**Conwy County Borough Council**

**Annual Governance Statement**

**2022-2023**

**1 Introduction**

Conwy County Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. It has a duty under the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021, to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 repeals the performance duties which were set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The Act came into force beginning on 1st April 2021. The new performance and governance regime, (other than the provisions relating to panel performance assessments), applies to councils from, the 2021-22 financial year onwards. It requires councils to undertake an annual self-assessment of performance, and answer the questions:

1) Is the Council exercising its functions effectively?

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

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

The first self-assessment for 2021-2022 has been approved and published on the council website and is available [here](https://www.conwy.gov.uk/en/Council/Accountabilty/Performance-information/assets-Corporate-Assessment/documents/CCBC-LGE-Self-Assessment-evaluation-2021-2022-E.pdf). The Council is now preparing its second self-assessment for 2022-2023, which will be reported to democracy in autumn 2023.

The third question, ‘Does the Council have effective governance in place?’ is answered by the self-assessment in this Annual Governance Statement.

The Council has a **Local Code of Corporate Governance** which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government and a **Governance Framework** which comprises the policies, procedures, behaviours and values by which the Council is controlled and governed. This statement is an evaluation of compliance with the Local Code and whether governance arrangements effectively support the delivery of Corporate Objectives. The Statement also meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014, which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement.

**2 What is Governance?**

Corporate governance is the system by which an organisation is directed and controlled.

A good governance structure will include as a minimum:

* Clear governance standards by which an organisation will be governed
* Governance roles and responsibilities
* A mechanism for measuring an organisation's performance against its governance standards.

To be successful an organisation must have a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management.

**3 Corporate Governance Arrangements**

|  |
| --- |
| Conwy County Borough Council is committed to ensuring good governance principles and management practices are adopted in all business activities to ensure public trust.   1. **The Local Code of Governance**   The Local Code of Governance provides a public statement that sets out the way in which the Council meets and demonstrates compliance with the CIPFA Governance principles.   1. **The Governance Framework**   The Local Code is underpinned by a Governance Framework which comprises the policies, procedures, behaviours and values by which the Council is controlled and governed.   1. **The Annual Governance Statement**   The Annual Governance Statement provides assurances over the Council's Governance arrangements, together with identifying areas of future focus and improvement. The purpose of the Annual Governance Statement is to report publicly on the extent to which the Council complies with its local code of governance. It identifies those areas which have been identified as needing improvement following self-assessment.   1. **Annual Governance Statement Action Plan**   The Council continues to review the self-assessment areas of improvement and they are monitored through the AGS Action plan. |

**4 Sources of assurance for this evaluation:**

| **Assurance Required Upon** | **Sources of Assurance** | **Assurances Received** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Delivery of Corporate Plan priorities | Corporate and service plans. | Annual Report  Audit Wales certificate of compliance. |
| Services are delivered economically, efficiently & effectively | Service performance reviews.  Strategic equality plan.  Annual self-assessment. | Corporate performance report.  Strategic equality plan annual report.  Scrutiny annual review.  Governance and Audit Committee review and challenge.  Panel performance assessment (once every administration). |
| Management of risks and issues | Risk and issue management framework.  Corporate and service risk and issue registers.  Service performance reviews. | External challenge from Audit Wales.  Scrutiny review and challenge.  Governance and Audit Committee review and challenge. |
| Financial planning and performance | Financial performance monitoring reports.  Medium term financial strategy.  Financial procedures.  Monitoring of economic indicators & associated financial receipts. | Regular performance and financial reporting.  Annual statement of accounts.  Audit Wales certificate of compliance. |
| Effectiveness of internal controls | Constitution (incl. statutory officers, scheme of delegation, financial management and procurement rules).  Council, Cabinet, committees and panels.  Strategic Leadership Team/Senior Management Team.  External regulation.  Internal audits. | External audit reports.  Internal audit reports.  Conwy Conversation records.  HoS assurance documented as part of annual assurance consultation meetings. |
| Community engagement & public accountability | Community involvement Strategy.  Engagement forward work programme.  Complaints’ policy. | Community engagement feedback.  Lessons learned.  Ombudsman reports. |
| Project management & project delivery | Programme and project management framework. | Benefits realisation plan outputs.  Lessons learned report. |
| Procurement processes | Contract procedure rules.  Financial Regulations. | Value for money evidenced.  Challenge contracts awarded |
| Roles & responsibilities of Members & Officers | Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and S151 Officer. | External Inspections  Annual Review with Cabinet |
| Standards of conduct & behaviour | HR policies & procedures  Codes of conduct | Complaints received |
| Training and development of Members & Officers | Corporate learning and development plan  Member development plan | Staff survey  Conwy Conversation records  Training records  Mandatory training completion reports  Councillor annual reports |
| Compliance with laws & regulations, internal policies & procedures | Policy framework  Information management strategy  Digital strategy  Cyber resilience strategy  Welsh language standards  Welsh language promotion strategy  Health and safety policy  Internal audit reports  Whistleblowing & other countering fraud arrangements | Independent external inspections  Welsh language annual report  Health and safety annual report |

**Two key pieces of assurance are provided by Internal and External Audit.**

The Head of Internal Audit stated in the 2022/2023 annual Audit Opinion that the Council’s internal control environment and systems of internal control provided adequate assurance over key business process and financial systems. Risk based audit planning through the Council’s assurance map has been used to ensure sufficient assurance is available to support the annual opinion. Working practices have continued to evolve to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of internal audits, with increased focus on areas of risk identified within the assurance map and a shift away from cyclical auditing processes. The internal audit plan continues to provide the required flexibility and alongside direct internal audit work the Head of Internal Audit has also drawn on additional sources of assurance, which are summarised as follows:

* Results of all audits undertaken during the year ended 31st March 2023;
* Results of follow-up action taken in respect of audits performed during the previous year;
* Whether any major or critical category ofrecommendationshave not been accepted by management and the consequent risks;
* The effects of any material changes in the organisation’s objectives or activities;
* The service has in place a comprehensive assurance map to ensure that those areas of greatest priority are focused upon, assurance gaps are filled and that there is no ’over assurance’ in any activity;
* The work performed by Audit Wales and other external regulators;
* Matters arising from previous reports to the Governance & Audit Committee;
* The work of the Improvement and Audit Group to monitor corporate risks to ensure all critical and major risks have been identified throughout the Authority;
* Gaining assurance that external funding flows have been well managed and that appropriate governance and accountability for the use of public money was in place.

The Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23 was presented to the Audit & Governance Committee on 15 May 2023.

The report concludes that the Authority has satisfactory internal control, risk management and corporate governance processes in place to manage the achievement of the Authority’s objectives for the 12 months ended 31st March 2023. 94% of the planned audits completed during the year were assessed as providing positive levels of assurance.  The findings in respect of follow up audits conducted during 2022/23 were reported to Governance & Audit Committee on a quarterly basis. Of the 2 follow ups the service performed during the year, 1 of the recommendations has been fully implemented, and the remaining 11 recommendations are in progress. The 7 moderate and 4 minor recommendations that remain in progress are in regard to compliance with the Financial Management Code and Edge of Care audits.

The external auditors, Audit Wales, issued an unqualified true and fair opinion on the accounts for 2021/22 and letters of compliance for the review of the improvement objectives and the annual report. Audit Wales’ opinion for 2022/23 is awaited but their Annual Audit Summary for 2022 can be found by clicking [here.](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/conwy_council_annual_audit_summary_2022_english.pdf)

We anticipate the audit of financial statements to be concluded in October 2023 when the audit opinion will be confirmed.

**5 Review of Effectiveness - How do we know our arrangements are working?**

This statement builds upon the CIPFA ‘Good Governance in Local Government 2020 Practitioner Update’. Conwy County Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Senior Management Team within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Internal Audit’s Annual Report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates. The effectiveness of the governance framework has been evaluated through review by the Improvement and Audit Group, and the Senior Management Team.

**DEFINITION OF ASSURANCE RATINGS**

The following assurance rating has been used to self-assess our governance controls.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **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. |
| 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. |
| LIMITED  ASSURANCE | Key controls are in place and to varying degrees are complied with but there are gaps in the process which leave the service exposed to risks. Objectives are not being met or are being met without achieving value for money. | There is a need to introduce additional controls and/or improve compliance with existing ones, to reduce the risk exposure to the Authority.  A high risk of loss, fraud, impropriety or damage to reputation. |
| NO  ASSURANCE | Key controls are considered to be insufficient with the absence of at least one critical control mechanism. There is also a need to improve compliance with existing controls and errors and omissions have been detected. | Key controls do not exist and objectives are not met or are being met without achieving VFM.  The Authority is exposed to very significant risk, which could lead to major financial loss, reputational risk of embarrassment or failure to achieve key service objectives. |

The **Three Lines of Defence Assurance Model** is central to the evaluation of effectiveness.

The Authority has in place well established processes to ensure it exercises its functions effectively. The service performance review and self-assessment processes are effective in 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.

These evaluation mechanisms are underpinned by a sound performance management framework embedded at every level of the organisation, to drive improvement and ensure compliance. The process for strategic and service planning ensures priorities at a service level are directly aligned to Corporate objectives and resources are identified and allocated appropriately; the process for risk and issue management ensures that risks and issues both at a service and Corporate level are controlled; the process for performance measurement ensures progress is closely tracked and timely interventions applied where appropriate. The effectiveness of these processes is tested via robust external and internal audit, scrutiny and challenge.

**1. First line of defence**

Under the first line of defence, operational managers have ownership, responsibility and accountability for directly assessing, controlling and mitigating risks. Heads of Service are required to assist the preparation of the AGS for the Council by providing an assurance statement for the internal control framework within their service. Each Head of Service is responsible for delivering the outcomes set out in their service plan. They are responsible for identifying and managing the risks and issues that may affect service delivery. This work includes monitoring the effectiveness of controls put in place to mitigate the risks and issues and carrying out remedial action where controls are weak or not in place.

Twice yearly service performance reviews (SPRs), remain in place. They provide assurance that services have sound governance arrangements. The mid-year service performance reviews for 2022/23 provided assurance that services were making progress in delivering the Corporate and service priorities, that risks and issues were being managed and regulatory compliance was being achieved. However, the significant financial and resource challenges faced by every service was the main focus of the review discussions. Budget reductions, cost increases, recruitment and retention challenges and staff absence, compounded by increasing service demand, continue to place considerable pressure on the Council’s ability to sustain the current level of progress and performance. There is agreement generally between officers and members that the current levels of service provision cannot be sustained with such resource difficulties and without negatively impacting staff wellbeing.

The mid-year Corporate performance report 2022/23 for the new Corporate Plan 2022-2027 was presented to democracy with an overall rating as follows:

*‘Overall good progress has been made during the first six months to deliver the Council’s wellbeing objectives despite staff and Councillors working within a challenging economic environment and still recovering from the impacts of the pandemic’*.

The Council continues to renew and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2022, the Council moved to its sustainable hybrid working model, providing the right balance between office and remote working to ensure service delivery and productivity is effective and efficient in supporting governance and improvement.

Conwy has a sound track record of controlling and managing its revenue budget. However, given the significant pay and price inflation as a result of the volatile global economic conditions as well as increased service demand exacerbated by the long term effects of the pandemic as well as the cost of living crisis, it has not been possible to stay within budget in 2022/23. At the end of the year, the Council was overspent by £2.75m, which was funded from reserves. Action was taken in year to contain the overspend and reduce the impact on reserves and balances. In 2022/23 services successfully delivered the vast majority of the planned savings in year.

Given the continued financial pressure, the Council is taking active steps to plan and manage its financial position in future years, including Member led budget working groups to consider the future shape of service delivery. In addition the Council is the first Council in Wales to invite the Welsh Local Government Association to undertake a Financial Peer Review to assist it in further developing its arrangements.

**Assurance Rating** Satisfactory Assurance

**2. Second line of defence**

The second line of defence consists of an oversight and monitoring of activities covered by several components of internal governance (audit compliance, risk and issue management, performance, financial control etc). This line of defence monitors and facilitates the implementation of effective governance practices by operational management and assists in reporting information up and down the organisation. A series of reports are written throughout the year including the corporate performance annual report, financial reports, equality reports, information governance, scrutiny reports, Welsh language reports – all of which are listed in the Governance Framework.

The CIPFA Financial Management Code sets financial management standards which are designed to support good practice and assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. Local government bodies face continued challenge to their financial resilience as a result of the significant pressure and demand on services. The economic instability has only served to exacerbate these pressures resulting in new and significant financial challenges over the coming years. In December 2022, the Council produced its medium term financial plan, which sets out the Council’s anticipated budget requirement for the next 2 financial years and plans how to manage the resource requirement within the funds available. The plan covers a two-year period, rather than three to five years, due to the very significant financial and economic uncertainty that the Council faces. Despite the comparatively short period of the plan, its aim is to help put the Council’s finances on a sustainable footing for the longer term.

All reports requiring political approval have been presented to either Cabinet or Council for approval and where appropriate to one of the four Scrutiny & Overview Committees for review and challenge. The reports in the main identify that the Authority is making good progress to meet corporate objectives and other supporting strategies, but there are significant challenges relating to resources and capacity. The reports are balanced and identify areas for improvement where needed. A forward work programme is in place to ensure reports are presented in a timely manner and are regularly reviewed by the chairs of Scrutiny with governance officers.

**Assurance Rating:** High Assurance

**3. Third line of defence**

Internal audit forms the organisation’s third line of defence. An independent internal audit function with a risk-based approach to its work, provides assurance to senior management. This assurance will covers how effectively the organisation assesses and manages governance and includes assurance on the effectiveness of the first and second lines of defence. In total, in 2022/23 Internal Audit gave 36 audit opinions, of which 22 were high assurance, 12 were satisfactory assurance and 2 were limited assurance. There were no audit conclusions of no assurance.

An external assessment of the internal audit service was conducted during 2022, assessing the Council’s compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). Across the mandatory elements of the PSIAS, there are 56 best practice areas or standards. The external assessment concluded that the Internal Audit Service is conforming to 55 of the PSAIS and partially conforming in one area. There were no areas of non-conformance.

The Institute of Internal Auditors suggest a scale of three ratings, ‘Generally Conforms,’ ‘Partially Conforms’, and ‘Does Not Conform.’ The external assessor’s overall opinion is that the Internal Audit Service **generally conforms** to the PSIAS and Code of Ethics in all significant areas and that it operates independently and objectively.

External Audit ( Audit Wales, Estyn, Care Inspectorate Wales) provides an opinion on the statement of accounts, the governance of the authority, and the governance and management of Social Care and Education Their audit reports about the Authority overall conclude that there are good governance arrangements in place.

Corrective actions arising from internal and external audit recommendations are closely monitored to ensure they are implemented and effective in addressing the area(s) of risk identified, further enhancing the authority’s governance arrangements.

[Audit Wales reports](https://www.audit.wales/publications?combine=&field_topics_tid_i18n=All&field_sectors_tid_i18n=55&created_1=All&field_reports_tid_i18n=All&field_area_tid_i18n_1=63)

[Estyn audit reports](https://www.estyn.gov.wales/inspection-reports)

[CIW Audit reports](https://careinspectorate.wales/)

[CCBC Internal Audit External Quality Assessment](https://cm-modgov01.corp.conwy.gov.uk/documents/s197473/Appendix%201%20-%20CCBC%20Internal%20Audit%20External%20Quality%20Assessment.pdf)

**Assurance Rating:** High Assurance

**Key Governance Self-Assessment Questions**

1. **Are Governance Arrangements effective in supporting delivery?**

This year’s AGS covers a period of time when the Authority was responding to a volatile economic environment, rising inflation and substantial cost increases, resulting in significant financial pressures and challenges.

**Community Engagement:**

Community and stakeholder engagement remains an integral part of the Council’s governance processes. Seeking the views and input of those who use its services and those who help to deliver its services remains critical in continuing to deliver its functions effectively and use resources economically, efficiently and effectively.

During 2022-2023 the hybrid working model has embedded further into the Council’s engagement practices. Hybrid meetings have become business as usual and are working well, providing great flexibility for attendance at democratic meetings, enhancing the opportunities for democratic debate and discussions. Engagement activities continue to be offered in a hybrid format, enhancing the effectiveness of the wider engagement process.

Extensive engagement has continued with staff and Trade Unions to evaluate the effectiveness of the hybrid working model and ensure it remains fit for purpose and enhances governance and business processes.

In line with the 5 year political administration, extensive community engagement was undertaken on the draft Conwy and Denbighshire Wellbeing Plan, to ensure it accurately reflects the community priorities, pressures and opportunities. Extensive engagement was also undertaken on the draft Corporate Plan for 2022 – 2027, with feedback incorporated into the final version of the plan, which was approved and published in October 2022.

There is a Corporate Plan wellbeing outcome focused on informing, including and listening to our communities, & adapting how we work to ensure we provide a variety of ways for people to communicate, collaborate and engage with our services.

The Council launched its engagement forward work programme and digitised the process for recording community engagement activities and feedback. This mechanism for recording engagement activity and feedback aims to ensure that community engagement is coordinated and appropriately targeted, maximising its effectiveness.

The Time to Change Wales campaign has continued to tackle stigmas around mental health. A range of engagement activities were delivered during the year, including daily engagement sessions during Mental Health Awareness Week and an organisation-wide event to acknowledge Time to Talk day on 2nd February 2023.

**Strategic Planning:**

Having in place strategic plans aligned to the Council’s wellbeing 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.

Corporate strategies, finances and service plans are aligned to the Corporate Plan wellbeing objectives.

The culture of outcome based planning is embedded in the Corporate planning and service planning processes.

All key strategic plans and corporate risks and issues are aligned to the relevant wellbeing objective and all reports submitted for democratic approval must evidence how they support the Well-being of Future Generations Act and to which Corporate Plan wellbeing objective and/or risk and/or issue they contribute.

All strategic plans are produced after implementing community engagement processes and are supported with resource management. There are positive links between strategic and financial planning which continue to be built upon.

**Key Decisions:**

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.

Key decisions reflect the impact on a number of factors, including sustainability, and the Authority continues to embed the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by ensuring that the Act has been considered in all key plans and all key decisions presented to democracy.

Through our sound internal recruitment procedures and Senior Employment Committee, we internally managed the successful recruitment and appointment of several senior management posts, including the Chief Executive, Head of Finance, Head of Audit and Procurement, Head of Integrated Adults, Head of Children and Family Services and Head of Law and Governance, to improve governance and the integration of business processes.

**Performance Management:**

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.

Value for Money: the Council’s Procurement policies include community benefits. They are an important part of our awarding criteria, as is value for money in itself. Contract procurement rules require that managers demonstrate value for money which therefore may not always be the cheapest option.

The Conwy Opportunities Board, service performance reviews, programme and project boards all provide opportunities for review, challenge and discussions for improvement. The staff suggestion scheme also invites staff to put forward ideas for improvement.

Annual Reports and highlight reports from programme and projects are evidence that in the main, our objectives are being delivered despite the current significant financial challenges. Over recent years we have had to adjust targets and in some areas made a decision for managed decline in alignment with reduced budgets.

Where there is evidence of performance in need of improvement, action plans are put in place and monitored.

Relevant staff responsible for the implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 have developed and implemented action plans.

1. **Are there barriers to achievements?**

The most significant barriers to achievement in 2022/23 included: the sustainability of the social care sector; the impact of the health board special measures’ status; increasing homelessness and lack of affordable housing; and difficulties in recruiting to vacant posts in key service areas as well as deleting some vacant posts in order to meet budget reduction targets. .

During 2022/23 our high priority issues were:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issue Ref.** | **Issue Description** |
| CI 1 | That demographic changes, such as a declining birth rate, are impacting on school places in primary schools and this will impact on secondary schools in the future. |
| CI 10 | The cost of specialist / independent education placements have increased significantly over the last 2 years and this is putting financial pressure on the service. |
| CI 11 | No capacity to undertake environmental enforcement. |
| CI 13 | Inability to recruit certain positions across the authority |
| CI 15 | The care sector is unsustainable and is not growing at the same pace as demand. |
| CI 16 | Social Care cannot meet the growing needs of the population of Conwy as a result of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act requiring a more preventative focus and as a result of the crises in the Social Care sector which has impacted on the availability of staff and placements. |
| CI 17 | Lack of suitable affordable housing provision. |
| CI 18 | Homelessness levels have increased. |
| CI 19 | We have insufficient resources to deliver essential care packages within the domiciliary care sector as a result of staff leaving the sector and general recruitment problems. |
| CI 21 | Business processes and collaborative arrangements are impacted by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board’s Special Measures status. |

However, that said, the mid-year Corporate performance report 2022/23 is evidence that despite the additional unprecedented pressures, there has been good progress in delivering the Corporate Plan objectives.

Financial austerity and the reduced capacity of staff who are taking on more roles as staff are not replaced remains a significant barrier. We continue to meet budget efficiencies but this becomes more challenging every year, and as a result difficult decisions have had to be taken to increase charges or reduce or stop some service provision.

We continue to explore and take advantage of other funding opportunities which have become available, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. We have secured £18m from the UK Levelling Up Fund to improve active travel infrastructure and flood resilience in the county. However these funds will cease in 2024 and 20 25 respectively.

Whilst we have an oversight of and attend all regional strategic partnerships, it is a complex landscape and careful management is needed to ensure that boards do not duplicate or conflict.

1. **Is governance supporting the delivery of objectives?**

* The Authority continues to review internal controls and make changes as required by legislation. Internal Audit regularly review their assurance map which is used to inform the Internal Audit plan.
* The Governance and Audit Committee completes an annual self-assessment of its performance to demonstrate it is discharging its responsibilities and its arrangements are effective. A corrective action plan is produced where areas for improvement are identified.
* The Head of Audit & Procurement Service and the Audit Manager meet regularly with service management teams to discuss their latest risks, concerns and requirements. This ensures that Internal Audit are up to date and aware of emerging issues and risks and will be able to focus resources in the greatest areas of priority and risk at the time.
* There are twice yearly performance reports to democracy and senior management and all managers can access performance data through CAMMS at any time.
* The corporate risk and issue registers are aligned to the wellbeing objectives and there are measures and method statements in place to support each corporate action.
* There are routes for both the public and staff to feedback their views through community engagement exercises, e-petitions, staff appraisals and the staff suggestions portal.
* There are feedback mechanisms in place through the social media, staff brief, staff engagement events, social media and managers’ forum.
* All projects and programmes have benefits realisation plans in place and keep lessons learned logs which are shared through the Programme and Project Management Forum.
* There has been an ongoing programme of modernisation across the whole Authority to ensure that we meet the highly ambitious budget reductions and ensure that we are as efficient as possible. The Workwise Project continued our modernisation work and renewal post-pandemic.
* A review of our main office estate has been completed and approval of the outline business case has been approved to consider in more detail a full business case for a 1 office solution at Coed Pella.

1. **What do we do well?**

* There are clearly defined functions and roles to facilitate members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose, and to determine the interventions necessary to meet the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the corporate outcomes. A comprehensive induction plan is in place to ensure that all newly elected members are supported to understand their roles and responsibilities and how the council works – particularly in relation to governance.
* A comprehensive induction plan is also in place for new senior managers to ensure they have the knowledge and support they need to perform their role effectively, contributing to the effective governance of the organisation.
* As well as a return to in person Corporate Inductions, a new onboarding page has been developed to induct all new members of staff and a source of reference for them to refer to as they develop in their new role.
* All corporate priorities and corporate risks and issues are assigned to senior managers and cabinet members in order that they can be held to account for the effectiveness of implementation.
* There are robust arrangements for effective financial controlthrough the Authority’s accounting procedures and financial regulations. These include established budget planning procedures, which are subject to risk assessment, and regular reports to members comparing forecasts of revenue and capital expenditure to annual budgets and a business planning framework process that supports the Authority’s resource allocation process.
* Despite 15 years of austerity, the Authority has a good track record of managing its spending plans within the approved budget. Successive annual improvement reports produced by Audit Wales have concluded that there is good internal control.

Despite the barriers and challenges identified, the Authority has delivered a number of achievements against its wellbeing objectives.

**Outcome 1 – People in Conwy value and look after the environment**

1. Installed electric vehicle charging infrastructure at one of our depots to support an electric fleet.
2. Planted 2,000 tree specimens in our newly constructed tree nursery which will be planted throughout the County when they have matured.
3. Installed 7,300 LED street lights, exceeding the energy reduction target by 3,000 kWh.
4. Installed solar street lighting, as part of a trial, with plans to trial this at further sites.
5. Continued to improve active travel routes with the development of 7 no active travel schemes county-wide, including: Glan Conwy RSPB link; construction of Dolgarrog Bridge; Towyn to Kinmel Bay and Marl Lane in Llandudno Junction.
6. Commenced the ‘Podback collection scheme’, collecting coffee pods for recycling from the kerbside.
7. Established a contract with Denbighshire Council for the operation of Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC’s), allowing residents from both counties to use HWRC’s across both counties.
8. Remained on track to achieve the annual target for waste reused, recycled and composted with 70% recycling rate at mid-year.
9. Remained on track to achieve the annual target for street cleanliness with all streets graded B and above for their level of cleanliness at mid-year (100%);
10. Secured £18m from the UK Levelling Up Fund to improve active travel infrastructure and flood resilience in the county.

**Outcome 2 – People in Conwy live in a county which has a prosperous economy with culture at its heart**

1. Partnered with Big Ideas Wales to deliver the Llandudno event of the *‘Big Ideas Wales on Tour’,* delivering workshops to young entrepreneurs / start-ups.
2. Attracted funding to enable the development of regeneration / place plans for our towns. Towyn and Kinmel Bay Town Council have almost completed their place plan.
3. Supported the rural Town Councils, namely Llanfairfechan, Penmaenmawr, Conwy and Llanrwst, in their work with Planning Aid Wales to produce a plan of community identified list of priorities.
4. Finalised the Llandudno 10 Year Regeneration Plan to further improve / sustain Llandudno.
5. Launched a *‘Visit Conwy this Winter’* campaign, which included the development and production of a pocket guide highlighting the Conwy activities, attractions and events that are available all year.
6. Published our Creu Conwy Culture Strategy and Library and information strategy.
7. Made good progress in using our libraries as community hubs, including using Llanrwst Library to support people living in rural Conwy and our enhanced *‘Open Doors Programme’*, promoting libraries, faith and civic buildings through a range of playful and adventurous activities.
8. Secured more than £391k of external funding for arts/heritage functions.
9. Significantly increased the level of digital engagement in our creative arts, heritage, museums, libraries and theatres, at more than 11.5m visits to our social media and websites, compared with 990k for the previous mid-year and 1.2m for 2021/22.
10. Supported 668 businesses through our business hubs, town business forums and drop-in sessions about the Rural Business Development Grant.
11. Secured £250k funding for the ‘Amdani Conwy’ project to develop volunteering opportunities in rural communities and for people with disabilities.

**Outcome 3 – People in Conwy are educated and skilled**

1. Provided support to schools in implementing the new curriculum, including providing support materials for teaching and learning and professional learning offer in designing and planning the curriculum.
2. Remained on track to transition pupils within all mandated year groups to the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system for those children for whom the LA has responsibility under the ALN Act.
3. Held a highly successful Jobs Expo in Colwyn Bay, which attracted over 170 job seekers, including young people. 70 local and regional businesses attended to promote a wide range of opportunities including vacancies and apprenticeships. A number of job opportunities were offered to young people as a result.
4. Identified 24 roles for eligible young people, with 10 job offers made and 7 young people taking up a position, as part of the Kickstart programme.
5. Recruited two dedicated members of staff to work on the ‘*Young Person’s Guarantee project’*. These officers will identify and engage with young people and develop effective projects to involve and inspire young people on their journey towards training or employment.
6. Arranged a dedicated employability and skills day through Conwy Employment Hub, to promote opportunities to Conwy Care Leavers, as part of National Care Leavers’ Week. 7 care leavers signed up to the Communities for Work Plus programme.
7. Received Wave 5 Welsh Government funding to refresh audio and visual resources in our schools.
8. Significantly improved the ratios of digital devices to pupils and upgraded the peripherals to allow schools to teach with the latest technology, as part of our Digital Strategy.
9. Migrated 68% of our primary schools, special schools and Pupil Referral Unit sites to full IT support arrangements and supported 88% of secondary schools sites with their network connectivity.
10. Recruited a new health and wellbeing development officer to support learners manage and improve their mental health and wellbeing.
11. Created Cynydd and Door Step Visits, a targeted support programme for Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) 16+ to overcome complex barriers to education, employment and training. We have seen positive outcomes for participants, including returning to education and securing employment. Monthly reports continue to show a positive trend and Conwy are currently at a NEET percentage of 4%, which is lower than the national target of 8%.

**Outcome 4 – People in Conwy have access to affordable, appropriate good quality accommodation that enhances the quality of their lives**

1. Set up a Strategic Rightsizing group, made up of Registered Social Landlords (RSL) partners and North Wales local authorities, to coordinate activities that encourage mobility within social housing to help make best use of existing stock. A development in Colwyn Bay that will give priority to applicants who want to downsize has been approved and will start on site before the end of the financial year.
2. Published our Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan.
3. Developed the RSL Development Framework, streamlining the way the Council manages its land for the purposes of affordable housing schemes by RSL development partners.
4. Implemented a targeted approach to bring empty properties back into use, by allocating officers to dedicated areas to analyse issues and identify solutions.
5. Created 10 new housing units that were previously empty homes.
6. Supported 447 homeless young people through our *‘Oak Tree programme’*.

**Outcome 5 – People in Conwy are safe and feel safe**

1. Made all 10 libraries into ‘Safe Places’ as part of a pilot and developed guidance on this for all front-facing CCBC services.
2. Published our Cyber Resilience strategy and rolled out the mandatory cyber-resilience training for staff.
3. Held the 4th annual corporate safeguarding conference with the focus this year being on on-line abuse/exploitation and domestic abuse in older people.
4. Reviewed and updated the Corporate Safeguarding Policy.
5. Established a multi-agency domestic abuse practice forum, providing opportunities for relevant agencies to work together to meet the needs and manage the risks for individuals experiencing abuse.
6. Re-established the Loud Voice Group, where children and young people cared for by the Local Authority can talk about their experiences and share their views. This enables professionals to learn about what is going well for these children and what can be done differently.
7. Reconfigured the family support and intervention processes to allow for earlier working with families, as a way of preventing the move to managed care services.

**Outcome 6 – People in Conwy are healthy**

1. Reinforced the positive impact of our family centres through continued provision of help and support, such as the *Croeso Cynnes / Warm Welcome* programme, providing access to welfare rights services and cook and eat sessions. These sessions are proving to be effective in enabling and empowering families to learn key life skills and improve their lives.
2. Developed 4 pathways to help keep care leavers healthy in the areas of sexual health, pregnancy and parenting.
3. Appointed an Autism lead for Conwy and Denbighshire to ensure Conwy meets its duties under the Code of Practice for delivery of autism services.
4. Retained our ‘Dementia Friendly’ organisation status.
5. Retained contracts with a range of providers to ensure unpaid carers are able to access support and appropriate respite. A strategy is being developed to ensure unpaid carers are able to avoid crisis and breakdowns in care provision.
6. Invested in improvements to our leisure centres, including gym refurbishments and new equipment at Colwyn Bay, and Llandudno Junction and a new 3G pitch at Abergele.
7. Increased the number of 11-16 year olds with Ffit Junior Membership to 329 at mid-year, compared with just 56 at the end of 2021/22.
8. Secured the highest ever membership level for Ffit Conwy, with a total of 5,204 memberships at mid-year.
9. Achieved 100% for the National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) clients whose health has improved on completion of the exercise programme.
10. Recruited 5 dementia support workers to help support individuals living with dementia to remain well.
11. Achieved 98% for packages of reablement which reduced the need for support, maintained the same level of support or mitigated the need for support. This is a really positive outturn when considering the ongoing demand on the service.
12. Improved the capacity of school kitchens which has led to all foundation phase learners being offered a free school meal. CCBC is one of only 8 Councils in Wales that has achieved this.
13. Remained on track to offer a free school meal to all primary learners by September 2023. This delivers a range of benefits, including: helping families with cost of living pressures; promotes healthy eating and improves social skills, behaviour and attainment.

**Outcome 7 – People in Conwy live in a county where the use of Welsh is thriving and people can participate in all aspects of community life through the medium of Welsh.**

1. Published the 10 year Welsh in Education Strategic Plan.
2. Supported 14 staff members to pass their Welsh exams.
3. Continued to make good progress with the ‘Work Welsh’ scheme, with 36 staff and 9 Councillors taking part.
4. Held *Panad a Sgwrs* sessions 3 times a week in Coed Pella for staff to practice their Welsh conversation skills over a cuppa.
5. Continued to make good progress with the Sgwrsio Scheme, extending the scheme to Councillors. 15 pairs of Welsh learners / fluent welsh speakers meet regularly to chat in Welsh.
6. Designed a new course to develop the Welsh written skills of fluent welsh speakers, which is already fully booked.
7. Delivered 386 Welsh promotion activities in our libraries, including: weekly bilingual storytime; events in support of *Merched y Wawr*; supporting Welsh learners through the *‘Reading Friends’* programme, helping people with their confidence in learning and speaking Welsh.

**Outcome 8 - People in Conwy are informed, included and listened to and can actively contribute to a community where their background and identity are valued and respected**

1. Appointed a new staff member to deliver the Council’s compliance with web accessibility standards.
2. Worked with 4 Town Councils and engaged with their communities to produce place-making plans which will be our grassroots evidence of the need to develop places where people want to live.
3. Started to develop our anti-racist wales action plan, following launch of the Welsh Government national plan.
4. Reviewed and updated our Community Involvement Strategy to incorporate our statutory duties relating to public participation in accordance with the Local Government Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

**Outcome 9 – CCBC is resilient**

1. Published our Corporate Plan 2022-2027.
2. Published our first annual self-assessment for 2021-2022 in accordance with the LGE (Wales) Act 2021.
3. Published our Workwise Framework and implemented our hybrid working model.
4. Installed CO2 monitors in our offices to monitor air quality and ensure sufficient ventilation, protecting staff and customer wellbeing and service continuity.
5. Developed the Conwy Conversation with formal launch planned for early 2023.
6. Established our Recruitment Project and made good progress. Improvements to date include: proactive marketing campaign to promote the key benefits of working for CCBC; improved application and vacancy control processes; training for staff on advertising jobs; improved format for job descriptions and a new on-boarding webpage.
7. Secured Stadiwm CSM sponsorship agreement and negotiated a 2-year deal with the WRU.
8. Developed an informal management trainee pathway in Social Care as a *‘Grow Your Own’* approach to supporting staff development and succession planning.
9. Continued to administer a number of Welsh Government grants for our residents and businesses, including:

* 1,408 unpaid carers’ support grant payments totalling £704k;
* 10,829 winter fuel support scheme payments totalling £2.2m;
* free school meal holiday payments to 3,000 households during every school holiday.

1. Achieved best in Wales for number of customers signed up to electronic billing (50%) and direct debit (87.5%).
2. Made good progress in implementing the New Core Financials System project, to ensure the long term resilience of our financial systems, with go live planned for early in the new financial year.
3. Incorporated the 4 foundation schools VAT claims directly into the Council’s monthly VAT claims, improving compliance.
4. **What could we do better? What do we need to keep a focus on?**
5. Improving the sustainability of the social care sector in the face of recruitment and economic challenges for both the local authority and care providers.
6. Managing the ever increasing demand for our social care services, which continues to be unprecedented.
7. Improving the social care accommodation options for children and young people in Conwy, reducing the need for out of county residential placements.
8. Implementing the newly established Housing programme in order to address the significant demand on housing services.

This will include:

* + Managing the unprecedented high levels of homelessness. 34% of cases of homelessness had been prevented at mid-year, the prevention rate has decreased to a level well below a rate ever reported for this measure. However, this was anticipated due to the impact of the “everyone in policy”.
  + Managing the continued increasing demand for affordable housing against the reduced turnover of existing housing stock and limited supply.
  + Managing the increasing number of households in temporary accommodation.

1. Managing our physical infrastructure to ensure it is safe, sustainable and climate resilient.
2. Mitigating and adapting to the effects of Climate Change and working towards our net carbon zero target.
3. Incorporating net carbon zero into our procurement approaches and updating our procurement strategy.
4. Securing clarification from WG on funding available to deliver projects under the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme.
5. Updating our Asset Management Plan to maintain a strategic approach to the management of our assets.
6. Continuing to support our resident and business communities in response to the economic challenges.
7. Improving our approach to recruitment and retention to ensure a sustainable workforce.
8. Improving our completion of safeguarding training for new staff by identifying and removing barriers to training completion, especially for casual employees.
9. Improving our cyber resilience and service continuity in light of increased digital demand and external cyber threats, such as the war in Ukraine.
10. Securing a solution to preserve digital documents in the longer term.
11. Developing collaborative approaches to implement preventative health and wellbeing measures which reduce reliance on health and social care.
12. Improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
13. Improving school attendance post-pandemic which currently stands at 89.4%. WG grant funding for our 4 attendance support staff is indicated to cease in March 2023.
14. Monitoring the impact of our hybrid working model on service quality, team culture and staff wellbeing.
15. Continuing to maximise opportunities for our staff to learn and use Welsh and for children and young people to access Welsh through their education.
16. Continuing to contribute to the national target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050 as set out in the Welsh Government’s ‘Cymraeg 2050’ strategy.

**6 Governance Issues**

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the **review of the effectiveness of the governance framework** by the Governance & Audit Committee, Principal Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and that the arrangements **continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework**. The areas to be specifically addressed with new actions planned are outlined below.

There are no significant governance issues, but we are via our governance procedures aware of and managing our risks and issues but after a process of self-evaluation to review our effectiveness, we have identified the following actions:

**A1 Implement the MTFP actions, including improving the alignment of business and financial planning processes, to help realise the Council’s vision.**

**A2 Build on the member induction programme and develop an on-going member training and development plan.**

**A3 Ensure mechanisms are in place to monitor the delivery of key strategies.**

**A4 Ensure that all aspects of governance training are included within the Council’s learning and development plan.**

**A5 Review and improve the Council’s approach to risk management.**

**A6 Implement the Governance and Audit Committee self-assessment action plan.**

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We will merge this action plan with the actions identified in the performance self-assessment to form one action plan.

Our corporate governance arrangements have continued to be effective in supporting the Council to adapt and deliver services without any continuity issues. We will ensure that this sound approach to governance continues in 2023-2024 and in future years as we continue to meet our challenges. Our governance arrangements have worked well to adjust to the immense pressures, and in theses turbulent times we cannot yet say what the long term impacts will be for public finance and public services, the change could be profound but also provide new opportunities, and we need to continue to ensure that our Governance Framework is fit for purpose.

**Conclusion**

The Authority has access to sound 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 a continued challenging period. Through member induction all elected members have been made aware of their constitutional responsibilities. Decisions are subject to effective external and internal scrutiny and where weaknesses are found, action plans are promptly put in place and monitored. Based on this self-assessment, the overall conclusion is that our governance arrangements for the period 2022/2023 were fit for purpose and effectively supported the delivery of our objectives.

**Signed Signed**

**Date Date**

**Rhun Ap Gareth Councillor Charlie McCoubrey**

**Chief Executive Leader of the Council**