risk that the impact of welfare reform (Universal Credit) is more significant than anticipated by the council	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00018 The risk that programme and project benefits are not fully realised	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00021 The risk that effective partnership interfaces between BCU Health Board and Denbighshire County Council do not develop, leading to significant misalignment between strategic and operational direction of BCU and DCC.	Partial	Medium ●

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

Corporate Risk	Coverage	Assurance Rating
CRR00027 The risk that even if the settlement is as anticipated, decisions that are necessary to identify and deliver the savings programme and enable a balanced budget are not taken or implemented quickly enough	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00030 The risk that Senior Leadership capacity and skills to sustain service and corporate performance is not available	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00031 The risk of fraud and corruption resulting in financial and reputational loss and possibly impacting on service delivery	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00033 The risk that the cost of care is outstripping the council's resource	Partial	Medium ●
CRR00034 The risk that demand for specialist care cannot be met locally	Partial	Medium ●
CRR00035 The risk that the return on investment that Denbighshire receives from the Regional Growth Deal is disproportionate	No recent coverage	N/a
CRR00036 The risk that any negative impacts of leaving the European Union cannot be mitigated by the council	Partial	Medium ●
CRR00037 The risk that partners don't have the resources, matching priorities or commitment to support delivery of shared plans and priorities	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00043 The risk that the council does not have the funds or resources to meet its statutory obligations under the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018	Partial	Medium ●
CRR00044 The risk of Ash Dieback Disease (ADB) in Denbighshire leading to significant health and safety issues that represent a potential risk to life	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00045 The risk that the council is unable to deliver the agenda of council and external organisations within existing resources	Partial	Medium ●

CRR00012 The risk of a significantly negative report(s) from external regulators – regular meetings with Audit Wales, recent reports and updates from Estyn, Care Inspectorate

## **Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21**

Wales and Ombudsman confirms that no significantly negative reports were received in 2020/21. A summary is included in the Annual Governance Statement 2020/21.

CRR00035 The risk that the return on investment that Denbighshire receives from the Regional Growth Deal is disproportionate – recent review by Audit Wales of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board was overall positive.

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Appendix 3 – Definitions

### Definitions of assurance ratings

High Assurance ●	Risk and controls well managed and objectives are being achieved
Medium Assurance ●	Minor weaknesses in management of risks and/or objectives but no risk to achievement of objectives
Low Assurance ●	Significant weaknesses in management of risks and/or control that put achievement of objectives at risk
No Assurance ●	Fundamental weaknesses in management of risks and/or controls that will lead to failure to achieve objectives

No opinion / Advisory ● - Advisory opinions are used for audit work carried out at the request of senior management to provide advice on risk, governance and/or control or to develop potential solutions to problems and provide control assurance. They are also used for our reviews of major change projects that are at an early stage where an assurance rating cannot effectively be awarded.

### Definition of risk ratings

Internal Audit reports include an action plan that raises risks/issues that highlight improvement areas. These risks/issues are defined in the following table as per the council's Risk Management Strategy. No 'Critical' risks/issues were raised during the year.

Low ●	Advisory issues discussed with managers during the audit and not included in audit reports and action plans.
Moderate ●	Operational issues that are containable at service level.
Major ●	Corporate, strategic and/or cross-service issues potentially requiring wider discussion at SLT.
Critical ●	Significant issues to be brought to the attention of SLT, Cabinet Lead Members and Corporate Governance & Audit Committee.

# Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

## Appendix 4 – Quality Assurance Improvement Programme

Progress against actions from the external assessment as at June 2021.

Ref	Standard	Agreed action	Comment
<b>Code of Ethics</b>			
1.	Do internal auditors have regard to the Standards of Public Life's <i>Seven Principles of Public Life</i> ?	Amend the Annual Declaration to include Standards of Public Life's <i>Seven Principles of Public Life</i> . <i>Chief Internal Auditor, Completed</i>	<b>Complete.</b> Auditors aware of the Standards of Public Life's principles and annual declaration updated and signed acceptance by all auditors.
<b>1000: Purpose, Authority and Responsibility</b>			
2.	Does the internal audit charter cover the arrangements for appropriate resourcing?	Internal Audit Charter " <i>Resources</i> " should incorporate the reporting arrangements if there are insufficient resources. <i>Chief Internal Auditor, May 2019</i>	<b>Complete.</b> Internal Audit Charter updated accordingly.
<b>1100: Independence and Objectivity</b>			
3.	The board approves the internal audit budget and resource plan.	Provide details of the annual resources available for Internal Audit, i.e. number of productive audit days available after taking into account non-productive time, e.g. annual leave, training etc. in the Internal Audit Strategy. <i>Chief Internal Auditor, May 2019</i>	<b>Complete.</b> Internal Audit Strategy states the annual resources available for Internal Audit.
<b>1300: Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme</b>			
4.	The " <i>Checklist for Assessing Conformance with the PSIAS</i> " produced by CIPFA to satisfy the requirements set out in PSIAS 1311 and 1312 was not used as a basis for the internal assessment.	The IIA's checklist was used for the internal assessment.  Agree to use the PSIAS checklist as agreed by the Welsh Chief Auditors Group in future to conduct the internal assessment. <i>Chief Internal Auditor, March 2019</i>	<b>Complete</b> Internal Audit assessment checklist updated.
<b>1300: Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme</b> <b>1311: Internal Assessments</b>			

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5.	Does the periodic assessment include a review of the activity against the risk-based plan and the achievement of its aims and objectives?	The Internal Audit Update report to Corporate Governance Committee to include a review of activity against the risk-based plan.  <i>Chief Internal Auditor, May 2019</i>	<b>Complete.</b>  Annual Internal Audit Report summarises work completed against the Internal Audit Strategy.
<b>1300: Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme</b> <b>1311: Reporting on the Quality Assurance Programme</b>			
6.	Has the CAE reported the results of the QAIP to senior management and the board and that the results of both external and periodic internal assessment must be communicated upon completion.	This has already been identified following the internal assessment. The external assessment report will be presented to the Corporate Governance Committee.  <i>Chief Internal Auditor, November 2018</i>	<b>Complete</b>  External assessment presented to Corporate Governance Committee in November 2018.
7.	Has the CAE included the results of the QAIP and progress against any improvement plans in the annual report?	Include results of the QAIP and progress within the annual report  <i>Chief Internal Auditor, May 2019</i>	<b>Complete.</b>  Annual Internal Audit Report includes the results of the QAIP and progress.
<b>2000: Managing the Internal Audit Activity</b> <b>2060: Reporting to Senior Management and the Board</b>			
8.	Is the frequency and content of such reporting determined in discussion with senior management and the board and are they dependent on the importance of the information to be communicated and the urgency of the related actions to be taken by senior management and the board?	This was also highlighted as part of the review of the Corporate Governance Committee's effectiveness in line with the CIPFA Code of Practice.  Review frequency of reporting on Internal Audit activity to the Corporate Governance and update the Forward Work Programme if required.  <i>Chief Internal Auditor, April 2019</i>	<b>Complete.</b>  Frequency of Internal Audit report reviewed and Forward Work Programme for the Corporate Governance Committee updated. All Low and No Assurance Reports continue to be reported to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.
<b>2100: Managing the Internal Audit Activity</b> <b>2110: Governance</b>			
9.	Has the internal audit activity evaluated the:  a) Design b) Implementation, and c) Effectiveness of the organisation's ethics-	Include a review of Ethics within the Internal Audit Strategy.  <i>Chief Internal Auditor, May 2019</i>	<b>Complete</b>  A review of Ethics has been completed and includes an agreed action plan. A follow up audit review of the agreed

## Internal Audit Annual Report 2020-21

	related objectives, programmes and activities?		actions will be carried out in 2021/22.
<b>2400: Communicating Results</b> <b>2410: Criteria for Communicating</b>			
10.	If there are any areas of disagreement between the internal auditor and management, which cannot be resolved by discussion, are these recorded in the action plan and the residual risk highlighted?	<p>Where risk/issues or actions cannot be agreed, these are highlighted within the action plan of the relevant internal audit report and the Corporate Governance Committee made aware.</p> <p>This will be incorporated within the Internal Audit Charter for clarity.</p> <p><i>Chief Internal Auditor, May 2019</i></p>	<p><b>Complete.</b></p> <p>Internal Audit Charter updated to include this requirement.</p>
11.	Does the annual report incorporate a comparison of work actually carried out with the work planned?	<p>This action is difficult to achieve in practice as the Internal Audit plan changes during the year to correspond to changes in risk and priorities.</p> <p>Chief Internal Auditor to assess the effort required to perform this comparison, and if it is not excessive, the comparison will be included in the Internal Audit Annual report.</p> <p><i>Chief Internal Auditor, May 2019</i></p>	<p><b>Complete.</b></p> <p>Comparison between work planned and work carried out included in the Internal Audit Annual Report.</p>

<b>Report to</b>	Governance & Audit Committee
<b>Date of meeting</b>	09 June 2021
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	Lisa Lovegrove – Chief Internal Auditor
<b>Report author</b>	Lisa Lovegrove – Chief Internal Auditor
<b>Title</b>	Direct Payments for Children – Internal Audit Follow Up

## 1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report provides an update on progress in implementing the action plan that accompanied the Internal Audit report on Direct Payments for Children dated November 2020 which was presented to this committee in November 2020.

## 2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. This report is to provide information on how the council is implementing improvements with regards to 'Direct Payments for Children' since the issue of the Internal Audit report. The report gave a low assurance, so Governance & Audit Committee requested a progress report. This is the first progress report.

## 3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That the committee reviews progress with addressing the audit actions and decides whether it requires any further update reports on progress with the improvement action plan.

## 4. Report details

4.1. Our original review of Direct Payments - Children was completed in November 2020 giving a low assurance rating.

4.2. Our follow up review was originally scheduled to be reported to committee in April 2021, however, it was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- 4.3. The Internal Audit follow up report (Appendix 1) shows that the progress with implementing the agreed action plan arising from the audit.
- 4.4. While Education and Children's Services has been placed under additional demands, particularly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, progress has been made with implementing the agreed actions raised. The result of our follow up review considers the assurance rating to now be 'medium'.
- 4.5. Internal Audit will continue to monitor the outstanding actions to ensure that they are completed with a second follow up scheduled for September 2021.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?**

5.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report

# Direct Payments for Children

Follow Up Review

## Purpose & Background Information

Our original review of Direct Payments for Children was completed in November 2020, giving a low assurance rating due to the significant weaknesses identified.

It should be noted that the updated opinion is based on the assumption that systems and controls as previously identified during the original audit remain in operation and are being complied with in practice. The purpose of our follow up exercise is not to retest the operation of controls which have already been assessed, but to review how management has responded to the action plans following our initial work.

## Audit Opinion

The follow-up identified that progress has been made to address the issues raised, but development had been impacted by a review of service delivery, and dealing with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Dates have been pushed forward to reflect this.

Progress has been made with the outstanding actions with ten actions complete, including:

- Guidance in place for when a child transitions to adulthood.
- A meeting was held confirming that direct payments are most appropriately used, but can be considered in other Children's Social Care teams.
- Updated guidance to standardise recording of direct payment information within new care and support plan.

The council is looking to procure the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) to replace both the PARIS system and the CIS system that is used to make payments. At the conclusion of our original review, it was envisaged that the PARIS system could be improved in the interim, but this is no longer a feasible option due to staff capacity.

A further follow up review will be needed to establish the progress made with the outstanding actions. Based on the results of the first follow up review, we are providing a medium assurance.

## Assurance Rating

Audit Opinion	Rating
At Final Report	Low ●
At First Follow Up	Medium ●

## Progress with Implementing Agreed Actions

Action Risk Rating	Actions Fully Implemented	Actions Not Implemented	Actions Not Yet Due
Critical ●	0	0	0
Major ●	6	3	0
Moderate ●	4	1	0

# Direct Payments for Children Follow-up Review

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Ref	Agreed Action	Issue & Risk	Manager Responsible & Target Date	Follow Up Status and Comments
1.1	Community Support Services (CSS) and Education & Children's Services to co-productively develop guidance for detailing the arrangements in place for when a child transitions to adulthood.	No documented guidance on direct payments or transition arrangements Moderate ●	<i>Team Manager (Complex Disabilities)/ Senior Social Worker/ Transition Social Worker, CSS Complex Disabilities Team</i>	<b>Complete</b> Transition Guidance was developed in 2019 and further reviewed in 2021.
1.2	Review shared Direct Payment Guidance and Procedures with CSS (last updated April 2019) to ensure that standard recording practices are clear and reflect the new templates and incorporate guidance on transition guidance.	No documented guidance on direct payments or transition arrangements Moderate ●	<i>Principal Manager (Intervention, Prevention, Health &amp; Wellbeing)/ Principal Manager (Operational Services)</i>  <i>31/03/2021</i>	<b>In Progress - Revised Date 30/09/2021</b> All staff that are involved with direct payments have been consulted as part of an internal review of the process. The documented guidance for staff is being drafted, but progress with finalising the document has been impacted by Covid-19 and other priorities.
2.1	Complex Disability Team (Transition) to develop a system which ensures that the required list of children transitioning to CSS is accessible to the management team.	Direct payments only provided in the Children with Disabilities team Moderate ●	<i>Team Manager (Complex Disabilities)/ Senior Social Worker</i>  <i>Complete</i>	<b>Complete</b> A report can now be run to list all children transitioning to Community Support Services (CSS). The Team Manager has access to run this report and the process is included within written guidance.

# Direct Payments for Children Follow-up Review

2.2	Meeting held to confirm that Direct Payments cannot be utilised in other Children's Social Care teams currently.	Direct payments only provided in the Children with Disabilities team Moderate ●	<i>Director of Social Services/Head of Children's Services</i>  <i>Complete</i>	<b>Complete</b>  A discussion took place between the Acting Head of Children's Services, Corporate Director: Communities, and the Principal Manager (Intervention, Prevention, Health and Wellbeing) regarding this action. The decision taken was that direct payments are most appropriately used within the children with disabilities team, but can be considered in other Children's Social Care teams. Further work will be done to promote direct payments.
2.3	Meeting to address the business continuity arrangements for the Children with Disabilities Team Manager to ensure that appropriate cover is available for leave and sickness absence from other team managers within the service.	Direct payments only provided in the Children with Disabilities team Moderate ●	<i>Principal Manager (Intervention, Prevention, Health &amp; Wellbeing)/Interim Head of Children's Social Care</i>  <i>31/12/2020</i>	<b>Complete</b>  Business continuity arrangements for the Children with Disabilities Team Manager have been reviewed but no changes have been made as it was felt that there is appropriate cover in place. Having appropriate documented procedures in place would assist to strengthen the arrangements
3.2	There have been issues with recording on PARIS. As PARIS is not used for making payments there are sometimes issues with double inputting data on both	Key management information held is not robust Major ●	<i>Principal Manager (Intervention, Prevention, Health &amp; Wellbeing)/ Principal</i>	<b>No Further Action</b>  A new system is being procured when the current contract ends in 2023, so no further time is being spent redesigning the current system to suit

# Direct Payments for Children Follow-up Review

	PARIS and the system used for payment (CIS or Proactis). The newest version of PARIS (6.1 build 19.39) has now been completed and ICT are currently investigating implementing changes to system to allow budget codes and tariffs to be recorded and edited.		<i>Manager (Operational Services)</i> 31/12/2020	the Service's needs due to the low number of direct payments that are made.
3.3	In the meantime, procedures and standards for recording direct payments in PARIS will be reviewed and the FAO Team will work with the Children with Disabilities Team to improve communication and data recording as much as possible considering the identified issues with PARIS.	Key management information held is not robust Major ●	<i>Team Manager (Client Services)/ Team Manager (Children with Disabilities)</i> 31/03/2021	<b>Complete</b> The Financial Assessment Officers (FAOs) regularly attend the Children with Disabilities Group Supervision meeting and a standing item is to review any issues to do with recording and processing of direct payments.  The FAOs have developed an Additional Information Checklist to complement the guidance for social worker staff.
3.4	Update recording guidance to standardise recording of Direct Payment information within new care and support plan and review templates.	Key management information held is not robust Major ●	<i>Team Manager (Children with Disabilities)</i> 31/03/2021	<b>Complete</b> The Regional Care and Support Plan templates were implemented during late 2019 and the Children with Disabilities team's current cases were all transferred across to the new templates by February 2020.

# Direct Payments for Children Follow-up Review

4.1	A joint working group has been set up by the Principal Managers in CSS and ECS to research and review the service specification for a Direct Payment Support Service going forward and an action plan is in place to pursue options to address the issues and commission an appropriate service to meet our requirements.	Non-adherence to Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) Major ●	<i>Principal Manager (Intervention, Prevention, Health &amp; Wellbeing)/ Principal Manager (Operational Services)</i> 31/03/2021	<b>In Progress</b> The Direct Payment Framework has been set up in partnership with Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC). Tendering has happened as part of this framework, but there are still elements of the framework that need to be tendered, e.g. advice and assistance. Therefore, the council has had to continue to spot purchase with the current provider and expenditure levels still contravene Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) by exceeding tendering thresholds i.e. £25k and above. Contract value above £25k requires a minimum complete process be undertaken through advertising on Sell2Wales via the Council's electronic procurement system with associated tendering documentation and sustainability assessment.
4.2	A prepaid card solution has been implemented by both Adults and Children's Services for Direct Payments which would reduce the need for a managed account service.	Non-adherence to Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs) Major ●	<i>Team Manager (Client Services)</i> Complete	<b>Closed</b> A similar action was raised under the Support Budgets/Direct Payments review for Community Support Services and the following progress was recently established:

				<p>The Team Manager (Client Services) confirmed that pre-payment cards have been implemented but with a pilot to identify how well the new process is working. This has identified some improvement is needed in terms of the real-time reporting to allow for robust monitoring, e.g. more detail in terms of expenditure. Staff have been trained to assist with embedding the process, but take up of new direct payments has been low during the pandemic as some lunch clubs and other support groups have been closed.</p> <p>We have closed this action to save duplication, and will continue to monitor progress as part of the CSS review.</p>
5.1	<p>To review the support provider service in relation to employing PAs and DBS and to consider alternatives. To consider the Authority taking on a more 'hands-on' approach rather than the light touch monitoring requested by the Director of Social Services.</p>	<p>Personal Assistants' Process is not robust Major ●</p>	<p><i>Principal Manager (Intervention, Prevention, Health &amp; Wellbeing)/ Principal Manager (Operational Services)</i>  <i>31/03/2021</i></p>	<p><b>In Progress - Review Date 31/09/2021</b></p> <p>As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been less demand for direct payments. The support service provider has been reviewed and the following actions taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a template has been developed to prompt a provider to carry out the relevant checks on personal assistants. However, the</li> </ul>

				<p>template could be strengthened to include Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) and Right to Work in the UK checks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In conjunction with the Direct Payment framework (see action 4.1), the advice and assistance service will be tendered that will include checks of personal assistants</li> <li>• Reviewing the feasibility of using a micro-provider to enable people to be self-employed as carers after having the appropriate employment checks and could help with recruitment issues</li> </ul>
5.2	To contact the All Wales Direct Payment Forum to gain an understanding of other Welsh Authority's monitoring process with regard to PAs and DBS checks.	<p>Personal Assistants' Process is not robust</p> <p>Major ●</p>	<p><i>Team Manager (Client Services)</i></p> <p><i>Complete</i></p>	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>The Team Manager (Financial Assessment) has contacted the All Wales Direct Payment Forum to gain a better understanding of other Welsh Authority's monitoring process, however, could not provide more insight.</p>

# Direct Payments for Children Follow-up Review

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6.1	Create recording standards for social worker team to ensure that information regarding direct payment, decisions, arrangement and reviews are recorded consistently.	Reviews of outcomes are not robust Major ●	<i>Team Manager (Children with Disabilities)</i> 30/09/2020	<b>Complete</b> A guidance document has been created to record standards for the social worker team to ensure reviews are recorded consistently. This will be shared with staff in due course.  We are satisfied that sufficient action in being taken to close this action.
6.2	Carry out quality assurance audit to ensure that social workers are using the existing template to review cases and are complying with recording standards.	Reviews of outcomes are not robust Major ●	<i>Team Manager (Children with Disabilities)</i> 31/01/2021	<b>In Progress - Revised date 31/03/2022</b> A quality assurance casefile tool is in place, but reviews have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, none have been carried on within the Children with Disabilities team as recording standards have only been recently developed.  Aiming to build in a review of the Children with Disability cases, to include direct payment arrangements, into the Service's Practice Audit schedule.

## Report Recipients

- Principal Manager - Intervention, Prevention, Health & Wellbeing
- Head of Children's Social Care
- Team Manager (Children with Disabilities team, ECS)
- CSS Team Managers (Complex Disabilities, and Client Services)
- Principal Managers (CSS)
- Corporate Director: Communities
- Head of Community Support Services
- Service Manager (Client Services)
- IT Business Partner
- Strategic Planning & Performance Officer
- Scrutiny Coordinator
- Chair-Performance Scrutiny Committee
- Governance & Audit Committee
- Lead Member for Finance, Performance & Strategic Assets
- Lead Member for Education, Children's Services & Public Engagement

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## Internal Audit Team

Sara Webster, Auditor      01824 712033      [sara.webster@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:sara.webster@denbighshire.gov.uk)

## Key Dates

Review commenced	March 2021
Review completed	May 2021
Reported to Governance & Audit Committee	9 June 2021
Proposed date for next follow up review	September 2021

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## Governance and Audit Committee Forward Work Programme

<b>28 July 2021</b>		<b>Standing Items</b>	
	1	Issues Referred by Scrutiny Committees (if any)	Scrutiny Coordinator – Rhian Evans
	2	Recent External Regulatory Reports Received (if any)	Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation– Alan Smith, Nicola Kneale
	3	Internal Audit Update	Head of Internal Audit – Lisa Lovegrove
	4	Forward Work Programme	Democratic Services
		<b>Reports</b>	
	5	Treasury Management	Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
	6	Audit enquires to those charged with governance and management- Annual Return	Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
	7	Anti-fraud and corruption policy	Head of Internal Audit – Lisa Lovegrove
	8	Draft Statement of Accounts	Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
Page 225	9	Internal Audit- Homelessness follow up report.	Head of Internal Audit – Lisa Lovegrove
	10	Annual SIRO report	Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation– Alan Smith
	11	Contract Management update	Head of Internal Audit – Lisa Lovegrove
	12	Constitution Update- Name of committee	Gary Williams, Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services
<b>22 September 2021</b>		<b>Standing Items</b>	
	1	Issues Referred by Scrutiny Committees (if any)	Scrutiny Coordinator – Rhian Evans
	2	Recent External Regulatory Reports Received (if any)	Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation– Alan Smith, Nicola Kneale
	3	Forward Work Programme	Democratic Services
		<b>Reports</b>	
	5	Social Services Budgetary Cost Pressures follow up report	WAO
	6	Parking Income	Head of Internal Audit – Lisa Lovegrove
	7	Final Statement of Accounts	Head of Finance – Steve Gadd

