

Conwy County Borough Council Performance Self-Assessment 2021/22 Evaluation Summary

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an evaluation of Conwy County Borough Council's self-assessment of our performance during 2021-2022, as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. This evaluation is an extension of our annual Corporate reporting arrangements and is published alongside our Corporate Annual Report.
- 1.2 This evaluation is based upon the evidence gathered to demonstrate the Council's performance against its internal performance management and governance processes. The evidence gathered and reviewed, including the categories used to evaluate our performance, is available upon request.
- 1.3 This report assesses the extent to which, based on the evidence reviewed, the Council is able to answer the 3 statutory questions positively, as follows:
- Is the Council exercising its functions effectively?
 - Is the Council using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively?
 - Does the Council have effective governance in place for securing the above?
- 1.4 Where gaps in performance were identified, a review was undertaken of whether these performance areas were already being addressed via the Council's risk and issue management processes. Those areas not already being addressed via these routes were then formulated into the improvement action plan included within this self-assessment report. This action plan will be monitored and progress reported as part of the Council's existing performance management framework and reporting arrangements.

2.0 Is the Council exercising its functions effectively?

2.1.1 Community Engagement

- 2.1.1.1 Community and stakeholder engagement is an integral part of how the Council operates on a daily basis. Seeking the views and input of those who use its services and those who help to deliver its services is critical in continuing to deliver good quality services which provide value for money.
- 2.1.1.2 Using the feedback from community and stakeholder engagement is a vital part of continuing to shape and improve services, deliver what people need and sustain the County for future generations.
- 2.1.1.3 There is evidence that our engagement strategies and methods have been aligned with the increased channel shift towards digital engagement, ensuring a balanced approach to planning and delivering our engagement activities. This is demonstrated by incorporating online engagement into our Community Involvement Strategy.
- 2.1.1.4 There is evidence that the governance arrangements of our engagement approach have been streamlined. A process has been established, to capture a corporate overview of all engagement activity taking place across the Authority, to ensure our engagement is coordinated, targeted, appropriate and relevant. The Engagement Forward Work Programme provides the framework for engagement to be well planned and coordinated.

- 2.1.1.5 There is evidence of a significant level of engagement activity taking place Authority-wide, demonstrating that the Council is proactive in its approach to seeking the views of its stakeholders. The Council engages with a wide range of stakeholders on a wide range of subjects and service areas.
- 2.1.1.6 There is evidence that the Council takes a diverse approach to its engagement, with a mix of methods used to maximise opportunities to involve and listen to stakeholders, tailored to the participants. This is demonstrated by the way the Council adapted to the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic in developing the Corporate Plan, using virtual environments to capture community feedback when face to face interaction was restricted. This is further demonstrated by the wellbeing walks arranged as another way of capturing community feedback on how the Council's services could further support community wellbeing during the pandemic.
- 2.1.1.7 There is evidence of using feedback received from engagement to improve and re-model services. This is demonstrated by the Digital Deposit Return Scheme pilot, where feedback from households participating in the pilot is being used to inform research into how a system will operate in the future. This is further demonstrated by the use of feedback from our consultation on the funding arrangements for additional learning needs (ALN), which has informed the model for how ALN services are funded in the future.
- 2.1.1.8 Improved planning and coordination of the engagement process Authority-wide will help to eliminate duplication and engagement fatigue and provide opportunities to share good practice. To achieve the full benefits of this process, ensuring its full adoption across all services is an area for further development.
- 2.1.1.9 There is some evidence of quality assurance taking place as part of the engagement process to assess suitability and effectiveness of the engagement approaches. Further development of both quantitative and qualitative measures to assess the impact of our engagement on service quality, delivery and customer and citizen experience would enhance this process.
- 2.1.1.10 There is some evidence of the Council feeding back to its stakeholders the actions taken following engagement, i.e. what has the Council implemented as a result of feedback received. This is a vital part of the engagement process in terms of keeping people informed, managing community expectation and enhancing the Council's reputation as proactive in engaging with and listening to its stakeholders. Informing stakeholders on what the Council has done with the engagement information received is an area for further development.

2.1.2 Strategic Planning

- 2.1.2.1 Having in place strategic plans aligned to the Council's improvement objectives is critical in ensuring national and local priorities are delivered effectively and statutory obligations are met. These plans underpin everything that the Council does and provide effective roadmaps to improve performance and operational efficiency and respond effectively to macro-environmental risks and opportunities.
- 2.1.2.2 There is evidence that the Council's strategic plans have clear outcomes and are aligned to national and local requirements, including the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Welsh Government priorities. This is demonstrated within the Corporate Plan 2017-2022 & 2022-2027, where there are key areas of focus, such as the environment, economy and culture, affordable housing and community safety. All of the outcomes are underpinned by cross cutting themes, including climate change, poverty and Welsh language to ensure these factors are considered in all that the Council does.

- 2.1.2.3 There is evidence of alignment of other strategic plans to the overall national and local requirements and Corporate Plan priorities. This is demonstrated by the development of strategies relating to digital and cyber resilience in response to the increased channel shift of activities to a hybrid model and the development of a Decarbonisation Plan in response to the Climate Emergency declaration and net carbon zero commitment.
- 2.1.2.4 There is evidence of robust processes for managing and monitoring the Council's performance in delivering its strategic priorities, considering every pillar of performance management. There is evidence of a robust process for completing equality impact assessments (EQIA's) for decisions and policies that go through the democratic process. The process for monitoring the completion of EQIA's outside of this is an area for further improvement.
- 2.1.2.5 The Council's strategic plans are underpinned by sound research and data to inform decision-making, evidenced by the Assessment of Wellbeing and use of national performance measures in strategic plans. There is evidence of limited internal resources in the areas of research and data management, which presents a risk to the robustness and effectiveness of strategic planning and decision-making. Reviewing the Council's approach to research and data management is an area for further improvement.
- 2.1.2.6 There is evidence of benchmarking within the Council and limited evidence of how it is used to improve services. The level of benchmarking varies from service to service and it would therefore be of benefit to review the Corporate approach to benchmarking to ensure it adds value to the Council. Hence, this is an area for further improvement.

2.1.3 Key decisions

- 2.1.3.1 The Council is publicly accountable to the communities it serves and is required to demonstrate openness and transparency in all decisions made. Providing opportunities for communities to access, scrutinise and challenge the Council's decisions and having a clear, audit trail of how decisions are made builds community trust and provides assurance that public resources are being used economically, effectively and ethically.
- 2.1.3.2 There is evidence of accountability and responsibility for decision-making at all levels, from strategic plans to actions assigned to individuals. The democratic process is robust with clear lines of accountability and responsibility for decision-making. The processes for monitoring decision-making are effective, with appropriate scrutiny and challenge to ensure openness and transparency.

2.1.4 Project management

- 2.1.4.1 Programme and project management is critical in ensuring service improvements and change are managed in a controlled way, where the effectiveness of delivery is continually monitored and risks and issues are managed well.
- 2.1.4.2 The Council is subject to a constantly changing macro-environmental landscape and is required to adapt and respond efficiently and effectively. Having a robust framework in place to manage these changes enables the Council to deliver effective change and add value.
- 2.1.4.3 There is evidence of sound processes in place to manage programmes and projects to a successful conclusion, encompassed within a Programme and Project Management framework. This is demonstrated by the scale of significant projects being delivered during the year, which are bringing positive change and improvement, such as the Economy and Culture restructure and Climate Challenge programme.

2.1.4.4 There is evidence of sound processes to assess and monitor the effectiveness of projects and programmes and their alignment to Corporate priorities both at a strategic and local level. This is demonstrated through benefits monitoring via the Conwy Opportunities Board and the benefits realisation process at programme and project level. The gateway review process has demonstrated it is effective in supporting the continuous review and improvement of project delivery, with improvements made to the management of capital projects.

2.1.4.5 There is evidence of a good level of ongoing training and good practice exchange to improve the quality of project and programme management. There is evidence that the information management system for projects is used Authority-wide, however there are variations in the quality of information held within the system. Conducting a quality review of the system content is an area for further improvement.

2.1.5 Performance management

2.1.5.1 Effective performance management is a crucial part of ensuring the Council delivers its statutory, national and local priorities, uses its resources in the most efficient and effective way, manages risks and challenges and drives continuous improvement.

2.1.5.2 There is evidence of sound processes to manage and monitor performance. The Service Performance Review and Self-Assessment processes are examples of monitoring and evaluating the Council's delivery of its strategic and regulatory commitments; how well issues and risks are being managed and whether financial and non-financial resources are being used economically, effectively and efficiently. There is evidence that the effectiveness of these processes is tested via robust external and internal audit, scrutiny and challenge.

2.1.5.3 There is evidence of service ability to analyse and interpret performance information qualitatively and quantitatively. However, the level of analysis and interpretation differs across services, due to different levels of performance management knowledge and data intelligence. Improving the Council's approach to data intelligence, where identified, in order to ensure all decision-making is evidence-based, is an area for further improvement.

2.1.6 Collaboration and integration

2.1.6.1 The Council works with a number of stakeholders in delivering its priorities. Maintaining strong partnerships helps the Council and its partners provide good quality, efficient services, improving the lives of the County's citizens and visitors.

2.1.6.2 There is evidence of robust and effective partnership arrangements in place which are aligned to the Council's priorities. Examples of this include: participation in the North Wales Economic Ambition Board to build a resilient economy across the North Wales region; embedding social care hardship ensuring the service is aligned with partnership arrangements; and alignment of objectives and actions with the NWSPEN (North Wales Public Sector Equality Network) collaboration.

2.1.6.3 There is an array of collaborative arrangements in place to drive improvement, share good practice and achieve efficiencies through shared learning. Examples of this include: SOCITM Wales (Society for Innovation, Technology and Modernisation), where shared IT solutions can be developed and membership of WARP (Warning, Access and Reporting Point) groups to help manage and improve the Council's cyber resilience.

2.1.6.4 There is evidence that collaborative relationships have been strengthened and maintained during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is demonstrated by the creation of the

community support service during the early stages of the pandemic, working in partnership with the third sector and town and community councils to support the vulnerable members of the community. This is further demonstrated by the extensive cross-sector working that took place with the public sector, third sector and communities to adapt and ensure service continuity.

- 2.1.6.5 There is evidence that the effectiveness of the Council's collaborations is monitored but this is identified as an area for further improvement, to ensure this evaluation encompasses all collaboration activity. It is recognised that a full review of the Council's approach to and management of its collaborations will ensure it remains efficient and effective.

2.2 Section Conclusion

- 2.2.1 It can be concluded from the evidence reviewed that the Council is exercising its functions effectively. There is evidence of robust processes in place underpinning delivery of Council services and supporting continuous improvement. There is evidence that these processes are being executed effectively in delivering Council priorities and improving services for citizens.
- 2.2.2 There is evidence of adequate and effective monitoring processes in place to track performance, with an appropriate level of scrutiny and challenge at all levels to ensure accountability. There is evidence of how these processes help the Council remain effective in meeting its governance and compliance requirements.
- 2.2.3 The Corporate Plan Annual Report 2021/2022 is further evidence that despite the additional unprecedented pressures, there has been very good progress in delivering the council's priorities.
- 2.2.4 Through this self-assessment process we can conclude:
1. The Council responded well to the pandemic;
 2. Engagement has been adapted and diversified to maximise feedback;
 3. The Council's engagement approach is compliant with the requirements of the LG&E Act;
 4. Strategic plans are closely aligned, supported by a robust performance management framework;
 5. There is good, transparent decision making, accountability and responsibility;
 6. There is a sound programme and project management framework, and good oversight of all strategic programmes and projects via the Conwy Opportunities Board;
 7. Performance Management is discussed in an open and supportive environment which enables honest discussions about where improvement is needed;
 8. The Council is an active participant in key partnerships across a complex partnership landscape.
- 2.2.5 The demands on IT&DT (Information Technology and Digital Transformation) Services brought about by the pandemic have necessitated a significant re-prioritisation of resources to deliver improvements to technologies supporting home working and expansion of digital services (including online Covid related grant applications).
- 2.2.6 Emerging priorities include increased focus on cyber resilience within the Council and the expansion of accessible online services. Recruiting appropriately skilled officers to meet the changing demands remains a significant challenge.

SELF-ASSESSMENT RATING:

LEVELS OF ASSURANCE	CONTROLS	RISKS
SATISFACTORY ASSURANCE	Key controls exist to enable the achievement of service objectives and to mitigate against significant foreseeable risks. However, there was some inconsistency in application and opportunities still exist to mitigate further against potential risks.	Some opportunities still exist to mitigate further against potential risks. Some risk of loss, fraud, impropriety or damage to reputation.

3.0 Is the Council using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively?

- 3.0.1 There is evidence of robust processes in place to manage Council resources. Whilst responding to the covid-19 pandemic, the Council adapted its workforce management approaches to align with the constantly changing macro-environmental landscape. This is demonstrated by the efficient application of redeployment and furlough procedures; adaptation of policies, risk assessments and working practices to ensure the workforce remained safe, well and supported.
- 3.0.2 The robustness of the Council's workforce management procedures is further evidenced by the recruitment of senior officer roles being managed successfully internally, without the need for external resources.
- 3.0.3 There is evidence of the Council improving its management of resources to build further organisational resilience. Examples include: the development of a hybrid working model, with the aims of improving service delivery and staff wellbeing, whilst maximising resource efficiencies; the Council's Decarbonisation Plan to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2030; and the development of Digital and Cyber resilience strategies to manage the increased demand for digital resources and support.
- 3.0.4 There is evidence that macro-environmental factors are having a detrimental impact on the Council's recruitment and retention of staff. Resolving this issue and updating the workforce management strategies to ensure they remain effective are areas for further improvement
- 3.0.5 There is evidence that despite budget cuts, the Council is managing its financial resources. This is demonstrated by achieving an unqualified financial statement of accounts, achieving a balanced budget and managing our activities within our resources.
- 3.0.6 The Council's approach to its management of resources is underpinned by a positive organisational culture, whereby constructive challenge and continuous improvement is embedded within the values, expectations, and practices that guide and inform the actions of all staff and Members.
- 3.0.7 There is some evidence of asset management for the Council's structural assets. The need to improve and sustain these assets in the longer term is identified as a concern and is being monitored through the risk and issue management processes. Developing medium and longer term financial strategies to ensure the Council improves its longer term alignment and allocation of resources is an area for further improvement.

3.1 Section Conclusion

- 3.1.1 It can be concluded from the evidence reviewed that the Council is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively. There is evidence of robust processes in place to manage financial and non-financial resources, underpinning the resilience and sustainability of Council services. There is evidence that these processes are being

executed effectively to ensure resources are allocated, used appropriately and value for money is being achieved.

3.1.2 There is evidence of macro-environmental factors, such as the pandemic and EU exit, which are presenting challenges to the Council’s continued ability to manage its resources efficiently and effectively. The sound governance processes in place enable the Council to monitor these factors and apply internal controls to minimise the negative impacts to service delivery and resilience.

3.1.3 There is evidence of comprehensive strategies for Health and Safety, Finance, Carbon, and Information Technology in place and plans are in development for a medium-term financial strategy, People Strategy, Asset Management and Procurement. Financial resources have been considerably challenging for several years. Despite this, the Council has evidenced that it uses its resources economically, efficiently and effectively by:

1. Engaging with staff and leading in the development of sustainable and future-proofed working models and practices;
2. Accelerating the channel shift towards more digital working and service delivery;
3. Adapting our performance model to support workforce wellbeing;
4. Adapting to online training for staff;
5. Improving our management of health and safety in relation to Covid and wider infection control;
6. Achieving unqualified financial statement of accounts;
7. Identifying no significant contract management issues or procurement challenges;
8. Prioritising climate change and carbon reduction as a corporate priority.

SELF-ASSESSMENT RATING:

LEVELS OF ASSURANCE	CONTROLS	RISKS
SATISFACTORY ASSURANCE	Key controls exist to enable the achievement of service objectives and to mitigate against significant foreseeable risks. However, there was some inconsistency in application and opportunities still exist to mitigate further against potential risks.	Some opportunities still exist to mitigate further against potential risks. Some risk of loss, fraud, impropriety or damage to reputation.

4.0 Does the Council have effective governance in place for securing the above?

4.0.1 A self assessment of governance arrangements is published each year in the annual Governance Statement. There is evidence of effective governance processes in place to govern delivery of Council priorities, manage risks and issues and drive continuous compliance and improvement in an open and transparent manner.

4.0.2 There is evidence that the Council has access to good information on which to base decisions which are made in a transparent manner through public documented meetings. Governance arrangements have effectively supported the authority through the extremely challenging Covid response phase and will hold the organisation in good stead as it moves into recovery and delivery phase.

4.0.3 There is evidence that Elected Members are aware that decisions must consider the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and through Member Induction all Elected Members are made aware of their scrutiny responsibilities. Decisions are subject to effective external and internal scrutiny and where weaknesses are found, action plans are promptly put in place and implementation monitored.

4.0.4 Based on this self-assessment, the overall conclusion is that the Council's governance arrangements for the period 2021/2022 remained fit for purpose and effectively supported the delivery of Council priorities.

SELF-ASSESSMENT RATING:

LEVELS OF ASSURANCE	CONTROLS	RISKS
HIGH ASSURANCE	Key controls are in place to ensure the achievement of service objectives and to protect the Authority against significant foreseeable risks and are applied consistently and effectively. No significant or material errors were found.	Low priority actions required which are easily managed.

5.0 Improvement Actions

The following improvement actions have been identified from this self-assessment to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of how the Council operates:

5.0.1 Community Engagement:

1. Improve the use of the Engagement Forward Work Programme and evaluate the effectiveness of engagement.
2. Consider the option of wider public engagement in democratic meetings (hybrid).
3. Implement the participation strategy.

5.0.2 Strategic Planning:

1. Review the process to capture, monitor and quality assure EQIAs for decisions not requiring democratic approval.
2. Ensure all services include a summary evaluation of their performance as part of the self-assessment model.
3. Review our corporate approach to data and research and address the issue of limited research resources, including delivering a data workshop.
4. Complete a review of critical staff training, including how mandatory and refresher training is delivered.

5.0.3 Key Decisions:

1. Review the alignment between annual service planning and longer term strategic planning.

5.0.4 Performance Management:

1. Become a Data Intelligent Council and review the quality of how we analyse and make evidence-based decisions.
2. Expand our range of assessment methods e.g. audit reports and better use of case studies to evidence improvement or impact.

5.0.5 Collaboration and Integration:

1. Review the effectiveness of collaborations to ensure alignment to strategic priorities and the value of officer and Elected Member contributions is maximised.

5.1 Improvement Actions from Annual Governance Statement 2021/2022

The following further improvement actions have been identified from the annual review of the Annual Governance Statement for 2021/2022 to further improve the effectiveness and efficiency of how the Council operates:

- A1 Continue developing a medium term financial strategy;
- A2 Complete the review of the People Strategy;
- A3 Assess the benefits of the Renewal Programme to determine their effectiveness;
- A4 Continue to support the new administration as they develop their knowledge and understanding of the Constitution and supporting governance arrangements;
- A5 Work to support the Council to recruit a new Chief Executive;
- A6 Review the procurement strategy.