

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 06 MARCH 2025

REFERENCE FROM GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT: 17 FEBRUARY 2025

VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (REF)

The reference from Cabinet of 6th February, 2025 as contained within the agenda was presented by the Director of Corporate Resource in conjunction with the Chief Executive and Councillor L. Burnett, Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources.

G. Chapman (Chair and Lay Member) commented that it was a good report, including identified areas for improvement, and he offered thanks to the Elected Members, officers and the staff team for a good outcome which demonstrated the value of the Council as an organisation.

Councillor E. Goodjohn offered congratulations for a positive report, which should be taken in the context of 15 years of austerity that meant that local government resources and capacity across Wales had reduced. It was therefore important to highlight how the change agenda across Wales was to be signalled to the public. The move to a county wide approach to the Corporate Plan rather than focusing on the Council as an organisation was welcomed. It was important to ensure that the public were aware of the key Council priorities and changes to service delivery, particularly in the context of diminished resources. In response and with permission to speak, Councillor L. Burnett the Executive Leader stated that there was a tricky balance as resources were scarce and there were challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis and a rise in energy prices. It was therefore very difficult to convey one message to the public, which was why the Council would seek to use a variety of messages, including on social media. In terms of a county wide approach an example of that was in relation to health which was not directly within the remit of the Council, but there were important joint community developments taking place for the benefit of communities and the action the Council was taking had a direct impact on the services provided by the NHS. Examples included a new community clinic planned for Holton Road in Barry and a new facility earmarked in Llantwit Major. Joint working with stakeholders and partners would be even more important moving forward.

In relation to the above comments, the Chief Executive added that in terms of signalling change and issues around the narrative within the Corporate Plan that it was not around the Council as an organisation but a place that was the Vale of Glamorgan, that was a hard sell given 10 to 15 years of budget reductions. The Council had made it clear that a significant amount of its budget was allocated to schools and supporting the most vulnerable residents, and public opinion was supportive of that. That had meant that resources to other non-statutory services

had had to be either reduced or the way they were delivered changed. Therefore, the Council had set out to work with partners, such as town and community councils, community groups and volunteer organisations including the transferring of community assets, and more of that would be carried out. It was important to recognise that in some instances, community groups would be able to access grant money denied to the Council and provide services that may have ceased had they remained within the Council. That was an important message that needed to be conveyed to the public. In addition, place making was an important development in understanding and meeting the needs of local communities, and more of that was required.

Councillor M. Hooper queried whether the Council would be considering the findings of the Audit Wales report around financial sustainability of public bodies in Wales with reference to the difficulties that Councils were facing in terms of medium- and longer-term financial planning. He stated that the Scrutiny function could be improved, with a key element of that ensuring that Committee members engaged more at meetings and asked appropriate questions. Finally, Councillor Hooper commented that with Community Asset Transfers there was caution as it was important to ensure that certain vulnerable groups were not excluded from the ability to become volunteers and take part in projects

In response to Councillor Hooper, the Chief Executive stated that he did not disagree with Audit Wales's findings. It had been a deliberate choice for the Corporate Plan to be ambitious and it was important for the Council to understand the needs of communities, which was why the Corporate Plan had a significant element related to strengthening communities and supporting our most vulnerable residents. Another key theme of the Corporate Plan was giving young people a good start in life. Therefore, the resources allocated by the Council particularly reflected those three key themes.

With regard to future Scrutiny arrangements, the Chief Executive advised that the key to that would not be how many Committee meetings there would be but was around its purpose and the quality of scrutiny taking place. That meant that a move to more investigatory Task and Finish Work being undertaken related to things that mattered and linked with the objectives with the Corporate Plan. In terms of Community Asset Transfers, the Chief Executive referred to the work being carried out in North East Barry. That was around spending time with the community, looking at what the specific needs were, what the specific requirements were and how the Council could improve the life chances of residents. There was working going on to strengthen communities, but there was more that could be done.

Councillor E. Goodjohn commented that the assessment represented an opportunity to change the Scrutiny function and the way that the Council performed through its new Corporate Plan. However, it should be recognised that there was a need to build-up capacity within the Council to achieve its objectives and to engage with and then consult with the public. The Council also required more capacity in order to improve public engagement in order to have sufficient reach within communities.

The Chair commented that Council needed to be bolder when it came to decisions around service delivery, particularly in the context of increased demands within certain service areas. It may be necessary for the Council to stop delivering non-statutory services which also required an honest conversation with the public around why the Council had chosen to stop providing a service. That would require a culture shift. Within the Council's response to the Panel Performance Assessment, there was no explicit mention of young people and so there was scope to look at how young people were engaged and their voices heard.

The Chair also expressed that there should also be consideration of areas of partnership working that may not add real value and represented a drain on resources. In terms of budgetary savings and pressures, there was scope for conversations with Health about the contribution that Council run services such as Social Care and Leisure made in support of health related services. The Chair commented that the decision-making process and the Council's scheme of delegation needed to be considered to ensure that less trivial matters could be determined by officers. In addition, the Code of Conduct for Members could be strengthened due to inappropriate comments being made at Committee meetings.

Finally, the Chair requested that progress against the areas of recommendation arising from the Panel Performance Assessment should be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee alongside the other recommendations contained within the Regulatory Report tracker.

There being no further comments or queries, it was

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report and appendices be noted.
- (2) T H A T the comments of the Governance and Audit Committee be referred to Cabinet for its consideration. A summary of the key comments is as follows:
  - The findings of the assessment demonstrated the values of the organisation, and so thanks should be passed onto the staff and Elected Members.
  - It was important to recognise that after 15 years of austerity the level of resource and the capacity of local government across Wales had been reduced. It was also important how the change agenda was signalled to the public. The move to a county wide approach rather than focusing on the Council as an organisation was welcomed and it was important to ensure that the public were aware of the key Council priorities and changes to service delivery, particularly in the context of diminished resources.
  - The Council needed to improve public communication, particularly in relation to the requirement for the Council to achieve a balanced budget. Engagement with communities should take place first to ascertain what their needs were, which should then be followed up with consultation on specific proposals and Council plans.

- Working in collaboration with partners and stakeholders was extremely important.
- It was important for the Council to consider findings of the Audit Wales report around financial sustainability of public bodies in Wales with reference to the difficulties that Councils were facing in terms of medium- and longer-term financial planning.
- There was a need to improve the Scrutiny function but a key element of that was ensuring that Committee members engaged more at meetings and asked appropriate questions.
- In terms of Community Asset Transfers and wider community work, it was important to ensure that certain vulnerable groups were not excluded from the ability to become volunteers and take part in projects.
- The assessment represented an opportunity to change the Scrutiny function and the way that the Council performed through its new Corporate Plan. However, it should be recognised that there was a need to build-up capacity within the Council in order to achieve its objectives.
- The Council also required more capacity in order to improve public engagement in order to have sufficient reach within communities.
- The Council needed to be bolder when it came to decisions around service delivery, particularly in the context of increased demands within certain service areas. It may be necessary for the Council to stop delivering non-statutory services which also required an honest conversation with the public around why the Council had chosen to stop providing a service. That required a culture shift.
- Within the Council's response to the Panel Performance Assessment, there was no explicit mention of young people and so there was scope to look at how young people were engaged and their voices heard.
- There should also be consideration of the areas of partnership working that may not add real value and represented a drain on resources.
- In terms of budgetary savings and pressures, there was scope for conversations with Health about the contribution that Council run services such as Social Care and Leisure made in support of health related services.
- The Members Code of Conduct should be strengthened.
- The decision-making process and the Council's scheme of delegation needed to be considered.
- Proposals for the Council's actions in response to the Panel Performance Assessment should be incorporated in the Regulatory Report Track and be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee.

### Reasons for decisions

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) In order for Cabinet to be aware of the Committee's comments.

