

Denbighshire County Council Corporate Self-Assessment

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1. Introduction

The council produces this annual self-assessment document to support compliance with our statutory obligation to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement (as required under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009).

This self-assessment helps us to understand our strengths and weaknesses in relation to our key processes, such as strategic planning, performance management, workforce planning and financial management.

It is important to note that this document is not the only source of self-assessment undertaken by the council. For example, our Annual Social Services Report also includes a self-assessment of similar processes as they apply to social services in Denbighshire. We produced a comprehensive self-assessment to support the recent Estyn inspection of our education services, and this document also covered corporate processes to support improvements in education. Each of our services also produces a bi-annual self-assessment, and many of these are relevant to areas covered within this corporate self-assessment, for example, Finance & Assets; Strategic HR; Business Planning & Performance.

Our previous Corporate-Self Assessment highlighted the need to improve the way we undertake and coordinate self-assessment across the council. We acknowledge that this is still the case, and it will remain an action within our Business Planning & Performance Service Plan. Although we try to ensure consistency, there are difficulties in aligning large scale self-assessments such as Estyn or CSSIW with the Corporate Self-Assessment, simply because their subjects and timetables are different. It is hoped that the Wales Audit Office review of self-assessment will provide learning points for a more consistent approach.

2. Supporting Our Corporate Priorities

Statement

The council is confident that the process for developing its new corporate priorities for 2012-17 was robust and inclusive, and that it has systems in place to support their delivery and to ensure that they are reviewed annually.

Strengths

- ✓ The work to develop our new corporate priorities has been extensive and robust. A significant amount of research, analysis and engagement work was undertaken with all stakeholders. We also addressed a previous weakness by improving our engagement with young people. We are confident that the priorities that emerged from this work are relevant.
- ✓ Our corporate priorities will be reviewed annually to ensure that they remain relevant. We also plan to allow residents and our partners an opportunity to comment on the continuation of our priorities before the development of the 2014/15 annual Corporate Plan Delivery Document (and for subsequent years).

Areas for improvement

- Although work is progressing well to develop the technical detail of delivering and monitoring the Corporate Plan, there is still work needed to better understand the two new programmes around 'developing the local economy' and 'modernising the council to deliver efficiencies and improve services for our customers'. Two new programme managers are now in post to help develop these.
 - Self-assessment is a key element of strategic planning, and we need to make further improvements to the way we undertake self-assessment, including doing more to coordinate our Annual Governance Statement, and the self-assessments undertaken for the WAO, CSSIW and Estyn.
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Assessment

The council has now developed its new Corporate Plan 2012-17, which was unanimously agreed by full council in October 2012. The decision was

made to wait until the autumn to agree the new Plan to ensure that our newly elected members were involved in its development. This was important for securing commitment to the Plan, which is crucial to its successful

delivery. Meanwhile, we continued to work to ensure that any outstanding activities from the Corporate Plan 2009-12 were delivered through our Service Plans for 2012-13.

The process for developing the new corporate priorities was substantial and robust. We first consulted with members of the public (including young people, student and youth councils) back in October - December 2011. Utilising their feedback and information (e.g. population statistics, performance data, engagement activity, etc.) we ensured that the new priorities were selected based on strong evidence of need. This information was presented to officers and elected members through numerous workshops held from November 2011, all the way up until the final workshop held with newly elected members and the Senior Leadership Team in July 2012. The public were again consulted on our emerging themes, shaping our final plan as it is today. We are confident that these are the right priorities for 2012-17.

A great deal of work has already gone into developing the technical guidance for measuring and monitoring five of our seven corporate priorities and the detail around delivery. Further work is now required to shape the two remaining, larger programmes for 'developing the local economy' and 'modernising the council to deliver

efficiencies and improve services for our customers'. Two new programme managers have now been appointed to manage these.

Each year we produce an Annual Performance Review, published in October. Following our review of performance against our Corporate Plan, we will invite residents and our partners to provide us with feedback on our priorities. This will then help us to develop the annual Corporate Plan Delivery Document, which details what we expect to do during each financial year.

It is acknowledged that we need to do more to coordinate the self-assessments undertaken for the WAO, CSSIW and Estyn. Furthermore, the WAO noted in its January 2012 Annual Improvement Report that, "The Council, in common with other authorities in Wales, should use its annual review of governance arrangements to provide a more robust self-assessment of their effectiveness." It is hoped that the Wales Audit Office review of self-assessment will provide some learning points to help us better develop a more consistent approach, as this is currently something that we are struggling with, owing to the different focus of these varying self-assessments and the timetables involved. This continues as an improvement activity within the Business Planning & Performance Service Plan.

3. Financial Management & Efficiency Programme

Statement

The council is confident that its financial management arrangements support priorities and ensure financial health, although a more strategic approach to the efficiency programme will be required for the difficult years ahead.

Strengths

- ✓ Co-ordinated internal and external audit reviews provide assurance that financial management is sound.
- ✓ Financial planning is becoming more integrated with business planning and performance management. This is a particular strength of the new Corporate Plan 2012-17, which sets out an ambitious but achievable programme of investment in our priorities.
- ✓ The efficiency programme has been successful to date, enabling us to identify approximately £13 million of savings in 2011-14 without any significant impact on frontline services.
- ✓ Members feel engaged with the budget setting process.

Areas for improvement

- A more coordinated and strategic approach is required to improve the effectiveness of individual funding streams.
- A more strategic approach to identifying savings will be required as they become increasingly difficult to achieve without having an impact on our communities.
- Savings to be made through procurement.

Assessment

We are confident that our financial management arrangements are resilient, and have been strengthened since the restructure of Finance and the development of our medium-term

financial plan. The WAO again gave an unqualified audit opinion on the council's latest statement of accounts, and has highlighted our financial planning methods as good practice to other councils. The devolution of financial management to schools was

praised in the recent Estyn inspection report.

Members have commented on how engaged and involved they feel in the budget setting process. This was also evident when we considered how we would pay for our corporate priorities. We think that we are leading the way in the UK by having a Corporate Plan that sets out an ambitious but achievable programme of investment in our priorities over the next five years. This has demonstrated the council's command of its finances, and the desire of Councillors to match their ambitions with the additional investment required to deliver real change for the communities of Denbighshire.

Finance has been a fundamental part of the agendas for the Service Performance Challenges, where we routinely ask services about their contribution to the efficiency programme, both in terms of performance (achievements to date) and future plans.

One area for development is to improve the co-ordination of individual funding streams to make it easier for

officers to identify and access opportunities, and to ensure that those funds can be used more strategically. The Partnerships & Communities Manager is doing some early work on this in relation to The BIG Plan.

Although we are satisfied that the efficiency programme has been effective to date, there is little scope left for services to find savings without making difficult decisions about which areas to disinvest in. Financial management therefore needs to adapt, and we will need a more strategic approach to fulfil the requirement to identify further savings for 2015-16 and beyond.

There are still savings to be made through procurement, where a lack of resource and support has meant that this service has not moved far enough. The inter-relationship between finance and procurement officers has been revised to give the extra resource along with an additional procurement officer and structured training programme. There will be a greater focus on e-procurement, e-invoicing and Proactis in future.

4. Workforce Planning & Development

Statement

The council has made some improvements to workforce planning and the way it makes use of its staff to achieve improvement. However, it is recognised that more needs to be done to improve the flexibility of the workforce to enable the council to utilise its staff in the areas of greatest need.

Strengths

- ✓ Structures and processes are now in place for more effective workforce planning.
- ✓ Improving the flexibility of the workforce is an important element of our modernisation priority within the Corporate Plan 2012-17.

Areas for improvement

- To increase workforce flexibility and release capacity to help support improvement and deliver our Corporate Plan 2012-17.
 - Further work to embed improvements made to workforce planning processes.
 - Explore a quality assurance framework to ensure managers are complying with policies and procedures, and to identify any gaps in staff training.
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Assessment

The Excellence Denbighshire event is designed to give wider recognition to the achievements of staff, any outstanding performance, and to acknowledge best practice. These events have been very successful to date, and we believe that they will help to foster a culture of pride amongst employees.

A Staff Survey was conducted in 2011, seeking perceptions of what it is like to

work for Denbighshire County Council and what could be improved. Action plans to address any identified issues have been reviewed by each service, producing a “You Said, We Did” document to evidence actions taken. The survey will be repeated in February 2013, which will enable us to assess the impact of those action plans.

One area where we would like to see improvement is in the flexibility of our workforce, so that this crucial resource

can be utilised more efficiently and effectively to support improvement. This now forms part of our Modern Council Programme. Outcome 2 of this programme is to achieve “A more flexible and effective workforce supported by cost efficient infrastructure”. The three themes driving this outcome are “Service Modernisation”, “Flexible working” and “Future workspaces”. The success of this is dependent on a coordinated approach to our ICT, office accommodation and workforce strategies. Six “working styles” have been identified in relation to how staff will work across the authority. This determines the ICT solutions required to enable staff to be more mobile and flexible about where and when they are able to work. At the same time a project is being scoped to determine how we can redeploy staff more easily to those areas where their skills are required.

A recent Internal Audit Report on Strategic HR, which included workforce planning, identified a number of processes in need of improvement. In particular, it was felt that there was no robust mechanism in place for business continuity and succession planning, the council being unable to determine accurately the future number of employees required within the Council, and having no way of identifying staff shortages and competency gaps. However, arrangements are now in place to support an annual Workforce Planning exercise with Services. The HR Business Partners undertook this work in October 2012, focussing on staff composition and numbers, absence,

skills sets and development, recruitment, retention, succession planning, working patterns and locations, as well as staff survey action plans. There was also an evaluation of the benefits of the previous workforce planning activity. Services reviewed their workforce plans to align them to the corporate priorities, identifying success factors and key themes that were fed into the HR Strategy Action Plan.

The Internal Audit Report also identified the need for the council to improve its approach to staff training, and in particular of managers to ensure that they are complying with their responsibilities in respect of relevant policies and procedures. This was felt to be especially true of recruitment and redeployment. Power hours have been introduced to address the deficit in training, and a new recruitment framework has been developed, which stipulates that at least one member of a recruitment panel has to have received recruitment training.

The council recognises that improvements can be made to enhance its approach to workforce planning & development, and in August 2012 a Systems Thinking exercise of Strategic HR was carried out, which identified 18 key processes that could be improved. The Internal Audit Report was discussed in the Strategic HR Service Performance Challenge, and a further piece of work by the service has determined its activities and workload, together with their prioritisation.

5. Risk Management

Statement

The council is confident that it has the processes in place to manage risk effectively.

Strengths

- ✓ Following our review of strategic risk management in 2011, we created an appropriate separation of duties regarding the coordination of risk management and auditing the system to ensure it is robust.
- ✓ The new risk methodology has, usefully, led to the removal of issues from the risks register, which has made the risk register more relevant and manageable.
- ✓ The distinction drawn between inherent and residual risks makes it easier to test the effectiveness of existing controls and to identify mitigating actions.

Areas for improvement

- Greater integration of Service Risk and Project Risk, possibly through the use of the project management software, Verto.
- During the first formal review of the Corporate Risk Register with CET, it became clear that there wasn't enough time to review the entire content of the register in one meeting. Therefore, we will now hold meetings with individual members of CET to consider the risks within their portfolios in greater detail prior to a full group discussion with CET.
- Constant review is required to ensure that the new risk methodology is fully embedded and understood by all relevant officers and Members. Although training has been provided for the new Council, attendance by members was poor. Further training may therefore be required, for example, the Corporate Improvement Team Manager is to deliver risk refresher training at the start of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting on 21st February 2013 as the Corporate Risk Register is an agenda item for that meeting.

Assessment

Following the risk review, we have adopted a new approach to risk management. This approach draws a

clear distinction between a risk (something that might happen) and an issue (something that has already happened and is being managed). As a result, our corporate and service risk

registers are clearer, more concise, and more relevant as management tools. We now include mitigating actions from the Corporate Risk Register in Service Plans to ensure that risk management is genuinely integrated into our business planning process. The separation of the Internal Audit function from the management of risk in the council has also allowed for a more independent assessment of how effective risk management is. An Internal Audit review of the process is taking place during February 2013, and any recommendations arising from that will be considered and implemented as appropriate.

We now draw distinctions between inherent and residual (i.e. current) risk levels. The introduction of inherent risk has enabled the council to be confident that it has full coverage of all the major areas of risk. Previously, when we only considered residual risk, it was easier to ignore many large inherent risks if officers felt that those risks were being well managed.

We are confident that this new approach significantly improves our ability to manage risk effectively. However, more work is needed to integrate this approach with the management of risk for projects. It is hoped that the newly acquired software for project management, Verto, can help with this.

It is also felt that the approach for updating the Corporate Risk Register can be improved upon. Our experience from the first formal review (following

the Service Challenges in June/July 2012) showed that this can be a time consuming process, and that it was too ambitious to attempt to achieve this in a single group session with CET. We have amended our approach and, for the current review of the Corporate Risk Register, we are holding individual meetings with individual members of CET to consider the risks within their portfolios in greater detail prior to a full group discussion with CET. It is agreed that this approach works better as it allows for the detail of the Register to be considered more thoroughly.

Risk Management training has been provided to elected members (before and after the elections in May 2012), but it was found that attendance on the whole was poor. As a consequence more focussed sessions were held with members of the Cabinet and Performance Scrutiny, as it is important that these groups in particular understand the process. There will be a constant review of training requirements for members, providing further opportunities as needed. For example, the Corporate Improvement Team Manager is to deliver risk refresher training at the start of the Performance Scrutiny Committee meeting on 21st February 2013 as the Corporate Risk Register is an agenda item for that meeting. This is also true of officers as responsibilities change through the recent restructures. The Corporate Improvement Team will continue to provide this support as required.

6. Responding to the External Environment

Statement

The council has processes to identify opportunities and ensure that it manages threats from the external environment.

Strengths

- ✓ The council has a robust risk management process in place that looks at external risks at the same time as internal risks are considered.
- ✓ A great deal of analysis of the external environment has been undertaken as part of the process of developing our new Corporate Plan 2012-17.
- ✓ We are involved in, and lead on, a number of regional and sub-regional collaboration projects, and have developed proper governance arrangements for our collaboration activity.

Areas for improvement

- The council is strengthening its research and intelligence functions to be more proactive in the way in which it considers the external environment, using comparative information and data to better help support decision making and strategic planning.
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Assessment

A comprehensive analysis of the external environment has been undertaken as part of the process of developing our new Corporate Plan, utilising information and intelligence to ensure that our new corporate priorities are based on strong evidence of need, as we have also done with The BIG Plan previously.

We have a strong system for risk management in place (see section 5), which considers external risk factors as well as internal concerns. These are reviewed twice a year through the Service Performance Challenge

Programme, and any significant risks are escalated to the Corporate Risk Register to give it greater prominence within the authority.

In terms of collaborations that we are engaged in (which are covered in greater detail in section 8), we are confident that effective management and communication procedures are in place to alert us to any emerging opportunities or threats from the external environment. We have developed a governance toolkit and partnership register which outline clear arrangements for monitoring our collaboration activity.

The council maintains strong working relationships with our external partners, including the joint Conwy & Denbighshire LSB, and actively engages with stakeholders and local communities, utilising such mechanisms as the Member Area Groups or Residents Survey for example (see section 10 for more detail on consultation & engagement).

We ensure that there is a constant dialogue with the Wales Audit Office and respond to their suggestions for good practice. Our Directors, Senior Leadership Team and managers meet regularly with counterparts from other authorities and agencies to share best practice, including regional and sub-regional bodies, such as the Regional Leadership Board. As part of our Modernisation Programme, the 'Hwb'

have also recently undertaken 'organisational raids' of other local authorities to look at different ways of doing things. The council also continues to be an active member of the WLGA and professional groups, such as APSE.

The council recognised that it needed to develop a more consistent approach to the use of information to support strategic planning and decision making, and as result there is now a new information and research element within the Corporate Improvement Team. It is hoped that through this organisation of information, including benchmarking comparative data, we will be better able to respond to the external environment, and identify opportunities and threats more easily.

7. Performance Management

Statement

The council is confident that it manages performance effectively, although some further work is required to fully embed the recent changes and improvements to our Performance Management Framework.

Strengths

- ✓ The Performance Scrutiny Committee is now well established in its role; as is the Service Performance Challenge programme, which was amended in 2012 to improve its effectiveness.
- ✓ Quarterly Performance Reports to Cabinet and Performance Scrutiny have been revised to cover all major sources of performance information. This reduces fragmentation and potential duplication in performance reporting.
- ✓ We now use Excellence Thresholds and Intervention levels to help us better understand performance in its context. This approach, which we believe to be sector-leading, enables a much more sophisticated level of discussion about performance than was possible previously.

Areas for improvement

- Some further work needs to be done to roll out the new Excellence Threshold and Intervention approach to all Service Plans.
 - The Service Performance Challenge Programme is currently being reviewed to ensure it remains relevant and effective.
 - Further work is required to ensure consistency in the role of Performance Scrutiny Link Members.
 - Consistency in terms of performance management roles within services.
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Assessment

The council has recently introduced Excellence Thresholds and Intervention levels into its performance management framework. They allow the council to understand how good the current position is, rather than

simply telling us whether we managed to meet a particular "target". To help us with this we have now adopted a four-"RAG" (Red, Orange, Yellow, Green) approach to performance reporting. The Corporate Improvement Team will continue to manage this change to ensure that it becomes

embedded and understood by officers and members. By the end of this financial year, all Service Plans will be established using the new Excellence Threshold and Intervention approach. The performance management framework for our new Corporate Plan is currently being established on this basis.

Quarterly Performance Reports to Cabinet and Performance Scrutiny have been amended to bring together all key strands of performance information, e.g. Corporate Plan; Corporate Project Register; and our Outcome Agreement. This approach reduces fragmentation and potential duplication in performance reporting.

A recent Internal Audit report on Performance Management highlighted that the Quick Guide to Service Planning was not user-friendly. It was also felt that the Performance Management Framework did not fully explain the 'intervention' procedure for poor performance. The document has since been reviewed to address those issues.

The Performance Scrutiny Committee, which is attended by the Corporate Improvement Team Manager, is working effectively. Members of Performance Scrutiny are aligned to individual services to help develop specialist knowledge and to ensure that any issues can be shared with the committee. Performance Management training has also been provided to this group and to Cabinet to support them in their roles. However, it is felt that some further work is needed to ensure that all Performance Link Members understand their role.

There is no corporate monitoring and reporting of performance for the Business Transformation & ICT team following the recent SLT restructure. However, given the importance of this team in delivering key areas within the new Corporate Plan, ICT will automatically form part of the Corporate Plan monitoring. This will be done through Ffynnon, and ICT will need to provide performance updates along with other services.

Service Performance Challenges are now well established, and we have made amendments to the process to improve their effectiveness. Each meeting now has a bespoke agenda based on actual issues, which means that all the meetings are more focussed and relevant. However, the process around monitoring actions arising from the meetings was not always clear. Therefore, during the most recent round, efforts have been made to include timescales for delivery and specific accountability. The Service Performance Challenge Programme is currently being reviewed by Corporate Directors to ensure it remains effective.

Finally, the Internal Audit report raised a concern with regard to the consistency of performance management across services, specifically where some services have dedicated performance managers carrying out a quality control role, while others act only as coordinators of data. The Head of Internal Audit will be taking this forward when he meets with Heads of Service to discuss the Internal Audit assurance work for 2013-14.

8. Partnerships & Collaboration

Statement

The council is taking advantage of opportunities for inter-departmental, collaborative and partnership working, and building on its experiences. However, the partnership agenda is challenging, and will demand a lot of continued attention in years ahead.

Strengths

- ✓ Corporate Directors now have clear portfolios based on Corporate Priorities and major areas of work rather than being responsible for particular operational service areas.
- ✓ The Council is recognised as a leader in terms of developing the partnership agenda, with a joint Local Service Board and its integrated strategic partnership plan (The BIG Plan).
- ✓ We have developed a Partnership Governance Framework and Partnership Register which outlines clear arrangements for the management and coordination of our collaboration activity.

Areas for improvement

- The configuration of Denbighshire's strategic partnerships is not yet right, and requires further work.
 - To develop an understanding of how to successfully scrutinise the performance of regional service delivery from a Denbighshire perspective.
 - Although already implemented, further work is needed to ensure that the Partnership Governance Framework becomes a properly embedded system.
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Assessment

Internally, our Corporate Directors now have portfolios that are less operational in nature and are more aligned to corporate priorities. The corporate portfolio approach lays the foundation for facilitating increased inter-departmental working. Both the

Corporate Executive Team and the Senior Leadership Team have become more strategic, which is enabling the council to identify cross-cutting opportunities. Our outcome-based approach to strategic planning is also conducive to this, as it is often the case that more than one service contributes to a single outcome.

The council is a lead player in driving the partnership agenda. For example, Denbighshire and Conwy's Local Service Boards have now been joined together. We have been sector leading in the way that we have merged our Community Strategy, Children and Young People's Plan, Community Safety Plan, and Health, Social Care and Well-Being Strategy into a single integrated strategy (The BIG Plan). However, the partnership agenda is extremely challenging and, although progress has been made, it is proving more difficult than anticipated.

Denbighshire, in conjunction with Conwy County Borough Council, has decided not to continue with two of its larger joint-service collaborations, namely Planning & Public Protection, and Highways & Infrastructure. It was found that the resources required for collaboration in these areas were not proportionate to the benefits. To continue would have done so at a cost to the rate-payer. Although we were committed to both of these large collaborations, we always approached them from a position of caution, and said from the onset that we would not continue should the expected savings failed to be realised, or if the quality of customer-service was put at risk. In both cases the executive on both sides agreed to withdraw.

However, this does not undermine our commitment to the collaboration agenda, as can be demonstrated by the fact that we are involved in, and lead on, a number of regional

collaboration projects. For example, we are involved in the North Wales Procurement Partnership, which delivered in excess of £250,000 in savings during 2011-12 alone. Also worth mentioning is the successful delivery of the Regional Food Waste project by Denbighshire on behalf of five other North Wales Authorities. The council continues to be committed to The Compact and are actively working towards it. The Senior Leadership Team have identified and agreed clear roles and responsibilities for its delivery.

To manage collaboration we have developed political tools, such as a dedicated Partnerships Scrutiny. However, we need to develop an understanding of how to successfully scrutinise the performance of regional service delivery from a Denbighshire perspective. This will be a challenge for all local authorities as more services explore the potential for regional delivery. The new joint Scrutiny powers afforded by the Local Government (Wales) Measure and subsequent WG guidance will help in this regard. This has recently been out for consultation and should be available soon.

We have also developed a Partnership Governance Framework and Toolkit, through which partnerships can be planned and monitored. This also includes a Partnership Register which highlights our current partnership activity. More work will be needed to ensure these tools become properly embedded.

9. Programme & Project Management

Statement

The council has improved its management of programmes and projects following a full review of the project management methodology, its completion of PRINCE2 training, and the procurement of a project management system. Continued work is required to fully embed each of these components into the council's culture.

Strengths

- ✓ A corporate Project Register is now operating successfully.
- ✓ The corporate approach to Programme and Project Management has been developed and works well.
- ✓ The procurement of a new Project Management system that will be used across the council, giving project and programmes greater visibility.
- ✓ A register of over 100 trained project managers across all areas of the Council, qualified to at least PRINCE2 Foundation Level.
- ✓ The recent implementation of a Stage Review process will assist the council in enhancing the quality of the Business Case and subsequent projects, enabling greater benefit realisation.

Areas for improvement

- Newly trained project managers will lack experience of applying their new skills. Through workforce planning, use of the project manager register, and the implementation of a Stage Review process, project managers who have recently acquired their PRINCE2 qualification will gain greater experience in project delivery.
- A process for the strategic allocation of resources to project management.

Assessment

Following a review, it was identified that the previous project management methodology was not consistently applied across the organisation. As a

result the council has reviewed the methodology to align more directly with PRINCE2 (Project IN a Controlled Environment; the Cabinet Office Government standard for Project Management). During the review, a

project management system was identified, which had been developed for use in the Public Sector. Verto was purchased and has been implemented. The templates previously defined have been transferred to the new system as web forms. This will result in a consistent approach, which is rigorous and flexible, allowing for overall improved delivery in quality, cost, time and scope of projects across the council.

To build capability across the organisation, 105 Project Managers have been trained to Foundation or Practitioner level in PRINCE 2 to complement the adoption of the PRINCE 2 methodology. The training is also being delivered to Project Executives (senior management) to ensure clarity and effectiveness in roles and responsibilities in the Project Management process. Training has also been delivered to members of the Council.

The council is developing a process for the strategic allocation of resources to project management. A risk with the current business model (where our project management team relies on income from project management) is that fee-earning capital projects can take priority over important corporate improvement projects, as the fees are required to fund the salaries of our corporate project managers. With the

completed training, some services may decide to manage projects themselves, therefore enabling project managers to gain the experience following their qualification.

A corporate approach to Programme Management has been developed, where a system is set up to coordinate, direct and oversee the implementation of a set of related projects and activities in order to deliver outcomes and benefits related to the organisation's strategic objectives. We remain committed to this mechanism of delivering cross-cutting activities within the authority. The Programme Board structure has been reviewed to support the new corporate priorities detailed in our Corporate Plan for 2012-17, and key lessons learnt from our experiences to date will inform the future delivery of Programme Management across the authority. Two new strategic programme boards have been established: 'A Modern Council'; and 'Economic and Community Ambition'. A third programme board is also being developed to support the 'Modernising Education and 21st Century Schools' theme. There is already a board in place for Modernising Social Services, which will be relevant to our priority to ensure that vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible.

10. Scrutiny & Challenge

Statement

The council is confident that its' Scrutiny and Challenge processes are robust, although the function needs to be promoted among our stakeholders, and further training opportunities provided to members.

Strengths

- ✓ Scrutiny committees have been reorganised around key themes to enable a more corporate approach, and have shown their strength through the successful delivery of working group objectives.
- ✓ Service Performance Challenges are now fully embedded in our performance management framework, and have been refined to improve their focus.

Areas for improvement

- The Scrutiny training programme for new members was not well attended. Additional training will be required once the powers afforded by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 have all been commenced.
 - Actions identified as part of our self-assessment for the All Wales Scrutiny Improvement Study will need to be carried forward. These include our communication with auditors, regulators and inspectors, and the promotion of the Scrutiny function to internal and external stakeholders.
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Assessment

Denbighshire's Scrutiny committees are based around the themes of Performance; Partnerships, and Communities, the council having moved away from directorate based committees in May 2011. Although the Scrutiny structure is only approaching the end of its second year, signs of improvement are evident.

The Performance Scrutiny Committee has appointed Performance Link Members for each service area following the May 2012 elections. This

enables those members to develop knowledge and expertise, and to bring areas of concern to the attention of the Committee. These Performance Scrutiny Link Members are also part of the Challenge for their designated services.

The Service Performance Challenges are now an embedded, twice-yearly event. Bespoke agendas are created for each service in an effort to make sure they add value and deliver knowledge that isn't provided in any other challenge arena. New members have now attended two rounds of the

programme, and have enjoyed the opportunity to meet with the Head of Service and relevant officers to challenge any shortcomings and examine matters in detail. Although these have proved to be very useful, they are continually reviewed and improvements are made as necessary. Having finished the second round of the programme, Corporate Directors are again reviewing their effectiveness.

The Performance Scrutiny Committee has also established a Focus Group that will meet on a regular basis with the Corporate Improvement Team Manager and the Head of Internal Audit to examine in detail performance data ahead of its submission to the Committee. Performance Link Members are also copied into Internal Audit reports that relate to their specific service area.

Since the 2012 elections, Communities and Partnerships Scrutiny Committees have established a number of working groups, e.g. the Bus Service Reductions Working Group; and the Highway Grass Verge Cutting Contract Working Group. The Healthcare in North Wales is Changing Working Group examined in detail the Health Board's proposals to change health service delivery mechanisms across North Wales. This Group, which received evidence from expert witnesses, compiled the basis of the Council's response to the BCUHB's consultation on the proposals. Following the publication of the BCUHB's final proposals with respect to this review this Working Group will reconvene to present their conclusions for Council's consideration.

With regards to training, all members of Scrutiny have been offered access to scrutiny overview, questioning and chairing skills courses. However, although these sessions were felt to be engaging and valuable by those who attended, they were on the whole poorly attended, some sessions being cancelled due to a lack of interest. Members have also been offered a networking opportunity to share information, training and best practice on scrutiny through the North Wales regional training event for elected members. Going forward, once the powers afforded to Scrutiny by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 have all been commenced, training will be required on the new provisions.

In our recent self-assessment as part of the All Wales Scrutiny Improvement Study conducted by the WAO, we highlighted a number of areas as being in need of improvement. There is a need for regular and effective two-way communication between Scrutiny and external / internal auditors, regulators and inspectors, which will help in the planning of improvement activity. Scrutiny chairs and executive members' must be proactive in promoting the role and value of the Scrutiny function to internal and external stakeholders, including engagement over planning and conducting scrutiny's work. Above all Scrutiny must ensure that the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area is heard as part of the local decision and policy-making process.

11. Consultation & Engagement

Statement

The council communicates effectively with its communities and stakeholders, although more work is required in some areas to ensure our approach is inclusive and consistent.

Strengths

- ✓ Locality-based engagement mechanisms have been developed and strengthened.
- ✓ A robust and inclusive process of engagement with the community, particularly young people, as part of the development of our new corporate priorities.

Areas for improvement

- The Consultation & Engagement Strategy needs to become embedded in council service delivery.
 - The development of Customer Standards for Service Plans 2013-14.
 - Further work on Town Plans to include the needs of surrounding rural communities.
 - Further improvements in the way we engage with business groups.
 - Roll out of the Denbighshire Volunteering Strategy.
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Assessment

The council endorses the national principles for public engagement in Wales. We have developed a Community Engagement Strategy to improve consistency in the way we undertake engagement activity. We also have an existing Corporate Communication Plan in place that is concerned with improving our use of the website, one-stop shops, and other information points. The council has

actively protected frontline services from funding cuts.

Denbighshire's Corporate Plan 2012-17 was the product of extensive and robust consultation and engagement activity (as highlighted in section 1). One of the corporate priorities that emerged from this work was 'modernising the council to deliver efficiencies and improve services for our customers'. We are very clear that the focus of this priority always

remains on the customer, and responsibility for developing this agenda has been assigned to the Corporate Director for Customers.

The six Member Area Groups have come a long way over the last year, now having a clear support structure with corporate leadership in place, and revised Terms of Reference. MAGs are now recognised as a strong mechanism for engaging with our local communities. A community Development Fund has been set up which will make use of 57 redundant trust funds that the council has not been utilising effectively in the past. Also the way in which services have engaged with participatory budgeting schemes in the county has been applauded as good practice.

The council is also actively working towards bringing services closer to the communities through the deployment of its staff, such as in Social, Regulatory and Youth services, and now in the emerging structure for the new Highways and Environmental services. We need to ensure that this approach is consistent throughout the authority. We are also introducing customer standards in our Service Plans, though further work is needed to develop these.

Considerable work has taken place to strengthen our relationship with Town & Community Councils through the introduction of the Charter, which formalises the role and responsibilities of each party. This has now been signed by 32 out of 37 councils.

The second Resident's Survey took place in the summer of 2011, and went

out to a random selection of 6,000 households in Denbighshire. The results have helped us to plan our activity based on community needs and perceptions. Our third Residents Survey will take place in 2013.

Town Plans have been agreed for all our main towns and these are currently being reviewed with the additional requirement to consider the needs of surrounding rural communities. It is hoped that in this way the Council's business planning can be brought closer to the communities.

The council continues to maintain a strong working relationship with the Denbighshire Voluntary Services Council, and there are now strong support arrangements in place for the Third Sector Liaison Group. The council also has clearer arrangements in place for liaising with the business community. However, the development of the local economy having been identified as a corporate priority for the authority, it is recognised that further improvements in the way we engage with business groups is needed.

Communications, Marketing & Leisure have developed a Denbighshire Volunteering Strategy, which will become a council wide strategy in the near future.

Finally, the way in which communities and the council pulled together during the floods that hit the county in late November 2012 must be acknowledged, council officers and volunteers working tirelessly to help communities recover. Flood Recovery Groups continue to meet regularly.

12. Conclusion

This Self-Assessment has been put together using the most current information available, including input from Corporate Directors, Heads of Service, and relevant officers from across the council. It highlights many strengths within the authority, showing that we have good systems in place to deliver services that benefit the customer. Most significantly it presents a picture of a council that is continually improving.

We are clear too about our weaknesses, and have identified a number of areas that require further improvement. These areas for improvement will be considered by services as part of the development of their Service Plans for 2013-14.

- In supporting our Corporate Priorities, the council still has considerable work to do in working out the detail for two of its larger priority programmes, namely 'developing the local economy' and 'modernising the council to deliver efficiencies and improve services for our customers'. The council also needs to consider its approach to Self-Assessment corporately, including doing more to coordinate our Annual Governance Statement, and the self-assessments undertaken for the WAO, CSSIW and Estyn.
- Financially, the council must consider a more coordinated and strategic approach to improve the effectiveness of individual funding streams, and to identifying savings. There are still further savings to be made through procurement.
- Workforce flexibility to support improvement is another area that has been identified as needing significant work. This will form part of the corporate priority for modernising the council. Further work is needed to embed improvements made to workforce planning processes, and to explore a quality assurance framework to ensure managers are complying with policies and procedures, identifying any gaps in staff training.
- In Risk Management, there is a need for greater integration of Service Risk and Project Risk. There also needs to be some consideration given to the amount of time required to update the Corporate Risk Register. Constant review is required to ensure that the new risk methodology is fully embedded and understood by all relevant officers and members, training being provided as required.
- The council must be more proactive in the way in which it considers the external environment, using comparative information and data to better help support decision making and strategic planning. Work is being done currently to strengthen its research and intelligence functions.

- In terms of Performance Management, further work needs to be done to roll out the new Excellence Threshold and Intervention approach to all Service Plans, the development of which should include Cabinet Lead Members and Performance Scrutiny Link Members. The Service Performance Challenge Programme needs to be reviewed to ensure it remains relevant and effective. And as recommended by the Internal Audit report, Head of Service should look at consistency in terms of performance management roles within services.
- The configuration of Denbighshire's strategic partnerships is not yet right, and requires further work. The council needs to develop an understanding of how to successfully scrutinise the performance of regional service delivery from a Denbighshire perspective. Further work is also needed to ensure that the Partnership Governance Framework becomes a properly embedded system.
- Newly trained project managers will lack experience of applying their new skills and should be given this opportunity to gain greater experience in project delivery. A process for the strategic allocation of resources to project management also needs to be developed.
- The Scrutiny training programme for new members was not well attended, and additional training will be required once the powers afforded by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 have all been commenced. Actions identified as part of our self-assessment for the All Wales Scrutiny Improvement Study will also need to be carried forward. These include our communication with auditors, regulators and inspectors, and the promotion of the Scrutiny function to internal and external stakeholders.
- Finally, the council's Consultation & Engagement Strategy needs to become more firmly embedded in the delivery of services, as does the development of Customer Standards to be included in the Service Plans for 2013-14. There is further work to do on Town Plans to include the needs of surrounding rural communities. We must also consider the way we engage with our business groups; and further roll out the Denbighshire Volunteering Strategy.

The council will endeavour to address all of the issues identified in this document, and hope that you find the assessment provided both useful and relevant. If you require any further information about the Corporate Self-Assessment, please do not hesitate to contact the Corporate Improvement Team on 01824 70 6161, or through email: corporate.improvement@denbighshire.gov.uk