WLGA Panel Performance Assessment

Draft Methodology

Background

1. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 established a new legislative framework for local government elections, democracy, governance, and performance.   The policy intent of the Act, which replaces the improvement duty for principal councils set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, is to create a more streamlined, flexible, sector-led approach to performance, good governance, and improvement.

2. The Act places a duty on councils to arrange for a panel to undertake and respond to a corporate, organisational level assessment, at least once during the period between two consecutive ordinary elections of councillors to the council, of the extent to which the council is meeting its performance requirements[1]. The duty came into force at the start of the local government electoral cycle, in May 2022. Performance requirements are defined as the extent to which a council:

    ▪ is exercising its functions effectively;
    ▪ is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively; and
    ▪ has effective governance in place for securing the above.

3. In March 2021, the Welsh Government published statutory guidance[2] to principal councils setting out the minimum requirements for implementing the performance provisions. The statutory guidance states these provisions are designed to support a culture in which councils actively seek and embrace challenge and "to provide a framework which supports councils, through an ongoing process of review, to think about their performance and effectiveness now and for the future; to encourage more inquisitive organisations willing to challenge themselves to do more, to be more innovative and more ambitious in what they do"[3].

4. The performance and governance provisions set out in Part 6, Chapter 1 of the Act are framed within the context of the well-being duty[4] in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which sets out a legally binding common purpose for the public bodies subject to that Act to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

    The statutory guidance also makes clear that the performance and governance provisions are also aligned with the socio-economic duty[5] and the [6] equality duty more generally.

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[1] Section 92, Chapter 1, Part 6 of Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

[2] Performance and Governance of Principal Councils: Statutory Guidance on Part 6, Chapter 1, of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Welsh Government, March 2021

[3] Performance and Governance of Principal Councils: Statutory Guidance on Part 6, Chapter 1, of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, Welsh Government, March 2021, page 10

[4] Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015

[5] Socio economic duty, Equalities Act 2010 Overview

[6] The Essential Guide to the Public Sector Equality Duty: An overview for listed public authorities in Wales | Equality and Human Rights Commission (equalityhumanrights.com)

5. The Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) is not an audit or inspection, and will not seek to duplicate any work undertaken, but should provide a complimentary external perspective. It is about supporting councils to understand how they can improve the extent to which they are meeting the performance requirements. The panel assessment should provide different perspectives; some independent, objective external challenge; and an opportunity to test thinking with impartial expert peers. The assessment should be seen as challenging, but also constructive and an effective and proportionate approach to continuously learning how to make the councils more resilient.

6. Under the legislation each council is free to determine its own approach to engaging with PPA's but the statutory guidance sets an expectation of three stages:

    ▪ Preparation (setting the scope, identifying, and commissioning the panel, establishing the terms of reference, sharing information with the panel, and making practical arrangements)
    ▪ Assessment (desk-based review, discussions with relevant stakeholders, verbal presentation of panel findings) and
    ▪ Follow Up (production of final report, the council's response to it and involvement of the governance and audit committee).

7. Before the panel has been appointed the council will have set out the scope for their PPA taking account of any challenges that have been highlighted in their self-assessment including findings from recent audit, inspection, or regulator reports.

8. It is expected that a PPA will require a time commitment of up to 8 working days for the Panel Chair and up to 6 working days for other panel members to cover all the activities involved in the assessment.

9. If the WLGA is commissioned to undertake the PPA, all public facing documents will be provided bilingually in accordance with the Welsh Language Standards. If councils require preparation and coordination communications, and facilitation of internal meetings/focus groups to be conducted through the medium of Welsh, this should be requested in advance to ensure that the panel have the appropriate level of Welsh language proficiency. If a translator is required, this would be discussed with the council in advance to agree the most cost-effective provision (e.g. WLGA commissioning a translator and recharging the council or the council providing translation support).

Stage 1: Preparation

10. Councils will develop specific scoping requirements for the PPA (possibly working with their partners) considering any challenges that have been highlighted in their self-assessment and/or in recent audit, inspection, or regulator reports. This will help to identify the skills and expertise required from the panel to maximise the impact of the assessment. The final terms of reference will need to be agreed between the Panel Chair and the Council.

11. Councils are also responsible for commissioning the panel and although the statutory guidance sets out the following <u>minimum</u> expectations the council may appoint additional members:

   ▪ An independent chair (i.e. not currently serving in an official or political capacity within local government)
   ▪ A peer from the wider public, private, or voluntary sectors
   ▪ A serving local government senior officer, likely to be equivalent to chief executive or director, from outside the council to be assessed
   ▪ A senior elected member, from outside the council to be assessed

Councils can commission the WLGA to coordinate and facilitate the PPA on their behalf.

12. Once appointed the panel will need to prepare for the second stage, the assessment, which can be facilitated by the WLGA as follows:

▪ A remote introductory contact from the WLGA Head of Improvement to:
   ▪ outline the PPA process,
   ▪ provide an overview of the council to be assessed
   ▪ explain, where appropriate, the Welsh legislative and policy context (e.g. the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021).

▪ A remote meeting of all the Panel, chaired by the appointed Panel Chair and arranged and supported by a WLGA Improvement Officer. The purpose of the meeting would be to:

   ▪ Introduce the peer assessors to each other
   ▪ Outline the scope of the PPA set by the council
   ▪ Agree a draft terms of reference (drafted ahead of the meeting by WLGA Improvement Officer, based on council's scope)
   ▪ Consider methodology against scope and refine as appropriate
   ▪ Agree a time commitment for the review
   ▪ Assign roles within the peer team (leads on difference aspects of the assessment)

- Identify what information the peer team require for the desk-based research (to be provided electronically where possible)
- Identify any individual peer needs or requirements
- Agree how the Panel will consult stakeholders[7], noting that the consultation must be designed to be representative of the relevant population

- Remote desk-based research: each peer would review the relevant material provided by the council and the WLGA, focusing on the role assigned to them. They would form a view from this research of the areas on which they would like to focus on when onsite and who they would wish to interview during the onsite assessment.
- The WLGA Improvement Officer would collate requests for further information and list of interviewee's/focus groups to share with the council.

The WLGA Improvement Team would then work with the peers and the council to agree arrangements for the onsite assessment. This would include agreeing and supporting facilitation of the consultation duties, access to further digital information as may be required by the panel and coordinating a timetable of interviews/workshops for the onsite assessment. A single point of contact within the Council should be nominated to assist with coordination.

Stage 2: Assessment

13. The panel, acting jointly, is required to assess the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements, that is, the extent to which:

- it is exercising its functions effectively;
- it is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and
- it has effective governance in place for securing the above.

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[7] In carrying out the PPA, the panel must, as a minimum, consult the following about the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements:

- local people;
- other persons carrying on a business in the council's area;
- the staff of the council;
- and every recognised trade union

The panel may choose to consult or involve others as it determines relevant to its assessment, partners and audit, inspection or regulatory bodies.

14. The panel should look at the current situation as well as a sufficient previous period to get a meaningful picture of how the council is performing, including any trends. The panel must consult the following about the extent to which the councils is meeting its performance requirements: local people, local businesses, staff, and recognised trade unions, the panel may also consult partners and inspection and regulatory bodies. The approach to consultation will be agreed with the council in advance and is likely to involve a combination of interviews, focus groups, and possibly digital surveys.

15. It is expected that the assessment would involve a hybrid of remote and onsite working. Introductory meetings, planning and preparation would be undertaken remotely, however, it is expected that all peers would spend up to four days 'onsite' together to undertake the assessment, supported by a member of the WLGA Improvement Team.

    A final remote meeting of the panel would be convened ahead of the onsite assessment to discuss initial findings from the desk-based research, areas of particular focus and agreement on who will attend which interviews.

    During the onsite assessment the panel would undertake:

    a. Various interviews and focus groups (including statutory consultees – see Appendix C for suggested approach and interviewees)
    b. Analysis of findings and agreement to conclusions and recommendations
    c. A presentation of the key findings and recommendations to the council – audience to be determined by the council's Leader and Chief Executive.

16. Appendix A provides guidance on areas and issues the Panel may wish to explore in assessing the performance requirements. In making its assessment the Panel is not expected to ask for any new materials for the PPA but may ask to see a range of available information. Appendix D contains a suggested list of materials that may be useful to the Panel.

17. It is important that the process is underpinned by trust and takes place in an environment in which everyone feels they can participate openly and honestly. The panel will respect that some information captured during an assessment may be confidential and sensitive in nature. In the interests of openness and transparency, the Independent Chair and Senior Member Peer will provide daily feedback to the Chief Executive and Leader on progress and emerging themes.

Stage 3: Follow Up

18. As highlighted in paragraph 14, the Chair will lead a presentation of the main findings and recommendations agreed by the panel on the final day of the onsite assessment.

19. The panel must produce a report setting out its conclusions as to the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements and any actions the panel recommends that the council could take. The WLGA Improvement Officer will collate all findings and prepare a draft report for discussion and input from the panel. Once the panel has agreed the content, the draft report will be shared with the Council to check factual accuracy. The council will be asked to consider and provide feedback on any factual inaccuracies in the draft report within 10 working days.

20. Once the factual accuracy of the report has been agreed, a final report will be issued to the council to consider their response to the recommendations. The council is responsible for publishing the final report. The panel is responsible for sending the report to the Auditor General for Wales, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, and Welsh Ministers (including Care Inspectorate Wales).

21. The council must prepare a response to the report and recommendations as outlined within the statutory guidance. It is the responsibility of the council to publish their response and submit a copy to the Auditor General for Wales, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, and Welsh Ministers (including Care Inspectorate Wales).

The WLGA Offer

22. The WLGA will support councils by helping identify a suitable panel of peers, which may involve drawing on the Wales Senior Officer, Councillor and Associate Peer registers and/or liaising with the LGA to identify suitable peers. Once agreed with the council, the WLGA will appoint the panel.

23. The WLGA will provide a panel manager to support and the facilitate the panel's work during the whole PPA process. It will be for each council to provide support to arrange meetings, facilitate panel consultation exercises and provide onsite facilities etc.

24. The findings and recommendations of the PPA will provide an external perspective and should be used to inform and identify areas where sector-led support might be valuable. The WLGA will endeavour to support councils in identifying, commissioning and delivery of sector-led support requirements identified in the PPAs either through its universal or targeted offers.

Outline of Costs

25. In accordance with the Statutory Guidance: Performance and Governance of Principal Councils, the council is responsible for all associated costs.

26. The WLGA will deliver the PPA on a full cost recovery basis. Each PPA will be tailored to the individual needs of the council, so a fixed cost cannot be given. However, it is anticipated that PPA's involving a panel of between 4 – 6 members, supported by an Improvement Officer, based on-site for up to 4- days, will cost between £22k-£24k for 2023-24. *Please note, this is a guide and will be subject to local requirements and annual pay and inflationary changes. Every effort will be made to ensure that costs are kept to a minimum.*

Appendix A: Issues for the Panel to explore

The following is not intended to be an exhaustive or prescriptive list. The extent to which these issues are explored should be proportionate to the requirements of the council as outlined within the scope, whilst observing that minimum standards of a PPA, required by the Act, are met. Appendix B summarises the core statutory and good practice references within the Welsh local government context. This approach should not inhibit the professional knowledge and experience of the peer team.

Performance Requirement One: The extent to which the council is exercising its functions effectively.
Guiding Principle: The council is self-aware and able to demonstrate that it is delivering its functions in accordance with the local, regional, and national context. Where improvement is required, suitable interventions have been identified promptly that should achieve the desired outcomes.
Panel Considerations
Leadership:
- What do the leadership consider are the key issues from a political (executive and non-executive) and officer perspective? Are views consistent?   - Does the council provide effective place leadership?   - Is there a collective narrative of place?   - Is the Public Services Board effective in ensuring that partners work collaboratively?   - Does the council benefit from effective local and regional partnership arrangements?   - How do the community and voluntary sector describe their experience of working with the council?   - Is there a focus on systems leadership and influence – locally, regionally, and nationally?   - Do leaders demonstrate personal knowledge and understanding of local communities? Do they show commitment to working with partners to reduce inequality and delivering services that are inclusive and accessible to a diverse community?

Corporate and Service Planning:

- Does the council have a clear vision and priorities which are informed by the local context (place shaping), with a wider understanding of how this relates to the regional and national context?

- Does the councils corporate planning process adequately meet the requirements of the WBFGA, socio-economic and equalities duties?

- Is there an integrated organisational cross-cutting approach to tackling issues such as climate change, poverty, regeneration/local economy, wellbeing, etc.?

- Is the policy framework integrated to ensure that core duties and cross-cutting priorities are aligned?

- Is there a shared understanding and ownership of the council's vision and priorities across officer groups and councillors?

- Is there clarity over what is required to achieve the council's objectives, including due consideration for the 5 ways of working, resourcing, and governance of performance? Are these requirements evident at service planning levels (golden thread)?

- Does the council communicate effectively? How does the council use community capacity to shape and deliver priority outcomes? To what extent does the council listen, empower, co-produce, collaborate?

- Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that under-represented groups are communicated and engaged with effectively? Do they have opportunities to be involved in decision making and the design and delivery of services?

- How does the council's leadership champion and direct action on climate change? How is the council working with system partners and the community to reduce the impact of climate change?

Risk & Assurance:

- Is there any evidence to suggest that there are concerns over the delivery of statutory duties that would have a corporate impact? If so, is the council managing these risks?

- Is there sufficient assurance from Internal Audit, Audit Wales, and other regulators on performance against statutory duties and achievement of objectives?

Performance Management:

- What is the outcome of the council's self-assessment of delivery against their functions?

- Is data used effectively to evaluate performance, identify risks, and drive improvement?

- Where there is scope to determine local service delivery standards, has the council determined expected standards, against which performance is measured using metrics and/or benchmarking?

- Is there a shared understanding of priorities for improvement across senior management, councillors, communities, workforce, and partners?

- How satisfied with services are residents, including under-represented groups? How is this measured?

- Does the council collect, share and publish relevant EDI data and information about its communities? How is EDI information regularly updated and used to identify priorities for the local area?

- Is there evidence of an embedded and continuous approach to performance management, which identifies required interventions that are acted upon promptly?

Performance Requirement Two: The extent to which the council is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively.

Guiding Principle: Resources are effectively aligned to assist the council in delivering its objectives and statutory functions and the council is able to demonstrate value for money is being achieved.

Panel Considerations

Corporate and Service Planning:

- Are corporate objectives and key statutory duties embedded within service plans?

- Do service plans include an evaluation of service performance (including audit and complaints/compliments) to identify areas of improvement are these aligned with corporate improvement objectives?

- Is there a clear commitment to prevention, with suitable resource deployed to preventing or resolving issues (root cause) over treating and managing issues? Has consideration been given to collaboration with other services/partners to provide an integrated solution?

- Does the council regularly consider the most appropriate delivery options for services (e.g. outsourcing, co-sourcing, commercial arms-length company, community transfer, etc.)?

- Is failure demand identified and treated?

- Has capacity to deliver objectives been quantified is this evident at service planning levels?

Digital & Data

- Does the council use digital tools and data to facilitate transformation and efficiency savings?
- Does the council have digital and data strategies that support corporate objectives and enable early identification and adapt to changing user needs?
- Does the council design its digital services around service user needs, and identify suitable metrics to continuously drive improvement?

Financial Planning:

- Is the corporate planning cycle aligned to the statutory budget planning cycle and has the council allocated funding according to priorities and need?

- Is there a medium-term financial plan/strategy which demonstrates how the council will sustain service delivery and manage future budget, demographic, demand, inflationary (workforce and other, and legislative pressures)?

- Is there a shared understanding and ownership of the scale of the current and future financial challenges?

- Are there sufficient reserves to provide assurance on management of risk and sustainability?

- Is the council compliant with the principles Cipfa Financial Management Code, if there are areas for improvement is there evidence that action is being taken? (Refer to councils own self-assessment, internal audit review).

- Do councils make good use of the powers available to them to recover costs/generate funding? E.g. full cost recovery, commercial strategies, community asset transfer, grants, etc.

- How is the council measuring value for money? Is there a clear understanding of unit cost and are trends in over/underspends monitored within the context of VFM?

Workforce:

- Does the councils organisation design support best use of the workforce?

- Are capacity and skills aligned to priorities?

- Do workforce plans take account of current and future skills needs and gaps?

- To what extent do workforce profiles represent the community?

- Has the council embedded equalities and anti-racism practices into their HR policies and practices and does it regularly review the effectiveness of these arrangements in line with the diversity and inclusivity of the workforce?

- Do individuals understand their contribution to the corporate objectives?

Procurement:

- Has the council reviewed its supply chains and procurement strategy in the context of the WBFGA to support the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing for current and future generations?

- Does the council adopt a category management approach to procurement?

- Are contracts evaluated and awarded based on the interpretation of Welsh Governments Wales Procurement Policy Statement?

- Does the councils procurement strategy maximise the councils spending capacity for community benefit?

- Does the council routinely publish and promote local service/goods provision gaps to support foundational economy?

- Are there suitable evaluation mechanisms in place to measure impact and continuously refine approaches?

Risk & Assurance:
▪ Is risk management embedded in the council?
▪ Is there evidence of integrated identification and responding to corporate risks?
▪ Is there a shared understanding of the most significant corporate risks (threats and opportunities)?
▪ Is there a collective view of the councils risk appetite that is communicated and understood?
▪ Is there evidence of a robust assurance framework, including data/reporting from key support functions such as finance, risk management, business continuity, HR, asset management, procurement, climate change, IT, health and safety, etc.?

Assets:
▪ Is there a strategic asset management policy, strategy and plan, which is aligned to corporate objectives and priorities, corporately owned and led, which identifies the objectives and actions that are required of many different services across the council?
▪ Is the operation and management of the councils property portfolio known and regularly reviewed through quality data on inventory, condition surveys, regulatory compliance, voids, joint ventures, community transfers, etc.?
▪ Are assets being managed to support other agenda such as climate change, housing shortages (health and wellbeing) financial resilience, place shaping, social value and regeneration?
▪ Does the council operate a corporate landlord model, and does it deliver efficiencies and support the delivery of corporate outcomes?
▪ Does the council have sufficient resources to maintain and manage the property portfolio to the expected levels? If not, is there a plan to increase resource, outsource or rationalise the portfolio to a manageable level?

Performance Requirement Three: The extent to which the council has effective governance in place for securing performance requirements one and two.

Guiding Principle: There are clear and robust governance arrangements, which encourages an open and transparent culture that welcomes scrutiny and constructive challenge.

Panel Considerations

Evaluation

- Does the Annual Governance Statement cover the key issues – and is it reflective / self-critical? When and how are the governance essentials reviewed? e.g., Constitution, Scheme of Delegation, etc.

- Is there an effective Internal Audit function (Public Sector Internal Audit Standards self-assessment and external assessment)?

- Is there an effective Governance & Audit committee?

- Is scrutiny welcomed and supported – both formal O&S (if applicable) and scrutiny more generally? Do all members have the opportunity to inform and influence?

- Does scrutiny add value through the provision of a broader perspective to influence policy, monitor and challenge performance, and review decisions to assess effectiveness on delivering intended outcomes?

  - Do statutory officers have sufficient authority and support to undertake their duties? Do statutory officers work together and feel listened to?

Leadership

- Is the council well led by councillors and officers?

- Is there an effective top-team?

- Are the roles of members and officers clear? Are there good officer-member and member-member relationships?

- What are the key governance issues from a political and officer perspective? E.g., clarity, transparency, speed of decision making, accountability. To what extent are they structural or cultural / behavioural?

- Are councillors and officers supported in their leadership roles – including learning and development?

- Do political group leaders take steps to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of their members?

- How do political and managerial leaders at all levels demonstrate leadership and commitment to reducing inequality and challenging discrimination within the councils?

Organisational culture:

- Is there a positive organisational culture – e.g. respect, transparency and challenge – and how is this reflected in behaviours and practice?

- What do protected groups of staff say about the culture of the organisation?

- Are there whistleblowing procedures in place? Do staff have confidence in this procedure?

- Are staff engaged with and listened to? Is there strong internal communications?

- Are there staff led networks or other safe spaces for staff from protected groups to discuss equality issues? Do staff networks feel able to influence the organisation?

- How is overall organisational health? What is the direction of travel of key indicators? e.g., staff satisfaction / morale, sickness absence, senior management stability

- Are there effective governance structures and processes to oversee and monitor the delivery of equality objectives and strategies?

- Are managers trained and equipped to manage staff fairly and deal with any EDI related issues?

- What known equality gaps exist within the organisation (e.g. pay gaps) and to what extent are mitigation plans in place?

Financial Governance:

- Are there effective budget monitoring arrangements?

- Are there sufficient arrangements in place to oversee capital and treasury management arrangements?

- Are financial plans backed by business cases and delivery plans which identify the steps needed to achieve the desired outcomes?

- Are the arrangements for managing and monitoring delivery sufficient?

- Does the organisation act to rectify matters when actuals diverge from budgets?

- Where there are commercial activities, is there sufficient understanding of the financial risks and evidence of effective governance and scrutiny? Are risks managed within the risk appetite?

- Does the council work positively with its Governance and Audit Committee and its internal and external auditors to ensure effective financial controls are in place and to address issues raised?

Capacity to Improve:

- Does the council's approach to self-assessment drive interventions and continuous improvement?

- How does the council adapt and learn? Is the council agile and able to pivot? Is innovation encouraged and supported?

- What will the council look like in the future?

- How is change and transformation led and managed?
- What are the key areas for development / capacity for improvement challenges?

- Are plans realistic (sufficient resource, achievable, timely, etc)?

Appendix B: Strategic Context and Best Practice Framework

In determining what good practice should look like in evaluating council performance, the following statutory and best practice guidance, strategies and plans have been taken into consideration. This is not an exhaustive list and should not inhibit the professional and political experience that the peer panel provides.

Strategic Context:

SPSF1: Core guidance - guidance to public bodies and public services boards on key definitions, how to carry out sustainable development, understanding the well-being goals, applying the sustainable development principle, an explanation of the individual duties (public bodies and public services boards) and collective duties, how public bodies fit into the architecture of the Act, and where the key changes in organisations are expected to be seen.

SPSF2: Guidance on the individual role public bodies have - guidance for all public bodies covered by the Act to help public bodies set well-being objectives, publish a well-being statement, review well-being objectives and report on progress.

SPSF3: Collective role (public service boards) - guidance for public services boards about the exercise of their functions, including preparation of an assessment of local well-being and a local well-being plan.

Future Trends Report: Inequality in a Future Wales

A more Equal Wales: The Socio-Economic Duty

Public Sector Equality Duty in Wales

Foundational economy: delivery plan

Leadership & Governance

CIPFA SOLACE: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework

CIPFA SOLACE: Delivering Good Governance in Welsh Authorities

Ethical Standards Framework for Wales

CIPFA: Audit Committees, practical guidance for local authorities and police (2022)

CIPFA Leadership Matters

ISO 31000 Risk Management

Audit Wales: Six steps to better scrutiny in Wales

Centre for Public Scrutiny: Risk and Resilience

Finance, Procurement & Asset Management

CIPFA Financial Management Code

CIPFA Financial Management Code Guidance

[Wales Procurement Policy](#)

[Procuring well-being in Wales](#)

CIPFA: A guide to Local Authority Asset Management

Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS)

Digital & Data

[Digital Strategy for Wales](#)

Performance Management

[Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021](#)

[Performance and Governance of Principal Councils](#)

Appendix C: Guidance for the Peer Team on Facilitating Meetings and Focus Groups

Facilitating meetings and group sessions

During the PPA, the panel will be seeking the views of a variety of stakeholders both within and outside of the council. Whilst a variety of mediums will be considered and the most appropriate utilised, the majority of the assessment will be undertaken through a series of meetings, which may be 1-2-1, small groups or larger focus groups.

Meetings are an opportunity to discuss topics, gather and triangulate evidence, explore issues, and assess appetite for change in some instances. Peers should conduct these meetings in an informal, conversational manner, ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

At the beginning of each meeting or focus group, introduce yourself and other peers. Then invite the person(s) you are meeting with to introduce themselves. Briefly outline the PPA process and explain that:

- Whilst it is a statutory requirement, we are there at the request of the council, to support the council with the improvement journey.
- Briefly explain the concept of sector-led support, bringing together a team with a broad experience of local government to act as critical friends.
- We are gathering the views of a wide range of people. If they are a statutory consultee, refer to the requirement. If the meeting is at the request of the council, then make reference as to why the council felt that their opinion should be sought.
- The process relies on people being open and honest about what the council is good at, what needs to improve and the challenges that need to be addressed.
- Information collated from our discussions is non-attributable to individuals. All findings will be triangulated, so feedback to the council will be based on issues having been raised from multiple sources, including peer observations.

At the end of the meeting/session:

- Ask if the person(s) you have met with have any questions they would like to ask or anything they wish to add
- Advise them of the next steps, i.e., informal feedback to the council, followed by a final report which will be considered by the council, and final report submissions.
- Thank them for their time and their openness and honesty.
- Remember not to mention any comments made that can be attributed to a named consultee.

Approach to groups meetings/focus groups

Depending on the requirements of the council, the Panel may hold some meetings/focus groups in person or online.

Having taken the approach outlined above, set the scene for the topics that you would like to explore with the group. It may be helpful to split into smaller groups to work through some open questions and ask for feedback to the wider group. Ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute.

When undertaking sessions with statutory consultees, peers will need to ensure that all three aspects of the performance requirements have been consulted upon.

To help clarify the points raised and further triangulate, it will be helpful to ask for examples that illustrate the feedback you are receiving.

Further information on tools available to the team will be shared in advance. However, it can be useful to ask participants to capture key points on post-it notes or another anonymised medium, to quantify some of the points raised. This may be a simple as asking, 'one area that the council does well' and 'one area for improvement'.

Recording information and triangulating findings

Meetings will be undertaken with at least two peers involved. Discussions should take place to agree, who will lead on what, and who will capture the feedback from discussions. Typically, for onsite meetings, flipcharts and post-it notes will be used to enable the groups to respond, which also helps capture feedback. There may be occasions when digital tools will be used to capture feedback.

It's important that the panel meet 2-3 times during a day to:

- Share key findings and any emerging issues to triangulate feedback
- Discuss lines of enquiry in forthcoming sessions
- Challenge and test initial messages
- Ensure that emerging feedback is evidenced and triangulated

At the end of each day, there will be a catch-up meeting with the chief executive and leader to keep them informed of emerging messages throughout the process. In doing so, it is important to emphasise that observations are being shared on an informal and confidential basis. Feedback will only be provided where findings have been triangulated.

Suggested PPA Interviewees:

The following list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive (other than the expectation of statutory consultee's), but a suggestion of individuals and groups the panel may wish to meet during the assessment. For some it may be more efficient to hold remote sessions/phone calls (e.g., interviews with regulators and partners):

- Leader
- Chief Executive
- All Cabinet Members
- All members of Senior Leadership Team
- Chairs of Scrutiny Committees
- Chair of Governance and Audit Committee
- Chair of Democratic Services
- Chair of Standards Committee
- Group Leaders
- Councillor focus group/s
- Heads of Service Focus Group/s
- Staff focus groups
- Union representatives
- Stakeholder focus groups
- Public Service Board focus group[8]
- Regional Partnership Board focus group
- Director of Resources
- Section 151 Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of Audit
- Head of Procurement
- Head of Human Resources
- Head of Property

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[8] Statutory members of each PSB are:

- local authority
- local health board
- fire and rescue authority
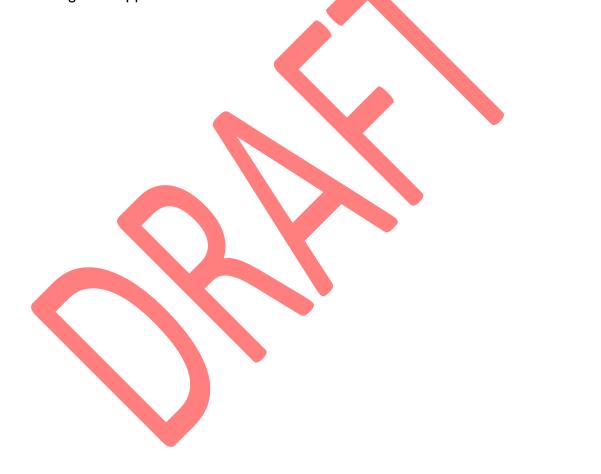- Natural Resources Wales

In addition, the following are invited to participate:

- Welsh ministers
- chief constables
- police and crime commissioner
- relevant probation services
- at least one body representing voluntary organisations

- Head of Democratic Services
- A leader and/or chief executive from a neighbouring authority
- Partner organisation Chief Executives (e.g., Health Board, neighbouring councils)
- Regulators (e.g. Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales, Audit Wales) – *it should be noted that no information will be shared with the panel that hasn't already been reported to the council.*
- Business Leaders/Chair of Chamber
- Representatives from Town & Community Councils

The panel may use a combination of focus groups and web-based surveys/questionnaires to fulfil the statutory consultation requirements. The council's self-assessment consultation process will be considered by the panel when determining their approach.

Appendix D

Suggested Reading for Panel Members

The following list of documents may assist Panel members in the development of their understanding of the council. It is not intended that every peer reads everything, but that panel members select from the list below, those documents which are most relevant to their role within them team / the aspect of performance that they are focusing on. The documents may also provide evidence to substantiate or otherwise issues that emerge from interviews or focus groups.

Council Documents:

- Corporate plan (current and previous)
- Annual statutory reports produced by the council for last three years, including Self-Assessment Report, Wellbeing Report (if separate to Self-Assessment Report), Annual Governance Statement (if separate to Self-Assessment Report), Social Services Annual Report
- External inspection and regulation reports (for last three years)
- Medium Term Financial Plan (current)
- Procurement strategy
- Commissioning strategy
- Workforce strategy
- Digital strategy
- IT strategy
- Asset Management Plan
- Commercialisation strategy
- Transformation plan
- Learning and Development Strategy
- Cabinet forward work plan
- Scrutiny forward work plan
- Scrutiny Annual Report (and any scrutiny self-evaluations undertaken recently)
- Governance & Audit Committee Annual Report and any self-assessment evaluations recently undertaken
- Public Participation and Engagement Strategy
- Strategic Equality Plan
- Any S54 Reports prepared by the Chief Executive
- Staff engagement and wellbeing plans and surveys
- Performance Dashboard/Reporting (councils' own KPIs)
- Citizen surveys/service user satisfaction surveys
- Customer Compliments/Complaints Reports
- Standards Committee Annual Report
- The Constitution (including Codes of Conduct, Overview and Scrutiny Structure and Terms of reference and Financial Regulations)
- Target Operating Model

- Performance Management Framework
- Risk Management Strategy & Corporate Risk Registers
- Data Management Strategy
- Head of Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion