

# **Executive Summary: Self-Assessment of Performance, 2022 to 2023**

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

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

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## Our Approach to Self-Assessment

Our approach to Self-Assessment follows the same one undertaken for the first year that one was legally required, in 2020 to 2021. We have continued to use a new style of Performance Self-Assessment Update report, one that responds to the performance requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and reflects on the Corporate Health of the organisation. Our reports, produced quarterly and published [online](#), involve an analysis of the seven governance areas recommended by the Act's statutory guidance, as well as continuing to catalogue the activity of our principle meetings (Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, and Governance and Audit), key news items, and reports by our internal audit and external regulators. This Executive Summary brings the volume of the quarterly reports together alongside a critical overview of our performance, the extent to which our performance is driving positive outcomes and how well our governance is supporting continuous improvement. This summary also looks ahead to key opportunities and challenges.

We have a great body of quality evidence around how we are performing as a council, which has been comprehensively catalogued in our quarterly Self-Assessment Performance Update reports. These make up our ongoing self-assessment. However, the extent of the evidence available has not been helped by the size of our new Corporate Plan Performance Management Framework. It is difficult to make such a large document accessible, but this emphasises the importance of our continuing to produce this short executive summary, providing only very high-level summary statements that assess our performance (taking into account the wealth of quality information available in our quarterly reports). We have also in our latest report reintroduced a colour and trend status summary that provides a more visual overview of performance, whilst still meeting accessibility standards.

It is a requirement that the council, through its self-assessment process, identify improvement actions, and in subsequent self-assessments reports provide an update on our progress against them. We have achieved this through our quarterly Performance Update reports (supporting the principle of ongoing assessment), which have identified improvement actions during their production. The council's Service Performance Challenge programme, which normally generates improvement actions, was suspended this year to reflect ongoing changes to Council's membership and our senior leadership

restructure. However, these will recommence during 2023 to 2024 and feed into our quarterly Self-Assessment Update reports.

During 2022 and 2023 the council launched its 'Stakeholder Survey' for the second time, to ask specific questions now required under the Act. An analysis of the most recent results is provided in our accompanying Self-Assessment Performance Update report for the period January to March 2023. The council will now look forward to running similar engagement exercises annually as part of its approach to Self-Assessment.

## **Equality and Diversity**

The new Corporate Plan encompasses our equality and well-being objectives, and these are reported through our quarterly reports. The Interim Strategic Equality Plan we were required to create for 2021 to 2022 is now complete and has been closed. Any indicators, measures, activities and projects which are still relevant / live, have been, where appropriate, transferred to the new Corporate Plan. Although our engagement work on the development of the Corporate Plan themes was comprehensive, we know that engagement with seldom heard groups or those with protected characteristics needs to improve, and we are working internally and with regional colleagues to develop solutions to this.

Our [report for the period October to December 2022](#), highlighted our commitment to equality and diversity and we considered how each new Corporate Plan theme applies the sustainable development principle and five ways of working (collaboration, involvement, long-term, integration, prevention) and delivers the seven well-being goals (Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015).

In October 2022, we established a Strategic Equality and Diversity Group, comprising Lead Members, the Corporate Director for Governance and Business, Heads of Service and Diversity Champions from each of the five political parties in the county. The group is chaired by the Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities. The role of the Group includes taking responsibility for ensuring that the council demonstrates fairness in its delivery of services and its employment practices; to ensure a culture in which all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, and offensive and discriminatory behaviour and harassment are not tolerated; and to monitor the quality of key well-being impact assessments and consider how those assessments are used in our decision-making. The

Group is not a decision-making body but can refer issues to relevant committees and groups when decisions are required.

The Group met twice in the period being reported to discuss equality and the new Corporate Plan (including our Strategic Equality Objectives), Well-being Impact Assessment, Diversity in Democracy, and the Anti-Racism Wales Action Plan. Going forward, the Group will critique Well-being Impact Assessments (focussing on equality and diversity), review the statutory reports for the Public Sector Equality Duty and Gender Pay Gap, and will ensure robust arrangements are in place meet the council's general and specific duties under the Equality Act 2010. The Group will also monitor our commitment to the Zero Racism Pledge.

## **Overall, how well are we doing?**

This Self-Assessment demonstrates that during the year we have used our resources economically, efficiently, and effectively; that our governance is functioning and effective; and that our focus is on securing the best possible outcomes for our environment and communities in Denbighshire. This section summarises our performance and governance across the year into some general observations about our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

- We have strong member engagement, and our governance is well-functioning and responsive. This is demonstrated by management of the escalated risk about safeguarding at senior leadership level, operational management and through to Scrutiny, Cabinet and Governance and Audit. We need to ensure we continually test consensus around how long we are prepared to tolerate the highest level of risk in our Corporate Risks, especially given the present challenges to community well-being and the potentially negative impact on staff well-being.
- Our senior leadership team is keen to ensure engagement with members and communities is proactive and meaningful. Members have been fully engaged in the development of our new Corporate Plan (a plan that compliments wider public sector plans). A challenge will be to ensure backbenchers continue to feel a part of the development and delivery of the Corporate Plan over the next few years.
- Members are likely to be asked to make ever more challenging decisions over finances and service delivery. This could jeopardise what is a very ambitious and wide-ranging Corporate Plan and impact community and environmental well-being.

- The legacy of the pandemic and the change to a new, hybrid working pattern has resulted in a new settled way of working for council employees and services continue to be delivered to a high standard. Policies to support a clear and consistent approach to hybrid working have taken longer than expected and a challenge for the future will be to ensure innovation and productivity is sustained.
- The rationale for the restructure of our senior leadership team reflected an understanding of how we are operating now and how we needed to adapt - in a sustainable way - to the likely demands we will face in the future. There are though Corporate Plan pledges for which we have no agreed way forward; and are cited here as gaps. We have faced continuing barriers with the connected theme in terms of sustainable travel (this is a perennial issue, a legacy of our [previous Corporate Plan](#)). There is sometimes a lack of pace and Corporate Plan governance structures, once confirmed, must be more agile in recognising and resolving barriers to progress.
- A lack of pace is also the result of continuing pressures recruiting staff (and has been the driver of escalations in several of our corporate risks). Key areas of work, such as in procurement, strategic asset management, highways and environmental services, and staff well-being have been impacted by staff shortages. In social care, we have worked tirelessly to ensure delivery is safe despite severe issues with recruitment and retention, as discussed in the [Director of Social Services annual report](#) (the 2023 to 2024 report is due imminently). These are national challenges that are resulting in risks to outcomes for our communities. We will need to be ever more creative in recruiting and retaining staff.
- Service Performance Challenges were suspended this year and will resume from April 2023. These are instrumental in identifying potentially transformative actions to address deficiencies in services, to better align services with strategic and collaborative objectives, and to support services to maximise opportunities to achieve better value for money or service outcomes. Actions arising from these challenges will be reported as Improvement Actions through our quarterly self-assessment reports.

## **Performance Objectives – Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027**

Given the accompanying Performance Self-Assessment Update report is our first opportunity to comment on performance, we are using the sections below in this Executive Summary to largely outline weaknesses or threats in relation to securing the change we

have committed to in our Corporate Plan. Future reports will contain more analysis about the effectiveness of our actions on outcomes for people, places, and communities. Where things are not working out as hoped, we will explain why and what we are doing about it.

The fact many of our Corporate Plan themes build on the work started in our last Corporate Plan demonstrates our commitment to using evidence and stakeholder aspirations to plan for the long term to prevent problems from deteriorating or developing in the first place. In short, we are committed to embedding the sustainable development principle and five ways of working.

Some of our new performance measures do not currently have thresholds, which means we have not set our level of ambition or intervention point. Thresholds will need to be agreed for as many remaining measures as possible to help us make judgements about our performance. We will also need to establish qualitative evidence of the changes we are seeking as some of these cannot be adequately measured using quantitative means alone. Given though that most activity has yet to start in earnest, we feel this summary adequately represents our current position and the main areas of challenge we are facing in the early stages in delivering our new Corporate Plan.

## **A Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs**

Measures: Priority for Improvement

Projects: On Target

This theme is well-established, and the council has a strong track record of collaborative working across services as well as with external partners to achieve goals set out in the [Housing and Homelessness Strategy Action Plan](#). However, performing well against this theme will be a challenge as factors outside the council's control, such as the economic climate, continue to create pressure and threaten success. The council has pledged to signpost residents to opportunities to improve the efficiency of their homes and this is an area for development with many new measures and activities in the pipeline from April 2023. The interconnected nature of this with fuel poverty will need to be considered going forward. Improving the energy efficiency of Council Housing stock is also a challenge for us and will likely require significant resource for us to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard that is expected to be upgraded in the near future. Tackling Denbighshire's levels of homelessness has been and will continue to be a significant area of work for the council and its partners. Much work is being targeted towards early intervention and



prevention as well as the use of our Welsh Government approved Rapid Rehousing Plan to reduce the number of households experiencing homelessness, ensuring that where homelessness cannot be prevented, instances of it are rare and brief. Bringing the Single Access Routes to Housing (SARTH) system in-house from April 2023 will provide an opportunity to better understand local housing need and keep residents informed of available housing options.

## **A prosperous Denbighshire**

Measures: Priority for Improvement

Projects: On Target

Establishing a performance framework encompassing economic growth and business and community enterprise development has largely been achieved. There is an opportunity to develop this further as the council's new economic strategy takes shape in 2023. This will be a significant and key piece of work with many interdependencies to manage and opportunities for collaboration and involvement with services across the council as well as external partners. To maximise the benefit for our residents, we will need to address current gaps in measuring the growth of our green and rural economies and our support of local social and community enterprises. Development of the economic strategy for Denbighshire will be an important milestone and will need to be in place early on in this Corporate Plan for us to be able to start to implement and measure change. Residents' incomes are lower by national comparison, with average annual pay figures for Denbighshire ranking lowest of all local authorities in Wales for 2022 to 2023. Poverty negatively affects well-being and is a driver of inequality (as evidenced in the [Conwy and Denbighshire Well-being Assessment](#)). Improving outcomes for our residents in this regard is a significant focus for this new Corporate Plan, but, as above, aspects of economic prosperity are beyond our control as a council. There is a need to play to our strengths and build on the recent success of schemes such as March for Business and Working Denbighshire, and to continue the good work done to secure external funding for large- and small-scale projects.

## **A healthier and happier, caring Denbighshire**

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: At Risk

It is worth noting that of all the Wales Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) domains, the highest number of areas in Rhyl in the 10% most deprived areas was in this domain; clearly demonstrating the relationship between socio-economic disadvantage and health and well-being. Thresholds will need to be set for as many measures as possible to help us judge our performance in this theme. The UK Government has announced that the implementation of the Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) is being delayed beyond this current parliament. The Council will continue with current arrangements for protection safeguards. No gaps in service provision are envisaged and we will look to implement and embed the LPS when possible. The Alzheimer's Society will no longer be offering the Dementia Friendly organisation status and will end the initiative in December 2023. We have decided we will, for the remainder of the year, stop our work to pursue this status, which means we will not complete the 2023 assessment. The Ageing Well in Denbighshire Group and the Dementia Friendly Council Group have merged, and work will continue to enhance provision for people living with dementia and those caring for them under the World Health Organisation eight domains of an Age Friendly Community.

## **A learning and growing Denbighshire**

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: On Target

The council's performance framework around its Learning and Growing theme is comprehensive and will provide a more detailed picture going forward on the work that it delivers in support of young people, specifically including more detail around early years' child development, and support for skills and employability. In the case of early years' support in particular, there is a great deal of valuable work taking place across numerous teams that previously was not publicly reported upon, and may also benefit from greater oversight and integration. A significant area of work for us is delivery against the Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme, but the council has a strong track record of excellent delivery in this area; investing some £100m in over 7 years in schools and education facilities across the county. Community Focussed Schools is also a new challenge for us that needs to be fully scoped and better understood, and will likely require significant resource for us to meet our aspirations. There also remains nationally an issue with how local authorities can report on attainment data, but we rely on close working with GwE, our School Improvement Consortia, to understand exactly what support our schools need to deliver high standards of teaching and learning.

## **A better connected Denbighshire**

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: Experiencing Obstacles

The project to develop a Sustainable Transport Plan (STP), which includes active travel, featured in our last Corporate Plan. It is not without its challenges, and whilst there are measures around reducing carbon emissions and increasing public EV charging points, at present it is unclear how other priority areas in the STP will be measured. These are:

- Increasing the use of passenger transport for everyday journeys.
- Increasing travel choices for our residents, businesses and visitors.
- Facilitating development that has good transport links and encourages journeys by sustainable transport modes.
- Increasing the use of active travel for everyday journeys.

## **A greener Denbighshire**

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: At Risk

Following positive feedback from Audit Wales on our programme management and organisational ambition on this agenda we are reassured that we have a well-scoped action plan in place. However, ensuring that we meet our net carbon zero commitment as an organisation by 2030 continues to be a challenge and will not be easily achieved. Becoming an Ecologically Positive Council by 2030 is looking more promising. We have good governance in place though to ensure continual monitoring and challenge takes place. A national report about the public sector's response more generally, to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, broadly says organisations need to be bold and take risks if they are to stand a chance of meeting this ambitious target. We will be reviewing our Climate and Ecological Change Strategy 2030, its scope and targets during 2023 to 2024. At that point it is likely that we will need to increase momentum, make bolder decisions, and be prepared to tolerate greater risks to become net carbon zero and to bring about nature's recovery across our land holdings.

## **A fairer, safe, and more equal Denbighshire**

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: At Risk

We are not confident that we have sufficient measures or activities in place to monitor our pledge within this theme to ensure that the experiences of people from diverse backgrounds, seldom heard groups, and those at a socio-economic disadvantage are heard and inform decision making. The Strategic Equality and Diversity Group (SEDG) will work with partners to ensure we have external contact details for seldom heard groups and community cohesion groups which will help to address this perceived gap. Positively though, the council was commended during the year by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales for its [good practice in the work which has been done on raising awareness of pension credit](#) for the county's communities.

## **A Denbighshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language**

Measures: Acceptable

Projects: At Risk

Welsh language performance measures for council services and customer services are to be determined once the Welsh Language Strategy and Policy have been agreed in June 2023. It is difficult to measure the culture change that the Corporate Plan calls for in terms of the use of the Welsh language internally, in the community, and our commitment to supporting the celebration of Welsh culture more broadly. We will have to develop more qualitative means of assessing our success in this area. There is a gap in terms of our desired cultural strategy for Denbighshire. There is no clear sense of how this will be achieved at present. Positively though, our new Cabinet includes a [Lead Member for Welsh Language, Culture and Heritage](#).

## **A well-run, high performing council**

Measures: Priority for Improvement

Projects: At Risk

This theme incorporates our values and principles as an organisation and statutory performance reporting obligations (predominantly under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021). Embedding and measuring a new customer service

framework will be a significant piece of work with many interdependencies across themes, such as Welsh language and culture. This work will require an integrated approach including officers from across services, stakeholders and elected members. How this will be taken forward has not yet been agreed. “Ensuring that value for money is embedded within our organisational culture, and that decisions are balanced by considering service quality and social value” has been cited as a suggested piece of activity with a suggested possible measure. This work needs to be scoped. Staff have worked with the Chief Executive to develop actions to embed [our five principles, which this theme has been structured around](#). We will incorporate these actions once they are agreed.

## **Governance Functions – The Council’s Corporate Health**

Denbighshire’s [annual governance statement](#) highlights specific strengths and areas for improvement. Our statement for 2021 to 2022 is published online. The 2021 to 2022 statement set out improvement actions that link to our governance functions, such as workforce capacity and resilience, code of conduct (see also [well-run high performing council](#)), procurement and contract management, funding and whistleblowing. Our statement for the financial year 2022 to 2023, will be presented to Governance and Audit Committee in July 2023.

## **Corporate Planning**

This section looks at how the council sets out and delivers its corporate and strategic objectives. In this last year, the council has continued to deliver on key strategic strands of work to meet its legislative requirements under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and the Equality Act (Wales) Regulations 2011. Significantly, its new Corporate Plan for 2022 to 2027 was approved by [County Council in October, 2022](#). Our corporate plan was developed using the body of evidence developed by the Public Service Board. Discussion at that level - and across Boards such as the Regional Leadership Board and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board - has informed the development of our Plan. However, we have seen less informal qualitative participation from partners, for example in our focus groups, than has previously been the case. We have also continued with implementing arrangements for two European Union replacement funds (the community Renewal Fund that ended in December 2022; and the Shared Prosperity Fund, for which applications for projects were sought), and the Levelling-Up Fund. Cabinet also endorsed the Regional Economic Framework for North Wales. These developments have been achieved whilst

simultaneously welcoming a new Council and Cabinet from May 2022, inducting, training and appointing new councillors to new responsibilities and committees; and working to restructure our Corporate Executive and Senior Leadership Teams (having appointed two new directors to key roles, and agreeing a new structure for services from April 2023). Key challenges ahead will include implementing new governance arrangements for the Corporate Plan; recruiting to four vacant Head of Service posts from April 2023; and moving our New Ways of Working project to the next phase to look at office assets. Improvement actions identified over the last year have therefore, on the whole, progressed very well. However, like most other councils in Wales, we know that we still need to consider arrangements to put a Peer Assessment Panel in place in the term of the current council, responding to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act, 2021. Although slightly improved, we also acknowledge that overall customer satisfaction with the council and its long-term plans is not where we would like it to be. Our new Corporate Plan has a clear focus on how the council works, including customer service, engagement, and our performance. It is important that we demonstrate improvement in these areas and respond to the expectations of our customers.

## Financial Planning

This section looks at our [financial planning](#), which relates to the management of our income and expenditure. The council's financial planning arrangements have proven robust, and the council holds a reasonably stable reserve and has strong monitoring and planning mechanisms in place to actively manage pressures, such as the Medium Term Financial Plan, Treasury Management, the Budget Setting process, and a [Capital Budget setting Process](#) which is in the process of being developed. There are of course some significant budget variations, but we work to resolve those, and we have a good record of delivering savings. We have reported to Audit Wales that our policies and procedures for [countering fraud and corruption](#) are in place and well-managed. Audit Wales has given assurance that the council has adequate arrangements in place for the [certification of grants and returns](#) (for 2020 to 2021). The continuing delays to the approval of the [Statement of Accounts for 2021 to 2022](#) remains a challenge due to the timescales affecting other areas of work for the Finance Team, and therefore impacting service delivery going forward. The most significant issues facing councils in recent times have been brought about by global economic uncertainty, inflation, and demographic pressures. There is a risk that the current level of services may be unsustainable over the coming years.

## Performance Management

This section looks at our [performance management](#), by which we mean the structures and processes we have in place to ensure we deliver what we said we would deliver, whilst encouraging active involvement and challenge from across the council, our elected members and residents. The council has undertaken significant work in this year to develop its new Corporate Plan Performance Management Framework, with excellent engagement and input at all levels of the organisation. Significantly, the new framework will address concerns around a lack of national benchmarking within the council's corporate performance reporting and elevate a significant amount of service level performance data to its public reports. The size of the framework will, however, present a challenge to manage, and considerable work is still required to embed the new framework within our reporting structures and to develop identified gaps. Following agreement of governance arrangements for the new Corporate Plan, it would also be timely for the council to update its [Performance Management Guide](#). The council has in this last year [published](#) and built upon its approach to self-assessment through its comprehensive quarterly performance reports, satisfying requirements under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act, 2021; and has delivered the second year of its annual stakeholder engagement, seeing an increase in participant numbers from the previous years. We continue to develop Verto, our performance management system, to make improvements where we can and update our guides and training materials, though these improvements have been secondary to those being made to the project management side of the system. Since their appointment, the council's scrutiny committees have considered a wide variety of reports touching on the council's performance in numerous functions, but no significant issues relating to corporate performance management have been raised this year. Following approval of the new Senior Leadership Team structure, arrangements for the council's Service Performance Challenge programme have also been agreed and will commence from May 2023. These are important meetings for considering the performance and improvement of our services. Finally, the council has struggled this year to maintain the capacity of its Internal Audit Team but is proactively addressing this and has seen some improvement in its staffing levels there more recently.

## Risk Management

This section looks at our [risk management](#), which describes our planned approach to identify, assess, control and monitor risks and opportunities facing the council. Training

was offered to all councillors on the council's risk management methodology (which includes risk appetite), ahead of the first [Performance Scrutiny](#) meeting of the new Council in June 2022. The report included, for the first time, a summary to help communicate the growing number of risks that the council faces in the current global climate. The council's [risk appetite statement](#) was reviewed and updated. The council's previously 'minimalist' risk appetite in relation to Workforce: Terms and Conditions was relaxed very slightly to a 'cautious' risk appetite, to reflect the way we are 'flexing' recruitment processes – in a safe way – to alleviate challenges in filling roles. All other aspects of our risk appetite statement have remained the same. This year we have seen a growing interdependency between risks (in terms of existing risks growing in likelihood or impact), and national and global issues that are beyond our control, such as the deterioration in the economy and continuing pressures in relation to recruitment and retention. We apply a "three lines of defence model" whereby for our most serious corporate risks, we use performance data, identify key and ancillary controls, and identify external and internal assurance that is in place or is planned. For example, the risk of "a serious safeguarding or practice error, where the council has responsibility, resulting in serious harm or death" was escalated during the year. Despite concerted efforts, the risk score was increased, and remains at an increased level based on our assessment that the chance of this occurring is higher than it was previously. Whilst we do not regard the likelihood as "almost certain to occur in most circumstances" (which is the definition of Risk Likelihood A in our risk methodology), the risk had to be escalated to the highest level. Our governance has responded to this with increasing oversight by Cabinet, Performance Scrutiny and Governance and Audit; whereby the relationship between risk management, corporate planning and workforce planning have been highly connected, and will be subject to further interrogation by Internal Audit in the new financial year. Performance Scrutiny and Governance and Audit Committees have been satisfied with our application of risk management but have asked to see more movement in risk scores where possible. Overall, we have a total of 20 risks on our corporate risk register; 11 of which are inconsistent with our risk appetite (55%).

## **Workforce Planning**

This section looks at our workforce planning, which is the process by which we analyse, forecast and plan workforce supply and demand, and assess gaps to ensure that we have the people and skills - now and in the future - to deliver our services and fulfil our strategic objectives. Workforce planning has continued to grow in significance as the consequences of the pandemic and changes in work patterns and opportunities have heightened



challenges in relation to recruitment and retention across the council and presented greater risks to outcomes for services and vulnerable people in particular (see [risk management](#) above). In October 2022, [Governance and Audit Committee](#) considered a report outlining the findings of the 'follow up' inspection of the Intake and Intervention Service, Education and Children's Services. The review identified positive findings and areas for improvement, and an action plan was created to improve on those areas of concern. The follow up inspection highlighted some areas of improvement, but recognised the impact of a high number of vacancies across the service that impacted the improvement journey. Again, staff retention and recruitment were recognised as of national concern. A detailed report about recruitment, retention and workforce planning across the council was presented to [Governance and Audit Committee](#) in January 2023, following earlier reports received in [November 2022](#), about the September 2022 risk review and recruitment and retention issues in social services. The Committee was reassured that officers were aware of and responding adequately to challenges in relation to recruitment and retention. An Internal Audit review into these matters will take place during 2023 to 2034. This review will be critical in ensuring our responses to recruitment and retention are correct and effective. In response to the continuation of hybrid virtual and in person committee meetings, a Senior Committee Administrator was appointed early in the year to support democratic governance activities. Our senior leadership restructure was consulted on and implemented at Director-level from summer 2022, with the complete senior leadership structure being implemented from April 2023. This has taken longer than expected but will result in a transformational redesign of services, whereby the council is on the 'front foot' in relation to influencing and preventing demand; better positioned to maximise opportunities; and has clearer leadership on important matters like climate change and Welsh language. We have improved the data that we hold about our own workforce for equality purposes, and after putting in place temporary additional resources to address the back-log caused by the pandemic of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks, compliance stood at 92% by the end of March 2023 compared to 85% in September 2022. We have completed a review of our flexible working policy and guidance, and subject to approval from Cabinet, these will be implemented from June 2023 together with support for staff and managers with the new ways of working. A fresh workforce planning process will commence once the new senior leadership structure is in place later in the year. This will need to align more closely to our strategic asset management (a weakness identified by Audit Wales in its [local study of Denbighshire's asset management and workforce planning](#)).

## Assets

This section looks at the latest developments to do with our management of the council's estate (including office buildings and highway infrastructure owned and / or controlled by the council) and digital assets. As we stated last year, the council faces significant challenges with regards to its assets. We have a perennially deteriorating and very large network of roads and bridges, requiring a continued financial budget commitment in order to address this decline, combined with meeting the challenge of progressing significant projects such as the replacement of the Llanerch Bridge; a large portfolio of buildings to align with our Net Carbon Zero ambition; a growing need to support and facilitate decarbonisation in procurements; and growing pressures on our ICT infrastructure. However, we have made improvements. We secured Welsh Government funding for optimised retrofit works for energy saving in our council housing. We have invested in our capability to generate the council's own electric from installed renewable energy generation; more than tripling the installed capacity through schemes such as roof mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) panels. Simple carbon mitigations are now included in our contracts, and it is now standard practice for major projects (above £1 million in value) to use a connection to the national grid for electricity, where available. We have made significant investments in green public transport, though the Ruthin electric bus (the country's first-ever zero emission 100 per cent battery-operated 16-seat minibus) and through electric vehicle charging, with points being installed across the county and through a multi electric vehicle charging hub (the largest charging hub in Wales, which went live in Rhyl). The council has drafted a revised Information Risk Policy, which it will shortly seek approval for. The requirement for services to consider Information Risk was part of their Service Planning for 2023 to 2024 and services are also encouraged to continually review their Service Risk Registers, which should capture any information risks that services are carrying. We have good health and safety and fire safety procedures in place. Community Focussed Schools and how those are maximised as assets will be a focus for the year ahead, as described under our [learning and growing theme](#). We have been unable to progress a Service Challenge Action (Improvement Action), to establish Remote Meeting Hubs in areas where broadband connection is poor. Development of a new [asset management strategy](#) has been delayed because of staff capacity. Once the strategy is in place, we will develop and deliver portfolio plans to determine the shape, size and future use of assets for each of the council's asset management portfolios. As stated above, the strategy and portfolio plans will need to closely align to workforce planning to ensure our

assets are managed for the longer term, in a way that supports and integrates with our workforce plan.

## Procurement

This section looks at [procurement](#). Procurement is the process by which the council meets its needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money and good outcomes for society, culture and the economy, whilst contributing to decarbonisation and nature's recovery. The council spends around £130million every year buying third party goods or services, and Denbighshire has continued to prioritise securing local community benefits through our procurements. During the year the Community Benefits Hub Manager became a permanent role and we have taken a leading role as Chair of the Welsh Government Social Value Working Group. We are delivering better outcomes for our communities through our procurements. For example, through initiatives such as tree planting, which includes the 'right tree in the right place' principle, or through a new standard practice for major projects (above £1 million in value) to use a connection to the national grid for electricity for their power supply (instead of local diesel generators), where available. One contractor, Balfour Beatty - on the Rhyl East Coastal Defence project - achieved an independently verified 82% reduction in energy use by the Site Office complex as a result. Going forward, the Community Benefits Hub will promote use of a 'green tariff' for electricity grid connection. In terms of outcomes for people, a solar panel project for council homes in Rhyl involved a proactive contractor drawing in tenants and other local people to upskill and some participants have gained full time jobs as a result (the number will be confirmed in the next reporting period). Other benefits remain challenging to measure and report (such as reduction in miles travelled on contract delivery). Contract Procedure Rules are compliant with the Socio-Economic Duty but need to be updated again to reflect new UK Public Procurement legislation due in 2023 to 2024. Notwithstanding delivery of many of our improvement actions and achievements for our communities, progress across a range of actions to improve and decarbonise procurement have continued to be slow as we were unable to appoint into procurement manager and specialist decarbonisation roles. For example, we had hoped to develop and adopt a new Procurement Strategy by the end of the summer 2022. Given the capacity issues we have faced and the national developments in relation to new legislation, a delayed start is probably correct given this is such an important area of work for us to get right; one that will require culture change across the organisation and the local supply chain. Fortunately, in February 2023, our Community Benefits Hub Manager was successfully appointed to

the Collaborative Procurement and North Wales Construction Framework Manager post. We are confident that following this appointment we are now well-placed to respond to the two new procurement Bills from Welsh and UK Governments and have a solid foundation for building on the relationships with the local supply chain, national companies and local community and voluntary groups. Our new Corporate Plan is in alignment with the growing mandate from Welsh Government to refocus procurement on community impact (Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill) as part of our assessment of value for money.