

To: Members of the Governance and
Audit Committee

Date: 31 May 2022

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Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend a meeting of the **GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE** to be held at **9.30 am** on **WEDNESDAY, 8 JUNE 2022 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, RUTHIN AND 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 ensuing year.

3 APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

To appoint a Vice Chair of the Governance and Audit Committee for the ensuing 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 Corporate Governance Committee meeting held on 16 March 2022 (copy enclosed).
- 7 COUNCIL PERFORMANCE SELF-ASSESSMENT 2021 TO 2022** (Pages 17 - 152)
To receive a report on the Council Performance Self-Assessment 2021 to 2022 (copy enclosed).
- 8 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT** (Pages 153 - 184)
To receive the Internal Audit Report 2021-22 (copy enclosed).
- 9 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT** (Pages 185 - 216)
To receive the Internal Audit Report 2021-22 (copy enclosed).
- 10 INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY 2022/23** (Pages 217 - 246)
To receive the Internal Audit Charter & Strategy 2022-23 (copy enclosed).
- 11 ANNUAL PLAN 2022** (Pages 247 - 266)
To receive the Audit Wales's Audit Plan for 2022-23 (Copy enclosed).
- 12 GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 267 - 270)
To consider the committee's forward work programme (copy enclosed).
- 13 DELIVERING SUSTAINED IMPROVEMENT REPORT** (Pages 271 - 282)
To receive the Audit Wales report – Delivering Sustained Performance Improvement (copy enclosed).
- 14 SPRINGING FORWARD REPORT** (Pages 283 - 300)
To receive the Audit Wales report – Springing Forward (copy enclosed).

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors

Ellie Chard
Hugh Evans
Justine Evans

Carol Holliday
Merfyn Parry
Elfed Williams

Lay Member

Nigel Rudd
David Stewart

Paul Whitham

COPIES TO:

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

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>	Denbighshire County Council
CONFIRM that I have declared a *personal / personal and prejudicial 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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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 6

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held via video conference on Wednesday, 16 March 2022 at 9.30 am.

PRESENT

Councillors Ellie Chard, Tony Flynn, Martyn Holland (Vice-Chair), Barry Mellor (Chair) and Rhys Thomas

Lay Member – Paul Whitham

Cabinet Members - Councillor Bobby Feeley Lead Member for Wellbeing and independence.

Observers – Councillor Meirick Lloyd Davies and Gwyneth Kensler

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), Corporate Director: Communities (NS), Interim Head of Community Support Services (DS), Principal Manager - Support Services (AL), Statutory & Corporate Complaints Officer (KR), Chief Digital Officer (BE) and Committee administrators (SJ and SLW).

Audit Wales representatives David Wilson and David Williams were in attendance.

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Huw Hilditch-Roberts Lead Member – Education, Children's Services and Public Engagement.

2 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Lay Member Paul Whitham declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 – Lat Members of the Governance and Audit Committee, as he was a current serving Lay Member of the committee.

3 URGENT MATTERS

No urgent items were raised.

4 MINUTES

The minutes of the Governance and Audit committee held on 26 January 2022 were submitted.

Matters of Accuracy – None

Matters arising – Lay member Paul Whitham – Minutes – Page 8 – asked if any issues raised in relation to the Contract Procedure Rules by CET would be presented back to the committee. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that any discussions raised at CET would be included in follow up Internal Audit reports presented to Governance and Audit Committee.

Page 12 - Internal Audit Follow Up - Project Management of Queen's Building – Members asked if the report presented to Cabinet was on Queen's building or contingency. The Monitoring Officer confirmed a report was presented to Cabinet in February regarding the project requiring extra funding. Members also heard a report had been presented to cabinet the previous day to request delegated authority to enter into the construction contract.

Councillor Martyn Holland- Page 12 – Project Management of Queen's Building – Asked for clarity that the contract for Verto had been signed. The Chief Internal Auditor confirmed enhancements to the Verto system had been agreed and work continued on the system and roll out for officers to adopt. It would provide better reporting and improved system facilities for project management.

RESOLVED, subject to the above that the minutes of the Governance and Audit committee held on 26 January 2022 be received and approved as a correct record.

5 REVIEW OF COMMISSIONING OLDER PEOPLE'S CARE HOME PLACEMENTS

David Wilson - Audit Wales representative, introduced the regional report (previously circulated) to members. He informed members the regional work had been carried out to assess how partners worked together and separately in the commissioning of care home placements for older people. The field work was conducted in February/ March 2021. He informed members Councils and Health boards were responsible for commissioning care home placements they do so within legislative and policy frameworks set out by Welsh Government. Key messages from the research was drawn together and illustrated the framework was encouraging a way of working that was impacting on health and social care professionals and the people that they served. From this research Audit Wales conducted two reports- one for Welsh Government and the second for North Wales Councils and Betsi Cadwalader University Health Board.

Members were guided through the main concerns raised by Audit Wales during the review. It was stressed Audit Wales had challenged Welsh Government to look at some of the key legislative requirements as they undertake a review of current policy to resolve some of the concerns raised from the Audit Wales report.

In conclusion the Audit Wales representative stressed the importance for partners to review the role they play in the process. Members need to be assured that public money was being spent wisely and work towards working building a more sustainable care sector with provision for the type of care needed.

Members heard 5 recommendations had been presented to Councils and Health Boards. Members were guided through the recommendations as set out in the covering report. All the reports produced by Audit Wales and Officers had been attached to the agenda for members information.

The Interim Head of Community Support Services guided members through the management response to the proposed recommendations detailed in the reports. He guided members through the proposals and officers responsible. It was stated the review of the pre-placed agreements would take some time, with the restrictions resulted from Covid work is taking a bit longer. Members were reminded that there was a number of alternative to residential and nursing care for the residents.

The Lead Member for Wellbeing and Independence thanked the Audit Wales for the report. She stressed to members the local pressure of staffing levels in the care sector.

The Chair thanked all officers for the detailed report and appendices. It was very well detailed and provided members with a lot of information.

The following points were discussed in further detail:

- A number of processes were undertaken to produce the findings of the report. Communication with authorities was vital to achieve an agreed outcome and recommendations. An emphasis on the role Welsh Government policy and legislation was stressed within the report.
- It was noted within the report a number of positive, good practice areas was found. As a region a number of areas were demonstrating good practice and potentially sector leading in areas. The relationship with providers across a large geographical area and complex system was very good. Officers felt the second draft was more demonstrate of the positive aspects and more of a balanced review.
- A previous report had been presented to committee on pooled fund arrangements. An arrangement was in place which Denbighshire administrated. Quarterly the other local authorities and health board completed a transfer for the amount of money they had spent on residential and nursing care. The funds were then sent back to each party from Denbighshire. Denbighshire received funds to cover the administration of costs. The arrangement is very complex and difficult to explain to a member of the public. The Audit Wales representative stated included in the report to Welsh Government had been a challenge for them to make it clear to the public sector the benefits of such arrangements. The Corporate Director stressed both the complexities and positive aspects of pooled budgets.
- Members noted the complexity around the structure chart that fits around the operation of the RPB. Part of the complication was due to North Wales being one of the biggest RPB's with 6 local authorities and a health board.
- Placements in neighbouring authorities and England does happen, the aim is always to place individuals close to family if placements are available. Officers stressed the importance of communication between the family, individual and practitioner took place and account of all opinions.
- A report on the development of the new population needs assessment had been presented to Scrutiny and then reported to Cabinet. Providing members the opportunity to comment on the assessment.
- The risk register reflects the issues raised in the report. It was felt the issues raised were well sited issues around commissioning, the workforce and having resources. Members were informed in addition to the corporate risk

register there was a service risk register which the Interim Head of Community Support Services reviewed on a regular basis.

The Chair thanked all the officers for the detailed response to members concerns. It was noted a lot of work had been undertaken with the reports both to Welsh Government and North Wales Councils and partners.

RESOLVED that members note the recommendations made by Audit Wales within the report. Members requested that regular updates be presented to the Committee when a detailed update is available.

6 CONSTITUTION UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer (MO), introduced the Constitution Update report (previously circulated) to the committee.

Members heard the report set out the legal position required by the Local Government Act 2000 for every local authority to hold a constitution. The Local Government and Elections Wales Act had made a number of changes to the law relating to local authorities, which required a number of changes to the current constitution. It was confirmed under the terms of the constitution; the MO had delegated authority to make changes that are required to comply with legal provisions and Cabinet/Council decisions. The main changes were listed in 4.4 of the covering report with further details listed in the appendices. Members were guided through the appendices that detailed all the changes to the constitution proposed.

Members thanked the MO for the detailed explanation of all the changes. During the discussion the following points were expanded upon:

- The petition scheme was scheduled to be drafted and presented to Council in May 2022. It would be made available online for all.
- The MO confirmed members part of the role of the Standards committee was to observe meetings. The Denbighshire Standards Committee had focused on visiting City, Town and Community Councils. There would not be a right to speak at those meetings unless invited to do so.
- Members attendance at meetings will still be recorded and made public each year. Signing in to the building was still enquired by members attending the meeting in person.
- An additional definition could be added to section to state that when 'Leader' is noted in the report it included an individual Leader or a job share Leader.

The Chair thanked the MO for the report and the easy to view proposed changes to the constitution.

RESOLVED that members note the changes required to the Constitution as set out in the appendices to the report.

7 CONSTITUTION GUIDE

The Monitoring Officer (MO) guided members through the report (previously circulated). Members heard the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 required that a local authority published an ordinary language guide to the Constitution. The guide would provide ease for officers, members and the public to understand the constitution. The proposed guide provides readers a brief description with a reference to the relevant section of the constitution. The Act stated regard to the statutory guidance in respect of the guide to the constitution, members heard that guidance had not yet been published but was needed to be in place by May 2022. Officers had seen the draft statutory guidance and informed committee; authorities should use the model guide to the constitution prepared by the Welsh Local Government Association in accordance with Lawyers in Local Government.

The Monitoring Officer thanked the Vice Chair for informing him of a couple of minor errors in the report. he confirmed the changes would be amended.

It was also highlighted that a structure diagram was required to be added to the guide.

The report would be presented to Council in May 2022 for approval.

The MO confirmed he would read through and ascertain if a definition of 'member' would be beneficial to the reader. If required, the MO confirmed he would include. An explanation was provided on the role of a member champion in the Council.

The MO agreed that the Welsh translated copy would be reviewed so a correct version mirroring the English version was made available.

RESOLVED, that the Committee note the contents of the Guide to the Constitution attached as Appendix 1 and recommend to Council that it be adopted.

8 LAY MEMBERS OF GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Monitoring Officer (MO) presented to members a report on the need to recruit lay persons to sit on the Committee following the local government election in May 2022 (previously circulated).

Members were reminded that the law required that a third of the Government and Audit Committee was required to be lay persons. A definition of a lay person was included in the report. Members heard the authority had participated in a nationwide advertising campaign, assisted by the Welsh Local Government Association. The adverts were released in National newspapers. The MO confirmed the authority had received applicants in response to that advertisement. The next stage was to shortlist and interview potential applicants. A panel was required from the committee to interview applicants for recommendations to Council in May for appointment. A total of 3 lay persons were required to sit on the committee. The current Lay member Paul Whitham had indicated to continue his membership on the committee so the committee panel would be interviewing to appoint a further 2 lay persons.

It was suggested a minimum of 3 members to sit on the recruitment panel.

RESOLVED that the committee appoint from its membership a panel to shortlist and interview candidates for the role of lay person on the Committee. Dates would be sought and circulated for members availability to sit on the panel.

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.

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. Also included was a summary of the changes to the structure of Internal Audit for members reference.

Confirmation that 5 Audits and 1 follow up review had been completed since the last committee meeting. The completed audits had all received a high or medium assurance. The follow up review had received a low assurance, members heard the report and relevant officers had attended Partnership Scrutiny in December 2021 for debate.

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 with key points stressed to members. Members heard the two reviews of schools had been undertaken remotely using a self assessment and both received a high assurance rating. Certain checks were unable to be completed such as financial reviews. Members heard schools had responded well to the pressures following the pandemic.

Members were informed that 3 moderate and 1 major issue had been raised with the Housing Repairs & Maintenance audit, overall a medium assurance rating was awarded. A follow up review was scheduled for September 2022.

Members were guided to the information provided of the progress in delivering the audit assurance. Some key changes to the Internal Audit were discussed including changes to staffing and interim arrangements following the retirement of the current Head of Business, Improvement and Modernisation. The Internal Audit Charter would address these changes.

Members heard a principal auditor role had been created within the team. The post was senior role to the senior auditor.

The CIA informed members that she also leaving the authority in April 2022. Scheduled meetings had been arranged to hand over the Internal Audit work. The CIA role was currently being advertised.

During the discussion –

- Members thanked the CIA for all her support and guidance with the reports and meetings.
- The tenant's handbook would be circulated to members for information.

- Certain repairs at properties should be charged something that is not currently being executed. Members heard the department were going to undertake an assessment to ascertain the loss of revenue from not recharging tenants.
- It was confirmed that regular updates on the Provision for the Homelessness would be included in the regular updates presented to this committee. Members were assured good progress was being made.
- Further resources in Democratic Services had been successfully approved. Recruitment for the additional staff had begun.

RESOLVED that, members note the Internal Audit's progress and performance.

The meeting adjourned for a comfort break (11.50 a.m.).

The meeting reconvened at 12.05 p.m.

10 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT 2020-21

The Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) guided members through the report (previously circulated). Members heard the report provided members with assurance on the complaints handling process. The constitution change, following the implementation of the Local Government and Elections Wales Act, required Governance and Audit Committee to have oversight of the complaints handling process.

Members were made aware complaint information was presented to Performance Scrutiny on a regular basis. It was made clear Performance Scrutiny reviewed performance in detail and Governance and Audit committee sought assurance that the process was robust and effective.

Detailed in the report the CIA highlighted the Ombudsman's Principles of Good Administration and Good Records Management and the six principals.

The Statutory & Corporate Complaints Officer provided a brief overview of the process the authority has in place. The process adopted by the Council is robust and effective. He confirmed there was very light intervention from the Ombudsman, regarding complaints received. The majority of complaints received are investigated and resolved at stage 1. Members heard very few complaints progressed to stage 2 investigations another indication of robust procedures.

Members felt it important as an authority it was vital to learn from complaints and make improvements and changes were possible. Members were pleased to note the majority of complaints were resolved at stage 1. Members heard that a breakdown to department was fed down to managers to address any trends in complaints. The findings of those reports was presented to Performance Scrutiny. Members heard over the past 5 years the number of complaints has dropped.

RESOLVED that, members note the Annual Complaints Report 2020-21.

11 ANNUAL AUDIT SUMMARY

The Audit Wales representative David Williams introduced the report (previously circulated) to members. He informed members the report demonstrated the work completed by Audit Wales over the previous 12 months. The report summarised the work previously reported and presented to the committee. The summary formed part of the Auditor General for Wales duties detailed in the pack.

The summary provided further information on the Audit of Denbighshire County Council's 2020-21 Accounts. A previous report had been presented to the committee in November 2021.

David Wilson – Audit Wales explained included in the report was local government studies published in the last 12 months. Officers assessed the studies and were expected to raise any concerns associated with Denbighshire County Council and present to members.

It was confirmed there were a number of performance work outstanding. That work was related to annual assurance and risk assessment work. 2 reviews were yet to be reported and would be presented to committee once completed.

The Chair thanked the Audit Wales representatives and for the work completed over the year.

RESOLVED, that members note the Audit Wales, Annual Audit Summary for Denbighshire County Council.

12 GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

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

The Chief Internal Auditor suggested an additional line for regular updates on the Commissioning Older People's Care Home Placements be included as an ongoing update on the FWP.

The Monitoring officer informed members that the Annual Whistleblowing report was due to be presented to members, it was agreed to include on the FWP for June 2022.

RESOLVED that, subject to the inclusion of the above addition the Governance and Audit Committee's forward work programme be noted.

13 FOR INFORMATION - AUDIT WALES REPORT

The Chief Internal Auditor (CIA) informed members that an action plan response from the service was scheduled for the upcoming June meeting. The report attached (previously circulated) was for information.

RESOLVED that members note the contents of the information report.

14 CYBER SECURITY UPDATE

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

In order to receive and discuss the confidential Cyber Security report it was –

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that it would involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 18 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

A confidential report by Chief Digital Officer (previously circulated), provided information an update on the current position in relation to Cyber Security measures in place with the authority. Members were reassured officers were working to ensure systems were resilient. Regular monitoring took place. It was noted members concerns on the number of scams and potential issues especially with the increased reliance of I.T. following the pandemic.

It was,

RESOLVED that members note the contents of the confidential report.

The Chair wished to thank the members of the committee for the support and hard work during his time as Chair. He expressed his thanks to officers in particular to Gary Williams (Monitoring Officer) and Lisa Lovegrove (Chief Internal Auditor) for all the guidance and support over his term as Chair.

A special thanks was offered to Audit Wales representatives for the contribution to the committee and detailed reports.

Councillor Martyn Holland (Vice-Chair), thanked Councillor Barry Mellor for his Chairing of the committee. He applauded his dedication to ensure all meetings were conducted professionally and with ease. He offered the thanks from all members of the committee.

The meeting concluded at 12. 35 p.m.

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Report to	Governance and Audit Committee
Date of meeting	June 8, 2022
Lead Member / Officer	Nicola Kneale, Joint Acting Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation
Report author	Iolo McGregor, Strategic Planning and Performance Team Leader
Title	Council Performance Self-Assessment 2021 to 2022

1. What is the report about?

This report accompanies the council's Performance Self-Assessment for 2021 to 2022, providing our end of year analysis of progress and challenges with our key performance objectives (i.e. our Corporate Plan Priorities) and in each of the seven areas of governance. The report also provides narrative on council activity in support of Equality and Diversity.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 Although piloted last year, this report is the first statutorily required document written in response to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which requires the council to produce a Self-Assessment of its performance against its functions. It also responds to our duty around equality monitoring (under the Equality Act 2010 and Wales Measure 2011, which includes the Socio Economic Duty), and our contributions to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

2.2 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. Our Executive Summary, presented alongside this report, provides an evaluative statement of our progress.

- 2.3 Feedback on the content of this report, attached at appendix I, II and III, by Governance and Audit is required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, before approval of the final documents by Council in July.

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 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 set 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 have originated from Service and Programme Plans. Progress has been reported to Performance Scrutiny, Cabinet and the Senior Leadership Team through our Quarterly Performance Reports.
- 4.2 With this report, we present three documents:
- Appendix I presents our Executive Summary, which seeks to draw out the highlights of our performance against our objectives (i.e. our Corporate Priorities that are our Well-being and Equality Objectives) and the seven governance areas (prescribed by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015). The short paragraphs within this document are effectively our statement of performance against our functions, also looking ahead to the challenges that we face and areas for improvement.

- Appendix II is our familiar quarterly Performance Update Report, which is our process for ongoing self-assessment and embodies all the evidence (internal and external) and analysis that seeks to answer the questions of ‘How well are we doing’, ‘How do we know’, and ‘What and how can we do better’? This Performance Update Report presents the latest picture covering only January to March 2022, but combined with the Executive Summary and the three preceding Update Reports, the full set make-up our Self-Assessment for 2021 to 2022. Reviewing all four Performance Update Reports together will allow the reader to see improvement activity that we have identified throughout the year in support of performance.
- Appendix III is a ‘one-off’ report that seeks to summarise the performance of our Corporate Plan 2017 to 2022 over its five-year duration, now that we have reached its final year.

4.3 Within each corporate priority subsection, we continue to include 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). We also include a separate Equality and Diversity chapter, which captures corporate initiatives in support of this agenda.

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

5.1 The Performance Self-Assessment 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 additional 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 the Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet. Following Governance and Audit, the report will go to Performance Scrutiny (June 9), and then on to County Council for final approval in July.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 No statement is required with this report.

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

10.1 Failure to publish our Self-Assessment would likely result in statutory recommendations from Audit Wales, with significant implications for the reputation of the council.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1 Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (chapter 1, section 89).

11.2 Part 2 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (section 13).

11.3 The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 (section 16).

11.4 Sections 9 and 13 of the Council's Constitution outlines Scrutiny's powers and duties with respect of governance.

Appendix 1 – Executive Summary: Self-Assessment of Performance, 2021 to 2022

Together with our four quarterly update reports for 2022 to 2023 that have functioned as our ongoing assessment throughout the year, this document makes up our Self-Assessment of Performance required under the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It presents an accessible end-of-year summary of our performance against key functions, specifically our Well-Being Objectives (otherwise referred to as our Corporate Priorities), the seven governance areas, and the Public Sector Equality Duty (which includes the new Socio-Economic Duty).

To review the evidence behind the conclusions in this document, please refer to the Performance Update Reports, published on our [website](#).

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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

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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Our Approach to Self-Assessment

It is worthwhile in this document that we briefly explain our approach to Self-Assessment, as this is the first year that one is legally required.

At the end of 2021 to 2022, the council trialled a new style of Annual Performance Report that would respond to the performance requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, broadening our existing approach to also reflect on the Corporate Health of the organisation. Based on advice from an independent auditor commissioned by the WLGA, this would satisfy the need to report on 'council functions'. Our report involved an analysis of the seven governance areas recommended by the Act's statutory guidance, as well as a more concerted effort to catalogue the activity of our principle meetings (Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, and Governance and Audit), key news items, and reports by our internal audit and external regulators.

What we learned from last year's report (which was some one hundred pages long) is that we have a great body of evidence around how we are performing, but that it is difficult to make such a large document accessible. This document seeks to address that issue by providing only very high level summary statements that assess our performance, taking into account the wealth of quality information that has been comprehensively catalogued in our quarterly Performance Update reports (which utilised the same self-assessment template that we developed for our last Annual Performance Report). In this way we have achieved ongoing self-assessment throughout the year.

It is a requirement that the council, through its self-assessment process, identify improvement actions, and in subsequent self-assessments reports provide an update on our progress against them. We have achieved this through our quarterly Performance Update reports (supporting the principle of ongoing assessment), which have not only identified improvement actions during their production, but also captured improvement actions identified from the council's Service Performance Challenge programme, which ran during the summer of 2021. Service Performance Challenges are an opportunity for senior managers, Cabinet and Scrutiny members to be assured as to the performance of our services and the challenges that they are facing.

Finally, in addition to reviewing internal and external bodies of evidence to inform our self-assessment, there are new requirements around annually engaging with a comprehensive

list of stakeholders around the performance of our functions (objectives and governance). During 2021 the council updated its Resident's Survey (now referred to as our 'Stakeholder Survey') to ask specific questions now required under the Act. An analysis of the results is provided in our Performance Update reports, and the council will now look forward to running similar engagement exercises annually as part of its approach to Self-Assessment.

Equality and Diversity

The council continues to deliver a number of great initiatives in support of those with protected characteristics and living in socio-economic deprivation. In this year we have renewed our commitment to equality, published in our [Interim Strategic Equality Plan](#); Council pledged to being a diverse council, supporting accessibility and diversity in local democracy; through our quarterly performance update reports we have enhanced our reporting around equality and diversity activity; and improvements to our Well-being Impact Assessments and their publication will better inform and support the transparency of decision making. We acknowledge, however, that more needs to be done to support officers and members with the completion and scrutiny of impact assessments. There will also be further opportunity to capture benefits delivered in support of protected characteristics and the Socio-Economic Duty as we develop our new Corporate Plan in 2022 to 2023. Although our engagement work on the development of the new Corporate Plan themes has been comprehensive, we know that engagement with seldom heard groups or those with protected characteristics needs to improve, and we are working internally and with regional colleagues to develop solutions to this.

Performance Objectives – Corporate Plan 2017 to 2022

Housing: There have been significant achievements within our housing priority that have directly benefited residents and alleviated inequality. Many of our ambitious targets for the supply of housing are either making good progress (additional), or have in some cases been exceeded (affordable and empty). We have also done good work to improve standards in the private sector, and made improvements within our processes and policies for housing and homelessness support, including the Strategic Housing and Homeless Group, and the Housing and Homelessness Strategy. However, homelessness prevention remains a key challenge for the council. Although we have successfully delivered a new

Extra Care facility in Denbigh, more work is needed to progress the facility in Ruthin, which has faced significant delays. There also remain of course significant challenges with the availability, affordability and standard of housing within the county, and we acknowledge there is still a lot of work to do to address these.

Connected: A number of projects have made good progress within this priority, including our investment in libraries, which has supported those at a socio-economic disadvantage and at risk of digital exclusion (not least during the pandemic). Our investment in zero emission technology and demand responsive travel has also helped remove barriers to travel, benefitting those with the protected characteristics of age and disability. However, many of the challenges that we faced five years ago remain. Despite overall improvement in road condition data over the last five years, the ongoing investment required to maintain our large rural network is significant, and we know improvements are needed in terms of the timeliness of repairs. Internet connectivity too, though much improved over the last five years, remains below the UK average, and though we have used our position to influence and lobby, progress has been extremely slow despite our best efforts. Delivery of our plans for sustainable and active travel, and the replacement of Llannerch Bridge are also key challenges ahead for the council.

Resilient Communities: There has been some really important work carried out within our Resilient Communities priority, especially in the context of the pandemic, demonstrating particularly how well the council works in partnership to protect and support our residents and community initiatives. Highlights have included our work around mental health, becoming a Dementia Friendly Council, our support for carers, and assistance to community development projects more broadly. We have also made good progress with regards to raising awareness of domestic abuse; but like all these areas, acknowledge that there is always more to be done and increasing demand and challenges to be met. The council continues to protect and deliver vital and valued services for the most vulnerable in its communities, receiving positive feedback and accolades for its provision in a number of areas, including care and libraries. However, we face significant challenges with the cost of care, and the recruitment and retention of care staff. We also acknowledge that we have more work to do to complete our involvement project for shaping and improving services.

Environment: The council has made excellent progress with its Environment projects over the last five years, not only through its extensive tree planting, varied biodiversity

work, protection of green open spaces, flood prevention work, and raising awareness about the important assets that we have in the county; but also with its Climate and Ecological Change Strategy. However, becoming a Net Carbon Zero authority by 2030 remains a significant corporate risk, and as funding for a number of key projects ends, the council must look ahead to further opportunities to absorb and reduce carbon, particularly as it exhausts the 'quick-win' options. Greater stakeholder engagement and training will help. The council also has challenges ahead of it with the achievement of energy efficient council homes, embedding revised waste management arrangements, and delivering two further significant coastal defence schemes. It is also important that the council continues its work to ensure equal access to our countryside and historic assets, particularly for those at a socio-economic disadvantage, to benefit the health and well-being of residents and visitors alike.

Young People: The council has made good progress with its Young People projects over the last five years, particularly in support of well-being, skills and work placements. However, there remain significant challenges arising from the impact of Covid-19, impacting the development of young people and the delivery of some projects; but particularly timetabling and attendance in schools, which has made educational inequality more acute. There are challenges arising from the implementation of the new curriculum too, not least in terms of the monitoring of school standards, with pupil attainment, on the whole, remaining just below the Wales average. A combination of Covid-19 and market instability is also causing delays and rising costs within capital projects, which is a significant risk to our Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly the 21st Century Schools Programme).

Governance Functions – The Council’s Corporate Health

Corporate Planning: In addition to closing down programmes of work from its Corporate Plan 2017 to 2022, which has delivered many tangible benefits for residents, the council has undertaken considerable work to ensure that it meets upcoming legislative requirements. This has included the new Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021; the need to develop Well-being Objectives (every five years) under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; and the publication of our [Strategic Equality Plan 2021 to 2022](#) under the Equality Act (Wales) Regulations 2011. The council has tackled these key strategic strands of work well, whilst in the same year appointing a new Chief

Executive; continuing to respond to the pandemic; and implementing arrangements for two European Union replacement funds and the Levelling-Up Fund. Key challenges ahead will include the Chief Executive's review of the Senior Leadership Team; rolling out our New Ways of Working arrangements; inducting and training new councillors from May; and better understanding our relationship with the new North Wales Corporate Joint Committee. Improvement actions identified over the last year have on the whole progressed well, but we recognise that there is scope for us to learn from the pandemic in relation to transparent decision making. We also acknowledge that overall customer satisfaction with the council and its long-term plans is not where we would like it to be. It is proposed that the next Corporate Plan has a clear focus on how the council works, including customer service, engagement, and our performance. We have seen good engagement between members and officers over the last two years of the pandemic, and there has been particularly strong research and public engagement work carried out in support of potential themes for the next Corporate Plan, 2022 to 2027. There is a clear plan to further develop our Corporate Plan proposals with the new Council, seeking their final approval in early October.

Financial Planning: The council's financial planning arrangements have proven robust and the council is well placed to maintain its financial sustainability over the medium term. The council holds a stable reserve and has strong monitoring and planning mechanisms in place to actively manage pressures, such as the Medium Term Financial Plan, Treasury Management and Capital strategies, and a new Budget Setting process that moves towards a 3 to 5-year process. There are of course some significant budget variations, but we work to resolve those, and we have a good record of delivering savings. We have also introduced revised policies and procedures for countering fraud and corruption. The delays with the draft Statement of Accounts remains a challenge due to the timescales effecting other areas of work for the Finance Team, and therefore impacting service delivery going forward. The most significant risk and issue facing councils and the wider public sector in most recent times has been the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as rising costs globally. It is welcome that the Covid-19 Financial Recovery Strategy has provided a robust plan for the council's response. Another area of work will be looking ahead to the transition of revenues and benefits services to the council.

Performance Management: The council has effective performance management arrangements in place that help it monitor, report and scrutinise performance in key areas,

as well as identify areas for improvement. These arrangements have recently been strengthened by the council's approach to self-assessment through enhanced quarterly performance reports, and annual stakeholder engagement. There are minor improvements that can now be taken forward with regards to Verto, our performance management system, which were not possible prior to the recent retender of the software. The new Corporate Plan from October will also bring with it the opportunity to enhance the performance framework that the council reports on corporately. The timing of Service Performance Challenges needs to be considered in the coming months as the position with the review of the Senior Leadership Team becomes clearer. It is important that these go ahead to comply with our Performance Management Framework, but also to meet recent recommendations from Audit Wales on the publication of performance information on non-priority areas. The council must look ahead to training opportunities for councillors after the election, as well as for new or interested staff. The council has identified actions that it is taking forward to improve Project Management and Contract Management, and is working with Care Inspectorate Wales on identified actions to improve the delivery of some aspects within Children's Social Services.

Risk Management: Internal Audit previously highlighted some areas of weakness in the management of risks, which the council has sought to address during 2021 to 2022 to ensure governance and controls are robust. For example, we have been clearer about how risk appetite methodology is applied and we have clarified controls that should have a direct impact on risk management, setting out the expected direction of travel for each of our corporate risks. We have identified internal and external assurance to ensure risks are appropriately managed and scrutinised. Our Corporate Executive Team has started interrogating risks that sit beyond our risk appetite in risk focus sessions with risk owners. Broadly, we have found that engagement with our risk management process has been good by both officers and members. However, as global events have grown in significance for our council and our community over the last two years, so too have the number of active risks on our corporate risk register. Events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, and more recently the conflict in Ukraine, have had consequences for the global (and local) economy and our communities. For this reason, a summary of our corporate risk register has been developed to improve internal communications. A full update report will be presented to Performance Scrutiny's [meeting in June](#) 2022.

Workforce Planning: Workforce planning has grown in significance as the consequences of Covid-19 have heightened challenges in relation to recruitment and retention across the council. We have proactively put measures in place to address these issues. We have also improved the data that we hold about our own workforce for equality purposes, and taken steps to address the back-log caused by Covid-19 of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. We have implemented a stronger approach to workforce planning and participated in an Audit Wales study, which is expected to highlight some further areas to strengthen. There have been a number of recent changes in senior leadership, and this will be a particular priority for the coming year. During the year, we have supported managers and staff with the new ways of working, particularly home working, which has become our predominant working style since the start of Covid-19. We have engaged with staff using a questionnaire to determine managers' training and development requirements. The feedback from the survey has informed our new training strategy, and an induction programme, policies and guidance have been developed. Dedicated training sessions for employees and managers will be rolled out from July. At the same time, we have focused on mental health and well-being and agreed a new mental health policy that has resulted in awareness sessions, training and online support. The focus for the year ahead will be to work with our Staff Council to support us in recruiting Mental Health Champions. Supporting the New Ways of Working Project and supporting managers and staff as we begin to return to the office will also present challenges and opportunities.

Assets: The council faces significant challenges with regards to its assets. We have a perennially deteriorating and very large network of roads and bridges; a large portfolio of buildings to align with our Net Carbon Zero ambition; and growing pressures on our ICT infrastructure. However, we have made improvements. We have adopted minimum standards for in-use and embodied carbon that all council non-domestic construction projects must adhere to, and we are looking ahead to adopting a new Asset Management Strategy this summer. We have made significant investments in our roads and bridges, including a £3m commitment to improve roads during 2021 to 2022. We have introduced new frameworks in support of our maintenance of schools, non-schools and housing. We have good health and safety and fire safety procedures in place. In partnership with Dŵr Cymru and Natural Resources Wales, we have also taken forward improvement actions to alleviate flooding. The council also has increased investment to ensure the safe

management of its data, and better support for home working. Looking ahead, an immediate challenge will be preparing our offices for New Ways of Working, accommodating increased staff numbers, hybrid meetings, and different workstyles.

Procurement: The Procurement Team has made some improvements this year to the advice and support available to services to encourage good procurement practice and adherence of the procurement policy across the organisation. However, progress across a range of actions to improve and decarbonise procurement have been hampered due to continuing challenges in recruiting to the Procurement Manager post. This has resulted in existing team members taking on more responsibility on top of existing portfolios. We lack specific expertise in relation to ecology and decarbonisation, but we hope to secure the budget for a new post during 2022 to 2023. We have seen some positive progress in relation to collaborative procurements, and we are getting better at working with services to identify opportunities where collaborative procurement may be possible. These remain challenging and sometimes partners' timescales are inconsistent with our own, leading to missed opportunities beyond our control. The Community Benefits Hub is making connections between businesses and community initiatives, and has seen positive outcomes for individuals securing full-time employment as a result of their work placements. Securing a sustainable future for the Hub remains a key challenge. The development and adoption of a new Procurement Strategy by the end of the summer is also an important area of work for us to get right.

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Appendix 2 – Corporate Plan Performance Update: January to March 2022

This document presents the council's performance against its priorities and governance areas between January to March 2022, including our application of the Sustainable Development principle, the Public Sector Equality Duty, and Socio-Economic Duty.

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

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Summary position

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: Excellent

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

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

Measures: Acceptable

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 2022, there were 2,050 people on the Single Route to Housing (SARTH) waiting list, which is a decrease from the last period, October to December (2,378). Our second SARTH measure considers the number of people housed from the register into either council stock or a Denbighshire Registered Social Landlord property. During 2021 to 2022 a total of 261 people were housed, down from 328 the previous year.

We have delivered 422 additional homes during 2021 to 2022. This is slightly down from 435 the previous year. In terms of the additional supply of council houses provided, 13 units were successfully added to our stock and all of these were 'buy backs' with no new builds completed in this period. There have been 222 additional affordable housing, including social housing, provided during the year. This is an exceptional return and the highest since we began recording figures in 2006, bringing our total since 2017 to 586.

The increase is because:

- The council has taken on 43 homelessness leases this year. Performance is normally around 10 annually, but there has been additional funding provided for long-term leases with the private sector.
- Grŵp Cynefin completed the Extra Care scheme in Denbigh, bringing forward 74 dwellings.
- Adra have substantially completed the development in Meliden, and did complete the development in Trefnant, which has added 38 dwellings so far.

Another area of success within this priority includes the Empty Homes project. 196 Empty Homes have been brought back into use during 2021 to 2022, bringing the total to 695 since 2017, exceeding the target of 500 homes.

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. 325 homes were improved during 2021 to 2022, down from 415 the previous year.

The percentage of households successfully prevented from homelessness (Section 66 duty) has fallen from 52% to 42% during 2021 to 2023. This equates to 31 successful outcomes out of a total of 81. The percentage of households successfully relieved from homelessness (Section 73 duty) has also seen a decline since the same period last year, from 31% to 22%, which equates to 108 successful outcomes out of a total of 501.

Our previous report overlooked two new data items from our 2021 Stakeholder Survey. There were two satisfaction measures pertinent to this outcome, covering:

- The percentage of residents reporting they felt satisfied with the availability of housing in their area (30%, down from 42% in 2018).
- The percentage of residents reporting they are satisfied with the standard of housing in their area (40%, down from 52% in 2018).

Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Project Update

Closed: Denbigh Extra Care Housing

Following some delays with the handover date at the beginning of this period, we are now pleased to report that the scheme is fully open and the provider, Abacare, are on site.

Experiencing Obstacles: Ruthin Extra Care Housing

We are still waiting on Grŵp Cynefin to set a firm date to start works on site. Preparatory works were due to begin during April, 2022, but there is slight delay due to bats. A construction programme is being drawn-up and an overall scheme programme is being developed. Grŵp Cynefin are anticipating demolition works to begin in full around June and we are currently working to a construction end date of February 2024.

Experiencing Obstacles: Additional Council Homes

The delivery confidence for delivering additional council housing developments has improved as progress has been made on various sites.

- The former [Prestatyn Library](#) will be demolished and the site will be redeveloped to create a new commercial space and apartments available for social rent, providing 14 older persons' apartments. Energy in the apartments will be generated by ground source heat pumps and solar panels on the roof to create improved energy efficient living for future residents.
- At its [meeting in March](#), Cabinet approved tenders for the renovation of a terrace of eight properties in Aquarium Street in Rhyl. A contract notice with an estimated value of £2 million was published on the Sell2Wales procurement portal in December. Four tender submissions were received, and following an evaluation exercise a preferred contractor has been selected.
- The purchase of three former council houses in Rhyl has been completed.

The application for planning permission for a residential development on land adjacent to Ysgol Pendref in Denbigh was refused, which would have included 22 affordable units for social rent to be offered to the council. Despite this and the schedule over-run that has been caused by the pandemic, the programme is still confident of successful delivery.

Closed: Affordable Housing

As described above, delivery of our Corporate Plan target for an additional 260 affordable homes has been exceeded, with 222 delivered during 2021 to 2022. Since the start of the Corporate Plan in 2017 we have delivered a total of 586 affordable homes. The affordable housing delivery action is now being taken forward within the Service Plan for Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services.

Closed: Empty Homes Back into Use

Again, the Empty Homes project has met and exceeded the Corporate Priority target of bringing 500 empty homes back into use, with 695 empty properties having been brought back into use since 2017. The Empty Homes delivery action will now be taken forward within the Service Plan for Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services.

Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	Status
The number of people who were on the Complex Disabilities Specialist Housing Needs Register for whom supported housing has been secured – Benchmarked Locally	5	13	Excellent
The additional supply of council houses provided	14	13	Does not apply Count only
Number of additional homes provided in Denbighshire – Benchmarked Locally	435	422	Excellent
Number of empty properties brought back into use (old definition) – Benchmarked Locally	184	196	Excellent
The number of private sector homes improved in standard and quality due to intervention from the council – Benchmarked Locally	415	325	Priority for improvement
The additional supply of affordable housing, including social housing, provided during the year – Benchmarked Locally	154	222	Excellent
Percentage of households successfully prevented from homelessness (Section 66 duty) – Benchmarked Nationally	52	42	Priority for improvement
Percentage of households successfully relieved from homelessness (Section 73 duty) – Benchmarked Nationally	31	22	Priority for improvement
Number of additional Extra Care Homes supported by the council	0	74	Does not apply Count only

Measure	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of residents reporting they felt satisfied with the availability of housing in their area – Benchmarked Locally	42	30	Priority for improvement

Measure	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of residents reporting they are satisfied with the standard of housing in their area – Benchmarked Locally	52	40	Priority for improvement

Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Measure	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
Number of people on SARTH waiting list – Benchmarked Locally	2,139	2,297	2,283	2,378	2,050	Priority for improvement
Cumulative number of people housed from the SARTH register	328	67	153	209	261	Does not apply Count only

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.

Accommodation Provision for the Homeless

In November, Internal Audit completed a follow-up review of homelessness accommodation, giving again a low assurance rating. The report was presented for information to the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in March](#). The review found that overall the council is taking a more strategic approach to homelessness, involving a number of key services in decision making. Operationally there have been restructures to help better meet demand and comply with the Welsh Government's rapid

rehousing model, but there remain a number of vacancies in the team that are putting pressure on capacity. Diary notes were not always kept up-to-date, and housing plans were not always in place. There was limited documented guidance, and while some quality assurance checks were initially put in place, these stopped when the administrator left their post. However, an accommodation officer has recently been recruited and they will be responsible for carrying out document checks going forward.

We have found that **collaborating** and **integrating** across services in strategic decisions around homelessness prevention is having a positive impact on effective decision making. It is now important that the council addresses any remaining issues around capacity to provide a service that meets growing demands, and **involves** individuals in ways in which we can meet their **long-term** well-being needs and **prevent** homelessness. This will particularly benefit those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Delivery of Housing and Homelessness Strategy

Denbighshire's [Housing and Homelessness Strategy](#) was adopted by Council in December 2020. Since its adoption there have been many key areas of progress within the Action Plan, which is being monitored by the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Group. Of the 40 actions identified, 9 have been embedded in operational delivery as 'business as usual', and 23 actions are on track to be delivered within the set time scales. There are some minor delays on 8 actions in accordance with the original deadlines set, which is due to the impact of Covid-19. The first three themes of the strategy have been reviewed. Theme four, which deals with homelessness in Denbighshire, will be reviewed in detail at the group's meeting in March, however, some actions are already well on the way to completion, including the acquisition of a building to provide temporary homelessness accommodation for families in Denbighshire; the review of the Housing Support Grant to ensure different levels of support are available for a variety of needs; and integrating the Housing First programme into the Homelessness Support Pathway. Theme five, 'Homes and support for vulnerable people', and Theme six, 'Promoting and supporting communities', will be reviewed in June.

This Strategy supports those at a **socio-economic disadvantage** and those who have protected characteristics such as **Age, Disability, Religion and Belief, and Race**. The Strategy and the action plan take a **long-term** approach to **prevent** and end homelessness within Denbighshire, promoting **collaboration** and **integration** with

partners, and **involving** communities to address issues and encourage community cohesion.

Housing Support Programme Strategy

At Cabinet's [meeting in February](#), approval was given for the vision outlined within the new Housing Support Programme Strategy. The Strategy is required of local authorities in Wales by the Welsh Government to outline their strategic direction for housing support and homelessness prevention. It has been aligned to the existing Housing and Homelessness Strategy, which is monitored by the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Group.

This work **integrates** with the Welsh Government's ambition for housing and homelessness. A thorough needs assessment was undertaken in **collaboration** with a range of stakeholders, also **involving** citizens who have experienced homelessness and accessed services, and providers delivering support services (including Third Sector organisations and other statutory partners such as BCUHB, Police and Probation Services). A draft action plan has been produced to support the delivery of the Strategy, which will be reviewed annually. The next stage is to add **long-term** actions with agreed timeframes prior to publishing the Strategy, which will seek to benefit those at **socio-economic disadvantage** and **prevent** homelessness.

Housing Maintenance Materials Supply Contract

Approval was given by Cabinet at its [meeting in January](#) on the direct award of the council's next materials supply contract to Travis Perkins through the Adra All Wales Materials Framework. In recent years, the supply of building materials to the council's council house repairs and maintenance team had been provided by Jewson's, who were awarded their current contract back in 2017, and was due to expire in early 2022.

A major benefit of the All Wales Framework is Travis Perkins' commitment and ability to support the **long-term** provision of renewable technologies, as well as carbon conscious materials for the construction of dwellings, including modular and timber frame solutions. It also offers opportunities across Wales for **collaboration** with other authorities and housing providers, offering potential material cost savings through economies of scale. Bulk transport and local storage solutions will also **prevent** and reduce carbon emissions through our supply chain.

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

Data for the condition of A, B and C roads for 2021 to 2022 is now available, though we do not yet have the national comparative data. There has been improvement in all measures, with the condition of A roads now at only 2.6% in poor condition, improved from 3.5%; B roads at 3.8%, improved from 5%; and C roads at 7.5%, improved slightly from 7.6%. The overall score is 5.7% for A, B & C combined, the third consecutive year of improvement in condition.

At March 2022, the coverage of superfast broadband in Denbighshire was at 93.9%, a very small increase of 0.53% since January. 3.95% of premises had broadband of 10mbps or below. This is a 0.23% decrease since January 2022. The picture is still one where Denbighshire's constituencies are among those with the poorest superfast broadband coverage when compared to the rest of the UK.

53% of public transactions with the council were undertaken through its website during January to March 2022, compared to the total number of transactions undertaken using all access channels. This is a 2% increase on October to December's figure.

During January to March 2022, 43% of damaged roads and pavements were made safe within target time. This remains a priority for improvement and a concern for the council. Essentially there is an identified reporting issue between two systems that is showing performance to be worse than it actually is, exacerbated by capacity issues and staff absence. These issues are being actively addressed by the Service with the expectation of improvement from the first quarter.

Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update

Closed: Superfast Broadband and Mobile Networks

Despite significant efforts by the community and the council, we are yet to receive a quote from Openreach for the Nantglyn (and surrounding villages) project. This has taken considerably longer than we had anticipated, and as part of the closure of the project it has been agreed that the pilot has been taken as far as it can. A webpage has been created on the council's website to help communities and local business find out about internet connectivity options; this includes ADSL broadband, Wi-Fi boosters and satellite broadband. All enquiries and communication between potential 'white properties' and the council have gone through the Digital Support Officer for the past two years, and that post will continue until at least September 2023.

The project has mapped current connectivity in Social Housing (both council and RSL owned), and our planning service has included advice about connectivity in relevant guidance notes and commentary for applicants. Following discussion with mobile providers, we have established a principle contact to encourage the extension of coverage across the county. It was decided that a written protocol was not needed. Lessons learned from the project have been recorded and a closure report is being prepared to offer recommendations as to how best to allocate the remaining budget.

Closed: Digital Exclusion

Although this project has come to an end, Community Navigators and the Edge of Care Team will continue to support people to increase their digital inclusion. We are planning intergenerational activity in collaboration with the Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council, Social Care Volunteers, Working Denbighshire, Book of You and Age Connects, linking with plans to create an Age Friendly Community. Virtual events between Cysgod y Gaer and the local school, and digital surveys of council housing tenants will also take place following formal closure of the project. We are working on digital inclusion webpages on our council's website with some simple pointers on how to get help; for example, from the digital buddies or through the support and resources available in libraries, all established by the project. This and additional information and signposting to support will also be available from [DataMapWales](#), as part of the Centre for Digital Public Services' review of digital inclusion.

Although there was a delay in the delivery of IT equipment for the Virtual Reality workstream, this is now being progressed and service leads will take this forward as business as usual. A group has been established to evaluate the benefits of introducing Virtual Reality technology into care homes and the community. The council is also revisiting discussions with Llandrillo Menai College to explore how robotics could be integrated into Bangor University's degree programme. We are looking at ways to develop the assistive technology suite at the Rhos-On-Sea campus in-line with current and future technologies.

Closed: Infrastructure for Events

All mobile equipment for our inventory has been purchased and delivered. The terms and conditions, process and booking system for the hire scheme are in development, but have been delayed due to staffing and flooding at the Rhyl Pavilion. We expect these systems to be in place by the end of May 2022. We are still waiting to take delivery of the van and trailer to support the scheme, but are hoping to launch the service this summer.

Meanwhile, £121,249 has been awarded to groups across the county (including town councils, village halls and a community centre) to improve local events infrastructure. Examples of improvements include digital enhancements at Llangollen Town Hall to enable live streaming; a stair lift in Neuadd Eleanor, Llanfair Dyffryn Clwyd; kitchen upgrade at Carrog Village Hall; and external electrical points for event purposes at Parliament Street car park, Rhuddlan. It is expected that this workstream will be complete by November, 2023. Interviews with promoters are also now complete, and the Market Research report has been produced and shared with the council. A work programme needs to be produced based on the report, and this was discussed at the Project Board's meeting in March to agree a way forward. All outstanding aspects of this project will be managed through service business upon closure of the project.

Project Brief: Travel to Work, Education and Services

As reported previously, a business case for a 'Sustainable Transport Plan' is not yet available, but a report on the development of a Sustainable Transport Plan was presented to Performance Scrutiny at its [meeting in November](#). During the meeting members made observations in relation to the electric vehicle charging infrastructure; the need to include the views and needs of disabled people; the importance of linking with regional and national transport strategy; and the need to involve and engage users and communities.

Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of principle A roads that are in overall poor condition – Benchmarked Nationally	3.5	2.6	Excellent
The percentage of non-principal/classified B roads that are in overall poor condition – Benchmarked Nationally	5	3.8	Excellent
The percentage of non-principal/classified C roads that are in overall poor condition – Benchmarked Nationally	7.6	7.5	Excellent
The percentage of adults (aged 16 or over) who have used the internet within the last 3 months (Conwy and Denbighshire) – Benchmarked Locally	89.8	Data pending	Priority for improvement
The percentage of mobile 4G road signal (all operators) – Benchmarked Locally	49.8	50.63	Priority for improvement

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 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of Superfast Coverage in Denbighshire (>30 Mbps) – Benchmarked Locally	92.23	92.63	92.75	93.37	93.92	Priority for improvement

Measure	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of premises with Broadband of 10 Mbps or below – Benchmarked Locally	4.45	4.34	4.33	4.18	3.95	Priority for improvement
The percentage of transactions undertaken via the web, compared to the total number of transactions undertaken using all access channels – Benchmarked Locally	50	56	48	51	53	Good
Percentage of damaged roads and pavements made safe within target time (CAT1 - Category 1 defects dealt within timescale) – Benchmarked Locally	87	67	64	51	43	Priority for improvement

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 three months 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.

Llannerch Bridge

Following Cabinet's commitment to support the principle of replacing Llannerch Bridge, made in December 2021, we are funding the initial cost of ground surveys and other specialist work that will inform a business case and bid for external funding to design and construct a replacement bridge. In January, we published a press release informing residents of signs of activity at the Llannerch Bridge site as the specialist surveying and mapping work commences. The council will be publishing quarterly newsletters to keep residents informed of the latest activity and, subject to Covid-19 restrictions, public meetings will be held to give residents the chance to discuss any concerns.

Any project to replace the bridge will apply the five ways of working under the sustainable development principle, looking for a **long-term** solution that **prevents** further harm, **integrating** and **collaborating** with stakeholders and partners to seek a solution, whilst of course **involving** local residents in the development of an option for any replacement structure. Such a project would also benefit local residents at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Public safety and the Rhyl Vision

During this period, work was undertaken to stabilise and prepare for the demolition of buildings at 123-125 High Street, Rhyl, deemed unsafe by structural engineers. The works were necessary in the interests of public safety, and the council communicated with surrounding businesses to offer support where possible throughout the period of the regrettable but necessary road closure. Although no formal plans have been drawn up or adopted for the site, we will work with the community to carry out a full consultation on any plans as they develop. Demolition was completed in early April, with the lower high street again being opened to traffic.

These works also support the council's vision for Rhyl, which focuses on key areas of regeneration, including improving the appearance of the town centre and linking it with the promenade. It has support from the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns project, and will complement the Queen's Market development and those developments that have already been completed on the waterfront.

The project to make safe, demolish and subsequently regenerate the site will apply the five ways of working under the sustainable development principle, looking for a **long-term** solution that **prevents** further safety issues and disruption to businesses and the public, **integrating** and **collaborating** with stakeholders and partners, whilst of course **involving** local residents during the demolition and to determine a future plan for the site. Our vision for Rhyl will also benefit those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Llangollen 2020 Castle Street Improvements

[The Llangollen 2020 Castle Street Improvement](#) project, which started in October and is due to be completed in May, is being undertaken by Denbighshire County Council in partnership with Welsh Government and Transport for Wales. Phase one will involve resurfacing Castle Street between its junction with the A5 and the Market Street junction. Phase two, which will involve surfacing Castle Street between the Market Street junction and the Mill Street / Abbey Road junctions, will commence in early May.

This **collaborative** project has engaged extensively to **involve** and **integrate** with partners, local residents, business and stakeholders; and where possible a number of changes have been accommodated that complement the overall scheme. These improvements provide **long-term** benefits for residents and visitors, giving more space for pedestrians to walk around the town centre, improved crossing facilities, and upgraded traffic signals to improve the flow of vehicles. Enhancements to access will also benefit the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**, improving safety and **preventing** any harm to individuals and congestion in the town.

Decarbonising Travel

Since its launch in September 2021, the zero emission Green Taxi scheme, funded by the Welsh Government, has (up until January) covered 15,501 zero emission miles across the county, providing an average of 969 zero emission miles each week, mainly on home to school journeys. Denbighshire is hosting the only North Wales pilot of the zero emission Green Taxi scheme as part of a wider national pilot to support the Welsh Government's goal to de-carbonise the taxi fleet entirely by 2028. Twenty-eight taxi drivers have stepped behind the wheel of four wheelchair-accessible Nissan Dynamo E-NV200 taxis to use as part of the 'try before you buy scheme'. The taxis have operated across Prestatyn, Rhyl, Bodelwyddan, St Asaph, Denbigh, Ruthin and Corwen. In response to feedback from the

drivers, the council is exploring the potential to extend the scheme with the offer of a vehicle capable of delivering 300 plus miles on a single charge.

Separate to this project, the council has secured a total of £57,400 grant funding from the UK Government's Office for Zero Emission Vehicles, supported by the Energy Saving Trust, to support the delivery of an Electric Vehicle Public Charging Pilot. The pilot will provide fast charging points in eight public car parks across Denbighshire for use by the public. Work on the pilot is expected to be completed by early summer. The chargers will be in place to support residents to transition to an electric vehicle where they didn't previously have access to a charging facility.

Finally, the council, together with Transport for Wales, launched a pioneering demand responsive public transport scheme in March for residents in and around the Ruthin area, joining pilots in Denbigh and Prestatyn. Ruthin's Fflecsi service will be available within the town of Ruthin itself, being able to travel around most of Ruthin's urban housing cul-de-sacs. This will introduce a bus service for many people in Ruthin for the first time, thanks to support from the Welsh Government and the Welsh Government Energy Service. Fflecsi will also serve a number of villages and hamlets, notably Bontuchel, Clawddnewydd, Clocaenog, Cyffylliog, Derwen, Graigfechan, Llanelidan, Pentrecelyn and Rhydymedwy. The Fflecsi bus is Wales's first-ever zero emission, 100 per cent battery-operated, 16-seat minibus. Intending passengers can book their demand responsive transport one hour ahead either through the Fflecsi app (available from the [Fflecsi Wales website](#)), or by phoning a dedicated call centre on 0300 234 0300. Where Fflecsi has previously been introduced in rural areas, it has seen an increase in passenger demand over the previous timetabled bus services.

These examples of zero emission travel and demand responsive travel apply the five ways of working under the sustainable development principle. They seek to **integrate** objectives at a national and local level, **collaborate** with partners, and **involve** users in **long-term** solutions that **prevent** further harm and damage to the environment. By improving access in and around our key settlements, the Fflecsi service will benefit those with the protected characteristics of **Disability** and **Age**, as well as those who are at a **socio economic disadvantage**.

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

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: Excellent

Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Measures Update

Denbighshire saw a 23% increase in the number of repeat victims of domestic crime during 2021 to 2022, rising from 551 to 678 by March 2022. This is slightly higher than the North Wales figure for the year, where there has been a 17.7% increase in repeat victims of domestic violence. The number of repeat offenders of domestic abuse in Denbighshire has decreased 28% from 115 to 83. In North Wales there has been a 27% decrease overall.

Within the national Dewis Cymru website the number of resources for Denbighshire stands at 533. This is consistent with the figure we saw for October to December, but is a decrease of 15% on the same period the previous year. There are currently 10,970 resources for Wales on Dewis Cymru, and 2,675 for North Wales.

390 carer assessments took place between January to March. This is 56% decrease on the same period last year (reduced by 488 from 878). Support for carers has continued and community support has been available regardless of whether carers have received an assessment.

Data for the average length of time adults (aged 65 years or over) are supported in residential care homes has reduced slightly from 1,044 (October to December) to 1,028 days for the period covering January to March.

To align with our interim Strategic Equality Plan, an additional measure has now been included in our Resilient Communities framework concerning the number of families resettled within Denbighshire under UK Resettlement Project. During 2021 to 2022 there were 6 families settled in Denbighshire, one more than the previous year. This brings our total to date under the scheme to 28 families (although two families have subsequently moved out of the county). The council has also pledged to support 10 families under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy project, and we are well on our way to achieving this. We are also now working with the Homes to Ukraine Scheme and working with hosts.

Our previous report overlooked two new data items from our 2021 Stakeholder Survey. There were two satisfaction measures pertinent to this outcome, covering:

- The percentage of people who agree "my local area is a place where people will pull together to improve the local area" (63%, up from 59% in 2018).
- The percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area (20%, down from 27% in 2018).

Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update

Experiencing Obstacles: Involvement in shaping and improving services

Due to the elections it was agreed to postpone our year 3 research until the summer, as the engagement policy will need to be agreed by the new council. The policy document has been drafted, but further work is needed to take account of the new Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 to support the development of a Participation Strategy (in addition to the existing draft engagement policy, supporting framework, templates and toolkits already developed). This, however, would take the work beyond the scope of the project and more into 'business as usual', therefore it is proposed to close this project and streamline the remaining project objectives into the Communities and Customers general communications and engagement workstream.

Closed: Supporting Carers

Although this project is now closed, representatives at the final project team meeting in February agreed that they wish to continue working together to identify and support carers of all ages in Denbighshire. The local action plans and progress update for the North Wales Regional Strategy were discussed, and it was decided that future meetings should be held quarterly to coincide with the North Wales Regional Carers Operational Group's work programme. It was also suggested that a carer's representative should be invited to join the group. The group recognised that there is more need than ever to ensure unpaid carers are identified as soon as possible, and have better information and support to ensure that they are able to continue with their caring role. The aim is that the joint approach, including working closely with Third Sector organisations, will be maintained, prioritising early intervention and prevention and developing supportive communities.

Community Support Services have also started to develop a plan to address issues highlighted in the State of Caring survey report 2021.

Closed: Reduce Domestic Abuse

This project has now been formally closed, with the last project board meeting held in February. Remaining workstreams will now be absorbed into the usual business of services, including Ask and Act training, Caring Dad's awareness training, and Spectrum training in schools. An additional children's support worker is also to be recruited within the Domestic Abuse Service Unit. One outstanding piece of work is to look at a domestic abuse housing tenancy policy; this will be taken forward by our Community Housing Team.

On Target: County-wide Community Development

The Community Development Team have continued to oversee and monitor the delivery of the 14 UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF) projects in Denbighshire, and all are progressing well. The UKCRF project period has now been extended until December 2022.

The latest round of Open Space Commuted Sums fund applications were recently assessed by the team, with a total of £204,929 being awarded to 13 projects. £17,888 of Welsh Government Funding was also distributed to support 16 food initiatives across the county, including all known foodbank and foodshare schemes.

The team have offered guidance to at least 23 different community initiatives during this quarter, including offering support to one group who subsequently secured £65,000 of grant funding for their project. The Digital Officer continues to support several communities to explore broadband connectivity improvement options, with one community recently celebrating the completion of their Openreach fibre broadband upgrade.

On Target: Assistive Technology

This project was identified in our interim Strategic Equality Plan, and is being reported here for the first time. It is aimed at helping dementia patients and citizens experiencing loneliness and low mood. Additional innovative dementia equipment has been purchased and installed within the council's care facilities, and training has been provided. For example, PARO, therapeutic robot baby harp seals that have a calming effect, have been

introduced at Dolwen and Nant-Y-Môr, and have been well received by residents and staff. Reminiscence Interactive Therapy Activities (RITA) have also been used in both Extra Care facilities during weekly group sessions and one-to-one sessions. The Welsh Language content on RITA has also been positively received. We are now waiting for the installation of the Reminiscence Pods (Rempods), which are unique pop-up therapy tools that turn any space into a calming environment for people living with dementia. Links have also been re-established with Llandrillo Menai College to look at how a robotics project there can be resurrected with Bangor University's degree programme. Discussions have also been had to develop the assistive technology suite at the Rhos-On-Sea campus, in line with current and future technologies being deployed.

On Target: Digital Information, Advice and Assistance

As with Assistive Technology above, this action was identified in our interim Strategic Equality Plan to help people better access our services. The council has launched web pages for sensory loss, and updated our carers web pages to include links to internal and external sources of information, advice and support. We have also launched webpages to aid workforce development, giving access to relevant training opportunities for external providers and unpaid carers to support them in their roles; and web pages to give information about autism. We are working on moving financial assessment forms online. Information about dementia that had been developed for staff on our intranet is now being adapted for the public and moved onto our website. We are aiming to publish this in time for Dementia Action Week, May 16 to 22.

Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of people reporting they have received the right information or advice when they needed it – Benchmarked Locally	88	No data No survey	Acceptable
The percentage of carers reporting they feel supported to continue in their caring role – Benchmarked Locally	55	No data No survey	Priority for improvement

Measure	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of people reporting that they know who to contact about their care and support – Benchmarked Locally	84	No data No survey	Acceptable
The percentage of people who agree "my local area is a place where people will pull together to improve the local area" – Benchmarked Locally	59	63	Good
The percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area – Benchmarked Locally	27	20	Priority for improvement

Measure	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	Status
The number of families resettled within Denbighshire under UK Resettlement Project – Benchmarked Locally	5	6	NA

Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Measure	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
The cumulative (year to date) number of repeat victims of Domestic Abuse including non-crime occurrences (3 or more in 12 months, measured as year to date)	555	148	332	509	678	Does not apply Count only
The cumulative (year to date) number of repeat offenders of Domestic Abuse	108	18	35	60	83	Does not apply Count only

(3 or more in 12 months)						
The number of live resources on the Dewis Cymru Platform – Benchmarked Locally	623	565	620	532	533	Acceptable
The number of assessments of need for support for carers undertaken during the year	878	114	221	302	390	Does not apply Count only
The average length of time (measured in days) adults (aged 65 or over) are supported in residential care homes – Benchmarked Nationally	1,053	1,053	1,050	1,044	1,028	Priority for improvement

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 October to December 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.

Vulnerable friends and relatives

The council has maintained efforts to protect vulnerable individuals from harm, encouraging residents to look out for their neighbours, friends and family during the ongoing pandemic, particularly those who may be lonely and their usual visitors may be self-isolating. As Covid-19 cases rose due to the Omicron variant, the council reminded the public about the need for good hand hygiene, ventilation, social distancing and face

coverings. People were also urged to help support the vaccination effort and book online or attend designated drop in clinics to get their first, second or booster jabs.

Working **collaboratively** with our partners and **integrating** our common desire to keep everyone safe and **prevent** any harm, the council continues to work to keep residents informed and help protect the most vulnerable (we know Covid-19 can be particularly adverse on those with a **Disability**, or from Black and Asian backgrounds. Those at a **socio-economic disadvantage** are also most likely to present with cases).

Regional Memory Support Assessment Service

North Wales has secured additional and recurring funding of £672k per annum from Welsh Government for developing an enhanced regional approach to supporting individuals who have memory issues / concerns or dementia at the pre-assessment and post-diagnosis stages. At its [meeting in November](#), Cabinet agreed that the council would act as the lead commissioner on behalf of the Regional Collaboration Team. At its [meeting in February](#), Cabinet awarded three contracts following the completion of a tendering exercise. With a combined potential value of up to £3.36m over 5 years, these three contracts will support the implementation of the North Wales Dementia Strategy.

Integrating and **collaborating** with partners, the service will directly support the protected characteristic of **Age** and **Disability**; it will encourage **involvement** and will bring new support to improve health for those living with dementia, **prevent** harm and meet unrealised needs in the **long-term**.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022 to 2023

Council approved the adoption of the all Wales Council Tax Reduction Schemes (and prescribed requirements) at its [meeting in January](#). This was in respect of the 2022 to 2023 financial year. Amendments within the regulations include an increase in line with the cost-of-living for personal allowances in relation to working age, carer and disabled premiums. Pensioner rates have been aligned with Housing Benefit and uprated by different mechanisms. Income bands and deductions made in relation non-dependants have been uprated. Additional amendments have also been made to support Afghan Nationals and UK nationals from Afghanistan; to provide redress for survivors of historical child abuse; and a higher rate of personal allowance for pensioners in Wales. Council also

agreed to three discretionary elements concerning the administration of the scheme, including to disregard 100% of the War Disablement pensions and War Widows Pensions when calculating income.

Integrating and **collaborating** with the Welsh Government and other local authorities on this scheme will benefit those at a **socio-economic disadvantage** and hopefully prevent greater hardship. Specific amendments will also benefit the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Race**.

Library Standards and Performance

At its [meeting in January](#), Performance Scrutiny reviewed the performance of Denbighshire's Library Service against the 6th Framework of Welsh Public Library Standards, and its progress in developing libraries as places of individual and community well-being and resilience. The performance data for 2020 to 2021 included twelve core entitlements that Denbighshire continued to meet, together with six quality indicators, for which a self-assessment has been carried out and included in the report. It was noted that, in line with general levels of town centre footfall, library visits had not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels, and that this situation was being mirrored across Wales. Levels of use is slowly increasing, however, and work is being carried out to re-engage with schools and welcome back partner service provision and group activities in libraries to increase attendance. Libraries are also now being used in different ways of course, seeing more people using digital means to access the service, including Order and Collect. It was acknowledged in the meeting that the partnership with Rhuddlan Town Council and St Asaph City Council had worked well for the libraries in those localities; and also that reductions in staffing levels had been carried out in such a way as to minimise any impact on library users and that there had been no negative feedback as a result.

Our libraries are critical hubs within our communities, directly benefiting those who are at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, and offer **long-term** solutions that **prevent** isolation, exclusion, and information poverty by **integrating** and **collaborating** with partners, whilst **involving** users.

Community Catalysts

The council is directing entrepreneurs to a new initiative that is now up and running across Denbighshire, providing professional advice to help individuals work for themselves to offer quality care and support. Many people in Denbighshire need some extra help to live the way they want to, perhaps because they are older, disabled or have a long-term health condition. The project, funded by the council, is being run by social enterprise [Community Catalysts](#).

Integrating and working **collaboratively**, this initiative directly benefits the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**. It encourages **involvement** and will hopefully help grow our care offer in the county, **prevent** harm, and meet individual needs in the **long-term**.

Winter Fuel Support Scheme

The council administered the Welsh Government Winter Fuel Support Scheme, which offered eligible households to claim a one-off £200 payment to provide support towards paying winter fuel bills. 5604 applications were received, with 4608 being approved. Applications closed in February. The scheme was open to households where one member is in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Based Employment and Support Allowance, Universal Credit or Working Tax Credits.

Integrating our mutual ambition to **prevent** hardship, at least in the short-term, this **collaborative** initiative between Welsh Government and the council directly benefits those living within **socio-economic disadvantage**. Due to the nature of eligibility for this funding, this should support those with protected characteristics, such as **Age**, **Disability**, **Marriage** and **Civil Partnership** (particularly in supporting unpaid Carers looking after family members).

Supporting Democracy

In the run-up to the County Council and Community Council elections in May, the council reminded residents of the importance of registering to vote. Voting ensures residents have a say on the issues of the day, and being on the electoral register can maintain people's credit rating. Everyone is responsible for registering themselves, and can do so at any time online: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote.

In March, the council held an information event aimed at the county's residents who were thinking of becoming a county councillor. Council representatives were on hand to provide information on the role of the county councillor, how the council works, the issues county councillors will face after the elections, the nomination and election process, and the support available to councillors once elected.

It is important that our democracy is accessible to all residents, and that they are supported to be **involved** in it. In September, Council committed to being a diverse council that represents its residents. Equal representation will benefit our communities in the **long-term**, removing any barriers that **prevent** those with protected characteristics from being heard, including **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Armed forces support

At Council's [meeting in February](#), Air Commodore Adrian Williams OBE and Tony Fish, Regional Employer Engagement Director (North), presented the Chairman with the Silver Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Award. The council is one of 24 Welsh organisations and private sector employers to have received a Defence ERS Silver Award in 2021 from the Ministry of Defence. The ERS encourages employers to support defence and is open to employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to defence and the armed forces community, and align their values with the Armed Forces Covenant. Denbighshire County Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2019.

The Covenant and our work in Denbighshire will directly benefit the protected characteristics of **Age, Disability, Marriage and Civil Partnership** and those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**. This work shows **collaborative** working, **long-term** thinking and an **integration** of ideals to support and protect veterans. It also seeks to **involve** interested stakeholders and **prevent** loneliness and isolation.

National Awards

The Social Care Accolades recognise, celebrate and share notable work of groups, teams and organisations in social care and childcare, play and early years in Wales, as well as individual care workers from across the public, private, voluntary and co-operative sectors in Wales. Two members of staff have been shortlisted in the Caring in Welsh category. This category honours individuals who make a positive difference to people's lives by

providing high-quality care through the medium of Welsh. Alaw Pierce, Service Manager, was nominated on behalf of Denbighshire's operational management team for her work in championing people's rights to use Welsh, and for being a role model for staff. Catherine Roberts, Assistant Manager at Cysgod y Gaer, was nominated in the same category for regularly going above and beyond the call of duty in her role, for being a dedicated carer, and for leading the team with exceptional examples of good practice. Sheila Mullins, a care assistant at Dolwen, has been shortlisted in another category to celebrate individual care workers in Wales who have a positive impact on people's lives. The North Wales Together Learning Disability Transformation programme, a partnership involving the social care departments of the six local authorities in North Wales and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, has also been shortlisted in the promoting equality, diversity and inclusion category. The award winners will be announced at a ceremony in Cardiff in April.

We are proud of the commitment and dedication shown by our social care teams, **collaborating** and **integrating** across organisations to deliver high quality services every day with care, compassion and empathy. We **involve** people in deciding the right care solutions for their situation in the **long-term**, **preventing** harm to the most vulnerable (particularly those with the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**).

Ukrainian Refugees

The council has processes in place and is making preparations to extend and accelerate the offer of resettling families from Ukraine. The council has a long history of accommodating and supporting refugees and has pledged to welcome families every year. As always, the council has received many kind offers of help from residents of Denbighshire. If anyone has any enquiries, they should email ukresettlement@denbighshire.gov.uk.

We will work **collaboratively** and **integrate** with national governments and volunteers to resettle refugees in Denbighshire, **involving** the refugees themselves in determining the best ways to support their **long-term** integration and **prevent** further hardship. This will benefit the protected characteristics of **Race, Religion and Belief, Age, Pregnancy and Maternity**, as well as helping those who are likely to be at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

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

Measures: Good

Projects: Excellent

Corporate Plan Performance Framework: Measures Update

During 2021 to 2022, the council planted 3,500 trees, achieving our ambition of planting 18,000 trees during the term of the Corporate Plan.

The completion of our East Rhyl Coastal Defence project means that we can now report that 1,650 properties have a reduced risk of flooding.

Final data for the percentage of council housing stock achieving an EPC (Energy) rating of C or above saw an increase from 46 to 53% during 2021 to 2022.

Data is currently pending for the four measures pertaining to the Climate and Ecological Change Programme for 2021 to 2022 (covering the species richness of council land, and carbon emitted through staff commuting, business travel and supply chains). This data is anticipated to be included in this report prior to publication.

We also have no information as yet for the total economic impact of tourism (£ million) for 2021 to 2022, for which data is normally published in October.

Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update

Experiencing Obstacles: Climate and Ecological Change

At its [meeting in February](#), Council was presented with an update on year 1 of its Climate and Ecological Change Strategy. Although the in-year delivery confidence for the programme is reported as experiencing obstacles, progress thus far has been progressive and commendable. The first ever analysis of local councils' climate action plans reveals that Denbighshire is the only authority in the region to score above the Welsh national average (47% against an average of 31%), and came second only to Cardiff City Council (who scored 70%). It was during this meeting that Council supported the creation of a dedicated Cabinet Lead Member for Climate and Ecological Change.

In December 2020 to June 2021, Audit Wales undertook a review of the council's ability to deliver on its environmental ambitions, which was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in January](#). It concluded that the council is making excellent progress in embedding its environmental ambitions, having moved quickly to make changes to its strategic planning frameworks, and allocating significant resources. The council has communicated well with citizens, trying to inform, influence and change behaviours; but more comprehensive stakeholder mapping would further strengthen engagement. Good work has been undertaken to train both councillors and staff, and though understanding is developing well, more detail is needed on what 'ecologically positive' means to the council, and how the ambitions influence the daily work of staff. Finally, the council has put baseline measures in place using an established performance framework, and reporting over the next year will help the environmental ambitions to embed and the measures to evolve.

At its [meeting in February](#), Cabinet approved the introduction of the new scheme of delegated decision making for land acquisition (freehold and leasehold) for carbon sequestration and ecological improvement purposes. This will increase the number of hectares of council owned and operated land in the highest species richness categories and the amount of carbon tonnage sequestered. However, at its [meeting in March](#), Communities Scrutiny requested that the decision be reconsidered by Cabinet at the first available meeting after the election, making recommendations for speeding-up the decision making process for land purchases; requesting that farming unions are again consulted with now that Covid-19 restrictions have eased; that local members are consulted about prospective purchases; the staffing levels within Countryside Services are reviewed to ensure adequate capacity to deliver; and that clarity is given with regards to land grading.

Closed: Living Assets

Our understanding of Denbighshire's 'living assets' is now much clearer. Survey work and inspections have been carried out in several locations across the county to develop a dataset containing information on species, condition, location, management requirements, etc. The project has now been closed; however, activity to maintain, enhance, protect and preserve Denbighshire's living assets for future generations will continue as usual business within Countryside Services.

Closed: Improving Biodiversity

Throughout Denbighshire there are now around 100 wildflower meadow project sites, including highway verges, footpath edges, cycleways and amenity grasslands. Along with the 11 roadside nature reserves, these sites are equivalent to nearly 35 football pitches worth of grassland managed as native wildflower meadows, boosting the welfare of native insects in Denbighshire. This project has now been closed, but further activity will be taken forward through the Service Plan for Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services.

At the request of Partnerships Scrutiny, a report was presented at their [meeting in February](#) about the council's policy with respect to verge and hedge maintenance and pesticide application. The main principle underpinning the policy is that verges must be managed to ensure the safety of all road users. However, verges are also increasingly recognised as important habitats for maintaining biodiversity, to the benefit of pollinating insects, wild flowers and other wildlife; as well as acting as vital wildlife corridors connecting habitats together. The council's policy therefore aims to address these desirable outcomes in a realistic and economic way. The policy can be found on the [council's website](#).

Closed: Tree Planting

Utilising funding from Welsh Government and administered by Natural Resources Wales, since 2017 the council has supported the planting of 18,000 trees at Glan Morfa in Rhyl and available sites in and around Denbigh. Overall, the completion of the PLANT project has resulted in the creation of an additional 80 acres of quality green open space strategically located adjacent to some of the more disadvantaged wards in Wales.

Additional benefits from this project include new access routes across the Glan Morfa site, along with picnic benches and seating. The site has been historically blighted by unauthorised motorbike activity and fly-tipping. As part of the project, site security has been improved with access barriers and boundary fencing installed. Trespass on the site has reduced significantly and Countryside Services will continue to work in partnership with North Wales Police to ensure that the site remains secure and fulfils its function as a safe and attractive green open space. Community engagement has been an important part of the project and has included a 'Wild Rhyl' celebratory event, numerous school tree

planting events, practical volunteer sessions through the 'Out and About' volunteer programme, and regular sessions under the 'Nature for Health' programme. Going forward Countryside Services will continue to maintain the tree stock and the Glan Morfa site, and to ensure future sustainability, engage with local organisations and groups, as well as schools and volunteers.

In addition to the above project, nearly 5,000 further new trees have been planted across Denbighshire through The Woodland Creation Project, which will help the council achieve its net carbon zero goal. By the end of March 2022, volunteers and council staff have planted 800 trees at Llanrhydd, 2,500 at Maes Gwilym, 1,500 at Cae Ddol, and 150 trees at Maes Esgob. Schools have been involved in planting in Ruthin and Rhyl.

Through Welsh Government funding, the Local Nature Partnerships Cymru ENRaW project, and the Local Places for Nature grant, a new site at Green Gates farm on the edge of St Asaph has been developed for a local provenance tree nursery. This new site aims to produce 5,000 trees and 5,000 native wildflower plants a year, with the hope to expand in the future. As the work at the tree nursery increases the council is keen to involve local people as volunteers. Volunteer work would include potting and maintaining the plants, surveying the surrounding fields as they develop, and potentially assisting in planting activities. If you would like to get involved, please get in touch through biodiversity@denbighshire.gov.uk.

On Target: Nature Corridor

Project funding is now coming to an end and focus has been on ensuring that all budgets are spent. For the most part this has been achieved, apart from a couple of areas that were set back by Covid-19 and other reasons. This has been discussed with Welsh Government, and they are happy with the progress of the project, and budgets have been amended where possible to ensure we were able to use it where needed. Several aspects of the project have been completed or at near completion, including the tree planting, the Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) project, and school ground improvements. Volunteer sessions and public engagement continue weekly, and we have engaged with many schools through tree planting on school grounds. Staff salaries continue until July to finish the project, and the calendar remains full until then with school engagement, site maintenance and improvement, volunteer sessions, and the well-being and walking sessions.

On Target: Moorland Management

The hydro-seeding of 5 hectares of Moel Y Faen in October 2021 has shown some success with the germination of the upland grass seed in areas. It is hoped that as we move into the spring that the effects of the seeding will become more evident. Heather cutting on Llantysilio Mountain and Llandegla Moor will be undertaken during March 2022, funded by the Natural Resources Wales Biodiversity Ecosystem Resilience Fund (BERF).

The wildfire risk assessment process is being developed and will generate thematic mapping using MapInfo GIS software, which will enable the monitoring of changes in wildfire risk on moorland areas over time. This project is ongoing with a completion date of October 2023.

Closed: East Rhyl Coastal Defence

This East Rhyl Coastal Defence project was completed ahead of schedule and within budget in February 2022. The successful placement of 128,000 tonnes of rock armour in front of the existing sea defences and the newly added 600 metres of sea defence wall and promenade will reduce the risk of flooding to 1,650 properties.

A public exhibition on proposals for a central Rhyl coastal defence scheme was held at Rhyl Town Hall between January 12 and February 9. It is anticipated that existing defences there could fail within the next 10 to 15 years, putting 550 residential and 45 non-residential properties at risk. If the council successfully obtains planning consents for the scheme, we expect construction to start in the autumn or winter periods of 2022, and take approximately two and a half years to complete. For more information on the scheme, [visit our website](#).

A further planning application for the Central Prestatyn Coastal Defence Scheme is also under development, comprising of the formation of flood embankments, ramps, outfall structures and rock armour, including landscaping, habitat enhancements, and works to existing culverts. This is currently being consulted upon and it is anticipated that a decision will be made in July. For more information, [visit our website](#).

Working in partnership with Natural Resources Wales and Dŵr Cymru, the council has also been exploring flood risk from inland watercourses and riparian land ownership. A report was taken to the Communities Scrutiny Committee [meeting in March](#), which

recommended potential methods for strengthening communication channels and building effective working relationships between all parties and organisations that have responsibilities for managing flood risk. It was agreed that a Flood Risk working group, comprising of the flood risk management authorities and land owner representatives, continue to meet on an annual basis and report on progress to Communities Scrutiny; that the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy page be re-launched, including links to Natural Resources Wales and Dŵr Cymru, and an explanation of the responsibilities of flood risk authorities and riparian land owners; that information on the responsibilities of riparian land owners is distributed to properties adjacent Rhyl Cut and Prestatyn Gutter; and finally, that the report is circulated to and Town, City and Community Councils.

At Risk: Energy Efficient Council Homes

Although delivery confidence has been impacted by Covid-19, a number of works contracts have now been re-established since the pandemic, with more projects planned during 2022 to 2023. These still mainly relate to external works, including insulation measures and heating installation works that are generally easier to deliver to the housing stock in this current time. We are also still waiting for further information from the Welsh Government with regards to the new Welsh Housing Quality Standard, which has been delayed due to the pandemic. We have been informed that consultation will be commencing in the summer, with a draft document expected by the end of the year. We believe the new policy will heavily impact targets on a national level, and may potentially influence future programmes of work and key asset management decisions for our housing stock.

Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	Status
Total carbon tonnage emitted through staff commuting – Benchmarked Locally	1,719	TBC	Good
Total carbon tonnage emitted through business travel – Benchmarked Locally	126	TBC	Excellent
Total carbon tonnage emitted through supply chains – Benchmarked Locally	22,206	TBC	Good

Measure	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	Status
Percentage of council owned and operated land in the highest categories of species richness – Benchmarked Locally	38.1	TBC	Acceptable
STEAM - Total Economic Impact of Tourism (£ million) – Benchmarked Locally	213.00	Data pending	Priority for improvement
The percentage of existing and acquired council housing stock (1st April 2017 baseline) achieving an EPC (Energy) rating of C or above – Benchmarked Locally	46	53	Priority for improvement
The annual number of trees planted to increase canopy cover in Rhyl and Denbigh – Benchmarked Locally	4400	3,500	Excellent
The number of properties with a reduced risk of flooding – Benchmarked Locally	No data	1,650	Excellent

Measure	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? – Countryside – Benchmarked Locally	87	85	Excellent
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? – Beaches – Benchmarked Locally	70	69	Good
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? – Parks – Benchmarked Locally	64	59	Acceptable

Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Our measure on the percentage of all new build council housing achieving an EPC (Energy) rating of A for 2021 to 2022 is not applicable as none were completed during this period. However, it is anticipated that 40 new builds will achieve an EPC (Energy) rating of A when completed in 2022 to 2023.

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.

Tidal Lagoon Project

A notice of motion presented to Council at its [meeting in February](#) acknowledged proposals for a large scale tidal lagoon project off the coast of Denbighshire. Councillors supported in principle of the development of this energy project off the Denbighshire coastline, and agreed to set-up a member and officer group to represent Denbighshire, and to monitor and evaluate progress. With the potential for over 5000 construction jobs, in addition to the environmental benefits, the project has the potential to significantly benefit those at a **socio-economic disadvantage** and boost the region's economy.

Non-Recyclable Goods in School Catering

Following a recommendation from Performance Scrutiny's [meeting in January](#), Cabinet resolved at its [meeting in March](#) that it writes to the Welsh Local Government Association to seek their support in lobbying the Welsh Government to progress the measures set out below:

1. Work with local authorities across Wales in a bid to reduce and eradicate the practice of using single use plastics and non-recyclable goods in the supply, preparation, and serving of school meals.
2. Provide sufficient financial resources to all local authorities to enable them to realise the above objectives and facilitate carbon reduction measures within their School Catering Services, whilst securing the delivery of a sustainable school meals service.

This activity demonstrates the council's commitment to **prevent** harm to the Environment. Only through working **collaboratively** and **integrating** with the ambitions of others will it be possible for us to achieve this key, **long-term** ambition, which has been articulated clearly to us through our **involvement** of young people.

Diseased Larch Trees

Between January and March, Natural Resources Wales began to fell diseased larch trees at Moel Famau in Denbighshire to help slow the spread of *Phytophthora ramorum*, commonly known as larch disease. They covered around 26 hectares, or the size of 30 football pitches. A popular destination, felling work was carefully managed to keep disruption to a minimum and to keep people safe. The 4,500 tonnes of trees removed will be put to use for house building, fencing and wood fuel, and Natural Resources Wales will replant the forest areas with alternative trees for timber production. Areas surrounding the car park, road and trails will be planted with a mix of broadleaf species to help wildlife.

This was a major, but essential operation where we **collaborated** with Natural Resources Wales to **prevent** the rapid spread of this disease. We also kept the public informed at every stage. We will support the replanting of trees on this site for the **long-term** benefit of the environment. Further information on tree health in Wales is available on the [Natural Resources Wales website](#).

Dark Skies

Currently only 2% of the UK's population receives a truly dark sky, but Wales has the highest percentage of protected dark skies in the world. On average 95% of the three national parks and five Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) of Wales fall within the highest two categories of dark skies, including our very own Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). During the very first Welsh Dark Sky Week in February, the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB hosted activities and events to celebrate our protected dark skies, and to help our communities learn, discover and be inspired by the night sky.

Involving people and raising awareness about the importance of our dark skies will help **prevent** harm and protect them for the **long-term** benefit of future generations, whilst also positively impacting biodiversity (60% of which relies on darkness to survive), and gives the local economy a boost during the quieter season. It will also reduce light pollution and CO2 emissions of course.

Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan

A consultation was launched in March for members of the public to have their say on a draft management plan for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB covers approximately 390 square kilometres, stretching from the coastal hills near Prestatyn to the north, and extending as far south as the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and the Berwyn Mountains. It includes land in Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham and is managed by the three county councils, with Denbighshire County Council as the lead authority for the joint AONB committee.

Developed in **collaboration** and **integrating** with partners, this draft management plan seeks to **prevent** harm to the natural environment and maintain its beauty for the **long-term** benefit of future generations. This consultation now seeks to **involve** stakeholders more broadly in our plans. Improved access to our countryside for the benefit of recreation, health and well-being is also an important strand within the plan, supporting **Disability** and **Age**, as well as those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

February Storms

Denbighshire faced two significant storms in February, Eunice and Franklin, which the council proactively shared communications about and made some changes to services in the interests of safety. This included the closure of libraries; the County Hall One Stop Shop; and schools, moving all pupils to remote learning. Additionally, due to the temporary closure of the composting site, the council did not operate its garden waste recycling service. We initiated our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol to provide emergency accommodation for rough sleepers. We monitored the situation hour by hour and had teams on stand-by to deal with any issues caused by the storm and to try and keep our roads clear from debris. The main impact in Denbighshire was expected to be the wind, so we called for people to stay away from coastal promenades during the storm for their own safety. We also closed key areas such as Central Car Park in Rhyl, The Nova Centre, Prestatyn, and all of our coastal public conveniences. There were also a number of flood alerts in place in Denbighshire, and crews were in attendance where we knew of surface water and flooding on roads to advise motorists to be aware and drive with caution. Storm

Franklin caused some damage to the roof of SC2, and Denbighshire Leisure closed the facility until repairs could be undertaken.

By working in **collaboration** and **integrating** with our partners, emergency services and Natural Resources Wales to gather as much information as possible to track the storms and their effects, we were able to take **preventative** measures to keep residents safe. By initiating the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, we also benefited those who were at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Ambassador Scheme

A scheme providing people with training and knowledge about tourism in North Wales is proving popular, with over 2,000 people signed up, and over 1,350 who have become Ambassadors, including Denbighshire Tourism Ambassadors. Denbighshire was the first to launch an online scheme of this kind in Wales. The Denbighshire scheme offers 12 online training modules on a variety of themes, including walking, cycling, towns, history, arts, coast, Welsh Language and food tourism. There are 3 levels of awards – bronze, silver and gold – depending on the number of modules completed. The scheme will deepen people's knowledge and understanding of the area as well as giving them the opportunity to attend events and visit some of our key sites across the county. It's totally free and open to everyone. For more information on the scheme and to sign-up please visit www.ambassador.wales.

Working **collaboratively** with partners, **integrating** with them and local businesses, and **involving** people in this kind of scheme showcases our fantastic attractions here in Denbighshire, and will benefit our tourism in the **long-term**, and **prevent** the stagnation of our economy. The scheme also seeks to improve people's access to our unique historic and natural assets, which, combined with a thriving economy and more local work opportunities, will benefit those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Waste and Recycling Update

From April the three main sites in Denbigh, Ruthin and Rhyl will be managed by social enterprise Bryson Recycling, as part of a joint contract with Conwy County Borough Council. The new contract will increase recycling rates, introduce more reuse activities, and implement a local circular economy approach to recycling. It will also see earlier

opening times, improved access, a wider range of items accepted at the Ruthin and Denbigh sites, free compost to site users, a new 'Choose to Reuse' area at each site, access to two Conwy recycling and waste parks at Abergele and Mochdre for Denbighshire residents, a charity run re-use shop at the Rhyl site, and more support of reuse projects within our communities.

As part of the changes, a small charge will apply from April 1 for residents choosing to bring in non-household waste, such as DIY and construction waste from works or improvements. This waste is classified as industrial waste, not household waste, and Council Tax only covers the cost of collecting, recycling and disposing of household waste.

Integrating and working **collaboratively** with Conwy County Borough Council to appoint a single operator will enable us to provide more **long-term** value to our residents and encourage responsible recycling, **preventing** harm to the environment. It will in particular benefit the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**, as Bryson is pledging £1 be donated to St Kentigern Hospice for every tonne of waste recycled.

New Moorland Path

Early in 2022, contractors working for the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty busily repaired a key section of the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail as it crosses Ruabon Moor, having secured funding through Natural Resources Wales. Small sections of the Trail have been upgraded each year since 2016, but with this additional funding over 850 metres of path has been resurfaced to complete the 1.4km of path across the moor. Sleepers, which made up the majority of this section of the National Trail, have been replaced by 250 tonnes of stone flags airlifted onto the moor to prevent vehicle damage to fragile habitats. This provides a more sustainable surface that will protect the moorlands fragile soils, which are important for the absorption and storing of carbon.

Working **collaboratively** with Natural Resources Wales and **integrating** our ambition for the National Trail and the moorland has helped to sensitively deliver this key milestone for the trail, which will benefit future generations in the **long-term**, whilst also **preventing** harm to the moor's delicate habitats. These access improvements will also benefit the protected characteristics of **Age** and **Disability**, as well as those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**, and allow for greater **involvement** in our natural environment.

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

There are two new data items to report on from our framework for this period. We have reintroduced our measure around the success of the Employment Bursary Project, as we are now able to provide data for this. During 2021 to 2022, there has been a 16% increase in the salaries of those enrolled on the scheme, which is consistent with the 17% increase recorded the year before. Since the project started in 2018, there has been an average increase of 20% in the salaries of those enrolled.

The second measure relates to the 18 to 24 claimant count. In line with national trends, data for January to March reveals that the fall seen previously in Denbighshire's claimant count continues to slow as it returns to pre-pandemic levels (6.5%), resting now at 6.4% (down from 6.9% in December). We remain behind the Wales average, which is now at 4.8%. It is worth noting that prior to the pandemic, Denbighshire was 2% behind the Wales average, but are now 1.6% behind. The UK claimant count has not yet recovered its pre-pandemic levels (which were historically lower than Wales), remaining just above the Welsh average, now at 5.0%.

There continues to be no published data in relation to school attainment and attendance due to the impact of the pandemic. However, through dialogue with colleagues in other local authorities, we are assured that Denbighshire's performance in terms of attendance is consistent with that of all Wales school attendance, with high levels of Covid-19 and illness unfortunately impacting absence across the year.

We can also share some positive data around our Supporting Parents in Denbighshire project that closed in September, but is continuing as usual business within Education and Children's Services. Since the initiation of the project in 2018, 130 practitioners and 48 settings in Denbighshire have benefitted from training opportunities offered through the Solihull Approach. Before and after Covid-19 restrictions, 139 parents received face-to-face training, but most significantly 2,362 have registered online.

Corporate Plan Programme Board: Project Update

Experiencing Obstacles: Modernising Education

Consulting with the school and stakeholders, good progress has been made on the development of plans for Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn in Denbigh, which caters for pupils with Autism Spectrum Condition from the ages of 3 to 19. The proposal is to bring three of the school's four sites together in one brand new building, which will be built on the playing field next to Denbigh Leisure Centre. The initial outline concept proposal has been completed and will now be developed further for wider consultation. Options continue to be explored for Ysgol Pendref, and the options developed for the Ysgol Bryn Collen / Ysgol Gwernant scheme by the external architects are being assessed. Initial dialogue has also commenced with Denbigh High School regarding investment at the site.

At Council's [meeting in January](#), a Notice of Motion was raised concerning the condition of Prestatyn High School, and it was agreed to task the Modernising Education Board to review the condition surveys of all schools to see whether they would call into question the current priority order of schools within the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly the 21st Century Schools Programme). The outcome of this review will be reported to Cabinet, together with any recommendations the Board may have as a result.

Another Notice of Motion was raised at Council's [meeting in February](#), concerning funds for a hydrotherapy pool at Ysgol Tir Morfa. It was again agreed that options would be considered by the Modernising Education Board and recommendations taken forward as appropriate.

Experiencing Obstacles: Childcare Settings

Although our start was delayed by two planning conditions, construction on the Oaktree Centre's extension finally started in February, with completion now expected in autumn, 2022. This represents a £1 million investment and will create three new childcare rooms, increasing overall capacity and supporting both English and Welsh language provision. The project is funded by the Welsh Government's Childcare Offer Capital Grant Programme and forms part of an overall investment of more than £3million in improving childcare facilities in Denbighshire.

Both childcare projects at Ysgolion Twm o'r Nant and Dewi Sant have unfortunately seen increases in their anticipated costs, and have consequently been paused until additional funding can be secured from the Welsh Government.

Closed: Welsh Language Centre

The building having been fully delivered and now in use, the final account has been settled and retention released. This project is now closed.

Experiencing Obstacles: School Nutrition Project

With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, it is steadily becoming easier to arrange training sessions. Year 1 schools are starting to pick up where they left off, and despite three postponements owing to increased Covid-19 cases in schools, 6 trainees from our year 2 tranche finally received the Come and Cook 'bolt-on' training. Five schools have been recruited for Year 3 of the project, and two have completed their Level 2 training and await a date for their 'bolt-on' day. All trainees have also been signed up for their food safety course online. It is hoped by the next report that some of the Come and Cook lessons will have been cascaded to pupils. Across the three years of the project, 21 schools have engaged in the programme, with 25 members of staff trained.

Closed: The Employee Training Grant

It was agreed at the last Corporate Plan Programme Board meeting that the bursary project would now close, it being acknowledged that full spend would not be achieved. However, the project has successfully supported 20 individuals (with one application still pending), and as reported above, has led to a 24% increase in the salaries of applicants accumulatively.

On Target: Work Start

The project has secured agreement from the Corporate Plan Programme Board and the Budget Board to bridge upcoming funding gaps until December 2022, looking ahead to opportunities provided through the Shared Prosperity Fund. A total of 110 placements have been sourced and advertised by the Work Start Team to date, with work underway to secure 30 further placements internally and with local businesses between April and

December. We have seen a decline in uptake, but we are reviewing our communications to help address this.

Closed: Working Denbighshire Ready for Work

Careers Events scheduled for April were unfortunately cancelled after 70% of schools were no longer able to attend due to staffing pressures. The conclusion is that it is not practical to arrange meaningful career fairs for students while Covid-19 rates remain high. An alternative was offered in that all schools were invited to attend the Skills Olympics Event at Rhyl College, organised by Grŵp Llandrillo Menai. The event offered an alternative platform for students to engage with the various college departments and employers to help inform future career options. Unfortunately, only three schools attended, but feedback was positive.

The project will now move into the closure stage as its funding comes to an end. Learning from the project will inform the needs outlined in the Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan.

On Target: Volunteering

We still hope to recruit service representatives to the Internal Volunteers Network where gaps have been identified. Work will be undertaken alongside HR to promote the benefits of services engaging with volunteers and they will be encouraged to promote their opportunities. We are hopeful of reviewing and updating all opportunities in time for Volunteers Week (June 1 to 7), at which time we will also run an active social media campaign. In the same week the council hopes to have a presence at the Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council's volunteer drop-in session in Llangollen to promote our opportunities.

Annual or Biennial Measures

Measure	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	Status
Percentage of pupil attendance in primary schools – Benchmarked Nationally	No data due to Covid-19	No data due to Covid-19	Excellent (Based on 2019 to 2020)

Percentage of pupil attendance in secondary schools – Benchmarked Nationally	No data due to Covid-19	No data due to Covid-19	Priority for improvement (Based on 2019 to 2020)
The percentage of children aged 4-5 years who are a healthy weight or underweight (reported one year in arrears) – Benchmarked Nationally	71.8	Data pending	Priority for improvement
Local Authority Points Score Average - KS4 Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate Indicator – Benchmarked Nationally	No data due to Covid-19	No data due to Covid-19	Excellent (Based on 2019 to 2020)
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) – Benchmarked Nationally	No data due to Covid-19	No data due to Covid-19	Acceptable (Based on 2019 to 2020)
The number of schools providing education through suitability and condition categories C and D – Benchmarked Locally	27	27	Priority for improvement
The percentage of pupils (using Pupil Attitudes to Self and School - PASS) who respond positively against pupils' feelings about school – Benchmarked Locally	87.2	No data No survey	Good
The percentage increase in the salaries of young people enrolled in the Employment Bursary Project – Benchmarked Locally	17	16	Excellent

Measure	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are job opportunities for young people at the start of their career – Benchmarked Locally	19	19	Priority for improvement
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are opportunities for young people to develop their skills – Benchmarked Locally	28	26	Priority for improvement

Measure	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are leisure opportunities that appeal to young people – Benchmarked Locally	50	29	Priority for improvement

Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Measure	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
Percentage of the population aged 18 to 24 claiming Job Seekers Allowance – Benchmarked Nationally	12.4	10.0	7.5	6.9	6.4	Priority for improvement

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.

Keeping Our Schools Safe

As schools returned for the spring term, the council reminded pupils and staff of the importance of taking regular lateral flow tests to help stop the spread of Covid-19, and to not attend school if they were displaying any symptoms. School staff were asked to wear a face covering in all indoor areas where physical distancing could not be maintained with secondary learners, and also asked to wear face coverings in classrooms. Both staff and pupils were encouraged to practice good hygiene, which includes regular handwashing and sanitising. Parents and carers were also advised to be aware of disruption to school transport at short notice, and to make contingency plans where possible. Where possible

though the council worked to make alternative arrangements and to keep those affected informed.

The rapid spread of the Omicron variant put significant pressure on schools, and unfortunately difficult decisions had to be made by schools to close classes or year groups due to the impact on staffing levels. The council is grateful to all of our school staff for their continued dedication and hard work, and to parents and pupils for their support for helping control the virus. Working **collaboratively** with schools at this time remains as important as ever, **integrating** our common desire to keep everyone safe and **prevent** any harm, particularly to the most vulnerable (we know Covid-19 can be particularly adverse on those with a **Disability**, or from Black and Asian backgrounds. Those at a **socio-economic disadvantage** are also most likely to present with cases).

Supporting the Economy

Residents have been reminded that if they are struggling to secure work, they can apply for free support through the council's Working Denbighshire Team. The service aims to support individuals by providing access to a network of services that can help with career opportunities. Over 300 participants have already secured a job through the scheme, and over 100 have already completed a placement of their choice. For more information, visit our [Working Denbighshire webpages](#).

Businesses impacted by the pandemic were encouraged to apply for additional funding available through the Welsh Government's Emergency Business Fund, which was administered by the council. The funding was available for retail, hospitality, leisure and tourism business, and their supply chains, affected by the move to alert level 2.

Applications for the fund closed in February. Support is also available from the council through an extended Welsh Government scheme where occupiers of properties wholly or mainly being used as retail, hospitality and leisure businesses may be eligible for a 50% rate relief. For more information, visit our [Business Rates pages](#).

Working **collaboratively** with the Welsh Government and **integrating** our shared ambition to support business and to help individuals out of **socio-economic deprivation** will **prevent** stagnation of our local economy and help it grow. By **involving** small businesses and individuals through our work, we are hopefully supporting their **long-term** stability and prosperity, and removing barriers to their success.

Winter of Well-being

Denbighshire County Council provided a range of free sporting, cultural and play based bilingual activities as part of the Welsh Government's Winter of Wellbeing Programme. Events took place throughout the county for a wide range of ages, creating plenty of safe places for free play and physical activity to encourage children and young people to come together and have fun while also strengthening their social, emotional, and physical well-being. The council launched its Winter of Well-being programme through its libraries, urging Children and Young people to nominate the books that made a positive difference to how they feel. Public libraries across Wales teamed up with The Reading Agency on this campaign, and the seasonal celebration of reading continued through to the end of March with a programme of activities and events delivered online and in libraries.

This work, delivered **collaboratively, integrating** with other organisations and **involving** children and young people, will **prevent** social isolation and skill deprivation, and benefit well-being in the **long-term**. It directly benefits the protected characteristic of **Age**, and those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Ending Period Poverty

Denbighshire County Council, through the Welsh Government Period Dignity Grant, has been running a subscription service for young people in Denbighshire where period poverty could be a barrier to their education. So far 220 education-based subscriptions have been provided, but now the scheme is to be expanded to a further 520 community subscriptions for those on low incomes from March. The free service, run in conjunction with social enterprise Hey Girls, will run until March 2023, providing either a one off delivery of re-usable period products, or a monthly delivery of eco-friendly disposable products directly to subscribers' homes. This is in addition to disposable 'In Case of Emergency' (ICE) single-use products that are available from schools, libraries, One Stop Shops, leisure centres, youth centres, Citizens Advice Denbighshire offices, foodbanks, and other organisations that have registered to receive products, provided by TOTM – an eco-friendly company. Sign up by visiting [our website](#), or contact DCCHG@denbighshire.gov.uk.

This **collaborative** and **integrated** approach seeks to **prevent** barriers to education, encourage participation, and support good health in the **long-term**. It directly supports the protected characteristics of **Age**, **Sex**, and those at a **socio-economic disadvantage**.

Protecting Safety

The decision was made to close Ysgol Brynhyfryd on Friday, March 18, after an electrical fault in the Ruthin area affected both the school and the neighbouring leisure centre. A contractor was brought in to carry out an investigation into the cause of the fault, in partnership with Scottish Power, also carrying out additional safety checks for health and safety reasons.

This action was unfortunate but necessary to guarantee the safety of pupils, staff and residents on the site. Working **collaboratively** and in an **integrated** way with Scottish power and the school, we were able to ensure that the school could reopen as soon as possible, **preventing** further incident or disruption. Although perhaps causing short-term negative impacts, this directly benefitted the protected characteristic of **Age** in the **long-term**.

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

Measures: Acceptable

Governance: Good

Corporate Health Performance Framework: Measures Update

With this report, 47% of our Corporate Plan measures currently present as a priority for improvement, up from 43% in the last report. One of our corporate projects is currently presenting as 'compromised' (Denbighshire and Flintshire Joint Archive Project), with 100% of projects being regularly updated by project managers. The status of the Archive Project reflects the fact that a large proportion of the funding has yet to be secured, and a site interface issue has emerged with the Theatr Clwyd redevelopment, which will delay access for at least a year. In the meantime, the project is looking at opportunities to progress the collaborative service in advance of the building, to both develop the service and improve resilience.

64% 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 received no formal recommendations for improvement from external regulators (Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales and Audit Wales). There has been one further low assurance follow-up report in this period from internal audit, covering Accommodation Provision for the Homeless (see [Housing above](#)). This was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in March](#).

Although our measure on the mean hourly rate of pay for women showed that women were being paid more than men during both 2019 to 2020 and 2020 to 2021, the difference in pay has now swung back to favour men by 6.7% in 2021 to 2022. 79% of the lowest paid jobs that the council offers continue to be occupied by women (down only 0.6% on the previous year).

We have seen a decline 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 recently published data for 2020 to 2021, we see a decline in appointments from 15% to 4%. This compares to 11% when looking at those that do not have these characteristics and were appointed.

Member attendance at meetings (where they were expected to attend) has fallen slightly to 84% for 2021 to 2022, down from 89% the previous year. This remains up from before the pandemic when attendance was at 79%.

Our measure on budget variance (i.e. what we have and receive versus what we are spending) has decreased from 2,731k in December 2021 to -2,399k in March 2022. The council's reserves remain at £7.135m.

The percentage of negative news stories about the council (taken as a proportion of all news stories about the council) has risen by 1% between January to March, to 9%. This represents 19 negative stories out of a total of 216. The percentage of external complaints upheld or partly upheld over the last quarter has increased from 52% to 60%. This represents 38 of 63 complaints upheld or partly upheld. This number is slightly higher (57%) for the same period the previous year, and the rate upheld is consistent with our annual average for 2021 to 2022 (60%).

As at March 2022, sickness absence stood at 9.57 days, up from 9.03 in the last period. This compares to 6.47 days in March 2021. As at March 2022, the percentage of staff who have had at least 3 one-to-one meetings in the last 12 months stood at 43%.

By the end of March, 36% of the council's spend from between April 2021 to March 2022 was with local suppliers (£62,126,180). 88% of contracts (over £25k and under £1,000k) contained community benefits. One collaborative procurement activity (Denbighshire Music Collaborative between Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham Councils) was undertaken during the period, and one collaborative procurement opportunity was missed due to timing (Phase II Road Resurfacing Programme between Denbighshire and Flintshire). There are 16 potential collaborative procurements on the horizon and these will be explored and developed in the coming months.

Our final measure considers the council's efforts to support residents into work through placements that we ourselves offer within the council. During January to March we successfully supported 9 additional placements, bringing our annual cumulative total to

143. This is a sharp increase on our performance in the previous year, aided of course by the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions.

Data is currently pending for our Net Carbon Zero measure, but is anticipated to be included in this report as soon as it is available. We are also waiting on confirmation of data for our two finance measures, pending the final Statement of Accounts.

Corporate Health Self-Assessment: Governance Areas

The following is our self-assessment against the seven key governance areas and seeks to paint a picture of how well the council is performing, how we know that (linking to evidence where it is available), and what we can do to improve.

Corporate Planning

Below are improvement actions that have been identified in support of Corporate Health in this area of governance.

Senior Leadership Team

A [special meeting](#) of Council was held in March where the Chief Executive sought approval to proceed with a review of the Senior Leadership Team, which is to be tackled in two phases. Initially the Chief Executive wishes to address capacity issues at the Corporate Executive Team level by introducing a new Director of Governance and Business, increasing from two directors to three. This post, plus the current vacant director post (Director of Economy and Environment) are to be appointed by the new Council following the election. Following these appointments, the review will then look at the leadership structure at the Head of Service level. In the meantime, interim arrangements are in place with four middle managers acting up to cover the two heads of service roles recently vacated through retirement (Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation, and the Head of Community Support Services).

Agree and implement a whole council approach to New Ways of Working.

The New Ways of Working Project is now being led by the Corporate Director for Communities following the retirement of the Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation. The project team continues to meet monthly and minutes are published on the council's internal website. A position statement was issued in March following the

move to 'alert level 0' and the removal of most restrictions. Following a review of office spaces for what is needed (especially as desks, chairs and IT equipment may have been moved) and completed risk assessments, from April the council is managing a phased return to the office, with the option of one day a week initially, increasing to two days from May. Those who wish to come in more frequently must discuss this with their manager. Workplace controls will also remain in place, including adequate ventilation, sufficient cleaning, and good hand hygiene. All arrangements will continue to be under review, and feedback on how it is working is welcomed.

Another development is that the ground floor of the Caledfryn office building in Denbigh is being shared with NHS staff, following a request to set-up a call centre. This is for approximately 30 staff, 7 days a week. This has resulted in some Denbighshire teams being relocated within the building, but there is sufficient space to accommodate these moves.

Develop a new Corporate Plan by October 2022.

In this period, the Strategic Planning and Performance Team have pressed on with work to develop the next Corporate Plan, with phase 2 of our County Conversation running from January 28 to March 11. Responses received confirmed the themes that were consulted upon, namely:

- **Housing:** Provide sufficient and affordable good quality housing, particularly addressing the provision of was affordable to young people in the area.
- **Economy:** Support post-pandemic economic recovery, including identifying and capitalising on opportunities to upskill residents and enable them to access decent employment and income.
- **Young People:** Support schools to provide excellent standards of education, through the provision of support and care for all learner preservation of mental health and well-being.
- **Connected Communities:** Maintain a good quality road infrastructure with good transport links and broadband connectivity.
- **Environment and Climate:** Protect our natural assets and defend communities against climate change

- **Addressing Deprivation:** Tackle entrenched deprivation and its associated challenges that some of our communities face.
- **A well-run, high-performing council:** To be a council that is fair, transparent, performs well, represents value for money, and responds to its customers.

Following the consultation, however, one additional theme has been identified as a gap and will be included in the draft proposal going forward:

- **Ageing Well:** Strong community networks enable people to live safely, happily and independently, but receive good support when needed.

Staff workshops are to be held in late April and May to gather more detailed professional input around our 'pledges' and possible actions to take forward under each of the themes proposed in the next Corporate Plan. The draft document will then be put forward for the consideration of the new Council during a workshop planned for July.

This period also saw the closure of the consultation on the content of the Conwy and Denbighshire Well-being Assessment in March. Feedback on the assessment has been positive with only very minor amendments or additions to make. The final version is being updated [online](#).

Respond to the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

With the publication of this report (plus the three quarterly update reports before it) and the accompanying Executive Summary, the council has met statutory requirements in relation to the Self-Assessment of performance against its functions. Arrangements for a Panel Assessment will be discussed with the new council following the elections.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act also required a number of changes to be made to the council's Constitution, as well as the introduction of a Constitution Guide to help members of the public understand its provisions. The changes and the Guide were reviewed by the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in March](#). At the same meeting, members agreed the process for appointing lay members to the committee (including a chair) from May, which again is a requirement of the Act. The law also

requires that the council has in place a Petition Scheme. This will be the subject of a report to Council in May.

Service Challenge Action: Ensure a question is asked at each Service Performance Challenge regarding commitment to customer service.

This action has not progressed as intended in this period as consideration needs to be given to the senior management restructure. Nonetheless, a paper summarising lessons learned and proposals for the 2022 to 2023 Service Challenge Programme has been prepared. It is felt that the format of the challenges during last summer worked well for its condensed timetable and reduced paperwork. Consideration does need to be given, however, to how service level data is reviewed, as this is an important part of our Performance Management Framework. Following a recent Audit Wales review of Performance Management ([see below](#)), proposals will also include a recommendation for the publishing of service level performance data.

Other developments in the last period

Governance and Decision Making

Of relevance to this chapter, an Internal Audit Report on Governance and Decision Making was completed in February, and presented within the Internal Audit Update to the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in March](#). The review gave a medium assurance rating and broadly found that existing governance arrangements worked well, with good levels of engagement between members and officers. However, there could be an opportunity to learn from the Covid-19 pandemic to balance quicker decision making with maintaining transparency and accountability. It was felt that roles and responsibilities could also be clearer (an issue that may be addressed by the council's new Constitution Guide); and there is a lack of awareness in relation to the Chief Officer delegated decision process, and a lack of evidence or clear audit trail to delegated decisions generally, making them difficult to scrutinise. Concerns were also raised around the capacity within scrutiny and democratic functions, but these have since been addressed following agreement to recruit additional support staff.

Annual Governance Statement Update

An update on the council's progress against improvement actions identified within the Annual Governance Statement for 2020 to 2021 was provided to the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in January](#). Overall it was reported that the council was making good progress on all actions.

Local Government Elections and Member Training

The council has made significant preparations for the Local Government elections in May, and arrangements are in place for the induction and training of councillors. This includes ICT handover and induction, code of conduct, holding effective hybrid meetings, equality and diversity, information on how the council works, and specific committee training and procedures.

Financial Planning

Below are improvement actions that have been identified in support of Corporate Health in this area of governance.

Budget and Council Tax

A report presented to [Cabinet](#) and [Council](#) meetings in January set out the implications of the Local Government Settlement and proposals for the finalisation of the budget for 2022 to 2023. The council is legally required to set a balanced and deliverable budget before the start of each financial year, and to set the resulting level of Council Tax to allow bills to be sent to residents. The final proposals to balance the 2022 to 2023 budget are shown in the Medium Term Financial Plan. The main areas of growth and pressures totalled £17.628m. A draft settlement of around 11% would have been required in order to fund all these pressures. The net +9.2% settlement generates £15.005m additional revenue, leaving a funding gap of £2.623m. The following items were included in the proposals in order to bridge that gap:

- Income budgets have been inflated in-line with the agreed Fees and Charges policy, which increases external income by £0.120m.

- Operational efficiencies amounting to £634k have been identified, which are within Head of Service delegated responsibility in consultation with Lead Members. No savings have been requested from Community Support Services or Schools.
- Council Tax increases by 2.95%, which, along with minor changes to the Council Tax Base, will generate £1.869m additional revenue. This compares to last year's increase of 3.8%, and 4.3% the year before that.

The budget for the 2022 to 2023 financial year has now been approved. The increase in funding comes with a number of new responsibilities the council will be required to fund, including pay increases, ensuring the Real Living Wage for social care workers, and mitigation for the end of the Covid-19 Hardship Fund.

Finance Update Reports

The Head of Finance presented updates on the council's finances for 2021 to 2022 to Cabinet in [January](#) and [February](#). The council's net revenue budget was £216.818m. There was a forecast overspend of £1.553m as of February 2022 (down from £1.641m in the month before). The 2021 to 2022 budget required service savings and efficiencies of £2.666m to be identified. Operational savings and fees and charges increases are assumed to have been achieved, and the school savings are delegated to governing bodies to monitor and deliver.

Capital Plan 2021 to 2022

A report went to Council's [meeting in February](#) to update members on the 2021 to 2022 element of the Capital Plan, whilst also attaching the recommendations of the Strategic Investment Group of capital bids recommended for inclusion in the Capital Plan. The Estimated Capital Plan is now £41.16m. Major projects include:

- Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly the 21st Century Schools Programme) – Ysgol Llanfair; Rhos Street School and Ysgol Pen Barras; Christ the Word, Rhyl.
- Rhyl Queens Market Redevelopment.
- New Waste Services Remodelling.
- East Rhyl Coastal Defence.

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 2021 to 2022. In addition, a number of potential disposals are also currently in development.

Property (2021 to 2022)	£000
Bodelwyddan Castle	500
Land at Meliden	544
Geufron Farm, Corwen	470
Land at Rhos Street, Ruthin	70
Total	1,584

The Strategic Investment Group, which includes representatives from the three scrutiny committees, has met to consider block allocation capital bids received for inclusion in the 2022 to 2023 Capital Plan, prepared by each service. The recommendations of the Strategic Investment Group for the inclusion in the 2022 to 2023 Capital Plan were supported and agreed by Cabinet at its [meeting in February](#).

Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2022 to 2023, and Prudential Indicators 2022 to 2025

A report presented to Council's [meeting in February](#) outlined how the council will manage its investments and its borrowing for the coming year, and sets the policies within which the Treasury Management function operates. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Code of Practice on Treasury Management (the "CIPFA TM Code") requires the council to approve the statement and Prudential Indicators annually. The Capital Strategy Report is intended to give a high level, concise and comprehensible overview to all elected members of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of the council's services.

Planning for the Statement of Accounts 2021 to 2022

The council has a statutory duty to produce a statement of accounts that complies with approved accounting standards. A report presented to Corporate Governance

Committee's [meeting in January](#) provided an update on the planning and timing of the Statement of Accounts 2021 to 2022. Last year the Welsh Government again issued guidance that clarified that, due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19, the statutory deadlines for the completion of the draft and audited accounts would be extended. The council took the early decision to issue a notice to say that we would not be aiming for the statutory early deadline, but the revised deadlines would be achieved. This decision was taken in consultation with Audit Wales and informed by their assessment of their ability to complete the required audit work. There was recognition that this would be a challenging year for all concerned to ensure all the information was available on time.

Firstly, the delay has meant that we have not had time to correct misstatements that we would normally have – these corrections will be made for next year's accounts. Secondly, in a usual year the focus and energy of the Capital and Technical team from September turn to strategic capital planning, budget setting, addressing Internal Audit recommendations, and planning for next year's closure of accounts processes. All these activities have been put on hold for 3 additional months and will have an impact on service delivery going forward.

Housing Rent Setting and Housing Revenue Budget

At its [meeting in January](#), Cabinet approved the Housing Revenue Account Budget for 2022 to 2023 and the Housing Stock Business Plan. It is a statutory requirement to set budgets and rent levels before the start of the new financial year. The budget must be consistent with the assumptions within the Housing Stock Business Plan, which has been designed to maintain Welsh Housing Quality Standard throughout the 30-year business plan. The budget has been calculated to ensure we can deliver our revenue services; the capital investment programme to maintain the quality standard of our homes; and to develop our new build programme. We are anticipating significant additional costs in future years due to likely new decarbonisation standards for our existing stock.

Cabinet also approved the decision for rents for council dwellings to be increased in accordance with the Welsh Government Policy for Social Housing Rents to an average weekly rent of £97.27, which is an increase of £2.92 with effect from April 4, 2022. As part of the Welsh Government rent policy the council will be required to ensure that any rent increase considers affordability for tenants, value for money, and an assessment of cost

efficiencies. Whilst 2021 has been a difficult year for household finances – and this will continue into 2022 – we are satisfied as to the affordability of our weekly rents.

Performance Management

Below are improvement actions that have been identified in support of Corporate Health in this area of governance.

Implement annual process for stakeholder engagement on council performance.

Lessons learned from the first year of the Stakeholder Survey (2021) have been evaluated and the project team are currently exploring options for ongoing annual stakeholder engagement. Future surveys will likely focus only on statutory questions required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, covering the performance of our corporate objectives and governance. It will be promoted through a targeted communications campaign.

Provide clarity to the Senior Leadership Team on the role of the Project Management Team.

A report was taken to the Corporate Executive Team in March to provide an update on progress with the review of the Corporate Programme Office. This included:

- Progress on the reconfiguration of Verto (our project management system) and its expected development up to the end of June 2022.
- The development of a Corporate Programme Office Guide that describes the roles and responsibilities of the team and what support they can offer. A draft will be presented to the Corporate Executive Team at the end of May.
- Two project support officer roles now in place in the team in response to organisational need.

Other developments in the last period

Embed interim Strategic Equality Plan

We have ensured that this report captures all outstanding actions towards the delivery of our interim Strategic Equality Plan (which covers October 2021 to October 2022). Actions

already completed will have been captured in the preceding quarterly update reports that accompany this document (published on [our website](#)) and make up the set that form our Self-Assessment of performance.

Annual Complaints Report

The first Annual Complaints Report, required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act, was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in March](#). Broadly it was felt that the council's complaints processes were robust, with its response rate to stage 1 and stage 2 complaints during 2021 to 2022 being generally excellent, with only two stage 2 complaints extending beyond the target response time (out of 25). The number of complaints received is also down from 262 the previous year to 237. Attached to the report is a letter from the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales, which reveals that 32 complaints relating to Denbighshire County Council were referred to them, split quite evenly over a number of areas, but the larger number relating to Children's Social Services (six), Complaints Handling (five), and Environment and Environmental Health (four). It was noted that it is very rare for the Ombudsman to intervene and challenge complaints decided on by the council, which should give further assurance as to our processes. However, compared with other local authorities in Wales and as a proportion of residents, the Ombudsman did receive the third highest number of complaints about Denbighshire County Council.

Queen's Buildings

An internal Audit follow-up report on the Queen's Buildings project, a key part of the council's wider programme to regenerate Rhyl, was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in January](#). The original report, received a year before this, had given the project a low assurance rating. However, this follow-up identified that progress had been made, with eight of the twelve identified actions being fully implemented, providing instead a medium assurance rating. A further follow-up report will be needed in July to establish the progress against outstanding actions that were delayed due to the project management system undergoing tendering and the current [review of project management](#) mentioned above.

An update on Queen's Building project was also given to Cabinet at its [meeting in February](#), where unforeseen rising costs were discussed. Additional funding was required

to deliver phase one of the project due to a number of factors, including a 25% rise in the cost of construction, due to the availability of labour and materials globally. The ground floor level of the new development also needs to rise by 740mm to protect against flooding. The Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme has part funded the project to date.

With construction due to start in April, but the letting of the construction contract falling after the last Cabinet [meeting in March](#), Cabinet agreed that approval of the construction contract through a Delegated Decision by the Chief Executive was required to ensure that the tight timescale for project delivery was achieved. All of the outputs need to be delivered and funding drawn down by the end of February 2023 or the council could face a significant claw-back of the grant funding. Cabinet further agreed, to stay ahead of long lead-in times for some items, to underwrite £500k of construction costs (covering groundworks, steel, and specialist piling) to ensure that the contractor can start in time and deliver the outputs required by the deadlines set by the funding bodies.

Planning Compliance

A report presented to [Communities Scrutiny in March](#) examined the effectiveness of the council's Planning Compliance Charter. The purpose of the Charter is to streamline the process of remedying alleged planning breaches by helping complainants, alleged contraveners, and other interested parties understand how the council's planning compliance function operates. The Charter has broadly been seen by officers and members as an effective tool for advising stakeholders how the council investigates and remedies alleged breaches of planning control. However, some minor amendments have been made to improve the process further and help better manage expectations. In response to feedback from elected members, further information will also be included about how stakeholders are updated on the progress of cases. Combined with the recent recruitment of a second compliance officer, performance in this area should continue to improve.

Audit Wales

Audit Wales presented their [Annual Audit Summary](#) for Denbighshire County Council at the Governance and Audit meeting [held in March](#). It confirmed:

- An unqualified true and fair opinion on the council's financial statements, and no significant issues with grant claims and returns.
- The council met its remaining Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 duties to secure continuous improvement.
- The council is well placed to maintain its financial sustainability over the medium term.
- In recovering from the impact of the pandemic, the council benefited from proactive engagement regionally and locally, showing strong collective leadership in planning and decision-making.
- The council is making excellent progress in embedding its environmental ambitions, though more comprehensive stakeholder mapping would further strengthen engagement, and reporting over the next year will help the environmental ambitions to embed and the measures to evolve.
- In reviewing Older People's Care Home Placements there are complex national processes that result in a significant focus on costs, which causes division amongst partners and has the potential to impact adversely on services users. Strengthening accountability and developing a regional strategy and delivery plan have the potential to drive positive change and better partnership working, especially in relation to complex and more specialist care. Audit Wales have reported locally to councils, and nationally to the Welsh Government recommending actions that should be taken.

Delivering Sustained Improvement

Audit Wales have published a [review of the council's performance management arrangements](#), seeking assurance that they are robust and likely to support continuous and sustainable improvement. It concluded that the council's Performance Management Framework and arrangements for measuring and reporting performance are effective, with some opportunities to improve the use of the performance management software. The council could also look to improve performance reporting of non-priority areas, how finance and performance information are considered simultaneously, and that staff 1:1s are recorded in an accurate and timely manner.

Care Inspectorate Wales

The Care Inspectorate for Wales issued a [letter in November](#) that summarised its findings of an assurance check (undertaken during June and July) of whether social services continue to help and support adults and children, with a focus on safety and well-being. The letter highlights a number of positive areas of practice across both adults and children's social services, as well as areas requiring improvement within children's services. Agreed actions are being taken forward within relevant services, and the progress of these will be reviewed through performance evaluation review meetings between Care Inspectorate Wales, relevant heads of service, and the Director for Communities.

Care Inspectorate Wales issued a [letter in February](#) after a follow-up review on the safety and well-being of children and families. This included the local authority's practice of reviewing, analysing and making decisions in relation to risk, and whether the local authority was meeting its statutory responsibilities under the Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014. Again, the review identified some strengths and areas for improvement, and agreed actions will be monitored through the service's Service Plan and routine performance evaluation review meetings going forward.

Risk Management

Below are improvement actions that have been identified in support of Corporate Health in this area of governance.

Understanding Risk Appetite

During the last two years we have seen a growing number of corporate risks that are beyond our risk appetite. This feels consistent with the global challenges we have been facing and continue to face. Our February review continued conversations about those risks, and we have identified assurance work (internal and external) that is planned or has already taken place to help us understand the effectiveness of our controls. For example, our review took account of a recent Audit Wales Review of Commissioning Older People's Care Home Placements by North Wales Councils and the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. A report about this review was also presented to Governance and Audit Committee at its [meeting in March](#).

As was reported previously, following the May elections, training will be provided to councillors to ensure that they understand the council's risk management methodology.

Service Challenge Action: Consider the provisions of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, particularly in regard to Corporate Joint Committee and any associated risks for the council.

Our review of this risk in February 2022 found the risk to be static. The North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) set its budget in January 2022. Its functions (strategic development planning; regional transport planning; and regional economic development) must be operational from June 2022. Scrutiny arrangements have yet to be confirmed. The CJC offers opportunities to establish a strategic and regional approach to these three functions to develop Denbighshire's economy and communities. However, there is a risk that there is insufficient clarity, time and engagement to capitalise on these opportunities. Conversely, there is a risk that the council puts in a lot of effort but doesn't receive a proportionate return on investment.

Other developments in the last period

Measuring our controls

We have specified relevant recent or planned internal and external audit work that gives risk owners assurance around the effectiveness of our controls, and furthered conversations around performance measures that can be used to better understand the success. Any relevant measures have now been identified in the register.

Communicating our Risks

As global events have grown in significance for our council and our community over the last two years, so too have the number of active risks on our corporate risk register. For this reason, a summary of our corporate risk register has been developed and approved for use in internal communications. A full update report will be presented to Performance Scrutiny at its [meeting in June](#).

Recruitment and Retention

Our February review highlighted the controls that are being implemented to manage this risk:

- Some services are taking specific actions. Highways and Environmental Services, for example, are working with Working Denbighshire; and Community Support Services are working with the Communications Team to deliver a targeted recruitment programme.
- A new group has been established looking at recruitment issues in care, chaired by the council's Corporate Director for Communities.
- HR has completed workforce planning with all services in November, and included discussion about recruitment and retention. The subsequent Corporate Workforce Plan has been discussed and recruitment and retention has been identified as a corporate concern with a number of actions being agreed in the delivery plan.
- Alongside services, HR are exploring a range of different strategies that could be put in place to support recruitment activities and help with retention, such as upskilling our own employees; working with partners; job redesign; and market supplement payments.

Updates to the Corporate Risk Register (February 2022 review)

Our February review resulted in a number of changes to the corporate risk register. The most significant changes included:

- Risk 14: The risk of a health and safety incident resulting in serious injury or the loss of life. The risk score was downgraded and is now within our risk appetite.
- Risk 16: The risk that the impact of welfare reform (Universal Credit) is more significant than anticipated by the council. This was successfully managed and is no longer a risk.
- Risk 18: The risk that programme and project benefits are not fully realised. The risk score was increased to reflect the economic challenges we are facing and is no longer within our risk appetite.
- Two new risks were introduced. The first about future funding to support the most vulnerable learners and disengaged young people; and the second regarding placements for Looked After Children.

Workforce Planning

Below are improvement actions that have been identified in support of Corporate Health in this area of governance.

Complementing New Ways of Working, we will review training, development and mental-health needs for staff.

Following the development of the induction programme, policies and guidance, dedicated training sessions for employees and managers are being developed to support the new ways of working. These sessions will commence, subject to approval being obtained, from July 2022.

We have asked the Staff Council to support us in recruiting Mental Health Champions. HR Business Partners are also working with services to support this. A Well-being Survey will also be launched in June.

Improve the information we have about our workforce, including equality information, to support more detailed analyses in future Public Sector Duty Reports.

The Public Sector Duty report has been published, but despite the continued effort to capture increased amounts of equality information we still have a large proportion of staff (around 50 per cent), who choose not to complete equality information. Many of these are not office-based. We are working on new, more accessible ways to enable these staff to update their information more easily.

Improve our workforce planning programme and consider how best to plan for posts requiring a specific level of Welsh above Level 1.

Following consultations with our Corporate Executive and Senior Leader Leadership Teams, the new council-wide plan for workforce planning is in place.

The proposal for how best to plan for posts requiring above level 1 Welsh will be presented to our Senior Leadership Team between April and June 2022.

At Council's [meeting in January](#), councillors raised urgent questions with regards to recruitment and retention issues experienced in the care sector. This was acknowledged to be an issue that pre-dated the pandemic, and was not of course unique to

Denbighshire. Assurance was given that a range of measures and initiatives have been agreed and were being monitored by a new Denbighshire County Council Social Care Recruitment and Retention Group, chaired by the Corporate Director for Communities. This will include looking at pay rates for all roles across adult and children social care and promoting our benefits. Additional dedicated HR resource has also been put in place to support social care recruitment and retention. We have accessed additional Covid-19 recovery funding to support recruitment to care for both external care providers and our internal services. Providers are also taking up initiatives to boost recruitment and retention.

Performance Scrutiny also examined staff absences, turnover and workforce planning as part of its [meeting in March](#). There has been an increase in staff absences during 2021 to 2022, with the three main reasons being muscular / skeletal; depression / anxiety and personal stress; and of course, Covid-19. Staff turnover is below the Wales average, however, there are some services where there are known issues, particularly within Highways and Environmental Services; Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services; and, as previously covered, social care. Grades seeing the largest churn were Grade 4 and below, where people generally leave for personal reasons, or Grade 10 and above where people have re-evaluated and are looking more towards retirement. Again it was acknowledged that the council, like public sector organisations, are facing recruitment and retention issues in a number of areas for different reasons. The workforce was praised for its excellent resilience over the last two years, dealing with the worst possible circumstances that anyone in local government has faced within living memory. Services have continued to deliver despite everything without significant impact on provision.

Service Challenge Action: Consider the staff resource requirements associated with the additional burden of managing / supporting virtual meetings, and the increasing number of Member Task and Finish Group meetings, and consider what, if any, actions are required.

We have recruited to the new post of Senior Committee Administrator to support democratic governance activities. It was an internal appointment; therefore, we now need to recruit to the vacant post, as well as that of a new Scrutiny Officer.

Service Challenge Action: Establish the latest position and level of risk associated with DBS / risk assessment indicators that are, or have been, a priority for improvement / acceptable.

Work to address the issue of compliance with Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and risk assessment (except for employees under Social Care Wales or CSIW) is ongoing. Compliance continues to be over 90% across DCC.

Revise one-to-one measures for Highways and Environment Services and Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services.

Our previous performance update report identified the need to revise our one-to-one measures for Highways and Environmental Services, and for Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services. From April 2022, we will only measure the completion of one-to-one meetings with staff who are expected to undertake at least three meetings within a 12-month period.

Other developments in the last period

Audit Wales Study

During December 2021 to February 2022, Audit Wales conducted a local study of Denbighshire's asset management and workforce planning. The draft report is now being considered. The final report is expected during May to July 2022.

Business Improvement and Modernisation

Following the retirement of the Head of Business Improvement and Modernisation, two new interim posts have been created and appointed to oversee the work of the service. The Strategic Planning Team Manager will oversee Strategy and Performance, Projects, Climate Change, Community Development, and Internal Audit; while the Chief Digital Officer will oversee Digital and ICT Services, Corporate Business Continuity, Digital Records and Archives.

Assets

Below are improvement actions that have been identified in support of Corporate Health in this area of governance.

Asset Management strategy

A five-year Asset Management Strategy has been drafted and will be presented to the council's Asset Management Group in June. This will include new terms of reference that will reflect the impending restructure of the Senior Leadership Team, and any changes to Lead Member responsibilities following the election.

Highways Maintenance Policies for Unclassified Roads

At its [meeting in January](#), Communities Scrutiny examined the council's policy for maintaining unclassified roads, along with the criteria and formula that will be applied for spending additional funding allocated for highways in the county. Maintaining the roads is a Statutory Duty laid down by the Highways Act, 1980, but there is interpretation between highway authorities as to the minimum standard, constrained by budgetary limitations, resources, the use (and type of use) its network gets, and a few other considerations. For this reason, each local authority lays down its minimum standards in a Code of Practice, which was ratified in Denbighshire by Cabinet in January 2020.

It was reported that it is much harder to evaluate the condition of unclassified roads. Since 2011 we have used a points system based on visual appearance, with high scores meaning the surface is visually poor e.g. potholed and requiring patching or resurfacing. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, this method was suspended for quite some months, so a recent evaluation is unavailable. The most recent trend showed that (after an improvement from 2011 to 2016) these roads were worsening, and we expect that new figures will show the roads to be back to, or worse than, the 2011 position.

Measures introduced to stop vandalism at public toilets

The council has taken action following incidents of vandalism at a number of public conveniences in Rhyl, Prestatyn and Corwen. The vast majority of the vandalism was happening between the hours of 6pm and 9pm, and the decision was taken to bring forward the closure time from 9pm to 6pm. The new closing time will be kept under review, but it is unfortunately needed at present to take action to try and prevent these issues, as they undermine the sustainability of the service and result in facilities being out of use completely for periods of time whilst we repair them.

Service Challenge Action: Develop proposal to improve ICT provision, fibre security, business continuity, school ICT provision, and digital Denbighshire

The proposal has been accepted by the Corporate Executive Team and the budget board to begin the process of rebuilding capacity within ICT to deal with the issues raised. 85% of schools have signed up to support contracts with Denbighshire ICT, and the other 15% have been advised. There is a rolling program in place to ensure the council's Digital Perimeter Security is up-to-date and operating at optimum levels. This activity has now been completed.

Service Challenge Action: Create hubs in areas across Denbighshire where there is poor broadband connection, to assist and enable remote meetings

We are awaiting confirmation from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) with regards to what is happening with the LFFN project, as the project extension officially expired in September 2021.

Across Denbighshire sites there have been six PSBA routers installed and circuits activated. 18 further sites have fibre fully complete and they are ready for PSBA circuits to be activated. Denbighshire router equipment has been ordered and will be provided. The roll-out for all of these will commence from April, 2022. There have been 22 sites removed from the current project scope, although there are current negotiations ongoing to secure funding for a 'Phase 3' roll-out. Unfortunately, no further details have been released to date.

Service Challenge Action: Work to enable translation provision with Microsoft Teams software

This activity is experiencing obstacles, but work continues nationally to make progress towards enabling the translation provision within Microsoft Teams. However, this action is dependent on intervention from Microsoft.

Service Challenge Action: Create a plan to support external partners and businesses to take forward the climate and ecological change programme

The plan was originally proposed to be complete by the end of April 2022; however, this has not been possible due to staff changes. It is proposed to be developed by the end of

October 2022, for wider behaviour change initiatives to be taken forward from 2022 to 2023 onwards. This will be supported by the 1.5 FTE new dedicated roles within the corporate communication team to work on this agenda.

Service Challenge Action: Ensure lessons learnt are captured from previous purchases of buildings

This action is now closed as it is business as usual. We will in future ask for any asbestos reports at acquisition stage. In addition to this, we will endeavour to ensure that we will still be assuming asbestos removal costs if we're demolishing or remodelling a property.

Procurement

Below are improvement actions that have been identified in support of Corporate Health in this area of governance.

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.

The Legal Services Manager continues to provide interim managerial support to the Procurement Team, in the absence of a Procurement Manager being in post. There continue to be capacity issues and these are still affecting the pace of progress in relation to these actions. Despite these challenges, during the period a joint task and finish group was convened to develop a new procurement strategy. The new strategy is intended to be presented for adoption between June and September 2022.

A paper, 'De-Carbonisation in Procurement', was presented to the Climate Change Board in February and will be presented to Cabinet following the May elections.

A new action that will be delivered from April 2022 will hopefully secure agreement for more specialist experience within the team to progress decarbonisation in our procurement. For example, we need to develop a bank of specific carbon-related questions that could be used as part of the tender evaluation process. These will need to be scored and weighted appropriately as part of the quality assessment of tenders. We are awaiting training and guidance from Welsh Government. Progress in this area will

undoubtedly help us to progress our aims to decarbonise our procurement and the supply chain.

We recognise we need to have a clearer vision for the type of benefits that have the potential to contribute to ecological improvement and carbon reduction, e.g. energy efficiency measures that can be accepted as contributing to Denbighshire's carbon emissions, as well as those indicators expected by Welsh Government. We will be using a tender currently in the pipeline to pilot ways to encourage and measure carbon reduction in the contract, using a Welsh Government template to support our approach and calculations.

During the period, Brenig Construction has been committed to delivering carbon reduction through their supply chain. Creating Enterprise, a social enterprise part of Cartrefi Conwy, were responsible for manufacturing the timber for the council's Passivhaus developments in Denbigh, creating one full-time job, and are now manufacturing timber in a new factory in Rhyl. In establishing this relationship, we've connected Creating Enterprise with our Community Resilience Team to explore additional areas of potential co-working; and also to secure more community involvement in landscape management, by introducing the Community Resilience Team to Denbigh in Bloom (one of the recipient organisations of Llwyn Eirin Community Benefits).

Review Contract Procedure Rules to ensure compliance with new procurement regulations and the Socio-Economic Duty

We have not yet progressed this review due to the difficulties we have faced in recruiting to the management role.

Service Challenge Action: Promote adherence to the Procurement Policy across the council

As reported previously, we have training slides about contract procedure rules and procurement generally, which our procurement business partners will present to their client departments in the coming months.

Ensure staff involved with managing contracts are suitably trained. Training will be rolled out across the council to all staff who are involved in contract management

A new Contract Management Officer came into post during the period, to progress with rolling out the Contract Management Framework across services. The post holder is responsible for facilitating and co-ordinating contract management best practice amongst staff. In the interim period, before the appointment was made, the Contract Management Framework and initial training was undertaken by the Chair of the Contract Management Forum and the Performance and Contract Manager.

Internal Audit Action: Procurement forward work plans to be compiled by each Service to include existing and horizon scanning of projects and activities

Procurement Business Partners attend service management teams for Denbighshire and Flintshire Councils. They have begun collating a list of existing contracts on Proactis and active tenders for each service in each county, and have started to ask management teams about other procurement needs that may be on the horizon. These are useful discussions for identifying opportunities for collaborative procurements.

Service Challenge Action: Explore long-term options for sustaining the Community Benefits Hub

The tender for the Bwthyn y Ddol Child Assessment Centre, being built by Conwy and Denbighshire Councils, includes some promising community benefits and we hope to secure monies from this contract to contribute funding for the Hub. Contract finalisation has been delayed, but project meetings are planned from May 2022 to gain pace.

The Community Renewal Fund has secured two fixed-term contracts, with one post holder being in post since March 2022 to deliver the economic empowerment project. One of its aims is to align community benefits with community need and ensure work placements are those that have a future; with skills in sectors predicted to grow. This will involve deeper engagement with the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. We are also building evidence to demonstrate the positive outcomes of the Hub.

Other developments in the last period

Denbighshire Leisure Limited

At its [meeting in January](#), Cabinet agreed to grant an extension for a period of twelve months to the term of the leisure services contract made between Denbighshire County Council and Denbighshire Leisure Limited. The rationale for the recommended contract extension was to reflect a lost year of operation due to Covid-19, which severely disrupted the company's ability to deliver services, obtain grants and grow future new business.

Revenues and Benefits

At the same [meeting in January](#), Cabinet agreed to progress the recommendation of bringing the revenues and benefits service back into the council in an effective transformation from Civica, with no adverse impact on service delivery or additional cost, and would in fact generate savings. The decision was necessary because Civica, for commercial reasons, wished to refocus their strategic direction and end all partnership arrangements with local authorities at the earliest opportunity. It was noted that the partnership had otherwise been an effective one, but that this was also an opportunity to provide a more efficient service.

Annual or Biennial Measures

Title	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	Status
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	15	4	Does not apply Count only

Title	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage difference in the mean hourly rate of pay for women – Benchmarked Locally	-13.5	6.7	Acceptable
The percentage of the lowest paid salaries (bottom quarter) that are women – Benchmarked Locally	79.9	79.3	Priority for Improvement
Member attendance (expected and present), year to date – Benchmarked Locally	89	84	Good
Net Carbon Zero – Total carbon tonnage emitted and absorbed by the council (excluding supply chain) – Benchmarked Locally	10,277	TBC	Excellent

Title	2018 to 2019	2021 to 2022	Status
Overall satisfaction with the council (%) – Benchmarked Locally	40	32	Priority for Improvement
Partners that agree the council works well with them (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	62	Good
Councillors and council employees who agree that there is a good working relationship between political leaders and senior management (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	60	Acceptable
Stakeholders who agree that the council manages its performance well (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	28	Priority for Improvement

Stakeholders who agree that the council manages it risks and challenges well (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	30	Priority for Improvement
Stakeholders who agree that the council manages its finances well (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	26	Priority for Improvement
Stakeholders who agree that the council has long-term plans in place (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	31	Priority for Improvement
Stakeholders who agree that the council treats it workforce well (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	35	Priority for Improvement
Stakeholders who agree that the council makes best use of its assets and resources (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	20	Priority for Improvement
Stakeholders who agree that the council purchases its goods and services in a fair and efficient way (%) – Benchmarked Locally	New to 2021	25	Priority for Improvement

Quarterly or Biannual Measures

Title	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
The percentage of Corporate Plan Measures showing as 'Priority for Improvement' – Benchmarked Locally	49	41	45	43	47	Acceptable

Title	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
The number of projects on the project register showing as 'compromised' – Benchmarked Locally	1	2	2	2	1	Good
The percentage of projects whose delivery confidence was updated in the last three months – Benchmarked Locally	94	96	90	84	100	Excellent
The percentage of corporate risks inconsistent with the council's risk appetite statement – Benchmarked Locally	55	No data Six-monthly	62	No data Six-monthly	64	Priority for Improvement
The cumulative number of negative reports	0	0	0	0	0	Excellent

Title	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
from external regulators – Benchmarked Locally						
The cumulative number of Internal Audit low assurance reports, financial year to date – Benchmarked Locally	4	0	1	3	4	Acceptable
Corporate and Service Budget Variance (£k)	-718	708	2,445	2,731	-2,399	Does not apply Count only
Council reserves (£k)	7,135	7,135	7,135	7,135	7,135	Does not apply Count only
Negative news stories as a percentage of all news stories about the council –	24	10	6	8	9	Priority for Improvement

Title	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
Benchmarked Locally						
The percentage of external complaints upheld or partly upheld over the last quarter – Benchmarked Locally	57	62	67	52	60	Acceptable
The rolling average number of working days / shifts per full time equivalent (FTE) local authority employee lost due to sickness absence – Benchmarked Locally	6.47	7.12	7.54	9.03	9.57	Priority for improvement
The percentage of staff who have had at least 3 one-to-one meetings in the last 12 months	45	44	42	36	43	Priority for Improvement

Title	Quarter 4 2020 to 2021	Quarter 1 2021 to 2022	Quarter 2 2021 to 2022	Quarter 3 2021 to 2022	Quarter 4 2021 to 2022	Status
– Benchmarked Locally						
The percentage of spend with suppliers based within Denbighshire – Benchmarked Locally	36	33	38	40	36	Good
The cumulative percentage of Denbighshire contracts over £25k and under £1m containing community benefits – Benchmarked Locally	No data New to quarter 1 2021 to 2022	75	88	88	88	Excellent
The cumulative number of work experience placements offered within the council	36	64	110	134	143	Does not apply Count only

Improvement Actions

Below are new improvement actions that have been identified through this report:

- Secure specialist experience within the council to progress decarbonisation in procurement.

Equality and Diversity

Equality and Diversity Campaigns

In support of the Interim Strategic Equality Plan, the council will regularly promote campaigns in support of people with protected characteristics or living at a socio-economic disadvantage. Since November (when the Strategic Equality Plan was adopted), the council has supported:

- White Ribbon Day (25 November 2021) for the Eradication of Violence against Women.
- Carers Rights Day (also 25 November 2021), to help people understand their rights, and to ensure that they are able to access support that is available to them.
- Holocaust Memorial Day (January 27 2022), to pay tribute to those persecuted and killed during the Holocaust and other genocides throughout the world.
- LGBTQ+ History month (February), marking the 50th anniversary of the very first Pride March in the United Kingdom in 1972.
- Time to Talk Day (February 3), in support of mental health.

On March 8 the council also celebrated International Women's Day by recognising the contribution and commitment of women working right across the organisation. There are a number of great examples of women that have progressed in their careers within the council, there being four women on our Senior Leadership Team. That sends out a clear message that women have the skills and ability to achieve their dreams and goals and to reach senior management positions within the authority. This also demonstrates the inclusive approach to employment, and the council has worked hard to ensure gender equality in the workplace. Women's careers are too easily derailed by life events and it's important that organisations have a full understanding of their impact.

Additional Learning Needs Implementation

In February, Internal Audit conducted a review of the council's arrangements to implement the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs (Wales) and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 and subsequent 2021 regulations, which came into force in September 2021. The report gave a high assurance rating, and its findings were presented within the Internal Audit Update to the Governance and Audit committee at its [meeting in March](#).

Overall the report gave assurance that the council is working effectively to implement the statutory guidance. Due to the delay with the roll-out of clear guidance nationally, Education and Children's Service colleagues have endeavoured to ensure that it complies with the Act through regular engagement with Legal and documenting the rationale and information available at the time for key decisions taken. An action plan has been developed to monitor performance across the various workstreams, which is regularly monitored. Dedicated resources are in place, and there are designated leads for each workstream. Local authorities are working regionally with the aim of adopting a consistent approach to implementation. The council and schools have also been supported by the Additional Learning Need Regional Transformation Lead for North Wales who has provided self-assessments to prepare for implementation, along with advice and templates. Training and engagement with schools has been extensive, and schools have been collaboratively working in clusters to prepare for the Act.

The Internal Audit review did highlight some areas that need to be developed further, including an Additional Learning Needs Strategy, provision mapping, and data retention periods, etc. These have been discussed with the relevant officers who are aware of the further work required.

Standards of Behaviour

At Council's [meeting in January](#), a Notice of Motion was put forward to ask for a review of the council's current grievance policy and process to ensure that councillors, officers and others are held to account for their behaviour, to include bullying and harassment. It was agreed that a member group be established to work with the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee to review the current resolution process and make recommendations in respect of any changes to be adopted. It was acknowledged that the council was establishing a new Strategic Equality and Diversity Group, and that it would be

useful for that group to take into account the overlap between equalities and the ethical framework. It was also agreed that the council would provide training, support and guidance to Town and Community Councils within the context of the ethical framework and the recent [Independent Review of the Ethical Standards Framework for Wales](#), but that it had no direct role in resolving disputes within those councils.

Young Person's Champion

In [December](#), the Council approved the creation of the role of Young Persons' Champion. This role will play an important part in acting as a strong strategic leader on raising and promoting young people's issues; arguing, supporting and defending the concerns, issues and needs of young people in the county. At its [meeting in January](#), Council considered the role description that had been created and elected Cllr Cheryl Williams to be the Young Person's Champion.

Diversity Champion

In [December](#), a Notice of Motion was accepted by the Council to create the role of Diversity Champion. At its [meeting in February](#), Council agreed the role description, which has been recommended by the Democratic Services Committee. The role will act as the council's conscience and advocate for diversity issues, including encouraging those from diverse communities to stand for elections.

Safeguarding Welsh Place Names

There is a legal duty on local authorities in Wales to have due regard for Welsh heritage and language in the naming of places in the county. However, there is no specific duty to have strict Welsh Language naming. Nonetheless, at the Communities Scrutiny Committee [meeting in January](#), it was confirmed that the council had recently adopted a policy for street naming and numbering that went beyond the legal duty, requiring any new street named in the authority to be in the Welsh Language. At the time we were one of only two counties in Wales to adopt a Welsh only policy in this regard. Scrutiny confirmed that they were satisfied that the council was utilising all its powers to safeguard Welsh and historical names in both the natural and built environment, but put forward a request that the Cabinet Lead Member remove the prefix / suffix 'Dreif' / 'Drive' from the New Street

Names list within the policy, as it is not a word that is found in the Welsh Language apart from perhaps verbally.

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment

The council's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment has now been submitted to Welsh Government. However, the project is experiencing a technical obstacle that it is seeking clarity on from Welsh Government. The Project Board met in March to discuss the initial response from Welsh Government, which unfortunately gave no advice on the issue. The council will again write to Welsh Government and outline the steps that we intend to take. There is a risk that if this issue is not resolved, it will impact on our deadline for the Local Development Plan, as the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment needs to be agreed first for it to progress.

Well-being Impact Assessments and Decision Making

Well-being impact assessments are the council's integrated screening tool to assess the likely impact that a proposal will have on the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Denbighshire, Wales and the world. These well-being impact assessments include consideration of the likely impact, over the longer term, on equality, Welsh Language and the environment. Our process has recently been updated to include the new Socio-Economic Duty, which in turn is incorporated into the council's reporting templates. Sessions were also held with elected members to raise awareness about the new Socio-Economic Duty. The council has also improved the publication of well-being impact assessments on its websites, so that they may be accessible and readily available for public scrutiny. However, more work is needed to ensure that officers diligently complete Well-being Impact Assessments, and training will also be given to the new council on their effective scrutiny. The Scrutiny Coordinator has also reviewed the Scrutiny aspects of the Socio-economic Duty in order to inform committee proceedings.

A further activity identified in our Interim Strategic Equality Plan was to review the well-being impact assessments of all HR policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the Socio-Economic Duty. This will be done as each policy reaches its review date.

Employability Support

The council has been delivering employability support through specialist mentors for council housing tenants, homelessness citizens, veterans and refugees. Through these areas we have seen a large number of referrals and support activity. The work is likely to be extended, with the exception of veteran support where the demand has been smaller than expected and the dedicated funds are coming to an end. Employability has also recently been embedded in Youth Service as part of the new Community Renewal Fund Project, Barod / Ready. We are exploring further employability support that may be offered through Children's Services.

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Appendix 3 – Performance Summary for Corporate Plan 2017 to 2022

This document gives a summary of performance data and project achievements across the five years of the council's 2017 to 2022 Corporate Plan.

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

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

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Summary position

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: Excellent

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

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

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
The additional supply of affordable housing, including social housing, provided during the year – Benchmarked Locally	67	45	26	139	154	222	Excellent	Yes
The percentage of residents reporting they felt satisfied with the availability of housing in their area (Residents Survey) – Benchmarked Locally	No data	42	No data	No data	30	No data	Priority for improvement	No
The percentage of residents reporting they are satisfied with the standard of housing in their area (Residents Survey) – Benchmarked Locally	No data	52	No data	No data	40	No data	Priority for improvement	No
Number of additional homes provided in Denbighshire – Benchmarked Locally	No data	196	124	242	435	422	Excellent	Yes

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
The additional supply of council houses provided	2	4	4	10	14	13	Does not apply Count only	Yes
Number of additional Extra Care Homes supported by the council – Benchmarked Locally	0	0	0	0	0	74	Does not apply Count only	Yes
Number of empty properties brought back into use (old definition) – Benchmarked Locally	?	151	181	179	184	196	Excellent	Yes
Number of people on SARTH waiting list – Benchmarked Locally	No data	1289	1148	1152	2139	2050	Priority for improvement	No
Cumulative number of people housed from the SARTH register	N/A	N/A	N/A	328	67	261	Does not apply Count only	No
The number of private sector homes improved in standard and quality due to intervention from the council – Benchmarked Locally	No data	No data	819	810	415	325	Priority for improvement	No
The number of people who	No data	7	10	9	5	13	Excellent	Yes

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
were on the Complex Disabilities Specialist Housing Needs Register for whom supported housing has been secured – Benchmarked Locally								
Percentage of households successfully prevented from homelessness (Section 66 duty) – Benchmarked Nationally	54	65	58	57	52	42	Priority for improvement	No
Percentage of households successfully relieved from homelessness (Section 73 duty) – Benchmarked Nationally	31	38	38	30	31	22	Priority for improvement	No

Ambition	Project	Achievement
There will be 1,000 more homes available within Denbighshire, including: 170 additional council homes; 260 additional affordable homes provided by private developers and RSLs.	Additional Council Housing Developments	Project ongoing, but delayed. By the end of the corporate plan period 170 units had either been completed or purchased, contracts had been awarded for their construction, or they were at the developed design stage. To date we have completed 9 units, purchased a total of 41, construction contracts had been awarded for a further 90 and 30

Ambition	Project	Achievement
		were at the developed design stage.
	Work with RSLs and the private sector to deliver additional affordable homes	Project Closed. Delivery of an additional 260 affordable homes has now been achieved and exceeded. The affordable housing delivery action is now being taken forward in Planning and Public Protection Service Plan.
<p>There will be fewer people in residential care through mechanisms including:</p> <p>Over 90 additional Extra Care Homes will be available for residents across Denbighshire (63 in Denbigh and approximately 30 in Ruthin)</p>	<p>Denbigh Extra Care Housing</p> <p>Ruthin Extra Care Housing (Phase 2)</p>	74 apartments have been made available in Denbigh. With a further 35 units in Ruthin planned to commence in 2022. Ruthin Extra Care Housing is still ongoing due to delays and we are currently working to a construction end date of February 2024.
<p>There will be more people living in their own homes for longer (including people with support needs) through mechanisms including:</p> <p>An additional eight Supported Housing Units in central Denbighshire to support adults with low level support needs.</p>	Denbigh Extra Care Housing	66 apartments have been provided in Denbigh for people over 60, with an additional 8 units to support adults with physical and learning disabilities, totalling 74 extra care units. Additional work around specialist housing is managed as business as usual.
<p>More young people (up to the age of 35) will be able to afford housing through mechanisms including:</p> <p>Mortgage deposit loan schemes;</p> <p>Supporting young people into stable tenancies.</p>	Work with RSLs and the private sector to deliver additional affordable homes	Affordable housing for Young People will continue to be progressed through the Strategic Housing and Homelessness Action Plan.
500 empty dwellings have been returned to occupation and used for housing needs in the area.	Bring 500 Empty Homes back into use	The project has exceeded the target of bringing 500 empty homes back into use, with 695 empty properties having been brought back into use since 2017. The Empty Homes delivery action will be taken forward in the Service Plan.

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

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
The percentage of transactions undertaken via the web, compared to the total number of transactions undertaken using all access channels – Benchmarked Locally	31	31	0	46	50	53	Good	Yes
The percentage of principle A roads that are in overall poor condition – Benchmarked Nationally	2.7	2.7	3.4	3.6	3.5	2.6	Excellent	Yes
The percentage of non-principal classified B roads that are in overall poor condition – Benchmarked Nationally	5.8	5.1	4.7	5.2	4.9	3.8	Excellent	Yes
The percentage of non-principal classified C roads that are in overall poor condition – Benchmarked Nationally	10.5	10.2	8.2	8.3	7.5	7.5	Excellent	Yes
The percentage of Superfast Coverage in	83	90.5	91.2	91.2	92.2	93.9	Priority for improvement	Yes

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
Denbighshire (>30 Mbps) – Benchmarked Locally								
The percentage of premises with Broadband of 10 Mbps or below – Benchmarked Locally	10.1	7.1	6.6	4.9	4.4	3.95	Priority for improvement	Yes
The percentage of mobile 4G road signal (all operators) – Benchmarked Locally	3.5	14.7	48.0	45.6	49.8	50.6	Priority for improvement	Yes
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 No data WIMD)	No data	No data	14	No data	No data	No data	Priority for improvement	No
The percentage of adults (aged 16 or over) who have used the internet (Conwy and Denbighshire) – Benchmarked Locally	76.9	86.8	87.7	89.8	No data	No data	Priority for improvement	Yes
Year to date average for the percentage of damaged roads and pavements	99.7	97	97.5	92	87	43	Priority for improvement	No

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
made safe within target time (Category 1 defects dealt within timescale) – Benchmarked Locally								

Ambition	Project	Achievement
<p>Improved travel connectivity across the county.</p> <p>Those with no access problems will consider private travel less and active travel/public transport more;</p> <p>There is help with mobility issues for those who don't have or who cannot drive;</p> <p>A public travel network has been established that is underpinned by active travel;</p> <p>Improved travel to key areas where transport can support the Growth Bid (Abergele, Prestatyn, St Asaph and Deeside);</p> <p>Non-emergency patient transport, community car schemes, and a third tier model will be more flexible and provide more bespoke solutions;</p> <p>Residents can use smart phones to access responsive and bespoke non-emergency patient transport;</p> <p>There will be more effective traffic flow, park and pedestrianised areas in town centres to support regeneration.</p>	<p>Better enable people to travel to work, education and services</p>	<p>This project was cancelled at business case stage. A new Project Brief is being developed for the production of a Sustainable Transport Plan for Denbighshire.</p>
<p>Improved travel connectivity across the county.</p>	<p>Invest in roads and bridges to maintain a viable,</p>	<p>This project was closed in 2017, but road and bridge maintenance is managed as</p>

Ambition	Project	Achievement
<p>Our road and bridge infrastructure continues to be viable because we have continued to invest in it.</p>	<p>sustainable infrastructure</p>	<p>business as usual activity within the Highways and Environmental Services.</p>
<p>County-wide superfast broadband and mobile networks (4G). Mechanisms include: Using public service assets to address gaps in coverage, where possible.</p> <p>Our ambition is to have, by 2022: 100% superfast coverage in Denbighshire (at least 30 Mbps) Zero premises with broadband of 10 Mbps or below 80% mobile 4G road signal</p>	<p>Make superfast broadband and mobile networks available to everyone</p>	<p>Project closed. Whilst the availability of superfast broadband and 4G has improved greatly since 2017, availability remains below the UK average and we have been unable to achieve our ambition. We have been able to put in place better internal processes to support digital infrastructure. However, despite our lobbying, we have not secured any faster roll-out of provision in the county, and significant challenges and barriers remain. We have also been unable to secure information or commitment from Openreach for the Nant Glyn (and surrounding villages) project.</p>
<p>There will be an increasing proportion of information and services with an online option and more council transactions taking place on line.</p>	<p>Ensure Council Information and Services are Accessible Online</p>	<p>The percentage of transactions undertaken through the council's website increased from 31% (2017) to 53%. The new Denbighshire County Council website meets accessibility standards and aims to make information and transactions as simple as possible.</p>
<p>All residents skilled and confident in accessing goods and services online.</p> <p>Those most likely to be digitally excluded are offered training and support to improve their digital access skills.</p> <p>Digital literacy in financial products and services is a priority area for support.</p>	<p>Target those most likely to be digitally excluded so they have the skills and means to use digital services</p>	<p>Project completed. Training has been delivered; digital buddies have been recruited; and hardware has been installed in libraries and residential care homes. Solo digital spaces have been implemented and are now open to the public for use along with professionals. A new virtual reality workshop will continue beyond the project, and aims to capitalise on the</p>

Ambition	Project	Achievement
		desire for meaningful virtual reality experiences and the dearth of skills in this area.
	Digital Access Points	Closed at business case stage (2018).
<p>An increased number of events will be staged in the county.</p> <p>Improved infrastructure will be in place that will make it cheaper and easier to hold events, such as installing better fixed solutions (pop up power, etc.).</p> <p>Improved Wi-Fi/mobile coverage, charging points or travel connectivity will help communities organise events.</p>	<p>Improve infrastructure to make it easier to stage events</p>	<p>Project closed. Notwithstanding the delays to the project due to the social distancing measures imposed, the project has established a mobile inventory of equipment, which will be launched in the summer of 2022. Recent approval for investment to local infrastructure across the county will help local communities to plan and stage their own events more cheaply and easily.</p>

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

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
The average length of time adults (aged 65 or over) are supported in residential care homes – Benchmarked Nationally	1184	1195	993	970	1053	1028	Priority for improvement	Yes
The percentage of people reporting they have received the right information or advice when they needed it – Benchmarked Locally	95	81.7	88	No data	No data	No data	Acceptable	No
The percentage of carers reporting they feel supported to continue in their caring role – Benchmarked Locally	89	56.5	55	No data	No data	No data	Priority for improvement	No
The percentage of people reporting that they know who to contact about their care and support – Benchmarked Locally	92	86.7	84	No data	No data	No data	Acceptable	No
Number of assessments of need for support	No data	525	234	1224	878	390	NA	NA

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
for carers undertaken during the year								
The percentage of people who agree "my local area is a place where people will pull together to improve the local area" – Benchmarked Locally	No data	59	No data	No data	63	No data	Good	Yes
The number of live resources on the Dewis Cymru Platform – Benchmarked Locally	453	454	508	536	623	533	Acceptable	Yes
The percentage of people who feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area – Benchmarked Locally	No data	27	No data	No data	20	No data	Priority for improvement	No
The cumulative (year to date) number of repeat victims of Domestic Abuse including non-crime occurrences (3 or more in 12 months, measured as year to date)	399	424	110	517	551	678	Does not apply Count only	No
The cumulative (year to date) number of	145	93	14	97	115	83	Does not apply	Yes

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
repeat offenders of Domestic Abuse (3 or more in 12 months)							Count only	
The number of families resettled within Denbighshire under UK Resettlement Project – Benchmarked Locally	No data	No data	No data	17	5	6	Does not apply Count only	Does not apply

Ambition	Project	Achievement
<p>Community groups will be thriving, with practical advice and support available to help them be effective.</p> <p>The Community Planning website will be available to support good practise in terms of planning, engagement, alignment with public sector strategic objectives, etc.</p>	Community Planning and Development Resource	Project completed. A free online resource for use by communities was created as a directory of information and provided guidance on the setting up of community plans. The project also offered officer time and support to communities who wished to create their own plans and bid for funding, signposting to an appropriate grant provider. Work continues as business as usual through our Community Development Team.
	Community Development Windfarms	The project started in September 2019 and was completed in March 2021. During this time the Community Development Team provided support to 253 groups. Work continues as business as usual.
	Rhyl Community Development Project	The council supported West Rhyl residents to become Community Champions and work with us on our Safer Streets Programme. In partnership with North Wales

Ambition	Project	Achievement
		Police and Clwyd Alyn Housing, a new community food garden was delivered; and 105 stainless steel bollards were installed along pavement edgings to alleviate concerns over vehicle parking around Gerddi Heulwen.
People will be more resilient and independent because they have access to good information that will help them. Dewis Cymru will be developed to support this aim.	Provide easily accessible information that supports people's independence and resilience	By February 2020 the content and activity for this project had been incorporated into business as usual for Library Services and the project was closed. Library Services continue to provide easily accessible information that supports people's independence and resilience.
	Working towards becoming a Dementia Friendly Denbighshire County Council.	Since the recognition from the Alzheimer's Society we have completed the majority of our action plan activities; shared good practice with staff through the staff intranet; promoted training to increase awareness of dementia throughout the council; extended and consolidated our connections with dementia friendly communities and groups across Denbighshire and the wider North Wales region. This project has now been closed, but further work will be undertaken within the council's usual business.
Residents will feel informed and empowered to influence services. In place will be: A citizen's panel; An engagement portal to manage new pieces of consultation, make consultation feedback mandatory, and	People are involved in shaping and improving services	Valuable customer information has been gathered through the lifespan of this project. Year 3 research has been delayed until the summer. A draft engagement policy, supporting framework, templates and toolkits have been developed for approval by the new council.

Ambition	Project	Achievement
<p>enable residents to express preferences according to consultations they'd be interested in;</p> <p>An engagement toolkit to support best practice.</p>		<p>Further work is needed on a Participation Strategy.</p>
<p>Everyone will feel safer in their communities, particularly those suffering the consequences of domestic abuse.</p>	<p>Act to reduce Domestic Abuse</p>	<p>The project closed with many bespoke pieces of work completed. For example, Denbighshire County Council's Domestic Abuse Policy and mandatory training for staff to recognise the signs of abuse and what to do. Further activity around reducing domestic abuse will carry on as business as usual throughout services.</p>
<p>People will be able to live in their own homes for longer.</p> <p>There will be:</p> <p>Greater support for carers to enable them to sustain their carer roles;</p> <p>More flexible housing that is able to accommodate to people's changing needs;</p> <p>Measures to help prevent loneliness and isolation that can lead to greater care demands.</p>	<p>Supporting Carers in Denbighshire</p>	<p>Project closed. Valuable multi-agency working has been established through this project, and our project group has agreed to continue with meetings and to monitor the action plans that have been developed.</p>
<p>Vulnerable people receive more effective support from public sector organisations.</p>	<p>Community Resource Teams / Ensure Adults and Older People who need health and social care in Denbighshire will experience a seamless service.</p>	<p>Project closed. Community Resource Teams have been collocated in Rhyl, Prestatyn, Denbigh and Ruthin.</p>

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

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
STEAM No data Total Economic Impact of Tourism (£ million) – Benchmarked Locally	479	490	509	552	213	No data	Priority for improvement	No
% of existing and acquired council housing stock (1st April 2017 baseline) achieving an EPC (Energy) rating of C or above – Benchmarked Locally	No data	28	33	40	46	53	Priority for improvement	Yes
Annual cumulative No. of trees planted to increase canopy cover in Rhyl and Denbigh – Benchmarked Locally	No data	2500	5800	10100	14500	18000	Excellent	Yes
No. of properties with reduced risk of flooding (1,000s) – Benchmarked Locally	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	1650	Excellent	Yes
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? No data Countryside –	No data	87	No data	No data	85	No data	Excellent	No

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
Benchmarked Locally								
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? No data Beaches – Benchmarked Locally	No data	70	No data	No data	69	No data	Good	No
How satisfied are people with their local open spaces? No data Parks – Benchmarked Locally	No data	64	No data	No data	59	No data	Acceptable	No
Total carbon tonnage emitted (Corporately) through supply chains – Benchmarked Locally	No data	No data	No data	22710	22202	TBC		
Total carbon tonnage emitted (Corporately) through business travel – Benchmarked Locally	No data	No data	No data	550	126	TBC		
Total carbon tonnage emitted (Corporately) through staff commuting – Benchmarked Locally	No data	No data	No data	1848	1719	TBC		
Percentage of DCC owned and operated land in highest categories of	No data	No data	No data	37.56	38.14	TBC		

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
species richness – Benchmarked Locally								

Ambition	Project	Achievement
70% of existing and acquired council homes will have at least a 'C' energy efficiency rating.	Improving Energy Efficiency in Council Houses	As at March 2022, 53% of certificated properties achieved, up 5.8%.
All our new council housing built will achieve an 'Excellent' energy rating.	Additional Council Housing Developments	No new council builds have yet been completed. This work is ongoing.
There will be growing numbers of black grouse, little terns, adders, sand lizards and bees.	Improving biodiversity in Denbighshire	This project has grown to now include over 100 bee friendly sites (including 11 roadside nature reserves). These sites are equivalent to nearly 35 football pitches worth of grassland managed as native wildflower meadows. Further actions to improve biodiversity will continue as business as usual, and most recently a tree nursery was opened with the aim of producing 5,000 native wildflower plants and 5,000 native trees per year.
	Moorland Management and Wildfire Prevention	In response to the summer 2018 Llantysilio fire, Communities Scrutiny Committee produced a comprehensive report into all aspects of the fire. It found the need for better communication between all stakeholders, improved management of the moorland and a proactive approach to prevent further wildfires. A Moorland Officer was appointed and continues to coordinate activity and help landowners and graziers to manage the moorland to improve its general health. This

Ambition	Project	Achievement
		has included restoration works at Llantysilio; condition surveys; fire risk assessments; and joint training with North Wales Fire and Rescue.
There will be 18,000 more trees across Rhyl and Denbigh	PLANT Project: Urban Tree Planting	Project completed. Completion of the PLANT project has resulted in the creation of an additional 80 acres of quality green open space strategically located adjacent to some of the more disadvantaged wards in Wales.
	To maintain, enhance, protect and preserve Denbighshire's living assets for future generations	Project closed. We now have a much clearer understanding of Denbighshire's tree assets. Survey work and inspections have been carried out across the county along key routes to develop a dataset containing information on species, condition, location, and management requirements. This information will inform our strategy going forward and how we react to issues such as Climate Change and Ash Dieback.
500 properties will have benefitted from a reduced risk of flooding through the Rhyl East scheme.	East Rhyl Coastal Defence Scheme	The project was completed in February 2022 ahead of schedule and under budget, and will give protection to 1,650 properties.
Renewable energy provision across the county has increased.	None	It is difficult for the council to exert any control in this area, but we have seen an increase in renewable schemes coming forward in the last 5 years, including further offshore windfarms, and one development on the Brenig. There is potentially a scheme for a solar farm near St. Asaph, and Awel y Môr off-shore windfarm (near Conwy) is

Ambition	Project	Achievement
		linking through to Denbighshire for its sub-station. Council also supported in principle the development of a tidal lagoon energy project off the Denbighshire coastline. We are also looking at what can be encouraged through the LDP.
Carbon emissions from council assets have reduced by at least 15% by 2022	Reducing carbon emissions from council assets	2019 to 2020 energy figures show that we reduced our carbon emissions by 15.69% from our 2017 baseline. During 2020 to 2021 the council further reduced its Net Carbon total by 27% on the previous year (although this was an exceptional year). Ongoing work to reduce our carbon emissions will continue through the Climate and Ecological Change Programme.
	County Hall Improved Utilisation – upgraded Building Management System	Ongoing action within the Climate and Ecological Change Programme.
The county has a higher profile as a location to visit, so that we can capitalise on Denbighshire’s economic potential. Tourism spend in the county has increased.	Develop a Tourism Strategy to raise the profile of Denbighshire.	Project complete. Tourism Strategy developed for 2019 to 2022. STEAM data shows the economic impact of tourism rose from £490m in 2017 to £552 in 2019. 2020 saw a 61.4% decrease to £213m.
Addition in support of the Environment Priority	Develop options to reduce plastics use within Denbighshire County Council (Phase 1 and Phase 2)	Phase 1, covering plastics used by the council, has been completed. Phase 2, covering plastics used by schools, is to be progressed through the Climate and Ecological Change Strategy.

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

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
Percentage of pupil attendance in primary schools – Benchmarked Nationally	95.1	94.9	94.5	94.9	No data	No data	Excellent	No
Percentage of pupil attendance in secondary schools – Benchmarked Nationally	93.8	93.7	93.5	93.4	No data	No data	Priority for improvement	No
% of the population aged 18 to 24 claiming JSA – Benchmarked Nationally	4.4	4.2	6	6.2	12.4	6.4	Priority for improvement	No
The percentage of children aged 4 to 5 years who are a healthy weight or underweight – Benchmarked Nationally	73.1	71	70.4	67.7	71.8	No data	Priority for improvement	No
Local Authority Points Score Average KS4 Welsh Baccalaureate Skills Challenge Certificate Indicator – Benchmarked Nationally	No data	25	30	33	No data	No data	Excellent	Yes
The percentage of pupils (using Pupil Attitudes	No data	86.2	85.9	86.1	87.2	No data	Good	Yes

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
to Self and School (PASS) who respond positively against pupils' feelings about school – Benchmarked Locally								
The % of children achieving 5 GCSEs A* to C (Level 2, Key Stage 4), including English or Welsh (1st language), Maths and English Literature, by the end of secondary school, against the % that achieved the expected standard at the end of primary school (Level 4, Key Stage 2) – Benchmarked Nationally	61	54	52	55	No data	No data	Acceptable	No
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are job opportunities for young people at the start of their career – Benchmarked Locally	No data	19	No data	No data	19	No data	Priority for improvement	No
The percentage of residents that	No data	28	No data	No data	26	No data	Priority for improvement	No

Measure	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Status	Improved
are satisfied that there are opportunities for young people to develop their skills – Benchmarked Locally								
The percentage of residents that are satisfied that there are leisure opportunities that appeal to young people – Benchmarked Locally	No data	50	No data	No data	29	No data	Priority for improvement	No
The number of schools providing education through suitability and condition categories C and D – Benchmarked Locally	No data	36	34	30	27	27	Priority for improvement	Yes
The percentage increase in the salaries of young people enrolled in the Employment Bursary Project – Benchmarked Locally	No data	No data	17	26	17	16	Excellent	Yes

Ambition	Project	Achievement
All young people are being supported to achieve their potential. We would expect to see a reduction in the number of	Monitoring and supporting positive	Project closed.87 % of pupils respond positively as to their feelings about school. The impact of Covid-19 and

Ambition	Project	Achievement
pupils not achieving the expected standard at the end of secondary where they did achieve the expected standard at the end of primary.	pupil attitudes to self and school	changes to the curriculum pose significant challenges for the measurement of attainment. The council works closely with GwE to monitor school standards on an ongoing basis.
Review education provision in Denbigh, Rhyl and Llangollen under the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme (formerly the 21 st Century Schools Programme).	Modernising Education	Completion of Band A, including within this Corporate Plan, four new primary schools on three sites, a new 3-16 through school, a Welsh Language Centre, and extensions / improvement to Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch. Work has also started on the extension of the Oaktree Childcare provision in Rhyl. Work started and ongoing for Band B, following acceptance of programme proposal by Welsh Government.
Young people are resilient and have the right skills to thrive, including practical, financial and emotional skills.	Monitoring and supporting positive pupil attitudes to self and school/well-being	Project closed. 87% of pupils respond positively as to their feelings about school.
	Health and Wellbeing - Nutrition and Cooking Skills	Project funding will end in July. 21 schools have engaged in the programme, with 25 members of staff trained in Come and Cook.
Parents have access to the right support so that they can give their children the best start in life.	Supporting Parents in Denbighshire	Project closed and now business as usual. 130 practitioners and 48 settings in Denbighshire benefitted from training opportunities. Before and after Covid-19 restrictions, 139 parents received face-to-face training, but most significantly 2,362 have registered online.
Help and advice is available so that young people make the right choices to prepare them for	Ready for Work	Project closed. Prior to Covid-19, successful career events were held with good regularity

Ambition	Project	Achievement
<p>the work that they want to do, and feel confident and well-supported to enter employment.</p> <p>Quality mentoring and work opportunities are available to young people to help them develop their skills.</p>		<p>throughout the county with strong attendance by schools / pupils and employers. It has not been possible to deliver face-to-face events during the pandemic.</p>
	<p>The Denbighshire Working Start Scheme</p>	<p>Project ongoing (on target). A total of 110 placements have been sourced and advertised by the Work Start Team to date. Funding of this project has been extended until December 2022.</p>
	<p>Young Person Employment Bursary</p>	<p>Project closed. 20 applications supported, leading to a 20% average increase in the salaries of applicants.</p>
<p>Young people can find employment that appeals to them and matches their skills.</p>	<p>TechZone / Parth Dechnoleg: Growth Sector Move-on Accommodation</p>	<p>Project closed at business case stage – no funding.</p>
	<p>Develop a co-working space for new enterprises at the former Costigans, Rhyl</p>	<p>Project completed (May 2021). New space for entrepreneurs delivered.</p>
	<p>Community Benefits Hub</p>	<p>Project ongoing (on target). Community Benefits now embedded within the council's work, delivering tangible benefits, including work placements. Hub has also helped secure collaborative procurement opportunities.</p>

Report to	Governance & Audit Committee
Date of meeting	8 June 2022
Lead Member / Officer	Nicola Kneale – Interim Head Business Improvement Modernisation
Report author	Bob Chowdhury, Chief Internal Auditor
Title	Internal Audit Report 2021-22

1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report provides the Committee with the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2021-22 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 2022-23 is being taken to the Governance and Audit committee for approval on the 8th June 2022. Appendix 1 details the position with audits contained in the 2022/23 audit strategy and those carried forward from 2021/22. 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. This year's annual opinion needs to consider a number of key factors: The last year has seen internal audit assignments disrupted again 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 in areas of greatest priority to the council with reduced resources available to Internal Audit due to a secondment to TTP. Internal Audit has been able to remotely, carry out audits from 1st April 2021, but this has come with new challenges.
- 4.3. 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. Two audit during the year 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.
- 4.4. Internal Audit has completed three 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.
- 4.5. 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.

4.6. 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.

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Introduction and background

This report outlines the internal audit work that Internal Audit has been carried out for the financial year 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

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.

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Internal Audit Opinion 2021-22

The CIA has based his 2021-22 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 2021-22.

This year's annual opinion needs to consider a number of key factors: The coronavirus pandemic has again disrupted the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan for 2021-22, 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.

The last year has seen internal audit assignments disrupted again 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 one member of staff was redeployed to directly support Denbighshire County Council's TTP service. Internal Audit has been able to remotely, carry out audits from 1st April 2021, but this has come with new challenges.

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. Two audit during the year 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 three 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

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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 2021/22. 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 2021/22 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.

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Summary of audit work 2021/22

The Internal Audit Strategy is produced to concentrate on key risks facing the Council. The Internal Audit Strategy 2021-22 was agreed with the Governance & Audit Committee on the 28 April 2021 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 2021/22 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	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
High Assurance ●	14	8	12	5	8
Medium Assurance ●	13	17	9	10	14
Low Assurance ●	4	5	7	1	2
No Assurance ●	0	0	0	0	0
Advisory ●	0	2	4	6	2
	31	30	32	22	26

The majority of assurance opinions were either 'high' or 'medium' this year (92.3%).

All 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. The two low assurance reports that featured in 2021-22 Internal Audit Annual Opinion were reported to Governance & Audit Committee during the financial year.

The first was a follow up report and after the 2nd follow up, the status has been changed to a medium assurance rating. The second review has not been followed up as the service is currently being restructured and after discussion with the Head of Service (HoS), it has been agreed to roll this follow up into quarter 2 in 2022/23.

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Projects which are at draft stage but are yet to be finalised are listed in Appendix 1. There are two assurance reports with a provisional assurance rating of medium or high.

Additionally, 18 audits from the Audit Strategy 2021-22 were either cancelled or deferred to 2022-23 (shown in Appendix 1). This was due to the reduced capacity of the Internal Audit team during the year, but also the focus of internal audit activity on changing priorities such as Covid-19 grants.

As in previous years, there were no reports with 'No Assurance' rating issued during the year.

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 review have been followed up during the year, consideration is given to the management response and progress made with implementing the agreed action plan.

The last year has seen no Government enforced lockdown, and there were no known impairments or restrictions to internal audit's scope affecting the projects undertaken during the year. Internal Audit has worked remotely during the last year and the team are now fully adjusted to the new way of working. Unfortunately, there have been instances where site visits could not be carried out, and this has meant 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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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 2020/21 exercise has been completed and the table below summarises the main results achieved in recent exercises:

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	£18,307
Council Tax rising 18s	£964	£3,039	£9,913
Council Tax Reduction Scheme	£3,302	£8,118	£74,289
Total	£31,784	£701,173	£115,339

Over the years the number of Housing Benefit (HB) matches have reduced significantly due to the roll out of Universal Credit and the number of Council Tax Reduction (CTR) have increased, which has resulted in the Council processing far more CTR matches this time resulting in a higher percentage of overpayments being recorded against the CTR matches.

Irregularities

During the 2021/22 financial year, Internal Audit has been informed of two allegations of fraud. Internal Audit carried out, or assisted with two investigations. A summary of the outcomes is shown in the table below. One allegation of fraud has resulted in a dismissal

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and the second is showing as no further action, but in both cases suggestions for improvements to existing controls were made.

Outcome of Investigations	2021/22
Dismissal / contract terminations	1
Resignations accepted after investigation	0
Written warnings issued	0
No further action	1
Investigations pending outcomes	0
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, 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 and was presented/approved at the Governance & Audit Committee in July 2021.

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. During the last year the Counter Fraud Strategy has been revised and taken to Governance and Audit Committee in July 2021 and approved by Cabinet Committee in September 2021. A Senior Auditor has been awarded the accredited counter

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fraud investigator qualification, but unfortunately the case management system to track fraud has not been set up.

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.

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

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

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appropriate oversight; and feedback to the Council with the level of support and guidance required for schools where concerns have been identified.

Agile Auditing

The concept of 'Agile Auditing' during the pandemic has been difficult to carry out as access to department ICT systems has been time consuming. 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 the team have considered the approach on a few 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.

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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	7
Final report issued within 5 working days of agreeing the draft report and action plan	Avg. days > 5	3
Implementation of Agreed actions	75%	48%

Overall, performance against the indicators has been good over the year. The audit agreed actions that have been implemented figure is lower than expected, as the number of follow ups are increasing and also certain services continue to prioritise resources on responding to the pandemic and other pressures.

Internal Audit are prioritising the completion of assurance work and continue to follow up previous reviews awarded a low assurance to ensure that necessary improvements are being made. While many actions are taking longer to resolve than originally envisaged by services, we are satisfied that progress is still being made to implement the requisite change.

The Chief Internal Auditor attends Service Management Team meetings to prompt completion and provide an update on the performance. 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 insufficient progress is made with audit actions arising from high or medium assurance reports.

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A customer satisfaction survey to recipients of internal audit reviews in 2021/22 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, 8 (out of total 23) completed the survey. The survey is anonymous to encourage honest feedback.

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%	100%
Was the audit constructive and did it add value overall?	100%	100%
How well has Internal Audit adapted to remote working	100%	100%

Performance relating to consultation with service has improved compared to last year’s survey results. This year has seen Internal Audit scoring good/very good in all survey questions resulting in 100% scores. An additional question has been included within the survey around the new way Internal Audit are undertaking reviews, and all completed questionnaires were happy with the new remote working style.

Here are a few examples of the comments received:

“I always find Audit very professional, they are consultative and certainly engage you through the whole process and take into consideration your views. I feel that I have a good working relationship with the audit team.”

“Our recent audit was very efficient - I felt it worked well for us by adding all documents to a shared 'Team' and the virtual feedback worked fine.”

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“The audit process and purpose were made clear from the outset and the process was fair throughout. We were offered opportunities to provide additional information where required and we felt our input was heard, valued and respected”.

We consider all feedback to ensure we continue to meet our stakeholders’ needs.

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.

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 is being submitted to Governance & Audit Committee for approval on the 8 June 2022 meeting.

The Chief Internal Auditor maintains a quality assessment process which includes reviews of all audit work. The quality assessment process and improvement is supported by a development programme and 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

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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. Additional improvement actions resulting from this year's annual internal self-assessment include:

- Update Audit Manual to provide greater coverage of consulting arrangements (Standard 2220)
- Update the assurance planning document to include the agreed corporate risk appetite (Standard 2010)

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Appendix 1- Summary of Internal Audit Work 2021-22

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
Risk Management	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	5
ICT Capacity & Resilience	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	4
Accounts Payable & Payroll	Complete	High ●	0	0	1
Treasury Management	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Capital Management	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Revenues & Benefits 2020-21	Complete	High ●	0	0	0
Project Management - SC2	Complete	Medium ●	0	1	2
Community Living Schemes	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Ysgol Bro Cinmeirch	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	5
Project Management – Queen’s Building follow up*	Complete	Medium ●	N/a	N/a	N/a
Contract Management follow up*	Complete	Low ●	N/a	N/a	N/a
Housing Support Grant	Complete	High ●	0	0	0
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Grant Certification	Complete	High ●	0	0	1
Equalities	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	3
Housing Rent Arrears	Complete	High ●	0	0	1
- Exceptions, Exemptions and Variations from	Complete	Low ●	0	4	0

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Report Title	Status of Project	Assurance Rating	Risks/Issues Raised		
			Critical	Major	Moderate
Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs)					
Denbighshire Leisure Limited – Governance & Contract Management	Complete	Medium ●	0	1	1
Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI-DSS) 3 rd Follow Up*	Complete	Medium ●	N/a	N/a	N/a
Housing Tenancy 2 nd Follow Up*	Complete	Medium ●	N/a	N/a	N/a
Revenues & Benefits 2020-21	Complete	High ●	0	0	0
Ysgol Brynhyfryd	Completed	High ●	0	0	2
Rhyl High School	Complete	High ●	0	0	2
Ysgol Llanfair	Complete	High ●	0	0	1
Governance and Decision Making	Complete	Medium ●	0	0	4
Housing Repair & Maintenance	Complete	Medium ●	1	0	3
Additional Learning Needs Implementation	Complete	High ●	0	0	0

2021-22 Audits – Reporting stage

Report Title	Status of Project	Comment
Ysgol Hiraddug	Draft	High ●
Ysgol Tremeirchion	Draft	High ●

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Ysgol y Castell	Draft	High ●
Financial Services 2021-22 - Control Risk Self-Assessment Outcomes, - Any changes since the last review or planned future changes, - Feeder System Transactions, - Accounting Systems/Budgetary Control, - Welsh Government Covid- 19 Related Payments, & - Bank Reconciliation & Foreign Payments	Fieldwork/Draft	
Families First	Planned for 2022-23	

* Reports are not yet finalised and so assurance rating and risk/issues raised have not been formally agreed with the respective customers.

2021-22 Audits Cancelled or Deferred

Report Title	Status of Project	Comment
Commercial Waste	Planned for 2022-23	
Prestatyn High School/ Post 16 Education Grant	Planned for 2022-23	
Ysgol Dewi Sant	Planned for 2022-23	
Ysgol Melyd	Planned for 2022-23	
High Ways Maintenance	Planned for 2022-23	
Health & Well Being	Planned for 2022-23	
Post 16 Education Grant	Planned for 2022-23	
Community Safety	Planned for 2022-23	

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Workforce planning	Planned for 2022-23	
LAC	Planned for 2022-23	
Liberty Protection Safeguarding	Planned for 2022-23	
Youth Service	Planned for 2022-23	
Cefydy Health Care	Planned for 2022-23	

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Appendix 2 – 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	High ●
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	High ●
CRR00018 The risk that programme and project benefits are not fully realised	Reasonable	Low ●
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 ●
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	High ●

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Corporate Risk	Coverage	Assurance Rating
CRR00031 The risk of fraud and corruption resulting in financial and reputational loss and possibly impacting on service delivery	Reasonable	High ●
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	High ●
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	High ●
CRR00047 The risk that the new North Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) results in the council having less influence and control at a local level	Reasonable	High ●
CRR00048 The risk that recruitment and retention issues, leading to a loss of expertise and capacity, worsen resulting in poor or inadequate services	Reasonable	Medium ●
CRR00049 The risk that the future funding regime doesn't allow the council to continue to support the most vulnerable learners and disengaged young people in the way we have been through EU funding	Reasonable	Low ●

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Corporate Risk	Coverage	Assurance Rating
CRR00050 The risk that Welsh Government's commitment to eliminate profit from the care of Looked After Children results in an unstable or unsuitable supply of placements	Reasonable	Medium ●

CRR00012 The risk of a significantly negative report(s) from external regulators – regular meetings with Audit Wales and updates from Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales and Ombudsman confirms that no significantly negative reports were received in 2021/22. A summary is included in the Annual Governance Statement 2021/22.

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.

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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.

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Appendix 4 – Quality Assurance Improvement Programme

Progress against actions from the external assessment as at June 2021.

Ref	Standard	Agreed action	Comment
Code of Ethics			
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>	Complete. Auditors aware of the Standards of Public Life's principles and annual declaration updated and signed acceptance by all auditors.
1000: Purpose, Authority and Responsibility			
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>	Complete. Internal Audit Charter updated accordingly.
1100: Independence and Objectivity			
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>	Complete. Internal Audit Strategy states the annual resources available for Internal Audit.
1300: Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme			
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>	Complete Internal Audit assessment checklist updated.
1300: Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme 1311: Internal Assessments			

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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>	Complete. Annual Internal Audit Report summarises work completed against the Internal Audit Strategy.
1300: Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme 1311: Reporting on the Quality Assurance Programme			
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>	Complete 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>	Complete. Annual Internal Audit Report includes the results of the QAIP and progress.
2000: Managing the Internal Audit Activity 2060: Reporting to Senior Management and the Board			
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>	Complete. 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.
2100: Managing the Internal Audit Activity 2110: Governance			
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>	Complete A review of Ethics has been completed and includes an agreed action plan. A follow up review of

Internal Audit Annual Report 2021-22

	related objectives, programmes and activities?		the agreed actions to be carried out in
2400: Communicating Results 2410: Criteria for Communicating			
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>Complete.</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>Complete.</p> <p>Comparison between work planned and work carried out included in the Internal Audit Annual Report.</p>

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Report to	Governance & Audit Committee
Date of meeting	8 June 2022
Lead Member / Officer	Nicola Kneale – Interim Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation
Report author	Bob Chowdhury – Chief Internal Auditor
Title	Annual Governance Statement 2021-22

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 2021-22, along with progress in addressing the improvement actions contained within the AGS 2020-21. 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 2021-22 (Appendix 1) and monitors the progress made on the action plan from 2020-21.

4. Report details

- 4.1. The Annual Governance Statement 2021-22 (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 has again been included within the statement, together with a review of the new ways of working for staff and members. The statement has also reviewed committee meetings and how they are now all on line and webcast arranged to ensure good governance arrangements.
- 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 will be 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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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.

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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.

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 was replaced this year by the Stakeholder Survey to meet the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and inform the Council's Self-Assessment of performance against its functions. The engagement was carried out during September and October 2021, and the results have been published within the 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.

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

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The Council has continued to make shielding calls to persons vulnerable to Covid-19 in response to the pandemic and these calls have been well received by members of the community.

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.

During 2021 to 2022, the majority of Corporate Plan projects have been able to recover from delays caused by the pandemic. The Corporate Plan Board formerly closed the programme in March, with projects either having already delivered and closed; ending imminently with their funding; or continuing as usual business within services. 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

Senior Management and Members (via Scrutiny committees and the Governance & Audit Committee), ensure the Council remains focussed on achieving its objectives and priorities. A new Chief Executive has been appointed and he is currently looking at

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restructuring the Corporate Executive Team (CET) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

The Council has approved the new CET structure and next year will see the Council move from two to three two Corporate Directors.

The council's Self-Assessment of Performance for 2021-22 is being drafted, and continues to include an assessment against our governance functions, as recommended by the statutory guidance for the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, which came into effect in May 2022. The Quarterly Performance Reports that make up the Self-Assessment have also continued to catalogue the activity of our principle meetings (Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, and Governance and Audit), key news items, and reports by our internal audit and external regulators.

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 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.

The new ways of working for staff and members has now been imbedded over the last 12 months and home working is now seen as the norm with ICT support in place.

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

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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 limited restrictions caused by the pandemic, the Council has managed to close its accounts for 2020/21 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 bonus payments and free school meals at speed. 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.

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Council meetings are carried out online and are now also available to the public in accordance with legislative requirements.

Covid-19 Impact on Governance

The Covid-19 pandemic has continued to cause an 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 Civil Contingencies Act. This has resulted in changes to governance arrangements, with council meetings moving to online, 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 are now carried out online and comply with the legislative requirements and the Local Authorities (Coronavirus)(Meetings)(Wales) Regulations 2020 under powers granted to Welsh Government under the Coronavirus Act 2020.

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 regular 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.

The Council now has simultaneous translations to virtual meetings which are now able to be webcast to allow public access and increase transparency and openness.

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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 has continued throughout the pandemic.
- As restrictions have been lifted, the Council implemented new rules to allow key employees access to work from a council office. The Council has also left 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.

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.

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Key contributors to developing and maintaining the Governance Framework

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

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Key Contributors	Contribution
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council
Internal Audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal control, risk management and governance arrangements • Delivers a programme of risk based audits, including counter fraud and investigation • Identifies areas for improvement in the management of risk
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 have now resorted back to pre-pandemic arrangements, with the exception of meetings taking place face to face. Meetings are now carried out online and webcast to allow the public to attend. Members and Officers have adapted to the new way of working and it ensures transparency and openness.

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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. Our Self-Assessment report for 2021 to 2022 will be going through committees in June, before final approval by Council in July.

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 2021/22 was to again 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,

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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:

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Internal Audit Low Assurance Reports Issued in 2021/22	Agreed actions relating to significant risks/issues
<p>Exceptions, Exemptions and Variations from Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs)</p>	<p>Presentation (awareness for new managers and refresher) to be delivered by all Procurement Business Partners at various DMG (or equivalent); and whole Service meetings where appropriate.</p> <p>Procurement Business Partners to support Services on improved awareness and understanding of CPRs and highlight at service management meetings areas of noncompliance or poor practice.</p> <p>Quick Guide (already produced) to be used as a starting point in any presentation</p> <p>Amend the Quick Guide if necessary to give greater clarity on sequence of legal/procurement comments in advance of Authorised Signatories.</p> <p>Utilise LINC and other methods to highlight good practices</p> <p>Variation Form – to be amended to include a section asking if previous variations have been sought and attaching copies of such signed variations; amend to reflect sequence of legal/procurement comments.</p>

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<p>Contract Management follow up</p>	<p>Report to SLT highlighting the weakness identified with contract management and non-compliance with CPRs with a view to SLT reviewing arrangements in their own services to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> All contracts are recorded on the Proactis contract management module or other suitable systems (until a decision is taken to replace it);<input type="checkbox"/> Signed contracts are obtained for all contracts over £25,000 and held on the Proactis system (or suitable approved contract management system);<input type="checkbox"/> Contract management activity is recorded in the contract management module within Proactis, or other method as agreed corporately;<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure that the delivery of community benefits is monitored;<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure appropriate performance indicators are included within contracts with suitable monitoring of the contractor's performance; <p>Ensure staff involved with managing contracts are suitably trained. Training will be rolled out across the council to all staff who are involved in contract management and delivered in two parts:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.Proactis Contract Management module2.Contract management principles (to explore the use of e-learning). <p>Contract Management framework will be produced to document the stages of contract management and include a task list with the minimum recommended activities to undertaken. Scope to develop standard templates at a later stage.</p> <p>Contract Managers Forum to be set up to share best practice.</p> <p>Once framework circulated and e-learning and training provided, guidance notes to be developed to provide staff with additional information around contract management.</p> <p>Procurement business partners to run a Proactis report showing a list of contracts by service area and share with service management teams in order for the Heads of Service to ensure that contracts are appropriately uploaded.</p>
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	<p>Scope to include contract risk categorisation score down the line once the contract management framework is launched.</p> <p>A review of the current contract management system (Proactis) to be undertaken to establish if the system is still fit for purpose. If the current system is considered unfit, then a business case will be formed to justify replacement.</p> <p>Review the commissioning form to include a section on KPIs to prompt for their inclusion in relevant contracts e.g. high and medium risk/strategic contracts.</p> <p>Proactis has the potential to send out reminders if monitoring is not completed/uploaded through creation of tasks. This will be included as part of the Proactis contract management training (see action 2.1).</p> <p>Review of the contract management system confirms it has the functionality to record contract risks. Mandatory field to be added to Proactis to capture the information and enable reporting</p> <p>All risks associated with operating a contract need to be recorded on a pre-contract risk form.</p> <p>A Contract Management framework will be taken to SLT for approval with the view for it to be adopted for all new contracts and applied by all services.</p> <p>Contract risk scores will be picked up in Proactis reports generated for service management teams to review and Heads of Service to ensure that the framework is applied appropriately.</p> <p>See also action 1.1, Heads of Service to ensure that any contracts deemed as a significant risk to the service or council are captured on the service risk register where appropriate.</p> <p>Community Benefit Hub will monitor all community benefits centrally to coordinate and ensure that they are delivered. Links to Internal Audit review of Section 106 agreements</p>
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[Caption; Issues identified by internal Audit 2021/22 and agreed actions to mitigate the issues.]

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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 of Denbighshire's compliance with 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.
- Further develop the Budget Process 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.

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- Include Unearmarked Reserves figure in the Corporate Dashboard to compliment the annual outturn projections.
- .

Key indicators

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

Key performance indicators	Outcomes 2021/22
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 2021/22
Ombudsman referrals 2021/22	No complaints upheld
Internal audit reports	2 low assurance reviews
Complaints about elected members	2 in 2021/22
Number of negative reports from our External Regulators	None in 2021/22

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 29 November 2021.

Annual Audit Summary Report 2021 provided a summary of their audit work which included:

- Continuous Improvement – The Auditor General certified that the Council had met its remaining Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 duties for the financial year

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2020-21, as saved by an order made under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

- Financial Sustainability - In Denbighshire County Council we concluded that the Council is well placed to maintain its financial sustainability over the medium term – it has a good track record of managing its budget and continues to work to further improve its financial position.
- Recovery Plan - Denbighshire County Council's recovery from the impact of the pandemic benefited from proactive engagement at both a regional and local level and the Council's planning and decision-making processes showed strong and consistent collective leadership. The Council's approach to recovery benefited from positive officer/member relations and addressed the challenges posed by the pandemic. Some actions taken during the response to the crisis, such as maintaining a focus on its climate change ambitions and well-established financial reporting arrangements were particularly positive.
- Delivering Environmental Ambitions - We concluded in our report that the Council is making excellent progress in embedding its environmental ambitions. We noted that the Council has moved quickly to embed its environmental ambitions in its strategic planning frameworks, it is communicating its ambitions well and has put baseline measures in place using an established performance framework. The full cost of the ambition is not yet known, more comprehensive stakeholder mapping would further strengthen engagement, and reporting over the next year will help the environmental ambitions to embed and the measures to evolve.
- Commissioning Older Peoples Care Home Placements - In concluding this work, we recognised that responsibility for the current challenges in the commissioning arrangements was widespread. The Welsh Government sets the national framework which is complex, and local partners have responsibility for the way that national policy and guidance are implemented. We have therefore reported locally to councils and the Health Board, and nationally to the Welsh Government, recommending actions that these bodies should take.

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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:

- CIW and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales published their joint National review of the use of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) in Wales.
- In November 2021, CIW also published its national overview report of assurance checks in Wales and Let me flourish, a national review of early help, care and support and transition for disabled children in Wales.
- In November 2021, CIW published its Assurance Check letter for the Council which summarises the findings of the CIW assurance check carried out in June and July 2021.

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Action Taken in Response to 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement

Last year's Annual Governance Statement highlighted seven areas for improvement. The table below sets out the action taken to address these issues during 2021/22:

Improvement areas identified in 2020/21	Progress to date
Review and update Officers' code of conduct and the process for capturing and response taken to declaration of interest, gifts and hospitality.	<p>This is still ongoing as the service over the last year has gone through a number of changes and has struggled with recruiting staff.</p> <p>It has been agreed at the HoS meeting in March 2022 that this would be rolled over into 2022/23.</p>
Continuing budget pressures and uncertainty over funding. Also, address any actions arising from the review of the Financial Management Code	<p>Welsh Government provided multi-year indicative settlement figures in 2021/22 for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and we will lobby for this practice to continue.</p> <p>We reviewed the Medium Term Financial Strategy and will continue to review on an annual basis.</p> <p>Work on the following areas are continuing and will be rolled over to 2022/23:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and document complete Capital Process including SIG Terms of Reference, clear decision making, accounting and project management processes. • Develop a clear long-term capital strategy. • Monitor on-going impact of Covid on services. • Further develop the Budget Process to embed long term decision-making and consultation as core principles <p>Include Unearmarked Reserves figure in the Corporate Dashboard to compliment the annual outturn projections.</p>
Address contract management weaknesses highlighted by Internal Audit.	<p>Internal audit completed the follow up review and the outcome was improvements had been made and the low assurance has been changed to a medium assurance rating. The next follow up has been scheduled for June 2022.</p>

Annual Governance Statement

Improvement areas identified in 2020/21	Progress to date
Implement requirements of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021.	The Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services and Strategic Planning & Performance Manager have completed this task.
Workforce capacity and resilience and reliance on key positions	<p>The appointment of the appointed of a new Chief Executive has been completed and on 14 March 2022 the Chief Executive took a report to Full Council to consider the strategic direction of the Council, including a proposal to restructure the Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT).</p> <p>The report was approved by Council and going forward the Council will have three Corporate Directors, one is already in post and the other two will be appointed in 2022/23.</p> <p>The HOS for Education & Children Services post has been split into a Head of Education Services and Head of Children Services and have both been filled.</p> <p>The review and update of the workforce plan is still ongoing as the service has been through a number of recruitments including filling the HR Manager post following a secondment. This process has been made harder as the team have struggled to recruit staff into the vacant positions.</p> <p>Internal Audit has not carried out the workforce planning process review, but has agreed with the Head of Legal, HR, & Democratic Services in March 2022, to put the review back to the end of quarter 2, so that the service has sufficient time to carry out the review.</p> <p>As the Council is now moving out of the Pandemic and staff are slowly returning to the office, the emphasis is now on developing the New Ways of Working Project.</p>
Review the Whistleblowing Policy	This review has not been completed and has been agreed to roll into the following year.
Uncertainty over future funding arrangements following EU Exit.	Resources and processes 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

Annual Governance Statement

Improvement areas identified in 2020/21	Progress to date
	<p>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>Matrix team established and work will continue to maximise opportunities from these new initiatives.</p>

[Caption; Areas of improvements for 2020/21 and progress to date]

Annual Governance Statement

Improvement Actions Arising from 2021-22 Annual Governance Statement

Looking ahead, the following areas for improvement have been identified to be addressed in 2022/23. This takes into consideration the continued impact of the coronavirus pandemic on governance:

Improvement areas identified for 2022/23	Agreed action
Review and update Officers' code of conduct and the process for capturing and response taken to declaration of interest, gifts and hospitality.	<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>Revised system to capture officer declaration of interests and gifts and hospitality</p> <p>Strategic HR Manager by 31/03/2023</p>
Workforce capacity and resilience and reliance on key positions	<p>Recruit vacant Senior Management Team positions i.e. Two Corporate Directors.</p> <p>CET / Strategic HR Manager, Leader & Director Communities by 31/07/2022.</p> <p>Review and update the workforce plan and coordinate an assessment with services.</p> <p>Strategic HR Manager by 30/09/2022</p> <p>Internal Audit review of workforce planning process.</p> <p>Chief Internal Auditor by 31/10/2022.</p> <p>New Ways of Working Project includes a work-stream developing new HR policies to support future work patterns</p> <p>Head of Customer, Communications & Marketing / Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services by 30/09/2022</p>
Review the Whistleblowing Policy	Update the policy capturing lessons learned from recent concerns raised.

Annual Governance Statement

Improvement areas identified for 2022/23	Agreed action
	Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services by 31/03/2023
Address exceptions, exemptions and variations from Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs)	Internal Audit will review progress in quarter 2, when the first follow up review is completed and findings will be reported to the next Governance & Audit committee.
Continuing budget pressures and uncertainty over funding. Also, address any actions arising from the review of the Financial Management Code	<p>Welsh Government provided multi-year indicative settlement figures in 2021/22 for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and we will lobby for this practice to continue.</p> <p>We reviewed the Medium Term Financial Strategy and will continue to review on an annual basis.</p> <p>Work on the following areas are continuing and will be rolled over to 2022/23:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and document complete Capital Process including SIG Terms of Reference, clear decision making, accounting and project management processes. • Develop a clear long-term capital strategy. • Monitor on-going impact of Covid on services. • Further develop the Budget Process to embed long term decision-making and consultation as core principles <p>Include Unearmarked Reserves figure in the Corporate Dashboard to compliment the annual outturn projections.</p>

[Caption; Areas of improvements for 2022/23 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 Jason McLellan, Leader of the Council

Signed

Dated

Name Graham Boase, Chief Executive

Signed

Dated

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Report to	Governance & Audit Committee
Date of meeting	08 June 2022
Lead Member / Officer	Nicola Kneale – Interim Head Business Improvement Modernisation
Report author	Bob Chowdhury – Chief Internal Auditor
Title	Internal Audit Charter & Strategy 2022-23

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with the Internal Audit Charter and Strategy for 2022-23. The Charter defines Internal Audit's purpose, authority and responsibility in line with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Strategy provides details of the proposed Internal Audit projects for the year that will allow the Chief Internal Auditor to provide an 'opinion' on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk and control during the year

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1 Local Authorities subject to the Account and Audit (Wales) Regulations must maintain an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of internal controls. The Charter has been updated to reflect that the Chief Internal Auditor's temporary responsibility for the Project Management Team has recently ended. In accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS), safeguards will continue for a period of time to maintain Internal Auditors' independence and objectivity.
- 2.2 The Strategy contains a risk-based internal audit plan that takes into account the PSIAS requirement to deliver an annual internal audit opinion and report

that the organisation can use to inform its governance statement. This Committee's terms of reference require it to consider internal audit's plans.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1 The Committee approves the Internal Audit Charter (Appendix 1) and the Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23 (Appendix 2)

4. Report details

- 4.1 The main changes to the Internal Audit Charter in Appendix 1 are included in the 'Positioning & Reporting Lines' section as follows:
- 4.2 There have been minor changes to the Charter around updating pronouns and the new Chief Internal Auditor qualifications.
- 4.3 The Internal Audit Strategy in Appendix 2 provides background to the internal Audit service as well as its proposed plan of work for the year based on an assessment of risk and consultation with services.
- 4.4 The proposed plan of work will allow the Chief Internal Auditor to provide an overall 'opinion' for the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2022-23 and inform the Annual Governance Statement. This Committee will receive regular information reports on progress.

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

- 5.1 There is no decision required with this report. There is no direct contribution to the Corporate Priorities, but some projects in the audit plan will review Corporate Priority areas and will provide assurance on their delivery.

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

- 6.1 Not applicable - there is no decision or costs attached to this report.

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

7.1 This report does not require a decision or proposal for change, so there is no impact on people who share protected characteristics.

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

8.1 The Chief Internal Auditor has consulted with Corporate Directors, Section 151 Officer, senior management and their management teams.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 There are no financial implications attached to this report.

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

10.1 Failure to deliver an adequate level of internal audit may mean that the Chief Internal Auditor cannot provide an annual 'opinion' on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk and control during the year. This would potentially lead to a significant governance issue being raised in the Council's 'annual governance statement' at the end of the financial year.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1 Not applicable - there is no decision required with this report.

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Internal Audit Charter 2021-22

Internal Audit Charter

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Internal Audit Charter

Introduction

This Charter defines the purpose, authority and responsibility of internal audit. The Internal Audit Charter establishes the internal audit activity's position within the Council; authorises access to records; and defines the scope of internal audit activities.

All UK public sector internal audit service providers work to the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS).

The PSIAS use generic terms that, in Denbighshire County Council's case, are translated as:

PSIAS	DCC
Chief Audit Executive	Chief Internal Auditor
Senior Management	Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
The Board	Governance & Audit Committee

The PSIAS require the Chief Internal Auditor to develop and maintain an up to date Internal Audit Charter to establish:

- Internal Audit's purpose, mission and position within the Council
- The Chief Internal Auditor's functional reporting relationship with the CEO and Governance & Audit Committee
- Authorisation for Internal Audit to access records, personnel and physical properties relevant to the performance of its work
- The scope of Internal Audit's work, including the nature of its assurance role, consultancy services and its involvement in anti-fraud and corruption work
- Arrangements for resourcing the Internal Audit service
- Arrangements for avoiding conflicts of interest within the Internal Audit service

The Chief Internal Auditor will review the Charter each year and present it to the Governance & Audit Committee for final approval.

Internal Audit Charter

Our Purpose

The PSIAS include mandatory elements of the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF):

- Definition of Internal Auditing
- Core Principles
- Code of Ethics
- International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

Definition of internal auditing:

“Internal auditing is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve an organisation’s operations.

It helps an organisation accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic, disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes”. (*PSIAS*)

Within the Council, Internal Audit is one of the cornerstones of effective governance. Our annual internal audit opinion and other reports are a key element of the framework of assurance that is used to complete the Annual Governance Statement. We give assurance to elected members and management, highlighting areas for improvement.

Our role is a unique one, providing effective challenge and acting as a catalyst for positive change and continual improvement in governance in all its aspects. Our role is particularly important when the Council is facing uncertain and challenging times.

Our Mission

“To enhance and protect organisational value by providing risk-based and objective assurance, advice and insight” (*PSIAS*)

Internal Audit Charter

Our Objectives

- Provide independent assurance and advice to management and elected members on risk management, governance and internal control
- Develop and promote our role to make a significant contribution to modernise the Council and deliver efficiencies and improve services for our customers
- Add value in all areas of our work, providing excellent service to our customers

Code of Ethics

All members of the Internal Audit service make an annual declaration that they agree to comply with the IIA Code of Ethics as follows:

Ethic	Principle
Integrity	The integrity of internal auditors establishes trust and this provides the basis for relying on their judgement.
Objectivity	Internal auditors demonstrate the highest level of professional objectivity in gathering, evaluating and communicating information about the activity or process being examined. Internal auditors make a balanced assessment of all the relevant circumstances and are not unduly influenced by their own interest or by others in forming judgements.
Confidentiality	Internal auditors respect the value and ownership of information they receive and do not disclose information without appropriate authority unless there is a legal or professional obligation to do so.
Competency	Internal auditors apply the knowledge, skills and experience needed in the performance of internal audit services.

In addition, our annual declaration states that we will declare any interests we may have in any services that we review; and have read the PSIAS, Code of Ethics, Council's Code of Conduct for Officers and have due regard to the Nolan Principles of Public Life.

Internal Audit Charter

Core Principles for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing

Our internal audit approach is underpinned by the following Core Principles:

- Demonstrate integrity
- Demonstrate competence and due professional care
- Is objective and free from undue influence (independent)
- Aligns with the strategies, objectives, and risks of the organisation
- Is appropriately positioned and adequately resourced
- Demonstrates quality and continuous improvement
- Communicates effectively
- Provides risk-based assurance
- Is insightful, proactive, and future-focused
- Promotes organisational improvement

In addition, the Chief Internal Auditor will be appropriately experienced and hold a professional qualification (CCAB or CMIIA) and is responsible for:

- Developing an annual internal audit plan based on an understanding of the significant risks to which the Council is exposed.
- Submitting the plan to the Corporate Governance & Audit Committee and Senior Leadership Team for review and agreement.
- Implementing the plan and reporting any amendments that may occur.
- Ensuring compliance with the Standards.
- Developing and maintaining co-operative relationships with management, other internal auditors, external auditors and other review bodies to ensure the most effective audit coverage is achieved.
- Maintaining a professional internal audit team with sufficient knowledge, skills and experience to carry out the plan.
- Providing an annual opinion as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's control environment including any issues which should be considered for inclusion in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

Internal Audit Charter

Internal Audit Positioning and Reporting Lines

The Chief Internal Auditor has a functional reporting line to the Interim Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation, but also has direct access on internal audit issues to the Council's S151 Officer, the CEO, Cabinet, Governance & Audit Committee and Scrutiny Committees.

These extended reporting lines provide Internal Audit with sufficient independence of the activities that it reviews to enable our auditors to perform their duties objectively, allowing us to make impartial and effective professional judgements and raise issues for improvement.

The Interim Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation reviews the Chief Internal Auditor's performance with input and feedback from the CEO and Chair of the Governance & Audit Committee. This ensures that the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion and scope of work cannot be limited or affected by his functional line management position within the Council.

Governance & Audit Committee monitor the effectiveness of Internal Audit's activities. It should be involved in the selection process when/if an internal audit service provider changes, the appointment or termination of the Chief Internal Auditor and in ensuring that internal audit is adequately resourced.

The Chief Internal Auditor will ensure that the Internal Audit service remains free from all conditions that threaten the ability of Internal Auditors to perform their work in an unbiased manner. Internal Auditors have no direct operational responsibilities or authority over any of the activities audited. In the exceptional circumstance where this is required, the approval of the Governance & Audit Committee will be obtained and safeguards put in place to protect our independence and objectivity.

Authority

The Council's Financial Regulations stipulate Internal Audit's rights of access, providing the service with authority to:

Internal Audit Charter

- Access all Council premises at reasonable times
- Access all assets, records, documents, correspondence and systems
- Receive any information and explanation considered necessary concerning any matter made under consideration
- Require any employee of the Council to account for cash or any other Council asset under his or her control
- Access records belonging to third parties, such as contractors, when required.

The Chief Internal Auditor attends Governance & Audit Committee and will meet independently with the Chair of Governance & Audit Committee periodically and has right of access to all Governance & Audit Committee members.

Scope of Internal Audit Activity

The Internal Audit service is very proactive and innovative, constantly aiming to improve. We have a customer-focused approach to audit planning, project scoping and service delivery, involving elected members, senior management and operational staff.

Our Internal Audit Assurance Plan links closely to the Council's Governance Assurance Framework, taking account of other assurances that the Council may receive, internal or external, to prevent duplication and co-ordinate regulatory work. It also takes account of discussions with senior management.

Our work provides a risk-based approach that allows the Chief Internal Auditor to form and evidence his opinion on the control environment to support the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

Internal Audit is not responsible for managing the risk of fraud – this lies with the Council's senior management. Internal Auditors have sufficient knowledge to evaluate the risk of fraud and the manner in which it is managed by the Council, but are not expected to have the expertise of a person whose primary responsibility is detecting and investigating fraud.

The Council's Financial Regulations and investigation procedures require managers to inform the Chief Internal Auditor of any suspected financial irregularities. The Chief Internal Auditor retains the right to decide on an appropriate course of action, which may mean a

Internal Audit Charter

joint investigation or investigation by the service. All investigation reports should be sent to the Chief Internal Auditor for inclusion in a report on fraud investigations within the Internal Audit Annual Report. We will also consider any control issues identified in the fraud investigation in terms of the impact on current and future internal audit activity.

Internal Audit occasionally provide guidance and advice e.g. on new systems or may help to develop new processes using our specific skills. Services may also occasionally ask us to carry out specific projects on a consultancy basis for a fee. The Chief Internal Auditor will accommodate such requests only where there is sufficient capacity to carry out the work to the required standard. We make it clear from the outset that we are working on a consultancy basis and are not giving audit assurance on these occasions.

The PSIAS permit assurance services to be provided where internal audit has previously performed consulting services. This will only be the case where the consulting/advisory work completed has not impaired objectivity. Individual objectivity will be managed when assigning resources to the engagement.

Resources

The Governance & Audit Committee has the responsibility to ensure the internal audit function is sufficiently resourced and has the required skills and competencies required to meet the Council's audit needs.

The service structure remains the same, so the team continues to be 6FTE. This comprises of the Chief Internal Auditor, one Principal Auditor, two Senior Auditors and two Auditors.

We have a well-qualified and experienced team, mainly following the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors qualification route (CIA) at Senior Auditor level and Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) for the Auditor role. The Chief Internal Auditor holds the qualification of Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountant (CIPFA).

In accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Chief Internal Auditor will advise senior management and the Governance & Audit Committee of any changes to

Internal Audit Charter

resources that are likely to affect the completion of the planned work which may impact the ability to provide the necessary assurance.

Internal Audit Plan

At least annually, the Chief Internal Auditor will submit to senior management and the Governance & Audit Committee an internal audit plan for review and approval. The internal audit plan will consist of a list of audit priorities and resource requirements for the next financial year. The Chief Internal Auditor will communicate the impact of resource limitations and significant interim changes to senior management and the Governance & Audit Committee.

The internal audit plan will be developed based on a prioritisation of the audit universe using a risk-based methodology, including input of senior management and the Governance & Audit Committee. The Chief Internal Auditor will review and adjust the plan, as necessary, in response to changes in the organisation's business, risks, operations, systems, and controls. Any significant deviation from the approved internal audit plan will be communicated to senior management and the Governance & Audit Committee through the Internal Audit Update Report.

Reporting and Monitoring

A written report will be prepared and issued by the Internal Auditor following the conclusion of each internal audit engagement and will be distributed as appropriate. Internal audit results will also be communicated to the Governance & Audit Committee.

The internal audit report will include management's response and corrective action taken or to be taken in regard to the specific findings. Management's response will be incorporated into an action plan which will include a timetable for anticipated completion of action to be taken and an explanation for any corrective action that will not be implemented.

The internal audit activity will follow-up all low assurance and no assurance areas and report the results to the Governance & Audit Committee. A representative from the Service

Internal Audit Charter

will be asked by the Committee to attend to explain the action taken to address identified weaknesses.

The Chief Internal Auditor will periodically report to senior management and the Governance & Audit Committee on the internal audit activity's purpose, authority, and responsibility, as well as performance relative to its plan. Reporting will also include significant risk exposures and control issues, including fraud risks, governance issues, and other matters needed or requested by senior management and the Governance & Audit Committee.

Quality Assurance and Improvement

The Chief Internal Auditor maintains the quality assurance and improvement programme which covers all aspects of Internal Audit's activities. The programme includes internal and external assessments to evaluate Internal Audit's conformance with the Mission Statement, the Core Principles of Internal Auditing and the International Standards and application of the Code of Ethics.

Internal Assessments

The Accounts and Audit Regulations (Wales) 2014 places a statutory obligation on the Council to conduct a review of effectiveness of internal audit at least once a year. This comprises of:

- Ongoing monitoring of the performance of the internal audit activity
- Periodic self-assessment of the internal audit activity against the PSIAS.

External Assessments

PSIAS require an External Assessment to be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor from outside the Council.

An external assessment was carried out in 2017-18 on a peer review basis organised through the Welsh Chief Auditors Group. The results were reported to Corporate Governance & Audit Committee in November 2018 which concluded that:

Internal Audit Charter

“The overall opinion following the external validation of Denbighshire County Council Internal Audit Service is that it generally conforms with the PSIAS. Some opportunities for further improvement have been identified as shown in this report but none of the items of partial or non-conformance are considered to be a significant failure to meet the Standards”.

Actions to address items of partial conformance have been completed as reported to the Governance & Audit Committee.

Any known instances of non-conformance with the PSIAS will be reported to the Governance & Audit Committee and any significant deviations will be considered for inclusion in the Council’s Annual Governance Statement.

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

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Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Introduction

The Internal Audit Service is an independent and objective internal team that provides assurance and advice to all levels of management and elected members on the quality of operations within the Council. We particularly focus on governance, risk management and control arrangements.

Internal Audit will continue to deliver its services in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the Internal Audit Charter which sets out its purpose, authority and principle responsibilities.

The Internal Audit Strategy for 2022/23 aims to support the council in making the best use of its resources and takes into account strategic risks and the corporate priorities. The internal audit plan and the work of internal audit must focus on the things that matter to the organisation, and the opinions and improvement suggestions that internal audit provide must help the organisation achieve its objectives and be valued by stakeholders.

This Internal Audit Strategy contains the proposed internal audit activity for the year and gives an outline scope of coverage for each area of work. The plan must retain sufficient flexibility to allow us to react to changes in the risk environment. Any changes will be agreed with management and reported to the Governance & Audit Committee.

The plan of work provides the council with objective opinions on the effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, governance and control arrangements. These are key elements of the evidence which informs the:

- Internal Audit Annual Report; and
- Annual Governance Statement.

The Internal Audit structure comprises six full-time equivalent (FTE) members of staff, comprising the Chief Internal Auditor, 1 Principal Auditor, 2 Senior Auditors and 2 Auditors (1 Auditor is currently seconded to Senior Auditor until 31 October 2022). The equates to 781 days available for productive assurance work. The number of productive days does not include "non-productive" days such as annual leave, training, illness, management (e.g. 121s) and team meetings.

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

High Level Audit Plan

The Audit Plan 2022/23 takes 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 2021-22

The plan recognises the need for additional assurance that controls are effective following the Covid-19 emergency. The plan remains flexible to ensure that it reflects any emerging or changes to risks and priorities of the Council. It will be regularly reviewed with services, and updated as necessary, to ensure it remains valid and appropriate so that internal audit resource is deployed effectively. As a minimum, the plan will be reviewed after six months.

The table on page 7 lists the priority audit areas for the year.

Counter Fraud and Corruption Work including NFI

Counter fraud arrangements are a high priority for the Council and assist in the protection of public funds and accountability. As per the Internal Audit Charter, Internal Audit is not responsible for managing the risk of fraud – this lies with the Council's senior management.

Internal Audit will continue to investigate instances of potential fraud and irregularities referred to it by management, and will also carry out pro-active counter fraud and corruption testing of systems considered to be most at risk of fraud. This is informed by CIPFA's 'Code of Practice on managing the risk of fraud and corruption'. Notable areas of fraud nationally include: Housing Benefit, Council Tax, Housing and Tenancy, Procurement, Insurance, Abuse of Position, Blue Badges and Direct Payments (Social Care).

Audit Wales facilitates a national data matching exercise (National Fraud Initiative – NFI) every two years. Work on the 2020/21 exercise is nearing completion; Internal Audit

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

coordinates with relevant Council services to ensure system reports are extracted accurately and on time, that data matches are reviewed and resulting action is taken as necessary. Progress will be reported to Governance & Audit Committee periodically as part of the Internal Audit Update report.

Internal Audit captures details of referrals where there are allegations/suspicious of fraud or corruption taking place and this is reported to the Governance & Audit Committee as part of the Internal Audit Update Report. An Annual Fraud Report will be included as part of the Internal Audit Annual Report to summarise and reflect on the work that has taken place during 2021/22.

Partnership working with other auditors

We continue to work to develop effective partnership working arrangements with other local authority audit services. We participate in audit networks, locally and nationally, which provide for a beneficial exchange of information and practices. This often improves the effectiveness and efficiency of the audit process, through avoiding instances of “re-inventing the wheel”, particularly in new areas of work which has been covered in other authorities. We continue to maintain an effective working relationship with the Council’s external auditors, Audit Wales, and meet regularly to exchange information and minimise potential duplication.

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Proposed Audit Priorities for 2022-23

This year's audit plan has been developed through discussions with senior and middle management, and aligned with the corporate priorities and corporate and service risks registers and the council's risk appetite. It is also informed by previous audit results, horizon scanning and current themes such as Climate Change and Covid-19. For 2021/22, key considerations for setting the plan include:

- ongoing covid-19 response, including the requirements for assurance over grants;
- financial challenges and related budget savings required to be delivered by the council;
- organisational changes including increased partnership working and major projects;
- organisational resilience and sustainability including workforce planning.

All audit areas identified as high priority within the plan will be undertaken together with annual audits of financial areas for the Section 151 Officer with particular focus on key changes and Covid-19 grants. Audit areas rated as medium priority will be kept under review and any changes or emerging risks will be captured and the audit plan updated as necessary.

The following list shows the current priority projects for 2022-23 that has been agreed between the CIA and each service management team and directors. The Governance & Audit Committee will continue to receive a regular progress update on Internal Audit work actually undertaken, which will include a list of upcoming work from the project priority schedule.

A summary brief for each audit area is listed in the table below, detailed scope of work will be developed and agreed with management prior to the start of each review. This is to ensure that key risks to the operation or function can be considered during the review.

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Audit Project	Audit Brief
Risk Management	Review will focus on the corporate risks in the Corporate Risk Register that have not been covered elsewhere in the Audit Plan; with a specific review of the effectiveness of the mitigating controls and further actions specified against each risk.
Fostering	Provide assurance over the controls in place to support the robust management of the fostering service including payments to foster carers and compliance with good practice and relevant legislation. Also review the embedding and benefits gained from being part of the Foster Wales national network.
Looked after children – Independent Reviewing Officers	Corporate risk – safeguarding. The role and responsibilities of the independent reviewing officers in caring for looked after children. Review the effectiveness of the IRO service with consideration to strategic and managerial oversight, performance monitoring and reporting.
Programme & Project Management	Corporate risk. Review of a sample of key council programmes or projects to give assurance over governance, risks management, and controls.
Financial Systems	Annual assurance for the S151 Officer. Focus on Covid-19 grants and impacts.
Revenues & Benefits	Annual Assurance for the S151 Officer. Focus on Universal Credit and Covid-19 impact and the council's response. To provide assurance around how Revs and Benefits service is handed back from Civic to the Council.
Liberty Protection Safeguards	Support/advise the Council on its response to new Liberty Protection Safeguards (DOLS/DIDS).

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Audit Project	Audit Brief
Mediquip	<p>Review arrangements over Mediquip to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contractual agreements and authorisation • risk management • management and supervision • performance management • financial arrangements
Court of Protection	<p>Review to cover the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • governance and procedures • management of client finances including investments • fees • access controls • performance monitoring and reporting
Community Equipment Service	<p>Review to cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance arrangements over partnership • Procurement – compliance with financial regulations and contract procedure rules, • financial management and monitoring to include pooled budget, • inventory, stock of equipment, and equipment servicing and • compliance with GDPR.
Commercial Waste	<p>Linked to corporate priority – Environment. Focused review of key processes including contract management and income collection.</p>
Denbighshire Leisure Limited (DLL)	<p>Service Level Agreement to provide internal audit service to DLL.</p>
Youth Service	<p>Linked to corporate priority – young people. Review effectiveness of the council's arrangements and its response to the recent WG's Youth Work Strategy.</p>

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Audit Project	Audit Brief
Highways Maintenance	Linked to corporate priority – connected communities. Review implementation of the Highways Code of Practice: "Well-Managed Highways Infrastructure".
Procurement – pre-tender stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review compliance with legislation, financial regulations and contract procedure rules, • project planning & appraisal • seeking quotations and invitations to tender • Effectiveness of community benefits hub • Environmental and carbon considerations
Partnership Arrangements	<p>Review to inform the Annual Governance Statement to assess adequacy of corporate arrangements to manage key partnership risks and for a sample of individual partnership arrangements review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance arrangements • Achievement of expected outcomes • Data protection arrangements • Monitoring of financial management • Funding agreements and monitoring arrangements where grants involved.
Cefndy Healthcare	<p>Service risk – review impact of Brexit and key risks. Scope to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic planning • Key controls – financial, policy and procedures. • Procurement & contract management – compliance with Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations. Consider ethical procurement and supply chain resilience. • Legal & regulatory compliance – also Brexit considerations • Customer service
Workforce Planning	Linked to corporate and service risk around capacity and resilience of key roles.

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Audit Project	Audit Brief
Tackling Poverty	New corporate priority relating to reducing deprivation. Review to cover governance arrangements including roles and responsibilities, strategies and plans.
School Audits	Reviews of schools providing assurance over: governance, financial management, safeguarding and other key areas.
Asset Management	Asset management over property including acquisition and disposal process and authorisations.
IT Asset Management	Evaluate controls in place over the Council's technology assets including, computers, mobile devices, corporate network and key business applications. Review to also consider how ICT maintains the ICT assets to support the council's operations.
Health and Wellbeing	Impact of Covid-19 on staff health and wellbeing and organisational response. To include a review of the Occupational Health service.
Flood Risk Strategy	Review corporate arrangements to manage flood risk, scope to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flood risk management strategy and operational plans - Coordination between services and partners - Systems and processes for identifying potential flood risk areas
Insurance	Evaluate controls to ensure the council has appropriate insurance in place to cover key risks associated with its activities and responsibilities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insurance coverage - Insurance renewals - Claims handling - Assessment of contractor liability for claims where applicable - Service charge for insurance cover

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Audit Project	Audit Brief
Planning Applications	<p>Review effectiveness of key controls in place around the processing of planning applications to ensure that applications are assessed appropriately and objectively and decisions are made in line with delegated officer responsibilities.</p> <p>Proactive counter-fraud review of the controls in place to mitigate the risk of fraud or conflicts of interests impacting the planning application process.</p>
Post 16 Education Grant	Assurance over the grant claim preparation and authorisation process.
Housing Support Grant	Assurance on the preparation of the grant claim and authorisation process.
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Grant Certification	Annual grant certification work on behalf of the AONB.
Homelessness	Review the effective controls in place for assessing people declared homeless and placing them into accommodation.
Blue Badges	<p>This service has not been reviewed for several years and the service feel a review around the following areas would add benefit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation and guidance • Controls and procedures in place for recording and processing claims
Library fees & charges	<p>Review to cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current fees and charges in operation within libraries • Proposed new charging policy
Cash Collection	Review corporate arrangements in place for cash collection and current banking arrangements
ALN	Following on from previous review, advisory/assurance work on implementation of the ALN, this year we will undertake sample test around the controls and processes.

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Internal Audit Performance Monitoring

Internal Audit will continue to use the following performance measures from 1 April 2022 to measure its customer service and its efficiency and effectiveness in following up action plans and ensuring that agreed improvement is delivered by services following an internal audit review.

Service Standards	Target
Internal Audit will discuss, agree and send services the Internal Audit Project Scoping Document before it commences work.	100%
At the conclusion of its work, Internal Audit will hold a closing meeting with all relevant people to discuss the outcome of its work, and then send services a draft report as soon as possible after that meeting.	Avg. Days (less than 10)
Internal Audit will issue a final audit report as soon as possible after agreeing the report and its action plan with services.	Avg. Days (less than 5)
Using performance management system (Verto), Internal Audit will monitor and report on the % of agreed improvement actions that have been implemented by services to show that Internal Audit's service is effective in helping to deliver improvement.	75%

Internal Audit Strategy 2022-23

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS)

PSIAS 1312 states that “External assessments must be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team from outside the organisation. The CAE [Chief Audit Executive, which is Denbighshire’s case is currently the CIA] must discuss with the board:

- The form and frequency of external assessments.
- The qualifications and independence of the assessor or assessment team, including any potential conflict of interest.”

This external assessment was completed in 2017-18 by the arrangement of the Welsh Chief Auditors Group through a peer review by a local authority Internal Audit Service. Denbighshire’s assessment was carried out by Gwynedd County Council’s Internal Audit Service and reported that Denbighshire Internal Audit Services:

“...generally conforms with the PSIAS. Some opportunities for further improvement have been identified ... but none of the items of partial or non-conformance are considered to be a significant failure to meet the Standards”.

The CIA has updated the self-assessment to capture the partial conformance items raised in the external assessment. The Quality Assurance Improvement Plan was reported to Governance & Audit Committee in November 2018 and an update was provided as part of the Annual Internal Audit Report in June 2019, July 2020 and June 2021. A further update will be included as part of the Annual Internal Audit Report in June 2022.

The Internal Audit Charter has been updated to capture the requirements highlighted in the report and a review of Ethics & Culture has recently been completed which means that all improvement actions arising from the external assessment have been addressed. A further update will be provided to the Governance & Audit Committee in June 2022 as part of the Annual Internal Audit Report.

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Report to	Corporate Governance Committee
Date of meeting	7 June 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Gwilym Bury, Audit Wales
Report author	Nicola Kneale, Joint Acting Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation.
Title	Audit Wales' Audit Plan 2022-23

1. What is the report about?

1.1. Audit Wales's Audit Plan for 2022-23

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. To inform Corporate Governance of the key topics that Audit Wales will cover in their work on Denbighshire County Council in 2022-23.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That Corporate Governance notes the plan and has the opportunity to ask questions to understand the context and the focus for the proposals.

4. Report details

4.1. Ahead of each financial year Audit Wales issues an audit plan for the areas that it will focus on for each local authority. The plan is developed in conjunction with Denbighshire County Council and is focused on high risk areas. The plan was recently discussed with SLT. Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales were also present at that meeting.

4.2. The attached Audit Plan sets out the audit areas, namely:

- Financial Statements (a statutory function of Audit Wales). Details of the scope of this area of work can be found on pages 6-7 of the attached.
- Performance Audit, to include focus on Unscheduled Care; Arrangements for

the Council's Support Functions, and one other to be determined. See p9 for more detail.

4.3. The in-year timing detail has yet to be worked out, but Audit Wales will inform Denbighshire County Council of it plans through regular meetings with the Acting Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation. It should be noted that the plan is flexible, acknowledging that it is subject to the risk of Covid-19 impacting on timescales.

4.4. All reports on the above topics will be shared with Corporate Governance & Audit Committee as they are available.

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

5.1. The results of these audits will help ensure the Council operates effectively across various functions, including in relation to its corporate priorities.

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

6.1. The proposed fee is £333,372 (see p11 for detail).

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

7.1. This is a report on a work plan, therefore a well-being impact assessment is not required.

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

8.1. This has been discussed with SLT, when Audit Wales, Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales were present as a regulatory group to discuss areas of risk in the Council to enable development of this plan.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. The annual audit is a statutory provision. The fees are an existing budget commitment for the authority.

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

10.1. There are no risks associated with this plan.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. No decision required. This report is for information purposes.

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2022 Audit Plan – Denbighshire County Council

Audit year: 2022

Date issued: March 2022

Document reference: 2879A2022

This document is a draft version pending further discussions with the audited and inspected body. Information may not yet have been fully verified and should not be widely distributed.

This document has been prepared as part of work performed in accordance with statutory functions.

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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

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2022 Audit Plan

About this document

- 1 This document sets out the work I plan to undertake during 2022 to discharge my statutory responsibilities as your external auditor and to fulfil my obligations under the Code of Audit Practice.

My duties

- 2 I complete work each year to meet the following duties.

Audit of financial statements

- 3 Each year I audit Denbighshire County Council's (the Council) financial statements to make sure that public money is being properly accounted for.

Value for money

- 4 The Council has to put in place arrangements to get value for money for the resources it uses, and I have to be satisfied that it has done this.

Sustainable development principle

- 5 The Council needs to comply with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet their well-being objectives. The Auditor General must assess the extent to which they are doing this.

Impact of COVID-19

- 6 The COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the United Kingdom and the work of public sector organisations.
- 7 While Wales is currently at Coronavirus Alert Level 0, Audit Wales will continue to monitor the position and will discuss the implications of any changes in the position with your officers.

Audit of financial statements

- 8 It is my responsibility to issue a certificate and report on the financial statements. This includes:
 - an opinion on the on the 'truth and fairness' of the Council's group financial statements for the financial year ended 31 March 2022; and
 - an assessment as to whether the Council's Narrative Report and Annual Governance Statement is prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant

guidance and is consistent with the financial statements and with my knowledge of the Council.

- 9 In addition to my responsibilities for auditing the Council's financial statements, I also have responsibility for:
- certifying a return to the Welsh Government which provides information about the Council to support preparation of Whole of Government Accounts;
 - responding to questions and objections about the accounts from local electors (additional fees will be charged for this work, if necessary);
 - the audit of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Committee; and
 - the certification of a number of grant claims and returns as agreed with the funding bodies.
- 10 I do not seek to obtain absolute assurance on the truth and fairness of the financial statements and related notes but adopt a concept of materiality. My aim is to identify material misstatements, that is, those that might result in a reader of the accounts being misled. The levels at which I judge such misstatements to be material will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee prior to completion of the audit.
- 11 Any misstatements below a trivial level (set at 5% of materiality) I judge as not requiring consideration by those charged with governance and therefore will not report them.
- 12 There have been no limitations imposed on me in planning the scope of this audit.
- 13 I will also report by exception on a number of matters which are set out in more detail in our Statement of Responsibilities, along with further information about my work.

Audit of financial statements risks

14 The following table sets out the significant risks I have identified for the audit of the Council.

Exhibit 1: financial statement audit risks

This table summarises the key financial statement audit risks identified at the planning stage of the audit.

Audit risk	Proposed audit response
Significant risks	
<p>The risk of management override of controls is present in all entities. Due to the unpredictable way in which such override could occur, it is viewed as a significant risk [ISA 240.31-33].</p>	<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • test the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments made in preparing the financial statements; • review accounting estimates for biases; and • evaluate the rationale for any significant transactions outside the normal course of business.
Other audit risks	
<p>Impact of COVID-19 Although COVID-19 restrictions have now been removed, there have been ongoing pressures on staff resources and of remote working that may impact on the preparation, audit and publication of accounts. There is a risk that the quality of the accounts and supporting working papers, eg around estimates and valuations, may be compromised leading to an increased incidence of errors. Quality monitoring arrangements may be compromised due to timing issues and/or resource availability.</p>	<p>We will discuss your closedown process and quality monitoring arrangements with the accounts preparation team and monitor the accounts preparation process. We will help to identify areas where there may be gaps in arrangements.</p>

Audit risk	Proposed audit response
Other audit risks	
<p>The COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant impact on the risks of material misstatement and the shape and approach to my audit. The Welsh Government has made available various funding streams to the authority. In some cases, these monies provide financial support to the authority itself. In other cases, the funds have been administered by the authority, making payments to third parties on behalf of the Welsh Government. Payments have been made available through a number of different schemes over the course of 2021-22 and the amounts involved are material to the accounts.</p> <p>Examples of audit risks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorrect accounting treatment for COVID-19 funding ie principal or agency arrangements • Fraud/error risks • Potential year-end valuation uncertainty • Estimation of accrued annual leave provisions 	<p>We will review the funding streams received from the Welsh Government and confirm the appropriate accounting treatment with the authority.</p>
<p>Asset valuations</p> <p>Accounting for Property, Plant and Equipment and Intangible Assets continued to be one of the most challenging areas of the accounts and gives rise to most of our audit findings.</p> <p>In light of the COVID restrictions that were in place throughout 2021-22 and uncertainties over market values for assets since the start of the pandemic, there is a risk that the carrying value of assets reported in the accounts may be materially different to the current value of assets as at 31 March 2022. In particular, this may be the case where assets have been valued on a rolling basis and not as at the financial year-end.</p>	<p>We will review the Council's asset valuation programme to establish when individual groups of assets were valued and seek to confirm that valuations carried out earlier than as at 31 March 2022 are not materially different to the current value of assets as at the year-end.</p>

Performance audit

- 15 In addition to my Audit of Financial Statements I also carry out a programme of performance audit work to discharge my duties as Auditor General as set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 in relation to value for money and sustainable development.
- 16 In response to the pandemic, I adopted a flexible approach to my performance audit work both in terms of topic coverage and methodology. This enabled me to respond to the fast-moving external environment and provide more real-time feedback in a range of formats.
- 17 For 2022-23, I intend to continue this approach to help enable my work to be responsive and timely, and where possible to share learning more quickly. As part of this approach, I anticipate that a significant proportion of my local performance audit programme will continue to be delivered through the Assurance and Risk Assessment Project, that will be ongoing throughout the year
- 18 Given the high degree of commonality in the risks facing councils I also intend to deliver a number of thematic projects examining risks common to all councils.
- 19 During 2020-21, I consulted public bodies and other stakeholders on how I will approach my duties in respect of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 from 2020-2025.
- 20 In March 2021, I wrote to the public bodies designated under the Act setting out my intentions, which include a). carrying out specific examinations of how public bodies have set their well-being objectives and b). integrating my sustainable development principle examinations of steps to meet well-being objectives with my national and local audit programmes.
- 21 My auditors are liaising with Denbighshire County Council to agree the most appropriate time to examine the setting of well-being objectives.
- 22 The examination of steps to meet well-being objectives will be conducted as part of work set out in this audit plan and successive audit plans, leading up to my statutory report under the Act in 2025.
- 23 For 2022-23, my performance audit work at Denbighshire County Council is set out below.

Exhibit 2: Performance Audit Programme 2022-23

This table summarises the performance audit programme for 2022-23

Performance audit programme	Brief description
Assurance and Risk Assessment	<p>Project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources and acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle.</p> <p>At Denbighshire County Council the project is likely to focus in particular on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial position • Capital programme management • Use of performance information – with a focus on service user feedback and outcomes • Setting of well-being objectives
Thematic review – unscheduled care	<p>We intend to undertake a cross-sector review focusing on the flow of patients out of hospital. This review will consider how Denbighshire County Council is working with its partners to address the risks associated with the provision of social care to support hospital discharge, as well as prevent hospital admission. The work will also consider what steps are being taken to provide medium to longer-term solutions.</p>
Thematic review (to be confirmed)	<p>To be confirmed following the consultation referred to in paragraph 24 below.</p>
Local review	<p>Arrangements for the Council's corporate support functions.</p>

- 24 In March 2022, I published a [consultation](#) inviting views to inform our future audit work programme for 2022-23 and beyond. In particular, it considers topics that may be taken forward through our national value for money examinations and studies and/or through local audit work across multiple NHS, central government and local government bodies. As we develop and deliver our future work programme, we will be putting into practice key themes in our new five-year strategy, namely:
- the delivery of a strategic, dynamic, and high-quality audit programme; supported by
 - a targeted and impactful approach to communicating and influencing.
- 25 The possible areas of focus for future audit work that we set out in the consultation were framed in the context of three key themes from our [Picture of Public Services](#) analysis in autumn 2021, namely: a changing world; the ongoing pandemic; and transforming service delivery. We also invited views on possible areas for follow-up work.
- 26 We will provide updates on the performance audit programme through our regular updates to those charged with governance.

Certification of grant claims and returns

- 27 I have also been requested to undertake certification work on the Council's grant claims, which I anticipate will include Housing Benefits, Teachers' Pensions, Non-Domestic Rates, Social Care Workforce Development Plan and Pooled Budget returns.

Statutory audit functions

- 28 In addition to the audit of the accounts, I have statutory responsibilities to receive questions and objections to the accounts from local electors. These responsibilities are set out in the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004:
- Section 30 Inspection of documents and questions at audit; and
 - Section 31 Right to make objections at audit.
- 29 As this work is reactive, I have made no allowance in the fee table below. If I do receive questions or objections, I will discuss potential audit fees at the time.

Fee, audit team and timetable

- 30 My fees and planned timescales for completion of the audit are based on the following assumptions:
- the financial statements are provided in accordance with a timescale to be agreed taking into account the impact of COVID-19, to the quality expected and have been subject to a robust quality assurance review;
 - information provided to support the financial statements is in accordance with the agreed audit deliverables document;

- appropriate facilities are provided to enable my audit team to deliver the audit in an efficient manner;
- all appropriate officials will be available during the audit;
- you have all the necessary controls and checks in place to enable the Responsible Financial Officer to provide all the assurances that I require in the Letter of Representation addressed to me; and
- Internal Audit's planned programme of work is complete and management has responded to issues that may have affected the financial statements.

31 If I do receive questions or objections, I will discuss potential audit fees at the time.

Fee

32 As set out in our Fee Scheme 2022-23, our fee rates for 2022-23 have increased by 3.7% as a result of the need to continually invest in audit quality and in response to increasing cost pressures.

33 The estimated fee for 2022 is set out in **Exhibit 3**. This represents a 3.2% increase compared to your actual 2020 fee.

Exhibit 3: audit fee

This table sets out the proposed audit fee for 2022, by area of audit work, alongside the actual audit fee for last year.

Audit area	Proposed fee (£) ¹	Actual fee last year (£)
Audit of accounts ²	184,702	178,234
Performance audit work ³	99,148	95,270
Grant certification work ⁴	48,333	48,333
Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB ⁵	1,189	1,134
Total fee	333,372	322,971

34 Planning will be ongoing, and changes to my programme of audit work, and therefore my fee, may be required if any key new risks emerge. I shall make no changes without first discussing them with the Council.

35 Further information can be found in my [Fee Scheme 2022-23](#).

¹ Notes: The fees shown in this document are exclusive of VAT, which is not charged to you.

² Payable November 2021 to October 2022.

³ Payable April 2022 to March 2023.

⁴ Payable as work is undertaken.

⁵ Payable October 2022.

Audit team

36 The main members of my team, together with their contact details, are summarised in **Exhibit 4**.

Exhibit 4: my audit team

This table lists the members of the local audit team and their contact details.

Name	Role	Contact number	E-mail address
Matthew Edwards	Engagement Director	02920 320663	matthew.edwards@audit.wales
Mike Whiteley	Audit Manager (Financial Audit)	02920 829389	mike.whiteley@audit.wales
David Williams	Audit Lead (Financial Audit)	07812 670234	david.williams@audit.wales
Jeremy Evans	Audit Manager (Performance Audit)	07825 052861	jeremy.evans@audit.wales
Gwilym Bury	Audit Lead (Performance Audit)	02920 320500	gwilym.bury@audit.wales

- 37 The only known threats to independence that I need to bring to your attention relate to Matthew Edwards, (the Engagement Director) and a team member, as both have a relative employed by the Council. As a result, they will not be involved in any work in relation to the relevant services and will only be permitted following a risk assessment.
- 38 I can confirm that there are no other known threats to the independence of my team members. In addition, I am not aware of any potential conflicts of interest that I need to bring to your attention.

Timetable

- 39 The key milestones for the work set out in this plan are shown in **Exhibit 5**.
- 40 The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 provides electors with the right to ask questions and to make objections to the Authority's accounts to the Auditor General. The rights to ask questions and make objections at audit are linked to electors' rights to inspect the accounts that are also set out in the 2004 Act.

Exhibit 5: audit timetable

Planned output	Work undertaken	Report finalised
2022 Audit Plan	February and March 2022	March 2022
Audit of Financial statements work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit of Financial Statements Report • Opinion on Financial Statements • Financial Accounts Memorandum 	June to August 2022	September 2022 September 2022 October 2022
Performance audit work: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assurance and Risk Assessment project • Thematic Review – unscheduled care • Thematic Review – to be confirmed • Local Review – arrangements for the Council's corporate support functions. 	Timescales for individual projects will be discussed with the Council and detailed within the specific project briefings produced for each piece of work.	
Grants certification work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Benefit • Non-Domestic rates • Teachers Pensions Return 	Autumn/Winter 2022	Autumn/Winter 2022

Planned output	Work undertaken	Report finalised
Annual Audit Summary	Not applicable	December 2022

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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

Meeting	Item (description / title)		Purpose of report	Decision required (yes/no)	Author – contact officer
27 July 22	1	Issues Referred by Scrutiny Committees (if any)	To receive and issues raised at Scrutiny		Rhian Evans – Scrutiny Co-ordinator
	2	Recent External Regulatory Reports Received (if any)	To consider any reports received		Nicola Kneale – Strategic Planning Team Manager
	3	Forward Work Programme			Democratic Services
		Reports			
	4	Draft Statement of Accounts 2021/22	To receive an overview of the draft Statement of Accounts 2021/22		Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
	5	Treasury Management (TM Review Report 2021/22 /TM Update Report 2022/23)	The receive the annual Treasury Management Report 2021/22		Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
	6	Follow up report – Internal Audit Contract Management	To receive an update following a low assurance Internal Audit review		Chief Internal Auditor
	7	Follow up report – Internal Audit-Exceptions and Exemptions	To receive an update following a low assurance Internal Audit review		Chief Internal Auditor
	8	Annual RIPA report	To receive the annual RIPA report		Gary Williams, Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services
	9	Update report on the uptake of Proactis	To receive a service update report on the use of Proactis.		Lisa Jones –Legal Services Manager
	10	Annual Whistleblowing report			Gary Williams, Head of Legal, HR & Democratic Services

Meeting	Item (description / title)		Purpose of report	Decision required (yes/no)	Author – contact officer
	11	2020-21 Certification of grants and returns	To receive the summary of the key outcomes from WAO's certification work on the Council's 2020/21 grants and returns.		Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
	12	Audit Enquiries Response			Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
21 Sept 22	1	Issues Referred by Scrutiny Committees (if any)	To receive and issues raised at Scrutiny		Rhian Evans – Scrutiny Co-ordinator
	2	Recent External Regulatory Reports Received (if any)	To consider any reports received		Nicola Kneale – Strategic Planning Team Manager
	3	Internal Audit Update	To update committee on Internal Audit's latest progress		Internal Auditor
	4	Forward Work Programme			Democratic Services
		Reports			
	5	Annual Corporate Health and Safety report	To consider the Health & Safety management within DCC during 2021-2022.		Corporate Health and Safety Manager – Gerry Lapington
	6	Fire Safety Report	To receive the annual report on the Fire Safety programme and performance.		Fire Safety Manager – Dawn Jones
	7	Approval of the Statement of Accounts 2021/22	To receive the audited accounts	Yes	Head of Finance – Steve Gadd

Meeting		Item (description / title)	Purpose of report	Decision required (yes/no)	Author – contact officer
	8	Audit of Accounts Report 2021-22			Head of Finance – Steve Gadd
	9	Follow up – Project Management of Queen’s building Rhyl	To receive a follow up report following a low assurance Internal Audit review.		Chief Internal Auditor
	10	CIW Inspection Report – Children’s Services	To receive an update report		Rhiain – Morrille – Head of Children’s Services
23 Nov 22	1	Issues Referred by Scrutiny Committees (if any)	To receive and issues raised at Scrutiny		Rhian Evans – Scrutiny Co-ordinator
	2	Recent External Regulatory Reports Received (if any)	To consider any reports received		Nicola Kneale – Strategic Planning Team Manager
	3	Forward Work Programme			Democratic Services
		Reports			
	4	Corporate Risk Register	To receive a review of the Corporate Risk Register.		Strategic Planning & Performance Team Leader - Iolo McGregor
	5	Care Inspectorate Wales – Assurance Check 2021- Update	To receive an update report on the actions (Confirm if ready)		Nicola Stubbins – Corporate Director

FUTURE ITEMS			
	1	Audit Wales report- Update	Nicola Stubbins – Audit Wales

NB The exact date of publication of occasional reports by for example Wales Audit Office or Annual Reports by the Ombudsman are not presently known. They will be assigned a meeting date as soon as practicable.

Date Updated : 22/02/2022 SJ

Delivering Sustained Performance Improvement – Denbighshire County Council

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 Performance management provides an opportunity to plan for improvements, measure success, learn from the experience and drive improvement. Done well it is a positive experience – done badly it can promote blame and a culture where poor performance is hidden and kept from those who can support and drive improvement.
- 2 The Council's performance management framework aims to help managers and councillors deliver improvement, demonstrate that they are delivering efficient and effective services and use resources effectively. Performance management is an integral part of the Council's approach to driving sustainable improvement.
- 3 In December 2019, an Internal Audit report on performance management gave a rating of high assurance overall. The report concluded that the performance management framework within the Council was managed well, and appropriate support was available. No major or critical risks were identified in the report.
- 4 Although the Council has a good track record of managing performance, it does face some significant challenges. The Council's Annual Performance Review 2020-21 shows that delivery against performance indicators is mixed with some rated as 'good' or 'acceptable' and many shown as being 'priorities for improvement'. A lack of data in some areas makes comparisons difficult. Whilst officers have prioritised dealing with the recent COVID-19 pandemic (the pandemic), which will affect performance in many service areas, it is important that the performance management arrangements continue to provide assurance and alert managers about variations around delivery of core services and outcomes.
- 5 The impact on the Council's 'business as usual' because of the pandemic has been considerable. Many services changed and adapted in response to the pandemic. The Council has been redefining, 'business as usual' recognising that the pandemic may also have changed demand for services and the ways in which the Council delivers them.
- 6 The Council has reviewed its priorities because of the pandemic but decided they remain unchanged. The Council also established a separate set of COVID recovery priorities which it has now either achieved or will form part of its New Ways of Working project.
- 7 Our review took place between June 2021 and September 2021, and involved document reviews, interviews and focus groups with officers and councillors, and virtual meeting observations. The review focussed on the Council's corporate performance management arrangements and examined Environmental and Young People's services as tracers to evidence how the corporate arrangements were being deployed in service areas.

What we found

- 8 Our review sought to answer the question: Are the Council's performance management arrangements robust and likely to support continuous and sustainable improvement as it rebalances from the impact of COVID-19?
- 9 Overall, we found that: **The Council's performance management arrangements are supporting the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities, with opportunities to strengthen arrangements in some areas.** We reached this conclusion because:
- The Council has an effective performance management framework in place
 - The Council's arrangements for measuring and reporting performance are effective with some opportunities for improving its performance management software
 - The Council has good arrangements for reporting on performance against its priorities but could improve its performance reporting in non-priority areas and report financial and performance data together

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

The table below sets out the recommendations that we have identified following this review.

Recommendations	
R1	<p>The Council should consider how it can better support staff to use the Verto system. It needs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• review the content and frequency of the training and support available to staff; and• consider whether the new Verto contract allows it to make the system more user friendly.
R2	<p>The Council needs to present financial and performance information simultaneously, to provide elected members and officers with greater understanding and context of the links between performance and spend/cost.</p>

Recommendations

R3 The Council should consider ways in which it makes service level performance information regularly available to councillors and for public scrutiny.

R4 The Council needs to ensure that staff one-to-one meetings are taking place as planned and are being accurately recorded in a timely manner.

Detailed report

The Council's performance management arrangements are supporting the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities, with opportunities to strengthen arrangements in some areas

The Council has an effective performance management framework in place

- 10 The Council's priorities are set out in its Corporate Plan 2017-2022. Each priority is supported by defined actions and expected outcomes. The five priorities are:
 - Everyone is supported to live in homes that meet their needs
 - Communities are connected and have access to goods and services locally, online and through good transport links
 - The Council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience
 - The environment is attractive and protected, supporting wellbeing and economic prosperity
 - Younger people want to live and work here and have the skills to do so
- 11 The Council has a clear and transparent process to set targets for each priority area which considers all-Wales performance data. If the Council's performance is in the upper quartile compared to other councils in Wales it is categorised as 'excellent'. If the Council's performance is between median and upper quartile it will be categorised as either 'good' or 'acceptable' performance and if the Council's performance is below the all-Wales median it is categorised as a 'priority for improvement'. However, the publication of fewer national data sets in recent years has challenged this methodology. Where national comparator data is not available, targets are set following discussions between heads of service and performance officers about what represents an acceptable level of performance. Inevitably, this process is more subjective. Councils will need to ensure that a suitable range of comparator information is available, if not nationally then regionally in the future, as it is an important component of self-evaluation/self-assessment.
- 12 Each service has a service plan that supports delivery of the corporate plan priorities. Service plans are agreed annually and rarely change significantly from year to year because they are linked to the corporate priorities, which are set for a five-year period. Service plans set out an overview of the service and the outcomes the service is aiming to achieve. The plans include the performance indicators, measures and activities that will be used to assess progress against achievement of the objectives. Each outcome is allocated a red, amber, or green (RAG) rating, which indicates the level of improvement needed, and these are updated when the service plans are reported each quarter. Service plan reports are considered as

part of the service challenge process, although this has not taken place in the usual way during the pandemic.

- 13 The Council's Strategic Planning Team supports managers with the development of service plans. The process takes account of intended outcomes, indicators, and targets for performance. This process typically begins in December, with the plan being agreed by the Head of Service and lead portfolio members by the beginning of the next financial year.
- 14 Both the Education and Children's Services plan and the Highways and Environmental Services plans support delivery of their relevant corporate priority although the links could be clearer. The Highways and Environmental Services plan references the Corporate Plan priorities but does not explicitly set out how the service plan objectives link to the Corporate Plan. The Education and Children's Services plan does not explicitly reference the Corporate Plan, although it is apparent that the service priorities are linked to the Corporate Plan objective 'Younger people want to live and work here and have the skills to do so'.
- 15 Targets for the service plans are reviewed annually, in June or July by Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet, supported by performance officers. If a target has been met easily, or if a target is no longer achievable, it can be revised as part of this process.

To link delivery of performance of corporate and service priorities to individual staff, the Council uses monthly one-to-one meetings, instead of an annual appraisal process. Officers we spoke to during this review were positive about this methodology, as the monthly one-to-one meetings were said to be more effective in terms of managing staff and their performance. However, in Education and Children's Services and Highways and Environmental Services, the percentage of staff who had at least three one-to-one meetings in the last 12 months was assessed as 'red'. Officers believed this was a recording issue rather than an actual reflection of the frequency of one-to-one meetings.

The Council's arrangements for measuring and managing performance are effective with some opportunities for improving its performance management software

- 16 Where performance is below the Welsh median, as noted above, it is categorised as red and triggers higher levels of scrutiny at a senior level. If performance is above the median or in the first quartile, it is categorised as amber or green and no further consideration is required.
- 17 The Council collates and records performance data using a bespoke performance management software system, called Verto which has many advantages over more generic software. For example, Verto can generate reports directly, and has greater stability when dealing with large data sets. However, many managers told us that they found Verto difficult to use. Internal Audit also identified difficulties

using and navigating the system as a risk in their December 2019 report on performance management.

- 18 Many staff only use Verto quarterly to provide the data used to report on performance to Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet. As a result, they have limited opportunities to become familiar with the system. Staff we spoke to did not consider Verto to be intuitive and described needing to take several steps to access the relevant section, which can be difficult for users to remember. The Council has provided staff training and made user guides available. The guides are available on Verto and also bilingually on the Council's intranet. We spoke to officers who had attended training, but still found the system difficult to use. Corporate performance officers are available to assist, but clearly it is more efficient if users can do their work independently.
- 19 Due to the length of time that Verto has been in place, (approximately seven years) the Council recently completed a tendering exercise for performance management software. The Council concluded that Verto continues to offer the Council the best functionality and value for money. The Council will therefore continue to use Verto, with some additional developer time incorporated into the new contract.
- 20 Having decided to continue to use Verto, the Council has an opportunity to reflect on the experience of staff using the system. By engaging with staff, the Council will better understand what additional support officers might benefit from and whether this can be accommodated with the additional developer time in the new contract. This could result in performance data being added to the system and accessed more easily and efficiently.

The Council has good arrangements for reporting on performance against its priorities but could improve its performance reporting in non-priority areas and report financial and performance data together

- 21 Performance against the corporate plan and service plan priorities is reviewed quarterly by Senior Leadership Team, by Cabinet and by the Performance Scrutiny Committee. The reports are publicly available as part of the scrutiny committee and Cabinet agenda papers. The reports provide a narrative update on progress against the priorities and report performance on specific measures. The reports include whether current performance indicates the measures should be a priority for improvement, acceptable, good or excellent. Whilst the information provided is comprehensive, it could be presented in a more visual way, for example, with the use of charts, tables, and colour coding to highlight variations between the target and actual performance.
- 22 The Council's Performance Scrutiny Committee meets every six weeks. The Committee considers the performance reports prior to their consideration by Cabinet. It also looks at items such as the Director of Social Services' Annual Plan,

the corporate risk register, Library standards and other service specific strategies and plans.

- 23 Where cabinet and scrutiny committee members request further clarification as part of the quarterly performance reporting process, the explanation for poor performance and remedial action can be discussed at the time. Where further clarity or detail is required, but cannot be provided immediately in the meeting, it can be reported back to members following the meeting, through the committee support officers. Councillors also have the option to add items to the scrutiny forward work programme.
- 24 The processes the Council has in place to manage and report performance are mostly effective but are clearly focussed on Corporate and Service Plan priorities. Historically, performance of corporate health areas such as sickness absence, or payment of invoices within agreed timescales, has not been reported to Cabinet or scrutiny committees and was therefore not accessible to the public. In June 2021, the Council added a new set of measures to its Annual Performance Report, which included performance in areas such as financial health, customer service, member attendance, gender pay and sickness absence. The Council intends that subsequent quarterly reports will continue to present this data.
- 25 The Council has established an annual service challenge process, where officers, Cabinet members and scrutiny chairs consider the performance of a particular service area. These service challenge sessions cover all council services and provide managers with an opportunity to share important information about their services and to be challenged about recent, current, and planned performance. At the service challenge sessions, attendees receive an overview of the whole service.
- 26 For this year, the information provided to councillors was less detailed as the intention was to focus on the impact of and response to the pandemic. This means that there was less information provided about service level performance. Feedback from attendees about the revised approach was positive, as under the previous format, some attendees found the level of detail and volume of information challenging to absorb and understand.
- 27 It is understandable and appropriate that the Council's response to the pandemic will have meant less focus on business as usual. However, when arranging future service challenge sessions, the Council will want to consider what information will help to facilitate effective challenge and ensure this opportunity to focus on the Council's broader performance is not lost.
- 28 Whilst officers report quarterly performance reports to Cabinet alongside finance updates and the Annual Performance Report contains some high-level financial information, the Council does not effectively align financial and performance information in its reporting. Internal Audit identified this as a risk and the Council accepts Internal Audit's findings, although it has not yet acted on the recommendation. Demonstrating the link between spending/costs and impact can be complex, but that should not prevent the Council from taking a more pragmatic

approach to presenting budget/spend and performance information simultaneously. That would allow officers and councillors to see the connection between output/activity and spend and would be a useful step forward from the current situation in terms of providing additional context for performance data.



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Springing Forward – Denbighshire County Council

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The Council's actions in respect of workforce planning are largely focussed on the 'now': until it has properly identified its future workforce needs it is not able to take actions to deliver them 13

The Council is focussed on dealing with current day to day challenges and has not yet set out its longer-term actions to address its ongoing workforce challenges 15

Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 As the world moves forward, learning from the global pandemic, this review has looked at how the Council is strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
- 2 We reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its assets and workforce.
 - a. for assets, our primary focus was on office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivers services to its residents; and
 - b. for the workforce, our focus has been on the challenges highlighted during the pandemic that have exacerbated some long-standing workforce issues.We looked at how the Council strategically plans to use its assets and workforce, how it monitors their use and how it reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements.
- 3 When we began our audit work under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, we recognised that it would take time for public bodies to embed the sustainable development principle, but we did also set out our expectation that over the medium term we would expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate how the Act is shaping what they do. It is now approaching seven years since the Well-being of Future Generations Act was passed and we are now into the second reporting period for the Act. Therefore, we would now expect public bodies to be able to demonstrate that the Act is integral to their thinking and genuinely shaping what they do.
- 4 This project had three main aims:
 - to gain assurance that the Council is putting in place arrangements to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services;
 - to explain the actions that the Council is taking both individually and in partnership to strengthen its arrangements as well as further embed the sustainable development principle; and
 - to inspire the Council and other organisations to further strengthen their arrangements through capturing and sharing notable practice examples and learning and making appropriate recommendations.
- 5 This is important because Denbighshire County Council invests considerable sums in its building assets and workforce. Some key information from 2020-21 is shown in **Exhibit 1**.

Exhibit 1: key facts and figures relating to building assets and workforce.

Number of Council buildings owned in 2020-21	4,000 buildings of which 3,372 are housing stock
Value of property, on 31 March 2021	Approximately £387 million
Number of staff	4,564
Spending on workforce	£143 million which equates to 69% of its total net revenue budget
Percentage of the workforce who were male	26.5%
Percentage of the workforce who were female	73.5%
Percentage of staff who work full time	63.6%
Percentage of staff who work part time	36.4%
Percentage of staff aged over 55 years	27.8%
Number of staff who left the Council by their own choice in 2020-21	265

6 The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on demand for buildings and the way that staff work. This report examines some of these impacts and the way that the Council benefits from the positives and mitigates risks from the negatives when planning future service delivery.

7 We undertook the review during the period December 2021 to February 2022.

What we found

- 8 Our review sought to answer the question: Is the Council's strategic approach strengthening its ability to transform? In doing this work, we have identified some of the direct impact of the pandemic as well as some operational and governance issues exacerbated by the pandemic.
- 9 Overall, we found that the Council is actively developing its New Ways of Working Project, which will impact on both its building assets and its workforce, integrating this activity with wider strategies, and looking further ahead will strengthen the Council's consideration of the sustainable development principle.
- 10 We reached this conclusion because:
- the Council continues to develop its New Ways of Working strategy but has not yet incorporated these plans into a corporate asset management plan that sets out the future for its building assets;
 - officers, supported by councillors are proactive in the management of assets, although there are opportunities to improve processes and consistency of asset management across the Council;
 - throughout the pandemic senior managers and Cabinet members carefully monitored the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's building assets;
 - the Council has workforce planning arrangements in place and will need to further develop these as it shapes its vision for its future workforce;
 - the Council's actions in respect of workforce planning are largely focussed on the 'now': until it has properly identified its future workforce needs it is not able to take actions to deliver them;
 - the Council is focussed on dealing with the current day-to-day challenges and has not yet set out its longer-term actions to address its ongoing workforce challenges.

Recommendations

Exhibit 2: recommendations

The table below sets out the recommendations that we have identified following this review.

Recommendations	
Post-pandemic learning	
R1	Consider learning and areas for improvement from the pandemic to help inform future use of assets and workforce, where the pandemic has highlighted such opportunities. These are shown in bold text throughout the report.
Vision	
R2	Clarify the Council's vision for the shape and size of its building assets and workforce in the short, medium, and long term.
Strategies and delivery plans	
R3	Develop asset and workforce strategies and delivery plans that build on learning from the Council's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic and deliver the Council's vision in these areas.
Strategies and delivery plans	
R4	Identify the costs of delivering these plans and incorporate these into the medium-term financial plan.

Detailed report

Assets

The Council continues to develop its New Ways of Working strategy, but has not yet incorporated its plans into a corporate asset management plan that sets out the future for its building assets

11 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has a draft New Ways of Working strategy with two strands; one covers Council members' working practices and the second covers office utilisation. At the time of our review, the New Ways of Working strategy had not been finalised. However, in respect of building assets, the intention is to review demand for offices, change its office portfolio and update its office layouts accordingly. The Council anticipates that fewer staff will attend the office, demand for video conferencing will continue and it will have an oversupply of office accommodation.
- the Council's New Ways of Working strategy aims to introduce a 'blended working' model where staff suggest to their manager the amount of time they spend working from home, working in the office, and working on site. To avoid unnecessary travel to the three main offices, the Council intends that staff may be able to meet in other Council facilities such as libraries or even premises in neighbouring councils.
- the Council's draft New Ways of Working Office Accommodation Strategy dated September 2021 sets out the current office portfolios, proposals for main office and ancillary office locations, conclusions, and next steps. The next steps section includes the need to undertake a wellbeing impact assessment, gain senior management and political agreement, discuss service needs, and develop office layouts that reflect future needs. The strategy does not include timescales, as officers understand there are staff and political sensitivities around these changes and intend to take an opportunistic approach to delivery when the timing is thought to be right.
- the Council is reviewing its corporate priorities and aims to have a new corporate plan that reflects the priorities of the new administration after the May 2022 elections. Its current 'Corporate Plan 2017-2022' is clearly committed to improving its building assets. In line with its environmental ambitions, it commits to reducing carbon emissions from Council assets by at least 15% by 2022, to improve the energy efficiency of Council houses and to reduce the number of properties at risk of flooding in Denbighshire.
- the Council is preparing a new asset management strategy to replace its previous 'Asset Management Strategy 2017-2021'. Whilst the new asset management strategy and the new medium-term capital strategy to support the asset management strategy were in development at the time of our review, neither had been approved. At this stage, plans are neither long-term

in nature nor are asset plans well integrated in line with expectations set out in the five ways of working under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

- the recent pandemic has significantly changed the potential future landscape of the Council's building assets. **In addition to taking account of its New Ways of Working project, the Council will need to take account of the local town centre economy if it closes its offices, the impact of technology on the way councillors and officers work, the case for owning buildings versus renting and the size of the current estate in relation to expected demand. As more staff work from home, the Council will need to review policies and procedures including travel and expenses and consider the health and safety of staff to ensure it discharges its responsibilities for their wellbeing.**

Officers, supported by councillors are proactive in the management of assets although there are opportunities to improve processes and consistency of asset management across the Council

12 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- in the early stages of the pandemic, staff adjusted to Welsh Government COVID-19 restrictions and there were understandable reservations around having close contact with others. The Council prioritised external repair work at first, but as time passed and safe working practices became better embedded, staff started to address the slippage of work that had inevitably accrued. Urgent repairs and high-risk work were carried out during the pandemic.
- building material prices have increased significantly during the pandemic which had an impact on contracts and contractors. In one capital project, the contractor declared themselves bankrupt, which impacted on delivery of the project. The Welsh Government supported the Council with flexibility around timescales and the funding 'envelope'. **The Council will need to take account of these pressures as it sets its own budget and ensures that future contracts provide value for money, are viable for contractors' businesses, and support its priorities around the local economy.**
- throughout the pandemic, the pressures on care homes have been widely publicised. In this review, we heard that the physical layout of some care homes had impacted negatively upon their operation. For example, some rooms were needed to store essential personal protective equipment and some homes found it difficult, when visits were permitted, to facilitate safe visits because of the configuration of the building. The Council sought funding through the ADSS Cymru Hardship Fund to support capital investment in its own care homes and offered advice to care home providers about where they might seek similar funding.

- managers and staff collaborated well through the pandemic. The Council has worked with Health colleagues to provide testing and vaccination centres. A Community Resource Team has been based in County Hall for some time and the Council has also shared accommodation with the Coroner and Registration services. **The Council will need to continue to explore more opportunities to share and collaborate in its use of accommodation as part of its review of its office capacity.**
- acquisition, disposal, and maintenance of building assets is managed by the Assets Team which is part of the Finance and Property Service. This team liaises with and supports operational managers, bringing specialist skills and knowledge to the management of buildings. The Council operates a 'Corporate Landlord' arrangement whereby buildings are owned by the Council not individual services, although running costs are met by services. The pandemic has heightened the importance of building assets in the delivery of services and the Council is clearly committed to reviewing the way it uses them in the future. **It is important that the Council also reviews its wider infrastructure to ensure it supports use of these buildings to ensure maximum efficiency and value are gained from the asset.**
- at an officer level, building assets were, in the past, co-ordinated through an officer-led asset management group which was a 'clearing house' for proposals before seeking approval through the formal decision-making process. This group was replaced by an Asset Management Group with a membership of officers and councillors, chaired by the Deputy Leader who has portfolio responsibility for building assets. This group does not have decision making powers but does provide a useful 'sounding board' for significant acquisitions and disposals of buildings. Officers present reports to the group for discussion, then councillors are invited to ask questions. This group is not formally constituted, and minutes are not accessible to the public, although minutes of decisions to acquire or dispose of land and buildings that are considered by the Council's Cabinet are accessible on the Council's website. The Council is currently reviewing its management structure and we were told that this may affect the positioning of the asset management team within that structure. **As the Council reviews the infrastructure supporting asset management, it should also take the opportunity to review the governance arrangements to ensure transparency of decision making and separation of roles between elected members and officers.**

Throughout the pandemic senior managers and Cabinet members carefully monitored the impact of COVID-19 on the Council's building assets

13 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- throughout the pandemic, senior managers have received regular reports highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on services and resources. The Senior Leadership Team received recovery theme updates that included references to building assets. For example, in June 2020 it received an update on housing recovery, in July 2020 it received a general update on recovery including issues with the Asset Management Group and an update on the Climate and Ecological Change Programme.
- governance arrangements were affected by the pandemic, particularly in the earlier stages, with most meetings being suspended between March 2020 and June 2020. These were then restored with the use of remote technology to facilitate virtual meetings. **As part of its contingency/emergency planning arrangements, the Council will need to consider the impact that the pandemic had on its governance arrangements and review whether senior managers and councillors received appropriate information during this period.**
- Cabinet members were routinely briefed by senior managers, although the Cabinet did not receive reports specifically setting out the impact of COVID-19, including on the impact on the Council's building assets.
- officers have continued to meet their colleagues and peers from other organisations to share experiences of the pandemic and learn from each other's approaches. The Chief Executive held virtual all-staff briefings during the pandemic, and these have included reference to the future use of offices and working practices. However, as the New Ways of Working project has not yet been formally approved, and the approach to implementation is 'opportunistic,' managers have been limited with how much detail can be shared with staff and how it might affect them personally. For some staff, we heard that this uncertainty is a concern and is affecting their morale.

Workforce

The Council has workforce planning arrangements in place and will need to further develop these as it shapes its vision for its future workforce

14 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Council has a track record of workforce planning, that was interrupted by the pandemic. Service workforce plans for 2018-19 included the composition of staff within the service, key challenges and risks, and actions that the

services needed to take during the year. Human Resources Business Partners have started to work with Heads of Service to develop workforce plans for 2022-23. This process was in its early stages during our review, confirming that the Council does not yet have an up-to-date workforce plan.

Workforce plans will also need to integrate more widely with other plans such as the New Ways of Working Project.

- to support workforce planning, officers have carried out an analysis on the New Ways of Working project looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) around the project. Each service has workforce profile information that includes the current workforce, such as the numbers of full or part-time staff, gender, attendance data and reasons why staff have left. **This provides a useful picture of the current workforce and should be used by managers to help them set out their vision of the future shape of the workforce. Once this is in place, workforce planning will help managers consider actions to deliver that vision.**
- the Council's Risk Register records two key risks around workforce. It identifies the risk that Senior Leadership capacity and skills to sustain service and corporate performance may not be available and the risk that recruitment and retention issues, leading to a loss of expertise and capacity, worsen, resulting in poor or inadequate services. **It recognises controls to manage these risks, and the Council will need to consider the implications of these when developing its new workforce plan.**
- the Council has seen the retirement or departure of some key senior managers during 2021-22 and the Chief Executive is currently proposing changes to the senior management structure. **With the local government elections in May 2022, the administration, together with the refreshed senior leadership team should be well placed to set out the Council's vision for the future workforce including its plans for blended working patterns.**
- the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 places a duty on public bodies to plan for the short, medium, and long term. As detailed above, the Council plans on an annual basis. Whilst the New Ways of Working project signals a different way of working, it does not fundamentally change the shape of the workforce. **The Council will need to consider how far into the future it is reasonable to set out its plans for the workforce and what skills, knowledge and capacity it will need over that period.**

The Council's actions in respect of workforce planning are largely focussed in the 'now': until it has properly identified its future workforce needs it is not able to take actions to deliver them

15 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Human Resources (HR) Team has worked hard to support staff and combat the impact of the pandemic. Business partners have worked closely with operational managers providing HR support.
- in the early stages of the pandemic, many staff adjusted to working from home, some were unable to work because the services they delivered were suspended and some staff were redeployed to other duties. This was an unprecedented set of circumstances which, coupled with personal and family commitments, placed many of the workforce under significant pressure. Most staff have now returned to their normal duties, although still operating under the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic, such as isolation and concerns about COVID-19.
- in line with legislation, staff have been required to work from home where possible. This has required staff to work very differently and has caused extra stress, particularly for staff with caring responsibilities and the added pressure of home tutoring. The Council instructed managers to allow staff to work flexibly and recognise that some days staff will not be able to 'put in their 'full shift'. Senior managers considered requests by staff to return to the office, where working from home did not suit their personal circumstances or they were feeling particularly isolated. For many, this new way of working has been successful, and it is likely that many staff will adopt blended working patterns in future, where they spend time working from a mix of home, usual workplace or on site. Whilst it is difficult for any organisation the size of the Council to ensure consistent compliance with directives, especially when there is room for interpretation, this can sometimes fuel a sense of unfairness. An example raised during the review was around many teachers working from home during the pandemic whilst some teaching assistants worked in their schools. **The Council should consider how it communicates the rationale for its decisions to minimise some of these cultural challenges.**
- working from home also brings with it some practical challenges. Knowing when or how officers can be contacted is difficult, especially when staff are working non-standard hours to accommodate caring responsibilities. Some staff may be reluctant to share their home phone numbers, which makes it difficult for colleagues to contact them. And if staff are working from home, how is their privacy protected when they are customer facing? **The Council should develop a protocol setting out its expectations of how and when staff should be contactable when working from home.**

- for those staff who were unable to work from home and whose services operated through the pandemic, they faced different challenges. The Council risk assessed staff who needed face-to-face interaction with the public and provided protective equipment and changed working practices to keep staff and the public safe. Trade Union representatives continued to meet HR colleagues and senior managers throughout the pandemic to monitor and address emerging staffing issues.
- to mitigate the risk of driver shortages in waste collection services, the Council sought details of staff who already held heavy goods vehicle (HGV) licences and may have been willing to help in the event of staff shortages. It also offered to support staff who wanted to learn to drive HGVs and take their tests. Considering **its experience during the pandemic, the Council should think about what other transferable skills staff have and how these can be recorded within its workforce data.**
- social care staff have been particularly affected by the pandemic. Domiciliary care staff have been at the forefront, working with particularly vulnerable service users, at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 themselves and working, as they do, often isolated from colleagues. Social workers have also worked throughout. With the added pressures of increasing workloads, and the widely reported recent child deaths in the United Kingdom emphasising the importance of sound safeguarding practice, there has been an increased fear of 'getting it wrong'.
- staff recruitment challenges have continued through the pandemic with resulting staff shortages. Competition for social workers, occupational therapists, and domiciliary care workers is recognised as a regional and national concern with pay, and competition for agency staff often quoted as significant factors. The Council has worked hard to recruit care staff and has employed recruitment specialists to address staff vacancies. Across the Council, it is implementing a 'grow your own' approach to develop its own talented staff, and the Council operates a flexible retirement scheme to help manage the consequences of experienced staff retiring sooner than expected. Under the scheme, staff must reduce their working hours and must leave the Council by the end of a two-year period. Some other councils in North Wales have a more flexible policy where the period to leave employment with the Council can be greater than two years. The scheme is administered by Clwyd Pension Fund and enables the Council to recruit replacement staff over a longer period, allowing some handover time with departing staff.
- other Council services have also experienced recruitment difficulties, particularly where technical skills that are in short supply are needed such as in procurement, legal, occupational health, and asset management. For some, the pandemic and increased use of remote access have allowed staff to work in other parts of Wales or further afield, without a daily commute. This has seen some staff and potential recruits in Denbighshire being attracted to other employers. **The Council understands these challenges**

around recruitment and will need to ensure that potential solutions are included in workforce plans to prevent the consequences for service delivery and the impact on residents.

- sickness absence has been affected by the pandemic. Overall sickness absence fell across the Council in the early stages of the pandemic, but recently numbers have started to increase again. The Council does not record staff isolating in its sickness data. Some services where face-to-face contact is necessary have seen increased levels of sickness, and other services where staff have worked from home have seen a reduction in sickness levels. Managers told us that stress has become the main reason for absence and is the consequence of several factors. For example, staff who in the past have carried out a challenging and uncomfortable meeting with a member of the public would have returned to the office where they might receive peer support. Where these staff are working from home, colleagues will not be there to pick up on the signs of anxiety and stress, and the staff member will often be left without support. Frontline staff and senior managers who have worked throughout to keep services operational and co-ordinate activity to combat the impact of the pandemic may now be feeling fatigued and the effects of long-term stress. **Managers understand the impact of COVID-19 on staff sickness within their services, but the Council needs to collate this information to ensure these factors are addressed through the workforce plan.**
- the pandemic has also provided opportunities. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has underpinned the work of the Council during the pandemic. If there were barriers to using remote technology in the past, these have been largely overcome. Staff have been supported to work from home and schools have supported pupils with remote access. **The Council should explore the benefits that have been realised through the increased use of ICT during the pandemic to identify wider opportunities in other services. It also needs to review the capacity of the ICT service to ensure it can continue to maintain and deliver improvements.**

The Council is focussed on dealing with the current day-to-day challenges and has not yet set out its longer-term actions to address its ongoing workforce challenges

16 In reaching this conclusion we found that:

- the Head of HR reports to the Head of Legal, HR and Democratic Services who is a member of the Senior Leadership Team and was able to offer specialist HR advice as issues arose during the pandemic. The Senior Leadership Team received regular recovery theme updates that included references to workforce. For example, in May 2020 it received an update which included details of the Redeployment Bureau and in July 2020 it

received a general update on recovery including the all-workforce COVID-19 risk assessment tool.

- in the early stages of the pandemic, all Council meetings including Cabinet were suspended. Cabinet resumed in May 2020 and received some reports on COVID-19, but it has not received any reports relating to the overall impact of the pandemic on the workforce.
- scrutiny committee members have considered reports on the impact of COVID-19, and the Council's recovery plans, but not on the overall impact of COVID-19 on its workforce. **The Council should consider how Cabinet and scrutiny committees might have supported its overall recovery arrangements, particularly in relation to workforce management.**
- officers have continued to meet with peers in other councils and trade union representatives to discuss emerging issues in relation to workforce, and national benchmarking information is available through InfoBaseCymru¹.
- the Council has engaged with staff regularly throughout the pandemic, However, because the New Ways of Working project has not yet been formally agreed, the Council has not engaged on the wider implications for the workforce. **The Council should consider how it can involve staff in the further development and implementation of its New Ways of Working project.**

¹ InfoBaseCymru is developed, supported and hosted by the Local Government Data Unit Wales to provide easy access to information for Wales, using maps and tables.



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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.