



GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

10.00 AM - FRIDAY, 26 JANUARY 2024

**MULTI-LOCATION MEETING COUNCIL CHAMBER PORT
TALBOT/MICROSOFT TEAMS**

**ALL MOBILE TELEPHONES TO BE SWITCHED TO SILENT FOR THE
DURATION OF THE MEETING**

Webcasting/Hybrid Meetings:

This meeting may be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's Internet Site. By participating you are consenting to be filmed and the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes.

1. Chairperson's Announcement/s
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of Previous Meeting (*Pages 5 - 10*)
4. Audit Wales - Presentation on their review into the effectiveness of Scrutiny arrangements at the Council (*Pages 11 - 52*)
5. Audit Wales - Strategic Approach to Digital Services (*Pages 53 - 102*)
6. Audit Wales Work Programme and Timetable - Q2 Updates (*Pages 103 - 126*)
7. Treasury Management Monitoring (*Pages 127 - 134*)
8. Annual Governance Statement - six monthly update (*Pages 135 - 146*)

9. Regulators Report Register (*Pages 147 - 158*)
10. Internal Audit Quarterly Update Report (*Pages 159 - 182*)
11. Forward Work Programme (*Pages 183 - 184*)
12. Urgent Items
Any urgent items at the discretion of the Chairperson pursuant to Section 100BA(6)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).
13. Access to Meetings
That pursuant to Section 100A(4) and (5) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded for the following items of business which involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 12 and 15 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the above Act.
14. Special Investigations Update Report (*Pages 185 - 188*)

K.Jones
Chief Executive

Civic Centre
Port Talbot

Friday 19th January 2023

Committee Membership:

Chairperson: J.Jenkins

**Vice
Chairperson: H.Griffiths**

Members: Councillors A.J.Richards, O.S.Davies,
P.D.Richards, P.Rogers, S.Grimshaw, R.Mizen
and W.Carpenter

**Voting Lay
Member:** A.Bagley, M.Owen

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GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

(Hybrid Council Chamber Port Talbot/Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

13 November 2023

Chairperson: J. Jenkins

Vice Chairperson: H. Griffiths

Councillors: A.J.Richards, P.D.Richards, P.Rogers,
S.Grimshaw, R.Mizen and W.Carpenter

Officers In Attendance: N. Daniel, D. Mulligan, H. Jones,
A.M.O'Donnell, C.Furlow-Harris, C. Plowman
and S.McCluskie

Representing Audit Wales: G.Gillett, M.Edwards.

Voting Lay Member: M. Owen, A. Bagley

1. **CHAIRS ANNOUNCEMENTS**

A one-minute silence was held in respect of the recent death of Committee Member, Cllr Marcia Spooner.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declarations of interest were received at the start of the meeting:

Joanna Jenkins: In regards to Agenda item 6, as she is involved with a charity which has gained financial benefit.

Helen Griffiths: In regards to Agenda item 7, as she is an employee at TATA Steelworks.

3. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on the 12th of October 2023, were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. **AUDIT WALES - DETAILED AUDIT PLAN 2023**

NPT Officers, went on to update the Committee on the detailed Audit Plan for 2023.

Members were informed the plan is set at an annual basis and had originally been shared in June 2023. It was stated the plan had been shared at a later date than previous years, which had not been anticipated.

The plan sets out key responsibilities for the year, in particular surrounding financial and performance details. It was highlighted that the plan was the first prepared under the revised auditing standard, as set out in appendix 1 of the plan. It was also highlighted the change was across an industry scope. Audit Wales went on to state the change had a large impact on how audits were now being documented.

Another key change members were privy to, were the skill mix on the audit.

A major risk that had been identified in the significant financial risks, were the management override of controls, present in all entities. Several audit procedures were identified to access key financial statements.

Areas of key focus had been identified in exhibit 2, predominantly the pension fund liability and the valuation of land and buildings.

Members attention was drawn to page 30 of the audit plan, where areas of focus were identified as being value for money arrangements, assurance and risk assessment, financial sustainability and procurement and contract management arrangements.

Audit Wales went on to draw the committee attention to page 32 of the audit plan, and details of the audit fee. Members were informed the fee was the result of the impact to the revised standard. Rates had increased by 4.8% due to inflation. A 10.2 % increase for the financial audit work across all sectors.

The Chair reminded the Committee, that the use of acronyms were still being shown throughout reports.

Decision:

That the report be noted.

5. **AUDIT WALES - AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS 2022/23**

Audit Wales went on to inform the committee of the positive report to the audited statement of accounts.

Members were informed, the draft accounts had been received at the end of May 2023, and were now complete.

Areas that were brought to the Committees attention were, set out in appendix 2 of the circulated pack.

Within paragraph 11, there had been no uncorrected misstatements in the accounts, however within paragraph 12 there were noted misstatements of accounts, which were now corrected in the final version of the statement.

A presentational issued was also noted, but this had no impact on the Councils net expenditure position. Further details could be found in appendix 3.

The Chair went on to say it was pleasing to receive an unqualified report during this time of hardship.

Members raised comments to the summary of corrections and gain an understanding as to why these were changed. Audit Wales responded by stating that internal recharges had wrongly been included within the statement of accounts. Impairment losses had also been miscoded, along with a misclassification of income. All of which had no effect on the bottom line and were considered minor adjustments.

The Chair went on to confirm their electronic signature was ready to be appended to both the letter of representation and the statement of accounts.

Decision:

That the report be noted.

6. **AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2022/23**

Officers went on to provide a summary of the audited Statement of accounts. Chair raised point to the use of acronyms being used within the report.

Members were informed the audited statement of account was one that was provided following completion of the annual audit. The accounts are prepared in line with legislation and were provided to Audit Wales on the 26th May 2023 for commencement, with the draft commended to Committee in June 2023.

It was further mentioned, that it was pleasing to receive an unqualified audit opinion.

The annual governance statement was also presented to the Committee.

The Chair raised queries surrounding 6 assets lists within the report and asked for clarity. Officers stated 1.8 million pound formed the former burrows yard site, Bryndulais Avenue depot, Seven Sisters, Canolfan Sheltered Housing, land at North Rhondda South Pit Glyncorwg, part of the Goytre Cycleway and land at Heol Y Croes Cwmavon,

Officers confirmed that any assets held for sale are valued each year. Members went on to raise a query surrounding unusable reserves and the sharp increase noted. Officers stated, it was particularly due to pension schemes, part of which were used within the reserves and the other was liability. Members were told, a valuable had been undertaken in 2020, and further carried out every three years. Factored which attributed to the increase, included inflation and mortality.

Decision:

- That the Letter of representation, included in Appendix 1 of the circulated report, be approved.
- That the final 2022/23 Statement of Accounts, included in Appendix 2 of the circulated report, be approved.
- That the Annual Governance Statement, included in Appendix 3 of the circulated report, be approved.
- That the Chair of Governance and Audit Committee be authorised to provide their electronic signature for both the Letter of Representation and the Statement of Accounts.

7. **STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER**

Officers went on to provide an overview to the strategic risk register. Members were informed the register could be found at appendix 1 of the circulated pack, of which the Cabinet Scrutiny Board had reviewed on Wednesday the 8th November 2023.

Since the last meeting of Governance and Audit Members were told several risks had been updated and also added to the register. The Chair highlighted difficulties in identifying areas due to lack of information submitted within certain columns of the register. Queries were also raised to deescalated numbers within the register and the spreadsheet. The spreadsheet and the difficulties in reading the information was noted.

Officers took on board the comments received.

Discussions were held on solutions, and it was proposed for training to be arranged for the committee on the Council's Corporate Risk Management Policy. This would include a discussion on how best to review risks contained within the register on a Directorate basis. .

Further clarification was raised regarding formatting. Officers confirmed the presentation of the risk register was under review.

Decision:

That the report be noted.

8. **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

That the forward work programme for 2023 2024 be noted.

9. **URGENT ITEMS**

There was one urgent item noted. That being agenda item 10, the Draft Self-Assessment 2022-2023.

10. **DRAFT SELF-ASSESSMENT 2022-2023**

Officers went on to provide a summary and recap to the draft self-assessment. Members were reminded that the self-assessment was duly part of keeping performance under review. Members were also reminded of the legislation requirements and the prompts needed for which the self-assessment is framed around.

Members were told that the self-assessment was the second to be processed, adopting the Local Government Association Efficiency

Toolkit. Adopting a model was a keen choice as It enables a year on year assessment of improvement.

Officers went on to take the Committee briefly through the report, highlighting specific points relating to how the authority took its approach to the assessment and sources of evidence used to form the self-assessment.

Officers noted progress has been made on the core activity areas identified within the report.

The chair referred to the difficulties in viewing the documentation with areas spilt over a several pages etc. Dates or lack of was highlighted as a concern. Officers stated the reasons behind these being that they were long term actions as opposed to short term, which are inclusive of target dates. The comments were noted. Members were keen to note the positives of the document.

The chair made reference to the difficulties in viewing the documentation with areas spilt over a several pages etc. Dates or lack of was highlighted as a concern. Officers stated the reasons behind these being that they were long term actions as opposed to short term, which are inclusive of target dates. The comments were noted and would form part of the review.

Members were keen to note the positives of the document.

Decision:

That the report be noted.

CHAIRPERSON

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE

26th JANUARY 2024

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – C GRIFFITHS

Matter for Information

Wards Affected – All wards

Audit Wales Review of Scrutiny Arrangements at the Council.

Purpose of the Report

To provide the Governance & Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Review of Scrutiny Arrangements at the Council final report, and the Council's organisational response form detailing how the Council intends to respond to the recommendations made.

Background

In 2018, Audit Wales published a report on Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council- Overview and Scrutiny- Fit for the Future? (Attached at Appendix 1) They concluded that the Council was making improvement to the scrutiny function, but further work remained to make it better placed to respond to current and future challenges.

Since the audit work of 2018, Local Government elections were held in May 2022 and the COVID 19 pandemic brought about changes to scrutiny meetings, including the introduction of online and hybrid meetings.

Audit Wales returned in 2023, where they focussed on looking at the current effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny function including the introduction of online and hybrid meetings. They drew on the findings from the 2018 review, as well as the Audit Wales 2019 discussion paper 'Six Themes to help make scrutiny Fit For the Future.'

Audit Wales undertook their review between February and May 2023.

They interviewed a variety of stakeholders including:

- Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny
- Scrutiny Committee Members
- Chief Executive
- Heard of Legal & Democratic Services
- Head of Democratic Services
- Scrutiny Officers
- Leader of Council

They also observed Council Scrutiny Committee meetings in person and online and conducted desk research into such items as the Council's constitution and the scrutiny procedure rules.

Outcome of the Review

The review (attached at Appendix 2) concluded that:

The Council is missing opportunities for scrutiny to maximise its impact, influence and effectiveness in holding cabinet to account, shaping council policies and reviewing performance.

It was recommended that:

Current model and role of scrutiny

- R1 The Council should review its current model for scrutiny to ensure scrutiny can fulfil its broader range of roles and responsibilities. Any revised model should ensure there are opportunities for scrutiny to engage in its wider roles, including for example, in relation to:
- Policy development
 - Performance monitoring
 - Holding cabinet members to account throughout the decision-making process
 - Following up outcomes of previous recommendations or decisions

Public engagement

- R2 The Council's scrutiny model should be more citizen focused by strengthening its arrangements for public involvement and engagement in scrutiny. This should include ensuring greater

transparency and timeliness about which items will be on the scrutiny committee agendas; and using existing engagement and consultation work to inform its scrutiny work including consideration of scrutiny topics, as part of its scrutiny reviews, in holding cabinet members and decisions to account, and in its performance monitoring roles.

Planning and work programme

R3 To enable the scrutiny model to be more citizen focused, the Council should review its arrangements for the way in which scrutiny is planned to ensure scrutiny can independently plan and strategically prioritise its own work programme.

Support

R4 The Council should review the type of scrutiny support it requires across all areas of the organisation including service areas, to enable scrutiny to perform its wider role and ensure that any resourcing implications arising from any changes to the scrutiny model are understood and planned for

Evaluation

R5 The Council should strengthen its arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny

Next Steps

Audit Wales presented their final report to all Members via an All Member Seminar on the 14th November 2023.

Members of Council agreed that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum be responsible for taking the recommendations in the review forward. They tasked the forum with establishing a Task and Finish Group to research and consider other models of scrutiny, with a view to presenting their findings on how an alternative model of scrutiny could operate in this Council, as well as informing how the Council will respond to the recommendations from the Audit Wales review.

The Task and Finish Group has commenced, and members plan to report their findings and proposals for improvement to Council in March 2024 so that any constitutional or administrative changes can be

actioned in the Council's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May to inform the next Civic Year's arrangements.

The Council is obligated to complete an Organisational Response Form (ORF) to Audit Wales and to the Governance and Audit Committee, setting out what actions it intends to put in place in response to the recommendations made.

At this stage, and with the agreement of Audit Wales, the ORF is fairly brief in detail as the actions will be completed following the conclusion of the Task and Finish Group of the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum and subsequent agreement by Council to any proposed changes to the model of scrutiny.

The ORF is attached at appendix 3, and Governance and Audit Committee are asked to note that a further version of the ORF will be brought to a future meeting at the conclusion of the ongoing review work.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts in respect of this item, although any proposed changes to the scrutiny model may impact costs relating to the delivery of that model.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment in respect of this item.

Valleys Communities Impacts

There are no impacts in respect of this item.

Workforce impacts

There are no workforce impacts in respect of this item, although any changes to the scrutiny model may impact Democratic Services Staff and officers across the Council.

Legal Impacts

There are no legal impacts in respect of this item, although any changes to the scrutiny model will result in necessary changes to the Council's constitution and scrutiny procedure rules.

Risk Management

Failure to respond to Audit Wales and consider this matter at the Governance and Audit Committee could lead to further consideration by Audit Wales, with association reputational issues for the Council.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- The Governance & Audit Committee note the report issued by the Audit Wales in relation to their Review of Scrutiny Arrangements.
- The Governance & Audit Committee note the Organisational Response Form issued by the Council in response to Audit Wales.
- The Governance & Audit Committee note that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny are currently undertaking a Task and Finish Group, which will add the detail
- The Governance and Audit Committee receive the final Organisational Response Form, once the Task and finish Group has concluded and Council has agreed how it plans to address the recommendations raised by Audit Wales.

Appendices

Appendix 1-

Audit Wales Review. Neath Port Talbot Council- Overview and Scrutiny- fit for the Future? 2018 Scrutiny Review Report

Appendix2-

Audit Wales Review of Scrutiny Arrangements at Neath Port Talbot Council 2023.

Appendix 3-

Organisational Response Form

Background Papers

Audit Wales 2019 Six Themes to help make scrutiny 'Fit for the Future.'

Officer Contact

For further information on this report item, please contact:

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WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Overview and Scrutiny – Fit For the Future? – **Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**

Audit year: 2017-18

Date issued: July 2018

Document reference: 624A2017-18

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The team who delivered the work comprised Sara-Jane Byrne, Katherine Simmons and Tim Buckle under the direction of Huw Rees.

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Summary report

Summary

- 1 This review explored with each of the 22 councils in Wales how ‘fit for the future’ their scrutiny functions are. We considered how councils are responding to current challenges, including the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 (WFG Act) in relation to their scrutiny activity, as well as how councils are beginning to undertake scrutiny of Public Services Boards (PSBs). We also examined how well placed councils are to respond to future challenges such as continued pressure on public finances and the possible move towards more regional working between local authorities.
- 2 As part of this review we also reviewed the progress that councils have made in addressing the recommendations of our earlier National Improvement Study **Good Scrutiny? Good Question?** (May 2014) (see [Appendix 2](#)). We also followed up on the proposals for improvement relevant to scrutiny that we issued in local reports including those issued to councils as part of our 2016-17 thematic reviews of Savings Planning and Governance Arrangements for Determining Significant Service Changes.
- 3 Our review aimed to:
 - identify approaches to embedding the sustainable development principle into scrutiny processes and practices to inform practice sharing and future work of the Auditor General in relation to the WFG Act;
 - provide assurance that scrutiny functions are well placed to respond to current and future challenges and expectations;
 - help to embed effective scrutiny by elected members from the start of the new electoral cycle; and
 - provide insight into how well councils have responded to the findings of our previous Scrutiny Improvement Study.
- 4 To inform our findings we based our review methodology around the Outcomes and Characteristics for Effective Local Government Overview and Scrutiny that were developed and agreed by scrutiny stakeholders in Wales following our previous National Improvement Study **Good Scrutiny? Good Question?**
- 5 During December 2017 and January 2018 we undertook document reviews, interviewed a small number of key officers and ran focus groups with councillors to understand their views on Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council’s (the Council) current scrutiny arrangements and in particular how the Council is approaching and intends to respond to the challenges identified above.
- 6 We observed a sample of scrutiny meetings and reviewed relevant meeting documentation provided to members to support their scrutiny role, such as reports and presentations.

- 7 In this review we concluded that the Council is making improvements to its scrutiny function, but further work remains to make it better placed to respond to current and future challenges. We came to this conclusion because:
- The Council is improving the environment in which overview and scrutiny operates, but pre-decision scrutiny is not timely or rigorous, and scrutiny committees are not effectively holding the Cabinet to account
 - The Council has made improvements to overview and scrutiny practice, but needs to strengthen public engagement, increase transparency and grasp opportunities for scrutiny to work differently
 - The Council does not evaluate the impact of overview and scrutiny and cannot demonstrate its overall effectiveness

Proposals for improvement

- 8 The table below contains our proposals for ways in which the Council could improve the effectiveness of its overview and scrutiny function to make it better placed to meet current and future challenges.

Exhibit 1: proposals for improvement

Proposals for improvement	
P1	The Council's scrutiny committees should ensure that, where appropriate, Cabinet members rather than council officers are held to account for the efficient exercise of executive functions in accordance with statutory guidance ¹ .
P2	The Council should consider the intended role of scrutiny committees in pre-decision scrutiny activity and ensure current arrangements enable sufficient time for scrutiny.
P3	The Council should review its arrangements for planning and undertaking scrutiny, and consider different ways of working that best suit the topic area and desired outcome.
P4	The Council should strengthen scrutiny committee ownership of forward work programmes, ensuring that there is a clear rationale for topic selection.
P5	The Council should strengthen the arrangements for engaging the public in scrutiny.
P6	The Council should put in place arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny.

¹ National Assembly for Wales, Guidance For County And County Borough Councils In Wales On Executive And Alternative Arrangements 2006, July 2006, Paragraph 2.1.8

Detailed report

The Council is making improvements to its scrutiny function, but further work remains to make it better placed to respond to current and future challenges

The Council is improving the environment in which overview and scrutiny operates, but pre-decision scrutiny is not timely or rigorous, and scrutiny committees are not effectively holding the Cabinet to account

- 9 The Council defines the role of its overview and scrutiny function on its website as being:
- pre-decision scrutiny (considering decisions to be taken by Cabinet);
 - performance (monitoring how services are performing);
 - policy and partnership (considering the impact of policies and holding partners of the Council to account); and
 - post-decision scrutiny (considering the impact of decisions after they have been made).²
- 10 We found that the majority of scrutiny activity at the Council is pre-decision scrutiny and that, as we reported in our Annual Improvement Report 2014, overview and scrutiny committee activity is still predominantly aligned with Cabinet and Cabinet Board work programmes.³ During our review, councillors told us that they valued the close links between Cabinet and scrutiny activity. As a result of the Council's pre-decision scrutiny arrangements, scrutiny committees regularly have the opportunity to consider items of relevance to the Council's improvement and governance arrangements.
- 11 The timescale for scrutiny committees to consider pre-decision scrutiny items is usually relatively short. Cabinet members frequently decide on these items at the Cabinet board meeting scheduled for immediately after the relevant scrutiny committee meeting on the same day. This approach to pre-decision scrutiny provides little time for scrutiny committees to plan their activity effectively, take ownership of the timing and method of scrutiny activity, or to determine if they require additional evidence to be gathered to inform their deliberations. This also limits scrutiny committees' ability to seek a range of perspectives to inform scrutiny

² Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, www.npt.gov.uk/5854

³ Auditor General, **Annual Improvement Report Incorporating the Corporate Assessment Report 2014 Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council**, Wales Audit Office, November 2014

activity. The Council should consider if the role of scrutiny committees in pre-decision scrutiny is sufficiently clear and meaningful. In doing so, the Council should also consider if its current arrangement for pre-decision scrutiny enables scrutiny committees to fulfil this role effectively. It may find for example, that consideration of fewer items in more detail, and with more time, would be a more effective use of limited scrutiny function resources.

- 12 Scrutiny committees routinely consider performance information relating to Council services and there is the opportunity for further development of performance scrutiny as part of the new performance management system being introduced.
- 13 In our Annual Improvement Report 2014, we highlighted that “whilst Cabinet Members at Neath Port Talbot attend the majority of scrutiny committee meetings they are not routinely questioned regarding policies, decisions and service performance, and instead largely attend as observers. This is not good practice.” This situation has not yet been addressed. Currently Cabinet members are not routinely being held to account by scrutiny committees. We found that officers, rather than Cabinet members, generally attend scrutiny committees to present reports, answer questions, and be held to account. The Council’s constitution states, ‘it is ultimately the elected executive which will be required to answer questions about its policies and decisions. Officer contributions should as far as possible be confined to questions of fact and explanation relating to policies and decisions...’ The Council’s scrutiny committees should ensure that where appropriate Cabinet members rather than council officers are held to account for the efficient exercise of executive functions in accordance with statutory guidance.
- 14 We understand that Cabinet members do now present reports at full Council meetings and senior Cabinet members are keen for all Cabinet members to start to take greater ownership of their portfolios in council meetings more generally, including scrutiny committees. Cabinet and scrutiny members reported that there is a more supportive culture of scrutiny within the Council.
- 15 To gain an understanding of the environment in which scrutiny operates, we also looked at the training available to scrutiny members. The Council has provided training for members on committee procedures and scrutiny. A scrutiny officer also delivered an induction session directly before the first scheduled meeting of each scrutiny committee. However, despite the training provided, some members remain confused over the role of Cabinet members in scrutiny.
- 16 The Council has provided some training to equip scrutiny members for the future. This included induction sessions on the Wellbeing and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (WFG Act), and a seminar/workshop session with members on the Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board Local Wellbeing Plan. Some members highlighted to us the need for further training, for example in relation to chairing skills and in undertaking ‘post-decision’ scrutiny. The Council is taking steps to address these training needs. However, there is an opportunity for the Council to consider whether training in other areas would enable councillors to be better placed to meet current and future challenges. This could include options

appraisals, financial analysis, scrutinising regional, collaborative and commercial arrangements, and engaging ward members and stakeholders in scrutiny work.

- 17 Some scrutiny members have identified actions that they believe could help to better equip them to undertake scrutiny activity, such as observing overview and scrutiny committees in other councils. There is an opportunity for councillors to learn more about the different scrutiny practices employed elsewhere to help them reflect on possible alternative methods and approaches when planning future scrutiny activity within the Council.
- 18 The Council has developed the role of member Scrutiny Champion. The position requires the incumbent to engage with other elected members and assist in advocating and promoting best practice in relation to sound scrutiny arrangements as part of the Council's corporate governance processes.⁴ The Council has also put in place a Chairs and Vice Chairs Forum. Scrutiny Chairs told us this was a positive development, enabling chairs to share intelligence, good practice or training needs.
- 19 The Council reviewed the dedicated officer support provided to scrutiny committees in 2017. The overview and scrutiny function are currently supported by a senior scrutiny and member development officer, two democratic services officers and a modern apprentice. Arrangements have been put in place to strengthen the support available to committees through the appointment of new members of staff. This was necessary to replace individuals who have changed positions, but it was also agreed that the democratic services assistant join the scrutiny team to provide additional support. Arrangements have also been made to provide accredited training to new staff members to improve the support they provide to scrutiny members. The Council intends to undertake a further review of officer support for overview and scrutiny committees in spring 2018 with a view to identifying any other support needs that are not being met. This provides the Council with an opportunity to consider the current support needs of scrutiny members, but also how these may change in light of current and future challenges. This could include ensuring that officers have the appropriate skills and expertise to support scrutiny members.

The Council has made improvements to overview and scrutiny practice, but needs to strengthen public engagement, increase transparency and grasp opportunities for scrutiny to work differently

- 20 We observed some scrutiny committee meetings during our review. We found them to be well-run with a number of challenging and relevant questions being asked by members. We also heard that members felt that scrutiny committee

⁴ Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, **Report to Democratic Services Committee**, 1st February 2018

meetings are generally not 'party political', and that the culture of committee meetings is productive.

- 21 From our observations and focus groups, it appears to us that the scrutiny committees' pre-briefing sessions are helping to make committee meetings more focused. These sessions help scrutiny committees to develop key lines of enquiry and a more cohesive approach to questioning. However, we found limited evidence that committees reflect on the best method of scrutiny activity when considering topics. We are aware that scrutiny committees sometimes establish task and finish groups and scrutiny inquiries. However, in common with many other councils in Wales, the majority of overview and scrutiny activity takes place at formal committee meetings where officer reports are considered.
- 22 When undertaking pre-decision scrutiny of Cabinet Board reports, scrutiny committees choose which items from the Cabinet Board agenda that they will scrutinise. However, the selected pre-decision scrutiny items are not set out in the scrutiny committee agenda so it would be difficult for the public to know which Cabinet Board agenda items are being scrutinised. This arrangement is not transparent. If no advance notice is provided to the public as to which items will actually be scrutinised, it is unclear how the Council makes effective arrangements in accordance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 to "enable all persons who live or work in the local authority's area to bring to the attention of the relevant overview and scrutiny committee their views on any matter under consideration by the committee".⁵
- 23 Officers and members acknowledged that public engagement is an area of weakness in the Council's overview and scrutiny arrangements and activity. Scrutiny committees rarely proactively seek the views of the public or service users as part of their work. Corporate engagement/consultation information is not systematically used by scrutiny committees to either identify potential scrutiny topics, or as evidence to inform scrutiny committee findings. As 'involvement' is one of the five ways of working set out in the WFG Act, the Council's overview and scrutiny committees may need to consider if their approach to engaging with the public in scrutiny remains appropriate as they scrutinise the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle.
- 24 Where the overview and scrutiny committees decide to establish task and finish groups or panels to review specific issues, there are clear processes in place to challenge the choice of topic and to plan the scrutiny exercise. The task and finish group produce a scoping paper and hold a planning meeting to challenge the topic selection and consider the main aims from the project, and the key issues to be addressed. A scoping template form is used. This includes how the scrutiny activity will contribute to achieving corporate/community objectives/priorities, an initial list of key officers, stakeholders or other agencies to involve, and timescales for completing the exercise. However, as the majority of scrutiny activity currently

⁵ [The Local Government \(Wales\) Measure 2011, 62 \(2\)](#)

takes place at scrutiny committee meetings, this level of planning is limited to a small proportion of scrutiny activity.

- 25 The Council's Constitution restricts the number of questions members can ask during any committees, and the duration that each member can question witnesses. This could potentially hinder effective scrutiny through stifling debate. However, our observations of scrutiny committees suggested that applying this restriction was not common practice and seemed to be implemented at the Scrutiny Chairs' discretion. The Democratic Services Committee has recognised that the Constitution requires amendment, and has resolved to ask the Monitoring Officer to consider amending the constitution to take into account the scrutiny process.
- 26 The Council's Cabinet has developed forward work programmes for Cabinet Boards and for the Cabinet. These forward work programmes will help scrutiny members to identify in a more timely way the forthcoming items they wish to focus on. However, scrutiny committee forward work programmes are not fully developed. They do not include the rationale for items, their purpose or the outcome that is expected of the scrutiny activity. Members are, however, beginning to become more selective of the items they choose to scrutinise from Cabinet Board agendas. They are suggesting more items to be added to forward work programmes that they themselves have identified, showing greater ownership of their activity.
- 27 The Council recognises that scrutiny of outside bodies is an area that needs further development, although the Council does participate in the joint scrutiny arrangements that have been set up to look at the effectiveness of 'Education through Regional Working' (ERW) across the region.⁶
- 28 As part of our review we considered how councils are beginning to undertake scrutiny of Public Services Boards. At the time of our fieldwork, the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee was discharging the function for scrutinising the Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board. They held their first meetings in January 2018. It is too early in the development of PSB scrutiny for us to comment on the effectiveness of these arrangements at the Council.

The Council does not evaluate the impact of overview and scrutiny and cannot demonstrate its overall effectiveness

- 29 As part of our review, we asked officers and members to identify examples where scrutiny activity had made an impact or added value. Officers and members highlighted some examples such as consultation on budget setting, and task and finish groups challenging current arrangements and making recommendations about community safety and tourism, which have been accepted by Cabinet.

⁶ Education through Regional Working (ERW) is one of four regional school improvement consortia in Wales.

However, as noted in [paragraph 21](#) above, the vast majority of overview and scrutiny activity in the Council is undertaken during formal committee meetings. Our review of scrutiny committee minutes found that at the conclusion of a number of items, reports were noted with no obvious outcome as a result of the scrutiny activity. We also found little evidence of scrutiny committees providing constructive challenge to Cabinet members during committee meetings.

- 30 The Council does not regularly review the overall effectiveness of its overview and scrutiny function, and overview and scrutiny committees have not produced annual reports in recent years. The Council has, however, demonstrated a willingness to improve the effectiveness of its overview and scrutiny arrangements. This includes drawing on outside support or guidance, such as reflecting on the work undertaken by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), to help improve scrutiny practice. The Council has also developed some local performance indicators relating to overview and scrutiny, including the number of recommendations made by committees and agreed by the Cabinet. The Council therefore has an opportunity to reflect on the work it is already undertaking to improve overview and scrutiny practice to develop a more comprehensive approach to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny activity.

Appendix 1

Outcomes and characteristics for effective local government overview and scrutiny

Exhibit 2: outcomes and characteristics for effective local government overview and scrutiny

Outcomes	Characteristics
<p>What does good scrutiny seek to achieve?</p>	<p>What would it look like? How could we recognise it?</p>
<p>1. Democratic accountability drives improvement in public services. 'Better Services'</p>	<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Scrutiny has a clearly defined and valued role in the council's improvement arrangements. ii) Scrutiny has the dedicated officer support it needs from officers who are able to undertake independent research effectively, and provide Scrutiny members with high-quality analysis, advice and training. <p>Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii) Overview and Scrutiny inquiries are non-political, methodologically sound and incorporate a wide range of evidence and perspectives. <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iv) Overview and scrutiny regularly engages in evidence based challenge of decision makers and service providers. v) Scrutiny provides viable and well evidenced solutions to recognised problems.

Outcomes	Characteristics
<p>What does good scrutiny seek to achieve?</p>	<p>What would it look like? How could we recognise it?</p>
<p>2. Democratic decision making is accountable, inclusive and robust. 'Better decisions'</p>	<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Scrutiny councillors have the training and development opportunities they need to undertake their role effectively. ii) The process receives effective support from the Council's Corporate Management Team which ensures that information provided to scrutiny is of high quality and is provided in a timely and consistent manner. <p>Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii) Scrutiny is Member led and has 'ownership' of its work programme taking into account the views of the public, partners and regulators whilst balancing between prioritising community concerns against issues of strategic risk and importance. iv) Stakeholders have the ability to contribute to the development and delivery of scrutiny forward work programmes. v) Overview and scrutiny meetings and activities are well-planned, chaired effectively and make best use of the resources available to it. <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> vi) Non-executive Members provide an evidence based check and balance to Executive decision making. vii) Decision makers give public account for themselves at scrutiny committees for their portfolio responsibilities.
<p>3. The public is engaged in democratic debate about the current and future delivery of public services.</p>	<p>Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Scrutiny is recognised by the Executive and Corporate Management team as an important council mechanism for community engagement. <p>Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii) Scrutiny is characterised by effective communication to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability. iii) Scrutiny operates non-politically and deals effectively with sensitive political issues, tension and conflict. iv) Scrutiny builds trust and good relationships with a wide variety of internal and external stakeholders. <p>Impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> v) Overview and scrutiny enables the 'voice' of local people and communities across the area to be heard as part of decision and policy-making processes.

Appendix 2

Recommendations from the report of the Auditor General's national improvement study 'Good Scrutiny? Good Question?' (May 2014)

Exhibit 3: recommendations from **Good Scrutiny? Good Question?** Scrutiny Improvement Study

Recommendation	Responsible Partners
R1 Clarify the role of executive members and senior officers in contributing to scrutiny.	Councils, Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association
R2 Ensure that scrutiny members, and specifically scrutiny chairs, receive training and support to fully equip them with the skills required to undertake effective scrutiny.	Councils, Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association
R3 Further develop scrutiny forward work programming to : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide a clear rationale for topic selection; • be more outcome focussed • ensure that the method of scrutiny is best suited to the topic area and the outcome desired; and • align scrutiny programmes with the council's performance management, self-evaluation and improvement arrangements. 	Councils
R4 Ensure that scrutiny draws effectively on the work of audit, inspection and regulation and that its activities are complementary with the work of external review bodies.	Councils, Staff of the Wales Audit Office, CSSIW, Estyn

Recommendation	Responsible Partners
R5 Ensure that external review bodies take account of scrutiny work programmes and the outputs of scrutiny activity, where appropriate, in planning and delivering their work.	Staff of the Wales Audit Office, CSSIW, Estyn
R6 Ensure that the impact of scrutiny is properly evaluated and acted upon to improve the function's effectiveness; including following up on proposed actions and examining outcomes.	Councils, Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association
R7 Undertake regular self-evaluation of scrutiny utilising the 'outcomes and characteristics of effective local government overview and scrutiny' developed by the Wales Overview & Scrutiny Officers' Network.	Council
R8 Implement scrutiny improvement action plans developed from the Wales Audit Office improvement study.	Councils
R9 Adopt Participation Cymru's 10 Principles for Public Engagement in improving the way scrutiny engages with the public and stakeholders.	Councils

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Organisational response

Report title: Review of Scrutiny Arrangements – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Completion date: [date]

Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R1	<p>Current model and role of scrutiny</p> <p>The Council should review its current model for scrutiny to ensure scrutiny can fulfil its broader range of roles and responsibilities. Any revised model should ensure there are opportunities for scrutiny to engage in its wider roles, including for example, in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy development - Performance monitoring - Holding cabinet members to account throughout the decision-making process - Following up outcomes of previous recommendations or decisions 	<p>Audit Wales presented their report and recommendations to Cabinet Members, and to all Members via an All Member Seminar.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Forum will create a research and review Task and Finish Group to take forward the recommendations of the Audit Wales report.</p> <p>The Task and Finish Group will consider the recommendations and conduct their own research into other service models of scrutiny across Wales.</p> <p>This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visits to other Local Authorities to examine their scrutiny models, - interviews with Scrutiny and Cabinet Members, -probing the approach to policy development, performance scrutiny and post scrutiny. -attending committee meetings, -viewing footage of virtual meeting - desk research of Forward Work Programmes and Scrutiny agendas. <p>The feedback from this research will allow the Chairs and Vice Chairs to establish a proposal for any changes to the scrutiny</p>	May 2024	<p>Craig Griffiths (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)</p> <p>Stacy Curran (Democratic Services Manager)</p>

		<p>model in Neath Port Talbot. These proposals will be put to Council for their ratification in March 2024, in order that any changes to constitutional or administrative arrangements can be put in place in the Councils' AGM in May 2024.</p>		
R2	<p>Public engagement</p> <p>The Council's scrutiny model should be more citizen focused by strengthening its arrangements for public involvement and engagement in scrutiny. This should include ensuring greater transparency and timeliness about which items will be on the scrutiny committee agendas; and using existing engagement and consultation work to inform its scrutiny work including consideration of scrutiny topics, as part of its scrutiny reviews, in holding cabinet members and decisions to account, and in its performance monitoring roles.</p>	<p>The Council's Public Participation Strategy 2023-2027 sets out how we will encourage and support people to participate in decision making.</p> <p>Once any changes to the scrutiny model have been approved, specific actions to target public participation in the democratic processes and in particular the scrutiny model will be developed.</p> <p>Ongoing work to improve the Council's Democracy Web pages will continue to ensure accuracy and transparency throughout.</p>	May 2024	<p>Craig Griffiths (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)</p> <p>Stacy Curran (Democratic Services Manager)</p>

R3	<p>Planning and work programme</p> <p>To enable the scrutiny model to be more citizen focused, the Council should review its arrangements for the way in which scrutiny is planned to ensure scrutiny can independently plan and strategically prioritise its own work programme.</p>	<p>Once any changes to the scrutiny model have been approved, specific actions to target planning and work programming will be developed. Currently, the scrutiny model dictates a very specific tie of the scrutiny forward work programme to that of the Cabinet Board. It is envisaged more focussed alignment with Corporate Plan priorities will be developed in line with a new scrutiny planning model.</p>	May 2024	<p>Craig Griffiths (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)</p> <p>Stacy Curran (Democratic Services Manager)</p>
R4	<p>Support</p> <p>The Council should review the type of scrutiny support it requires across all areas of the organisation including service areas, to enable scrutiny to perform its wider role and ensure that any resourcing implications arising from any changes to the scrutiny model are understood and planned for.</p>	<p>Once any changes to the scrutiny model have been approved, a review of the scrutiny support services will be undertaken to ensure an appropriate resource in in place.</p> <p>Further organisational resource changes will be considered should the new model so require.</p> <p>Work has already commenced within the IT department to allow for more direct assistance with elected members and audio visual equipment and this will be enhanced.</p>	May 2024	<p>Craig Griffiths (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)</p> <p>Stacy Curran (Democratic Services Manager)</p>

R5	<p>Evaluation</p> <p>The Council should strengthen its arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny.</p>	<p>Once any changes to the scrutiny model have been approved, a review of the arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny will be undertaken to ensure evaluation opportunities are maximised.</p>	<p>May 2024</p>	<p>Craig Griffiths (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)</p> <p>Stacy Curran (Democratic Services Manager)</p>
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Review of Scrutiny Arrangements – Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Audit year: 2022-23

Date issued: October 2023

Document reference: 3873A2023

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

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Summary report

Summary

What we reviewed and why

- 1 In 2018, Audit Wales published a report on [Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council – Overview and Scrutiny – Fit For the Future?](#) We concluded that Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (the Council) was making improvements to its scrutiny function, but further work remained to make it better placed to respond to current and future challenges. We made a series of proposals for improvement:
 - the Council’s scrutiny committees should ensure that, where appropriate, Cabinet members rather than council officers are held to account for the efficient exercise of executive functions in accordance with statutory guidance;¹
 - the Council should consider the intended role of scrutiny committees in pre-decision scrutiny activity and ensure current arrangements enable sufficient time for scrutiny;
 - the Council should review its arrangements for planning and undertaking scrutiny, and consider different ways of working that best suit the topic area and desired outcome;
 - the Council should strengthen scrutiny committee ownership of forward work programmes, ensuring that there is a clear rationale for topic selection;
 - the Council should strengthen arrangements for engaging the public in scrutiny; and
 - the Council should put in place arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of overview and scrutiny.
- 2 Since our audit work in 2018, local government elections were held in May 2022 and the COVID-19 pandemic brought about changes to scrutiny meetings, including the introduction of online or hybrid meetings.
- 3 In undertaking this new review in 2023, we focussed on looking at the current effectiveness of the Council’s scrutiny meetings, including the introduction of online or hybrid meetings.
- 4 To inform this review, we drew on our 2018 work and the above proposals for improvement. We also used Audit Wales’s 2019 discussion paper [Six themes to help make scrutiny ‘Fit for the Future’](#), with some adjustments to reflect local priorities to inform our work.
- 5 We undertook this review during the period between February to May 2023.

¹ National Assembly for Wales, Guidance for County and County Borough Councils in Wales on Executive and Alternative Arrangements 2006, July 2006, Paragraph 2.1.8

Current scrutiny arrangements at the Council

- 6 The majority of Council decisions are made by Cabinet, made up of ten elected members. The Council also has four Cabinet Boards with service specific remits, made up of two or three members of the Cabinet. Both Cabinet and the Cabinet Boards are decision making bodies.
- 7 The Council has four scrutiny committees and one scrutiny sub-committee, whose remits correspond with those of Cabinet and the Cabinet Boards.
- 8 The Council's Scrutiny committee meetings take place immediately prior to a corresponding Cabinet Board meeting. A few days in advance of a scrutiny committee meeting, or earlier the same day, the scrutiny committee meets to decide which of the already published Cabinet Board papers it wishes to scrutinise. The content of the relevant Cabinet reports is then reviewed by the scrutiny committee with any comments or amendments being reported to the Cabinet Board meeting that takes place immediately afterwards.

What we found

- 9 Our review sought to answer the question: How effective are scrutiny arrangements at the Council?
- 10 Overall, we found that: **The Council is missing opportunities for scrutiny to maximise its impact, influence and effectiveness in holding cabinet to account, shaping council policies and reviewing performance.** We reached this conclusion because:
 - the Council's current scrutiny model is not fulfilling many important aspects of its role, which increases the risk that members do not make informed decisions in a timely manner;
 - the scrutiny model is not citizen focused and does not provide easy opportunities for public involvement and participation in scrutiny;
 - the scrutiny model is compromising its ability to use its time effectively to independently plan and strategically prioritise its own work;
 - the Council's scrutiny support arrangements are focused on maintaining the current scrutiny model and ways of working and do not encourage scrutiny to explore its wider role and potential; and
 - while the Council has put in place some arrangements to evaluate scrutiny activity, these arrangements are limited.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

The table below sets out the recommendations that we have identified following this review.

Recommendations	
Current model and role of scrutiny	
R1	<p>The Council should review its current model for scrutiny to ensure scrutiny can fulfil its broader range of roles and responsibilities. Any revised model should ensure there are opportunities for scrutiny to engage in its wider roles, including for example, in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">– Policy development– Performance monitoring– Holding cabinet members to account throughout the decision-making process– Following up outcomes of previous recommendations or decisions
Public engagement	
R2	<p>The Council's scrutiny model should be more citizen focused by strengthening its arrangements for public involvement and engagement in scrutiny. This should include ensuring greater transparency and timeliness about which items will be on the scrutiny committee agendas; and using existing engagement and consultation work to inform its scrutiny work including consideration of scrutiny topics, as part of its scrutiny reviews, in holding cabinet members and decisions to account, and in its performance monitoring roles.</p>
Planning and work programme	
R3	<p>To enable the scrutiny model to be more citizen focused, the Council should review its arrangements for the way in which scrutiny is planned to ensure scrutiny can independently plan and strategically prioritise its own work programme.</p>
Support	
R4	<p>The Council should review the type of scrutiny support it requires across all areas of the organisation including service areas, to enable scrutiny to</p>

Recommendations

perform its wider role and ensure that any resourcing implications arising from any changes to the scrutiny model are understood and planned for.

Evaluation

R5 The Council should strengthen its arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny.

Detailed report

The Council is missing opportunities for scrutiny to maximise its impact, influence and effectiveness in holding cabinet to account, shaping council policies and reviewing performance

The Council's current scrutiny model is not fulfilling many important aspects of its role, which increases the risk that members do not make informed decisions in a timely manner

- 11 The Council's scrutiny function is not regularly or effectively undertaking wider and more impactful aspects of its role. The Council's current scrutiny model is narrowly focussed. There is also a continued lack of clarity and understanding about the wider role of scrutiny amongst elected members we spoke to during our fieldwork. Taken together, they are hindering scrutiny's effectiveness and potential impact on the Council's decision and policy shaping, and on its residents and communities.
- 12 Throughout our fieldwork it was clear that many members do not have an understanding of the wider range of roles, responsibilities, influence and potential that scrutiny could and should have. This includes ensuring that cabinet members and decisions are held to account and scrutinised throughout the policy- decision-implementation process, not only at the stage where the reports to cabinet have already been published. The wider work of scrutiny could influence policy development in a more timely way. Scrutiny should also monitor the performance and effectiveness of the outcomes of those policies and decisions over time to ensure that they are delivering improvements for the Council's citizens.
- 13 The Council typically refers to its current scrutiny model as 'pre-decision scrutiny'. In practice, the Council's current scrutiny model is not effective pre-decision scrutiny. It is more accurately described as last-minute commenting on, reviewing or editing already published cabinet reports, immediately before cabinet makes the decision.
- 14 For the Council to undertake effective pre-decision scrutiny, it means that members should be engaging with a proposed cabinet or council policy/decision weeks or months in advance of the policy/decision being discussed and agreed at cabinet meetings. This would provide scrutiny with time to decide whether it would want to undertake a more informed and in-depth look at a specific issue/policy/decision relating to the cabinet or council forward work programme. This would mean scrutiny would have time to gather relevant and rounded evidence from a range of perspectives, engage citizens and other stakeholders in its reviews, and put forward evidence-based proposals, recommendations, improvements or alternative

and additional options to the Cabinet in good time to inform its forthcoming decision. This would enable scrutiny to fulfil the policy development part of their role.²

- 15 The limitations of the Council's current scrutiny model, and the restrictions it places on scrutiny's ability to engage in a timely manner on a range of issues, poses risks to the timeliness of the Council's decisions. For example, given the last-minute nature of the current scrutiny model, it could mean that some key decisions are having to be deferred or delayed to give scrutiny sufficient time to consider them thoroughly. It could also mean that Cabinet could find itself making some key decisions without the benefit of having heard a full range of informed views, which potentially could lead to a weaker decision that has not benefitted from the full benefits of informed and in-depth scrutiny and options.

The scrutiny model is not citizen focused and does not provide easy opportunities for public involvement and participation in scrutiny

- 16 We found that public involvement and participation in the Council's scrutiny is limited, and there is no clear plan to increase public engagement within its scrutiny activity. While the Council's overarching Participation Strategy includes some arrangements around citizen's involvement during decision making and scrutiny, the document is not specifically focused on the wider options for public participation in scrutiny. The current scrutiny model means that information about what scrutiny is looking at is not easily accessible or transparent for members of the public. The current scrutiny model in turn means that scrutiny is missing opportunities for public involvement and participation in scrutiny.
- 17 We found that scrutiny committees decide, in private meetings, which published Cabinet reports it will consider. These private meetings usually take place just before the scrutiny committee meeting, so any member of the public cannot not know in advance which of the published Cabinet reports or items will be further considered by scrutiny. Councils must make arrangements that enable all persons who live or work in the area to bring to the attention of the relevant scrutiny committee their views on any matter under consideration by the committee.³ However, the Council's current scrutiny model means that it is very difficult for a member of the public, and in fact any member of the council outside of the scrutiny committee members, to know how to bring their views to the attention of the scrutiny committee.
- 18 Public engagement is not just about attending committee meetings. In our recent audit work, 'Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council – Setting of Well-being

² Centre for Public Scrutiny, Practice guide on pre-decision scrutiny, Practice Guide 2 on Pre-decision Scrutiny (June 2014)

³ Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Objectives', we commented positively on the Council's wider approach to engagement and involvement. However, this inclusive approach is not being extended to the Council's scrutiny function and the scrutiny committees are not routinely engaging with the information that the Council has already gathered, for example, through its Let's Talk and citizens survey. The current model of scrutiny limits scrutiny's ability to do so as it does not plan ahead early enough to enable scrutiny to decide what type of information and range of voices it might want to draw on to inform its own reviews, reports and recommendations to Cabinet and Council.

- 19 Without including further opportunities for public participation and public involvement in scrutiny, scrutiny is missing opportunities to consider a wide range of its residents' views. Furthermore, without maximising opportunities for public involvement and participation, it means that the voices and concerns of the public are less prominent in shaping scrutiny's work to inform the cabinet's decision and policy processes. Scrutiny can provide a high-profile platform for the voice of the local citizen; however, the Council's scrutiny is missing opportunities by not involving citizens and stakeholders, and including their views within scrutiny to ensure it has impact on the local community.

Scrutiny's current model is compromising its ability to use its time effectively to independently plan and strategically prioritise its own work

- 20 Scrutiny is not using its time effectively to undertake its full role and to prioritise the key areas to scrutinise in more depth. It spends comparatively little of its time on developing and delivering its own work programme. Instead, scrutiny spends the majority of its time and effort commenting on already published Cabinet reports immediately before a decision is made. Members told us that they were not always clear about the impact that their work was having.
- 21 Focusing on Cabinet's work programme rather than scrutiny's own work programme means that scrutiny's work is led by and defined by Cabinet's plans and strategic priorities, rather than its own priorities and risks to influence better outcomes for local people. Whilst it is helpful for scrutiny work programmes to have reflected on the Cabinet's work programme, scrutiny's specific focus on imminent Cabinet decisions, to the exclusion of other potential issues, is taking up a disproportionate amount of its time and compromising its independence and ability to have ownership of the topics it considers. It also limits scrutiny's opportunities to fulfil other aspects of its role and to shape reports to meet their needs and those of their citizens and communities.
- 22 No scrutiny function has time to look at everything the Council does. Therefore, to be effective, it will need to carefully consider what it will and, more significantly, what it will not look at in depth. Giving greater time and emphasis to planning its own work programme will allow scrutiny to prioritise its resources to areas,

priorities and risks where it can add most value and have the greatest impact for its citizens.

The Council's scrutiny support arrangements are focused on maintaining the current scrutiny model and ways of working, and do not encourage scrutiny to explore its wider role and potential

- 23 The Council's scrutiny members benefit from a broad range of support from Democratic Services officers. However, the support scrutiny members receive from the wider organisation is not always meeting their needs. The role of the wider Council in providing support and enabling scrutiny to undertake its own reviews and commission its own reports are currently underdeveloped.
- 24 We heard from members about the various examples of support they receive from Democratic Services officers. Members also spoke highly of the wider support they received from the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Executive.
- 25 At the local government elections in May 2022, the Council experienced a significant change in membership, resulting in a large number of new members or members in new roles. This has meant that members have required additional Democratic Officer's support on a wider range of issues than has been the case in the past.
- 26 The support and advice members receive from the Council's Democratic Service Officers covers a wide range of subjects, including training when newly elected, advice on selecting topics for scrutiny, the role and remits of committees, through to practical and specific help with accessing committee papers online and taking part in remote meetings.
- 27 However, some of the Council's members' support could be more efficiently met elsewhere in the organisation. For example, the increased use of technology since the pandemic has led to an increased demand for technical support for members that is currently being mostly met by Democratic Services Officers. If some of this demand was able to be met by IT officers, that would release capacity for Democratic Officers to provide support that is more directly relevant to their role.
- 28 Under the Council's current model of scrutiny, in practice, the support that scrutiny receives from the wider organisation is largely a by-product of the support provided to Cabinet. As the scrutiny meetings and agendas are led and defined by those of the Cabinet and Cabinet Boards, the proportion of reports and information that is produced and provided specifically for scrutiny, to its current specifications, is limited. For scrutiny to have more influence and impact, it will need to embrace its wider role on shaping policy and scrutinising the effectiveness of the Council's policies and performance. This in turn is likely to change the support that scrutiny needs from the wider organisation if scrutiny is to have a broader impact.

While the Council has put in place some arrangements to evaluate scrutiny activity, these arrangements are limited

- 29 During our fieldwork, scrutiny members described their significant time investment in scrutiny activity, but they were not always clear about the impact their scrutiny activity was having.
- 30 We did not find evidence that scrutiny is regularly or proactively undertaking work to evaluate the effectiveness and the impact of its activity. The Council has some arrangements in place to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny, such as the Annual Scrutiny Report and the role of the Scrutiny Champion in reporting on impact. However, some of these arrangements were paused during the pandemic and some are not yet fully embedded after the local government elections. The Council therefore is not using its evaluation arrangements to its full potential to help ensure and improve the impact of scrutiny.



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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

26th January 2024

REPORT OF THE CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

Wards Affected: All Wards

Matter for information

Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review – Organisational Response

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides Members with an overview of the findings and single recommendation from the recent Audit Wales thematic review of the NPT Digital Data and Technology Strategy – full report contained within Appendix 2.
2. Following approval at Cabinet on the 28th November 2023, Members are requested to note the organisational response contained in Appendix 3.

Executive Summary

3. In January 2023, Audit Wales informed the council that they would be carrying out a thematic review of Digital Strategies across all 22 councils in Wales. The final scope of the review is contained in Appendix 1.
4. Given the extensive work that was underway to develop an innovative new NPT Digital Data and Technology Strategy, with an agreed timeline to report to Council for adoption in July 2023, it was agreed that the Audit Wales review would take place after the strategy had been considered by Council.
5. The Neath Port Talbot [Digital Data and Technology \(DDaT\) Strategy](#) was formally approved and adopted by Council on 12th July 2023.

Background

6. The Audit Wales Digital Strategy Thematic Review set out to answer the question *'In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?'*
7. The objectives of the review were as follows:
 - *provide assurance that the councils' digital strategies will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources;*
 - *provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principal in the design of their digital strategies;*
 - *explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and*
 - *inspire and empower councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/ approaches where relevant.*
8. During July 2023, Audit Wales undertook a comprehensive audit of the supporting documentation and evidence which was used to develop the NPT DDaT strategy.
9. The audit was also informed by interviews with Digital Services senior officers and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the development of the council's digital strategy, as well as a sample of Cabinet Members and senior officers from key portfolios / service areas impacted by the digital strategy.
10. A draft report was issued to officers in September for review and following a collaborative engagement with Audit Wales to clarify a number of areas, the final report was received on the 27th October – Appendix 2.

11. The key findings contained within the report are as follows:

We found that the Council's strategic approach to digital is informed by a good understanding of its digital provision and the Council drew on a range of data from external sources.

The Council's strategic approach to digital is well aligned with its other key plans and strategies and those of its partners and it has strong arrangements to communicate its strategic digital approach.

The Council has committed resources to support delivery of its digital strategy but does not yet know its long-term cost implications.

The Council is developing comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of its digital approach, however the absence of a clear timeframe to deliver its digital strategy will make it difficult for the Council to assess progress and value for money.

The Council reviewed its previous digital strategy, learnt from this and shares its learning.

12. The report is generally very positive and contains a single recommendation for consideration as follows:

If the Council continues with the approach of not stating a timeframe to deliver its Digital, Data and Technology strategy, it should put in place arrangements to:

- *clearly articulate its short, medium and long term outcomes and intended benefits;*
- *cost its short, medium and long term ambitions and match them with available resources; and*
- *assess if it is delivering the strategy and its intended outcomes at the intended pace.*

13. As officers were still in the process of developing the new delivery plan to underpin the new DDaT Strategy which had just been adopted at the point of the Audit, they were not able to include this in their review. It should be noted that one of the key findings confirms that

the Council is developing comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of its digital approach.

14. Officers are confident that the robust programme delivery arrangements that have now been put in place are meeting all the areas highlighted in the recommendation and have included details in the Cabinet approved organisational response (Appendix 3).

Financial Impacts:

15. There are no financial impacts.

Integrated Impact Assessment:

16. Not required.

Valleys Communities Impacts:

17. There are no Valleys Community impacts.

Workforce Impacts:

18. There are no workforce impacts.

Legal Impacts:

19. There are no legal impacts.

Risk Management Impacts:

20. There are no risk management impacts.

Consultation:

21. There is no requirement for consultation on this item.

Recommendations:

22. For the Committee to note the Cabinet approved Organisational Response document (Appendix 3).

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review Final Brief

Appendix 2 – Audit Wales Digital Strategy Review Final Report
Appendix 3 – Cabinet approved NPT Organisational Response to Audit
Wales

List of background papers: None

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Project Brief – Digital Strategy Review – Neath Port Talbot Council

Audit year: 2022-23

Date issued: July 2023

Document reference: 3661A2023

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

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Project brief

Background

- 1 Digital is key to delivering a wide range of council services in a more economic, efficient and effective way. It follows that it is also an important means of councils delivering their wellbeing objectives and carrying out sustainable development.
- 2 Digital strategies also have a significant impact on how people access services, whether through improved access to services or the potential for 'digital exclusion' where services are 'digitised' but as a consequence some members of the public may be unable to access them.
- 3 This work also builds on our previous 'springing forward' review that looked at the topics of assets and workforce that we undertook during 2021-22. We are undertaking this audit at each of the 22 principal councils in Wales.

Legal basis

- 4 We are carrying out this audit under the duties contained within:
 - section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) to help enable the Auditor General to be satisfied (or not) that the Council has put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources and;
 - section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to help enable the Auditor General to assess the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.

Audit objectives

- 5 Our objectives for this audit are to:
 - provide assurance that the councils' digital strategies will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources;
 - provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principal in the design of their digital strategies;
 - explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and
 - inspire and empower councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/approaches where relevant

Audit questions

- 6 **Appendix 1** contains the audit questions and audit criteria.

Audit scope

- 7 The audit will cover the Council’s strategic approach to digital, and specifically the extent to which this has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the council’s resources.

Audit criteria

- 8 The proposed audit will use the audit criteria set out in **Appendix 1**, which also shows how the criteria relate to the audit questions. This has been informed by our cumulative knowledge as well as the question hierarchy and positive indicators we have developed to support our Sustainable Development Principle examinations.

Audit methods

- 9 The audit will be informed by interviews with senior officers and cabinet members responsible for the development of the council’s digital strategy, as well as a sample of cabinet members and senior officers with responsible for key portfolios/service areas impacted by the digital strategy. We will also review the documents set out in **Exhibit 2** below.

Output

- 10 The audit will produce the following output(s):
- Local report for each principal council
 - National summary report
- 11 We also intend that our findings will help inform a Good Practice Exchange Event on the topic of digital in the autumn of 2023.

Timetable

- 12 **Exhibit 1** shows the high-level timetable of the main audit stages.

Exhibit 1: audit timetable

Stage	Date
Issue project brief	03/07/2023
Issue draft local report	22/09/2023
Issue final local report	20/10/2023
Publish national summary report	31/10/2023

Audit Wales contacts

13 **Exhibit 2** sets out the Audit Wales team that will be working on this audit.

Exhibit 2: Audit Wales contacts

Name	Contact details
Gary Emery – Audit Director	Gary.Emery@audit.wales
Tim Buckle – Auditor Manager	Timothy.Buckle@audit.wales
Allison Rees – Senior Auditor	Allison.Rees@audit.wales
Debra Allen – Executive Assistant	Debra.Allen@audit.wales

Fieldwork schedule

14 We will conduct our fieldwork in line with the organisation’s stated language preference. We will make every reasonable effort to accommodate language preferences of individuals during the audit, if we receive these at the point of setting up fieldwork.

Document request

15 We will undertake a review of the documents listed below. The list is not exhaustive and we may request additional documents during the course of the project. Where documents in the list below are publicly available please direct us to their online location. Where we already have copies of the documents, we will confirm this at the project set up meeting. Also, we would be grateful if you could provide us with any additional documents that you feel may be relevant to this work.

Exhibit 3: initial document request

Document title
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital strategy or equivalent• Evidence base used to inform the digital strategy• Evidence of extent and methods of involvement activity in developing the digital strategy including any evidence of stakeholder mapping• Evidence of how the digital strategy is communicated within the council and to partners• Implementation plans for the digital strategy• Service plans that relate to key elements of the digital strategy• Savings plans that relate to the digital strategy• Key corporate plans and strategies – including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– asset management plan,– workforce plan– well-being statement– carbon reduction plan– learning and development plans– medium term financial plan• Public Services Board Well-being Plan• The Council's Annual Self-Assessment Report• Monitoring reports or equivalent in relation to the digital strategy• Budget monitoring reports including service area budget reports that relate to key elements of the digital strategy• Reports setting out the details of any partnerships relevant to the delivery of the digital strategy and/or reports of any reviews of these partnerships

Interviews

16 **Exhibit 4** sets out the initial list of people we would like to interview during our work. We will confirm specific details of who we would like to interview during the project set-up meeting for and contact you again to arrange mutually convenient dates and times when we begin the evidence gathering stage.

Exhibit 4: interviewees

Title
Senior officer responsible for the development of digital strategy Chris Owen, Chief Digital Officer
Sample of two senior officers with responsibility for key services impacted by the digital strategy Diane Mulligan, Chief Accountant - Financial Services

Title

Ian Finnemore / Nita Sparkes, Social Services Officer - Social Care Case Management Transformation

Cabinet member with the portfolio covering digital strategy and with a portfolio covering a key service impacted by the strategy
Cllr Simon Knoyle, Cabinet Member for Finance, Performance and Social Justice

Cabinet member with a portfolio covering a key service impacted by the strategy
Cllr Sian Harris, Cabinet Member for Children and Family Services

Appendix 1

Audit questions and criteria

Main audit question: **In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?**

L2 questions	L3 questions	Criteria
1. Is the Council's digital strategy informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?	1.1 Is there is a thorough understanding of the 'as is' (i.e. current demand/ issues to be addressed) and the reasons why/ underlying causes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has drawn on a broad range of information from internal and external sources to develop a thorough understanding of the 'as is' and how it is likely to change. This includes information (including data) relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – service sustainability/ resilience and resourcing challenges, – the needs of citizens and communities. – the underlying causes of current demand/issues to be addressed. – analysis of future trends and how they might impact. E.g. social, economic/political, environmental, cultural or technological. They might include known trends e.g. ageing population, depleting natural resources and particularly

	<p>1.2 Is there a thorough understanding of the long-term factors that will impact and the challenges and opportunities that may result (e.g. risks and opportunities)?</p>	<p>technological advances They might also include those with a higher level of uncertainty e.g. jobs and skills needed in the future.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The analysis of the ‘as is’ and how it is likely to change is well informed by involvement activity, as appropriate, that reflects recognised good practice (e.g. National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales advice and guidance). • The Council uses its evidence base effectively to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Identify actions in its strategic approach to digital that are likely to be most effective and why, including how they could address the root causes of problems. – Inform decisions around its use of digital technology that seek to balance the need to meet short- and longer-term objectives.
<p>2. Does the Council have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through the use of digital technology?</p>	<p>2.1 Is the council planning over an appropriate timescale?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has considered what long term means in planning its approach to digital – i.e. how far ahead it can/should plan and why (at least 10 years with consideration of longer-term trends as appropriate) • The Council has considered how actions can deliver the best impact over that timeframe in terms of outcomes and most effective use of resources. This could include consideration of appropriate intervention points linked to the Commissioner’s definition of prevention. (click on the following link for details: Taking account of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in the budget process – The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales) • The Council has set out measures for its digital strategy that reflect short and long-term impacts and value for money, with milestones that reflect progress as appropriate • The Council has set out how its digital strategy will be resourced over the longer term as far as is practical (See also criteria relating to integration)

	<p>2.2 Has the Council thought about the wider impacts its digital strategy could have, including;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how it could contribute to each of the seven national well-being goals? • how delivery will impact on the other things it is trying to achieve (i.e. its well-being objectives and wider priorities)? • how delivery will impact on other what other public bodies are trying to achieve (i.e. their well-being objectives)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has considered how its digital strategy can make a contribution across the well-being goals. • Staff developing the digital strategy understand what colleagues and partners do and how their work relates, and have sought to integrate their work with that of their colleagues from across the Council and with partner organisations • Integration is evident in the alignment of the digital strategy with other key corporate strategies and service plans. For example medium term financial plan, workforce plan, asset management strategies, well-being statement and carbon reduction plans. • The digital strategy is aligned with other strategic intents such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – customer experience, – management of demand/ reductions in demand failure and prevention – design and implementation of new service delivery models. • The council’s digital strategy aligns with the plans/strategies of local and national partners including the Welsh Government’s Digital Strategy for Wales Digital strategy GOV.WALES and well-being plans.
	<p>2.3 Is there a wide and common understanding of what the council is trying to achieve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors and senior officers responsible for implementing the digital strategy have a common and clear understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve and the intended impact on service delivery • The Council’s digital strategy is clearly communicated to staff and partners who may help deliver it
<p>3. Is the council working effectively with the right people and partners to design and deliver its digital strategy</p>	<p>3.1 Has the Council identified who it needs to involve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has a good understanding of who will be directly and indirectly affected by its digital strategy and who it needs to involve. • The Council has effectively involved the full diversity of views in developing its digital strategy, including from non-traditional sources and from those it may have previously failed to reach.

	<p>3.2 Is the council effectively involving the full diversity of people affected by its digital strategy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has provided genuine opportunities for people to influence design and delivery of its digital strategy from an early stage, including representatives of groups who share protected characteristics. • The Council has used the results of involvement to shape the design and delivery of its digital strategy
	<p>3.3 Is the Council collaborating effectively with the right partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is collaborating to ensure it delivers better outcomes and value for money through its digital strategy and has put appropriate arrangements in place to support this, for example for; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sharing or pooling expertise and resources – sharing information – ensuring effective monitoring, evaluation and accountability including consideration of value for money
<p>4. Has the council resourced delivery of its digital strategy so it can deliver long-term/preventative benefits?</p>	<p>4.1 Does the Council understand long-term resource implications?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has assessed the costs and benefits of using digital technology to invest in long-term, preventative approaches and the cost (both financial and in terms of outcomes) of not doing so. • The Council has thought about the resources it will need to deliver its digital strategy over the medium and longer term (whole life costs) and how it could manage risks/ meet those costs including for example planned ‘invest to save’ initiatives and managed reductions in technical debt. • The Council has calculated and set out any savings it intends to make through implementing its digital strategy
	<p>4.2 Does the Council allocate resources to deliver better outcomes over the long-term?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action (inc. preventative action) that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and/or use of resources over the longer term is promoted and supported, even: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs. – where the benefits are likely to be accrued by or attributed to another organisation.

<p>5. Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress?</p>	<p>5.1 Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress towards, short, medium- and longer-term objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council monitors the costs and benefits of delivering its digital strategy from a value for money perspective • The Council is measuring the wider contribution the digital strategy is making across its own/ partnership objectives • Progress is measured against short, medium and long-term objectives
<p>6. Is the Council learning lessons from how it works?</p>	<p>6.1 Does the Council review the effectiveness of its digital strategy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council regularly reviews the effectiveness of its digital strategy including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - effectiveness of its collaborative activity - effectiveness of its involvement activity, including the impact of the strategy on service users including those who are digitally excluded - the impact of the strategy on those who share protected characteristics - the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the digital strategy overall in helping the council to achieve its strategic objectives. • The Council has reviewed lessons learned from its response to the pandemic and is applying this learning to its digital strategy
	<p>6.2 Does the Council share lessons learned from its approach to its digital strategy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council shares and applies any lessons learned from the development and delivery of its digital strategy widely across the organisation, and with partners where relevant

Appendix 2

Fair processing notice

Date issued: May 2023

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Depending on the particular power or function, these statutory bases fall with Article 6(c) and (e) of the UK GDPR—processing necessary for compliance with a legal obligation, for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority. Where we process special category data, the additional legal basis for processing this will ordinarily be Article 9(2)(g) of the UK GDPR (together with paragraph 6 Schedule 1 Data Protection Act 2018) relating to the exercise of a statutory function for reasons of substantial public interest.

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Our published report may include some of your information, but we will contact you before any publication of information that identifies you—see also “your rights” below.

We may share information with:

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telephone calls in Welsh and English.

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Digital Strategy Review – Neath Port Talbot Council

Audit year: 2022-23

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Report summary

Report summary and recommendation

Exhibit 1: report summary

The exhibit below summarises the reason we undertook this audit, our key findings and recommendations for the Council.

Why a strategic approach to digital is important

- 1 Digital technology is key to delivering a wide range of council services in a more economic, efficient and effective way, is also an important means of councils delivering their wellbeing objectives and carrying out sustainable development.
- 2 Having a clearly articulated strategic approach to digital can bring several benefits such as:
 - establishing a common vision for use of digital and the intended outcomes for local communities linked to the council's strategic objectives;
 - helping to ensure that councils' use of digital technology is aligned with their key strategic objectives and other plans and strategies and is informed by a good understanding of current and future trends;
 - reducing the risk of duplication both within councils and with partners;
 - consideration of resourcing digital over the short, medium and longer term together; and
 - providing a framework against which to monitoring progress over the short, long and medium term.

The focus of our audit

- 3 We looked at the extent to which the Council's strategic approach to digital has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources.

Our key findings

- 4 We found that the Council's strategic approach to digital is informed by a good understanding of its digital provision and the Council drew on a range of data from external sources. The Council's strategic approach to digital is well-aligned with its other key plans and strategies and those of its partners and it has strong arrangements to communicate its strategic digital approach. The Council has committed resources to support delivery of its digital strategy but does not yet know its long-term cost implications. The Council is developing comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of its digital approach, however the absence of a clear timeframe to deliver its digital strategy will make it difficult for the Council to assess progress and value for

money. The Council reviewed its previous digital strategy, learnt from this and shares its learning.

Our recommendation for the Council

Monitoring benefits

- R1 If the Council continues with the approach of not stating a timeframe to deliver its Digital, Data and Technology strategy, it should put in place arrangements to:
- clearly articulate its short, medium and long term outcomes and intended benefits;
 - cost its short, medium and long term ambitions and match them with available resources; and
 - assess if it is delivering the strategy and its intended outcomes at the intended pace.

Detailed report

What we looked at and why – the scope of this audit

- 1 We reviewed the Council's strategic approach to digital, and specifically the extent to which this has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the Council's resources.
- 2 Our findings are based on document reviews and interviews with a sample of Cabinet Members and officers. The evidence we have used to inform our findings is limited to these sources. We undertook this review in July 2023.
- 3 We set out to answer the question '**In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?**' We did this by exploring the following questions:
 - Is the Council's digital strategy informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?
 - Does the Council have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through the use of digital technology?
 - Is the Council working effectively with the right people and partners to design and deliver its digital strategy?
 - Has the Council resourced delivery of its digital strategy so it can deliver long-term/preventative benefits?
 - Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress?
 - Is the Council learning lessons from how it works?
- 4 **Appendix 1** sets out the detailed questions we set out to answer along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

Why we undertook this audit

- 5 This audit was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General's duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 6 We sought to:
 - provide assurance that councils' digital strategies will help to deliver well-being objectives in a way that secures value for money in the use of resources;
 - provide assurance that councils are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in the design of their digital strategies;
 - explain how councils are using/planning to use digital technology to meet people's needs and deliver better outcomes; and

- inspire and empower councils and other public sector bodies by identifying and sharing examples of notable practice/approaches where relevant.

The Council's digital strategy

- 7 Council approved its Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) strategy in July 2023. The strategy is intentionally not timebound.
- 8 The Council's vision is: 'Neath Port Talbot Council will adopt the best Digital, Data and Technology to transform services for residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitors.' The vision is supported by four strategic aims:
 - continue to put all residents, businesses, elected members, staff and visitors at the centre of what we do.
 - become smart and connected as a council and as a place, joining up and using the data we hold to improve our understanding of what matters to our residents (aligned to corporate plan).
 - fully capitalise on the transformational benefits that Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) offers, by ensuring it becomes fully embedded in how council operates – across people, processes and technology.
 - ensure all DDaT services are robust, responsive, inclusive, scalable and secure. This will enable the council to undertake its day-to-day business, meet its statutory obligations and support business transformation through the innovative application of DDaT across service areas.
- 9 The DDaT strategy includes four strategic delivery themes. These are:
 - digital by design;
 - using the right technology;
 - data and research led decision making; and
 - our people.
- 10 Since 2021, the Council has increased the revenue budget for digital services by £500k. In 2023-24, the Council set up a Digital Transformation reserve of £1.2 million to provide funding to support digital transformation.

What we found: The Council has an integrated and well-articulated digital strategy, but does not have a clear timeframe to deliver it which makes it more difficult for the Council to assess progress and value for money

The Council's strategic approach to digital is informed by a good understanding of its digital provision and it has drawn on a range of data from external sources to inform its approach

- 11 The Council has a good understanding of its digital provision which has shaped and informed its DDaT strategy. In 2021, the Council commissioned an external provider to conduct a wide-ranging review of its digital services. The review included extensive staff consultation to understand digital capacity and capability in the Council. The Council used the findings of this review to inform its DDaT strategy.
- 12 The Council drew on extensive internal data to inform its DDaT strategy and used external evidence sources to gain a broader view of the current situation in the County such as digital exclusion rates, the digital infrastructure and regional and national digital priorities. The Council used data from the Tax Reform Group of The Chartered Institute of Taxation which identifies factors leading to digital exclusion. The DDaT Strategy reflects the importance of digital inclusion and collaboration to reduce digital exclusion. Considering a wider range of information and data is helpful for the Council to have a greater understanding of challenges, opportunities and risks for digital within the County Borough.
- 13 The Council sought the views of its citizens in 2021 through its 'Let's Talk' campaign on what is important to them following the pandemic. This campaign gathered views on their future digital needs, particularly citizens' concerns on digital exclusion. While this public engagement gathered citizens views on digital which the Council reflected in its DDaT strategy, this consultation was not specifically on the DDaT strategy.
- 14 As the Council has not specifically consulted its citizens on its DDaT aspirations, it has not specifically involved or consulted with the full diversity of the population and its representative groups. By not involving the full diversity of citizens in developing the Council's strategic digital approach, the Council risks designing approaches that do not meet citizens' needs and therefore do not secure value for money.
- 15 However, a key strategic aim of the DDaT strategy is 'digital by design' i.e. designing and developing digital services based on residents and businesses needs. The Council intends to gain a greater understanding the current situation and future digital needs by involving and consulting at individual digital project

design level. The Council are also developing 'user personas' to represent the needs of different groups under this Digital by Design strategic theme. The Council plans to consult and involve on individual digital projects. However, this approach can bring risks. The Council has resourced the development of a new strategic approach without fully consulting on it. This potentially could result in a further resource commitment to amend a strategic approach that does not meet the needs of its citizens.

The Council has strong arrangements to communicate its strategic approach to digital

- 16 The Council is using different and proactive ways to inform staff of its DDaT strategy. Following Council approving the DDaT strategy in July 2023, the Digital Service intend to produce short videos on the 'what/how/why' of the strategy. These videos will be available for all staff on the intranet. The Council's Business relationship officers engage with services to further promote the roll-out of the strategy and respond to questions. Many of the Council's partners also received a copy of the draft strategy for comment. Communicating the Council's strategic approach to digital to staff and a range of stakeholders increases the likelihood of their being a common understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve and therefore increases the likelihood of it being delivered.

The Council's strategic approach to digital is well-aligned with its other key plans and strategies and those of its partners

- 17 There is strong alignment between the Council's DDaT strategy and the Council's corporate priorities. There is close alignment between the Council's Corporate Plan which states its digital intentions in 5 years and in 20 years, the Strategic Change Programme, the Decarbonisation and Renewable Energy Strategy and 'The Future of Work – Strategic Workforce Plan'. The Council's vision for digital aligns with the Public Services Board. All mention the importance of digital in becoming a smart and connected Council and as a place. The Council considered the Welsh Government Digital Strategy for Wales in its consideration of its own digital ambitions and priorities as well as engaging with the Centre for Digital Public Services. Aligning its strategic approach to digital both across the Council and with partners should help the Council identify opportunities to share resources, avoid duplication of efforts and deliver multiple benefits.
- 18 The Council works in partnership in delivering its digital strategic ambitions. Throughout the DDaT strategy, the importance of partnership working and collaboration is clear. For example, the Council identified a need to modernise how it manages and feeds data, research and analysis into its decision-making. To achieve this, the Council identified working with partners from academia, public health, statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and the community. This should

help the Council access evidence to inform future policies and strategies. The Council is also a key partner in the Swansea Bay City Deal's Digital Infrastructure Programme and the partnership works collaboratively to assist each other deliver its digital transformation strategy. Working in partnership can result in a sharing of knowledge, expertise and/or resources that can lead to better outcomes whilst also improving value for money.

The Council has committed resources to support delivery of its digital strategy but does not yet know its long-term cost implications

- 19 The Council has increased its resourcing of digital, created a Digital Service and allocated specific funding to support future digital transformation. Since 2021, the Council has increased the revenue budget for digital services by £500k. The Council has set up a Digital Transformation reserve of £1.2 million to provide funding to support digital transformation. While this demonstrates the Council's commitment and recognition of the importance of digital, the Council allocated this amount before approving its new strategy. Therefore, the Council cannot be assured it has allocated a suitable amount of funding to deliver its digital ambitions.
- 20 The Council understands the enabling role of digital and its importance in supporting the workforce deliver more efficient and effective services. The Council completed a restructure of its former IT service and created a Digital Service and allocated £100k towards the restructure. The Digital Service, alongside its HR and Organisational Development service, is intended to support the workforce in improving digital capacity and capability as well as providing improved career development, progression and succession planning. This approach has the potential to provide the Council with additional digital support and stability in delivering its digital transformation.
- 21 The Council set up a new operating model to support the Council's digital vision and ambitions. This model focuses on six key areas one of which is Governance Controls. As part of Governance Controls, the Council is seeking to understand the long-term cost implications in delivering its digital ambitions. Once the long-term costs are known, the Council should be better informed and can use this information to more accurately allocate resources.

The Council is developing comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of its digital approach, however the absence of a clear timeframe to deliver its digital strategy will make it difficult for the Council to assess progress and value for money

- 22 The Council is putting in place comprehensive arrangements to monitor its digital strategy on an annual basis and its individual digital projects. At the time of our fieldwork, some of the arrangements were new, or under development so it is too early to assess their effectiveness.

- 23 The Council is developing an annual delivery plan to support the DDaT strategy. The delivery plan will contain measures and metrics to help it track progress. There will be specific performance indicators in the delivery plan that should complement the quantitative and qualitative measures already identified by the Council. This information should provide the Council with information to determine progress on an annual basis. It will also be important for the Council to be able to monitor and evaluate the value for money of the DDaT strategy.
- 24 The Council intend to review the DDaT strategy annually. This should help the Council gain assurance the strategic approach remains current. It should also provide the Council with greater flexibility to adapt and update the strategy in line with the challenges and opportunities at the appropriate times.
- 25 The Council established a Digital Transformation Board to drive the prioritisation of activities, ensuring alignment to corporate priorities, with escalation and reporting through to Corporate Directors Group and Cabinet Policy and Resources Sub Committee. The Board consists of digital service officers and representatives from each directorate. Representation across Council services can reduce the risk of duplication of efforts, it can identify opportunities for different services to collaborate to deliver multiple benefits and ensure a common understanding of the Council's digital priorities.
- 26 The Council has a Digital Services Pipeline Tracker. This Tracker contains digital projects and records the stage each project is at in its implementation. This should allow the Council to determine the timeliness of implementing each project and intervene if projects are behind schedule.
- 27 A fundamental element in understanding the future success and impact of a digital project and wider strategy is understanding the perceived financial and/or non-financial benefits at the outset. For the Council to have this information, it developed a Digital Transformation Board Service Request form which services can complete to request funding from the £1.2 million Digital Transformation reserve. The form had not been used at the time of our fieldwork and the Council had not allocated any funding from this Reserve. The form requires services to identify the benefits of the digital proposal, such as improvements to customer satisfaction levels, operational efficiencies, whether it will generate savings and/or improve productivity. Ensuring that digital projects articulate the intended benefits at the outset will help the Council assess whether the benefits are being realised when monitoring progress.
- 28 The Council has not set a clear timeframe to deliver the DDaT strategy. This presents several challenges for the Council if it is to be able to:
- adequately resource the delivery of its strategy over the short, medium and long-term
 - clearly articulate its short, medium and long term outcomes; and
 - judge if it is delivering the strategy at its intended pace.

- 29 By not having a clear timeframe to deliver the strategy, it will be difficult for the Council to gain assurance its digital strategic approach is delivering what the Council wants, when it wants it delivered and to adequately determine if the Council is securing value for money.

The Council reviewed its previous digital strategy, learnt from this and shares its learning

- 30 The Council reviewed its previous digital strategy and digital provision and used the output of this review and its recommendations to shape and influence its current digital strategy.
- 31 The Council has a positive approach in sharing lessons learnt. This has included sharing lessons at external seminars on developing its target model to align with Welsh Government's Digital Strategy for Wales and from its approach to digital recruitment. This willingness to share ideas and lessons learnt also provides an opportunity for the Council to learn from others.

Appendix 1

Audit questions and audit criteria

Below are the questions we sought to answer in carrying out this audit, along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

Main audit question: **In developing its digital strategy has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle and put in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources?**

Exhibit 2: audit questions and audit criteria

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
1. Is the Council's digital strategy informed by a good understanding of current and future trends?	1.1 Is there is a thorough understanding of the 'as is' (ie current demand/issues to be addressed) and the reasons why/underlying causes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has drawn on a broad range of information from internal and external sources to develop a thorough understanding of the 'as is' and how it is likely to change. This includes information (including data) relating to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – service sustainability/resilience and resourcing challenges. – the needs of citizens and communities. – the underlying causes of current demand/issues to be addressed. – analysis of future trends and how they might impact, eg social, economic/political, environmental, cultural or technological. They might include known trends eg ageing population, depleting natural resources and particularly technological advances. They might also include those with a higher level of uncertainty eg jobs and skills needed in the future. • The analysis of the 'as is' and how it is likely to change is well informed by involvement activity, as appropriate, that reflects recognised good practice (eg National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales advice and guidance).
	1.2 Is there a thorough understanding of the long-term factors that will impact and the challenges and opportunities that may result (eg risks and opportunities)?	

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council uses its evidence base effectively to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – identify actions in its strategic approach to digital that are likely to be most effective and why, including how they could address the root causes of problems; – inform decisions around its use of digital technology that seek to balance the need to meet short and longer-term objectives.
<p>2. Does the Council have a clear vision of what it wants to achieve through the use of digital technology?</p>	<p>2.1 Is the Council planning over an appropriate timescale?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has considered what long term means in planning its approach to digital – ie how far ahead it can/should plan and why (at least ten years with consideration of longer-term trends as appropriate). • The Council has considered how actions can deliver the best impact over that timeframe in terms of outcomes and most effective use of resources. This could include consideration of appropriate intervention points linked to the Commissioner’s definition of prevention. (More details can be found in: <u>Taking account of the Well-being of Future Generations Act in the budget process – The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales</u>). • The Council has set out measures for its digital strategy that reflect short and long-term impacts and value for money, with milestones that reflect progress as appropriate. • The Council has set out how its digital strategy will be resourced over the longer term as far as is practical (see also criteria relating to integration).
	<p>2.2 Has the Council thought about the wider impacts its digital strategy could have, including:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has considered how its digital strategy can make a contribution across the well-being goals. • Staff developing the digital strategy understand what colleagues and partners do and how their work relates, and have sought to integrate their

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how it could contribute to each of the seven national well-being goals? • how delivery will impact on the other things it is trying to achieve (ie its well-being objectives and wider priorities)? • how delivery will impact on other what other public bodies are trying to achieve (ie their well-being objectives)? 	<p>work with that of their colleagues from across the Council and with partner organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration is evident in the alignment of the digital strategy with other key corporate strategies and service plans. For example medium-term financial plan, workforce plan, asset management strategies, well-being statement and carbon reduction plans. • The digital strategy is aligned with other strategic intents such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – customer experience; – management of demand/reductions in demand failure and prevention; and – design and implementation of new service delivery models. • The Council's digital strategy aligns with the plans/strategies of local and national partners including the Welsh Government's Digital Strategy for Wales Digital strategy and well-being plans.
	2.3 Is there a wide and common understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors and senior officers responsible for implementing the digital strategy have a common and clear understanding of what the Council is trying to achieve and the intended impact on service delivery. • The Council's digital strategy is clearly communicated to staff and partners who may help deliver it.

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
<p>3. Is the Council working effectively with the right people and partners to design and deliver its digital strategy</p>	<p>3.1 Has the Council identified who it needs to involve?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has a good understanding of who will be directly and indirectly affected by its digital strategy and who it needs to involve. • The Council has effectively involved the full diversity of views in developing its digital strategy, including from non-traditional sources and from those it may have previously failed to reach.
	<p>3.2 Is the Council effectively involving the full diversity of people affected by its digital strategy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has provided genuine opportunities for people to influence the design and delivery of its digital strategy from an early stage, including representatives of groups who share protected characteristics. • The Council has used the results of involvement to shape the design and delivery of its digital strategy.
	<p>3.3 Is the Council collaborating effectively with the right partners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council is collaborating to ensure it delivers better outcomes and value for money through its digital strategy and has put appropriate arrangements in place to support this, for example for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sharing or pooling expertise and resources; – sharing information; – ensuring effective monitoring, evaluation and accountability including consideration of value for money.

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
<p>4. Has the Council resourced delivery of its digital strategy so it can deliver long-term/preventative benefits?</p>	<p>4.1 Does the Council understand long-term resource implications?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has assessed the costs and benefits of using digital technology to invest in long-term, preventative approaches and the cost (both financial and in terms of outcomes) of not doing so. • The Council has thought about the resources it will need to deliver its digital strategy over the medium and longer term (whole life costs) and how it could manage risks/meet those costs including, for example, planned 'invest to save' initiatives and managed reductions in technical debt. • The Council has calculated and set out any savings it intends to make through implementing its digital strategy.
	<p>4.2 Does the Council allocate resources to deliver better outcomes over the long-term?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action (including preventative action) that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and/or use of resources over the longer term is promoted and supported, even: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs; – where the benefits are likely to be accrued by or attributed to another organisation.

Level 2 questions	Level 3 questions	Criteria
5. Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress?	5.1 Is the Council monitoring and reviewing progress towards, short, medium and longer-term objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council monitors the costs and benefits of delivering its digital strategy from a value for money perspective. • The Council is measuring the wider contribution the digital strategy is making across its own/partnership objectives. • Progress is measured against short, medium and long-term objectives.
6. Is the Council learning lessons from how it works?	6.1 Does the Council review the effectiveness of its digital strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council regularly reviews the effectiveness of its digital strategy including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – effectiveness of its collaborative activity; – effectiveness of its involvement activity, including the impact of the strategy on service users including those who are digitally excluded; – the impact of the strategy on those who share protected characteristics; – the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the digital strategy overall in helping the Council to achieve its strategic objectives. • The Council has reviewed lessons learned from its response to the pandemic and is applying this learning to its digital strategy.
	6.2 Does the Council share lessons learned from its approach to its digital strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council shares and applies any lessons learned from the development and delivery of its digital strategy widely across the organisation, and with partners where relevant.



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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

Organisational response

Report title: Digital Strategy Review

Completion date: October 2023

Document reference: 3877A2023

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Ref	Recommendation	Organisational response Please set out here relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Please set out by when the planned actions will be complete	Responsible officer (title)
R1	<p>If the Council continues with the approach of not stating a timeframe to deliver its Digital, Data and Technology strategy, it should put in place arrangements to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – clearly articulate its short, medium and long term outcomes and intended benefits; – cost its short, medium and long term ambitions and match them with available resources; and – assess if it is delivering the strategy and its intended outcomes at the intended pace. 	<p>The NPT Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) Strategy has intentionally not been time bound to a three or five year period.</p> <p>Given the considerable rate of change in DDaT, NPT have decided to embrace an Agile approach to the creation of the DDaT strategy, where we will regularly review and iterate the strategy to capitalise where appropriate on emerging opportunities for the Council.</p> <p>This approach will allow us to remain current and provide us with greater flexibility to adapt and update the strategy in line with the challenges and opportunities at the appropriate points.</p> <p>The Audit Wales findings highlighted that the Council is ‘developing comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of its digital approach’.</p> <p>Following on from the adoption of the DDaT Strategy by Council, officers have now implemented comprehensive governance arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of our DDaT strategy.</p> <p>The robust governance arrangements address our ability to clearly articulate benefits, align</p>	<p>Annual Business plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023 / 24 - complete • 2024 / 25 - in development <p>Forward Budget Plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023 / 24 – complete • 2024 / 25 - in development <p>Medium term financial plan 23-28 – Full alignment from Digital Transformation Board / Pipeline</p> <p>Digital Transformation Board – Cross organisation prioritisation of Digital programmes of work. Board established October 23 and monthly meetings taking place.</p> <p>Multi-year Digital Transformation Pipeline – Established with an extensive programme of work resourced and timetabled. Regular review via bi-weekly team leader stand ups and monthly</p>	Chief Digital Officer

resources to our prioritised programmes of work, and to assess delivery against the overarching DDaT Strategy.

Specific arrangements include:

- Digital Transformation Board
- Prioritised multi-year digital pipeline
- Annual Business plans (aligned to fiscal year)
- Annual Budget plan
- Medium term financial plan alignment

Transformation Board reviews to track progress and risks.

DDaT Strategy Progress Reporting and Scrutiny

- Annual report to Cabinet (Policy and Resources) Sub Committee
- Quarterly reports to Corporate Directors Group
- Updates as required to Corporate Management Group
- Quarterly updates to Directorate Management Teams

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

26th JANUARY 2024

Report of the Director of Strategy & Corporate Services

Noelwyn Daniel

Matter for Information

Wards Affected – All wards

Report Title - Audit Wales – Programme & Timetable – Quarter 2
Update to 30th September 2023

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report from Audit Wales is to provide the Committee with an update on the work they have undertaken up to the 30th September 2023. The update includes information on the following areas of work:

- Annual Audit Summary
- Financial Audit Work
- Performance Audit Work
- Local Government National Studies (planned / in progress)

The update also includes progress on the planned work of:

- Estyn
- Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

In addition to the above, the update also lists Audit Wales National Reports and others that have been published.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts in respect of this item.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment in respect

of this item.

Valleys Communities Impacts

There are no impacts in respect of this item.

Workforce impacts

There are no workforce impacts in respect of this item.

Legal Impacts

There are no legal impacts in respect of this item.

Risk Management

There are no risk management issues in respect of this item.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the quarterly update.

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Audit Wales – Quarter 2 Work Programme Update

Background Papers

None

Officer Contact

For further information on this report item, please contact:

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Audit Wales Work Programme and Timetable – Neath Port Talbot Council

Quarterly Update: 30 September 2023

Annual Audit Summary

Description	Timetable	Status
A report summarising completed audit work since the last Annual Audit Summary, which was issued in March 2023.	March 2023	Complete & Published Neath Port Talbot Council – Annual Audit Summary 2022

Financial Audit work

Description	Scope	Timetable	Status
Audit of the Council's 2022-23 financial statements	To provide an opinion on the 'truth and fairness' of the Council's financial statements for the financial year ended 31 March 2023.	February 2023 to November 2023	Nearing completion, reporting November 2023

Description	Scope	Timetable	Status
<p>Certification of Grant returns for financial year 2021-22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Benefit Subsidy • Non-Domestic Rates • Teachers' Pension Contributions • Social Care Workforce Development Plan 	<p>Certification that nothing has come to our attention to indicate that the return is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not fairly stated • Is not in accordance with the relevant terms and conditions 	<p>December 2022 to September 2023</p>	<p>Partly complete</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Benefit Subsidy <p>Complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Domestic Rates • Teachers' Pension Contributions • Social Care Workforce Development Plan
<p>Certification of Grant returns for financial year 2022-23</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Benefit Subsidy • Non-Domestic Rates • Teachers' Pension Contributions • Social Care Workforce Development Plan 	<p>Certification that nothing has come to our attention to indicate that the return is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not fairly stated • Is not in accordance with the relevant terms and conditions 	<p>In line with certification deadlines.</p> <p>September 2023 to January 2024.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Complete</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Domestic Rates

Performance Audit work

2021-22 Performance Audit Work	Scope	Timetable	Status
<p>Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015 (WFG Act) examinations</p>	<p>We will seek to integrate the delivery of our WFG examinations of steps to deliver well-being objectives with our other audit work. We will discuss this with the Council as we scope and deliver the audit projects listed in this plan.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p>Improvement reporting audit</p>	<p>Audit of discharge of duty to publish an assessment of performance.</p>	<p>December 2021</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>Assurance and Risk Assessment</p>	<p>Project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources.</p> <p>At Neath Port Talbot Council, the project is likely to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial position • Self-assessment arrangements • Recovery planning • Implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act • Carbon reduction plans • Assessing the Council's response to its independent investigation and subsequent action plan 	<p>Complete</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Published 2021-22 Financial Position Update</p> <p>Published ARA progress update letter summarising Implications of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act, and Self-Assessment.</p> <p>Published Carbon Reduction plans summary</p> <p>Assessing the Council's response to its independent investigation undertaken as part of ongoing</p>

2021-22 Performance Audit Work	Scope	Timetable	Status
			<p>Assurance and Risk assessment work.</p> <p>Recovery Planning – ongoing monitoring</p>
<p>Springing Forward – Examining the building blocks for a sustainable future</p>	<p>As the world moves forward, learning from the global pandemic, this review looks at how effectively councils are strengthening their ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities for its workforce and assets.</p>	<p>Autumn 2021 onwards</p>	<p>Reports being drafted.</p>

2022-23 Performance audit work	Scope	Timetable	Status
Assurance and Risk Assessment	<p>Project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources and acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle. The project is likely to focus in particular on:</p>	<p>March 2022 – December 2023</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial position 	<p>Ongoing monitoring of financial position</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital programme management 		<p>AW will not undertake detailed work at all councils as part of our 2022-23 work programme. We are currently exploring our options for undertaking a detailed piece of work on this topic either in 2023-24 or future years.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of performance information – with a focus on service user feedback and outcomes • Setting of well-being objectives 	<p>February – September 2023</p> <p><u>Report issued to the Council August 2023</u></p>	<p>Report being drafted.</p> <p>Complete</p>

2022-23 Performance audit work	Scope	Timetable	Status
Thematic Review – Unscheduled Care	A cross-sector review focusing on the flow of patients out of hospital. This review will consider how the Council is working with its partners to address the risks associated with the provision of social care to support hospital discharge, as well as prevent hospital admission. The work will also consider what steps are being taken to provide medium to longer-term solutions.	August 2022 – July 2023	Fieldwork nearing completion, reporting from September 2023 onward.
Thematic review – Digital	A review of councils’ strategic approach to digital, and the extent to which this has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of councils’ resources.	Final report issued to the Council October 2023. Report will be published on our website end of November 2023.	Complete
Scrutiny Review	A review to seek assurance on the effectiveness of the Council’s scrutiny arrangements.	Final report issued to Council October 2023. Report to be published on our website end of November 2023.	Complete

2023-24 Performance audit work	Scope	Timetable	Status
Assurance and Risk Assessment including any follow up work	Project to identify the level of audit assurance and/or where further audit work may be required in future years in relation to risks to the Council putting in place proper arrangements to secure value for money in the use of resources and acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle. This Assurance and Risk assessment work may involve any follow up/tracer work that we may identify from our audit reports and recommendations in previous years.	Ongoing	Ongoing
Thematic review – Financial Sustainability	A review of councils’ financial sustainability including a focus on the actions, plans and arrangements to bridge funding gaps and address financial pressures over the medium term.	March – June 2024	Scoping
Thematic review – commissioning and contract management	A review focusing on how councils’ arrangements for commissioning, and contract management apply value for money considerations and the sustainable development principle.	January – July 2024	Scoping

Local government national studies planned/in progress

Study	Scope	Timetable	Status	Fieldwork planned at NPT Council
Planning for sustainable development – Brownfield regeneration	Review of how local authorities are promoting and enabling better use of vacant non-domestic dwellings and brownfield sites	October 2022 – September 2023	Reporting – September 2023	Yes – interview with nominated officer at seven councils and survey.
Governance of special purpose authorities – National Parks	Review of systems and effectiveness of governance	November 2022 – September 2023	Evidence gathering – fieldwork due to be completed end of June 2023	No
Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs)	Assessing CJCs' progress in developing their arrangements to meet their statutory obligations and the Welsh Government's aim of strengthening regional collaboration.	September 2022 – August 2023	Draft report has been issued to the four CJCs. Letters to the four individual CJCs will also be issued. Updated summary report due to be published August.	Yes – We explored the Council's perspective via our routine liaison meetings. Fieldwork included interviews with the chief executive, director of finance and chair of each of the four CJCs.
Governance in Fire and Rescue Authorities	Review of systems and effectiveness of governance	September 2023 – March 2024	Project brief issued	No

Study	Scope	Timetable	Status	Fieldwork planned at NPT Council
Homelessness	Examining how services are working together to progress the response to homelessness.	tbc	Scoping	tbc

Estyn

Our link inspectors are continuing to work with Torfaen as part of our follow-up process for an authority causing significant concern. Wrexham local authority was removed from the causing significant concern category following a monitoring visit in July. We inspected Gwynedd in the week beginning 26 June and Carmarthenshire in the week beginning 10 July. Both reports have been published on our website. We will be inspecting Conwy local government education service on the week beginning 6 November.

Field work being carried out across local authorities during the autumn term includes a focus on attendance, school improvement and the work of the local authority to mitigate the impact of poverty on learners' attainment.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

CIW planned work 2023-25	Scope	Timetable	Status
Thematic reviews			
CLDT	Working with HIW we will complete a small sample of joint CLDT inspections in 2024. We will use this approach to evaluate and consider our approach to joint inspection.	2024-25	Planning
Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards – 10 years on	We are working in partnership with HIW to consider our approach and follow up on the report: A National Review of the use of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) in Wales (hiw.org.uk) undertaken in 2014.	2024-25	Scoping
Stoke pathway	Working in collaboration with HIW a National Review of Patient Flow: a journey through the stroke pathway (hiw.org.uk) has recently been published.	Complete	Published

CIW planned work 2023-25	Scope	Timetable	Status
<p>National review of Care Planning for children and young people subject to the Public Law Outline pre-proceedings</p>	<p>Purpose of the review To provide external scrutiny, assurance and to promote improvement regarding the quality of practice in relation to the care planning for children and young people subject to the public law outline pre-proceedings.</p> <p>To consider the extent to which practice has progressed since the publication of both the CIW 'National Review of care planning for children and young people subject to public law outline pre-proceedings' and the publication of the PLO working group report 2021 including best practice guidance.</p>	<p>In progress</p>	<p>Publication November 2023</p>
<p>Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Annual Monitoring Report for Health and Social Care 2022-23</p>	<p>The 2020-21 report was published on 7 February 2021</p> <p>The 2021-2022 report is underway</p>	<p>Published</p> <p>To be confirmed</p>	<p>Published</p> <p>Preparing</p>
<p>Joint Inspection Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA)</p>	<p>We will complete a further two multi-agency joint inspections in total.</p> <p>The findings following Denbighshire County Council have been published - Joint Inspectorate Review of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA): Denbighshire 2023 Care Inspectorate Wales</p> <p>The findings following Bridgend County Borough Council have been published - Joint Inspectorate Review of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA): Bridgend 2023 Care Inspectorate Wales</p> <p>We will publish a national report in late spring 2024.</p>	<p>April 2023 – April 2024</p>	<p>Delivery</p>

CIW planned work 2023-25	Scope	Timetable	Status
Performance review of Local Authorities	<p><u>We continue to inspect Local Authorities in line with our updated Code of Practice for our local authority inspection activity Care Inspectorate Wales</u></p> <p><u>How we inspect local authority services and CAFCASS Cymru</u></p>	Ongoing	Ongoing

Audit Wales national reports and other outputs published since September 2022

Report title	Publication date and link to report
NHS workforce – data briefing	September 2023
Income Diversification for National Park Authorities in Wales	September 2023
Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK	September 2023
Springing Forward: Lessons learnt from our work on workforce and assets (in local government)	September 2023
Local Government Financial Sustainability Data tool update (further update planned autumn 2023)	September 2023
NHS finances data tool – to 31 March 2023	September 2023
Public interest reports – Ammanford Town Council and Llanferres Community Council	September 2023
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board - Quality Governance Arrangements Joint Review Follow-up	August 2023
'Cracks in the Foundations' – Building Safety in Wales	August 2023
Maximising EU funding – the Structural Funds Programme and the Rural Development Programme	June 2023
Digital inclusion in Wales (including key questions for public bodies)	March 2023
Orthopaedic Services in Wales – Tackling the Waiting List Backlog	March 2023
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board – Review of Board Effectiveness	February 2023

Report title	Publication date and link to report
Welsh Government purchase of Gilestone Farm	January 2023
Together we can – Community resilience and self-reliance	January 2023
A Picture of Flood Risk Management	December 2022
'A missed opportunity' – Social Enterprises	December 2022
Poverty Data Tool	November 2022
'Time for change' – Poverty in Wales	November 2022
Learning from cyber-attacks	October 2022 (distributed privately to audited bodies)
National Fraud Initiative 2020-21	October 2022
COVID-19 business support in 2020-21 – Memorandum for the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee	October 2022
Payment to the Welsh Government's Former Permanent Secretary on Termination of Employment	September 2022
Equality Impact Assessments: More than a Tick Box Exercise?	September 2022
Welsh Government – setting of well-being objectives	September 2022
Welsh Government workforce planning and management	September 2022

Audit Wales national reports and other outputs (work in progress / planned)^{1, 2}

Title	Indicative publication date
Covering teachers' absence – follow-up (letter to the Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee)	October 2023
NHS quality governance	October/December 2023
A465 Section 2 – update	November/December 2023
Ukrainian refugee services	December 2023/January 2024
Local government digital strategy review – national summary	January 2024
Local government use of performance information, outcomes and service user perspective – national summary	November/December 202
Affordable housing	February/March 2024
Active travel	Spring 2024
Cancer services	To be confirmed (scoping)
Velindre Cancer Centre	To be confirmed (scoping)

¹ We will continue to keep our plans under constant review, taking account of the evolving external environment, our audit priorities, the context of our own resourcing and the capacity of audited bodies to engage with us. Follow up work could also lead to other outputs, as may other local audit work where we consider there is merit in a national summary output of some kind.

² We have also published to our website a paper – [Our work programme for 2023-2026](#) – that provides additional detail about our national work (including local thematic reviews). In addition to new work that we will be taking forward in 2023-24, the paper includes details about indicative topics for work to start in 2024-24 or 2025-26.

Title	Indicative publication date
Welsh Government capital and infrastructure investment	To be confirmed (scoping)
Addressing biodiversity decline (pan-public sector and at Natural Resources Wales)	R&D work underway September to December 2023. Data gathering with representative groups. Outputs will inform any further audit work.
Further and higher education funding and oversight – Commission for Tertiary Education and Research	To be confirmed (scoping)
The senior public service	To be confirmed (scoping early 2024)
Challenges for the cultural sector	To be confirmed (starting in 2023-24)
Rebalancing care and support	To be confirmed (starting in 2023-24)
Tackling NHS waiting lists	To be confirmed (starting in 2023-24)
Access to education for children with Additional Learning Needs	To be confirmed (starting in 2023-24)
Audit Committees. ‘What does good look like?’. R&D work to understand the broad audit committee landscape across all sectors in Wales. Outputs to support Good Practice Exchange events and potential future audit work.	R&D work Sept – Dec 2023 Good Practice Event Spring 2024

Good Practice Exchange events and resources

Title	Link to resource
<p>Strategy to Action: How digital makes a difference to everyday lives This event will take a practical and honest view at the digital landscape in Wales and will offer practical ideas for public and third sector organisations which will help them achieve the best value for money.</p>	<p>27 September 2023 09:00 – 13:00 – North Wales – To register for North Wales</p> <p>5 October 2023 09:00 – 13:00 – Cardiff – To register for Cardiff</p>
<p>Working in partnership to improve wellbeing This event will bring together the North Wales Insight Partnership, the Public Service Boards and the C4C community to share wellbeing plans across the North Wales region, as well as sharing the innovative work being undertaken by a range of sectors around wellbeing in our communities. The event will provide opportunities to discuss how we can connect all of this work to deliver real change.</p>	<p>24 October 2023 09:30 – 16:30 To register for North Wales Cardiff date TBC</p>
<p>Integrity in the Public Sector ‘Trust is built and maintained through competence, reliability, and honesty, as well as the building of genuine and sound relationships between the public sector and the public it serves. That means the public sector must be accountable for the management and delivery of public services and outcomes, for the direction and control of the work it does, the resources it manages, and for its behaviour and ethics.’ This event will look at how public services can promote a culture of integrity.</p>	<p>5 December 2023 10:00 – 12:00 Online To register</p>
<p>Podcast: Auditing Community Resilience In this edition of The Exchange, our Local Government team discuss some of the factors that cause poverty in Wales, as well as the value provided by social enterprises, and the importance of keeping wealth in communities.</p>	<p>To listen</p>

Recent Audit Wales blogs

Title	Publication date
<p>Building Safety – Have we learnt from Grenfell?</p>	<p>1 August 2023</p>
<p>Helping people to help themselves</p>	<p>15 February 2023</p>
<p>A perfect storm – the cost of living crisis and domestic abuse</p>	<p>21 November 2022</p>

Title	Publication date
<u>Tackling poverty means tackling poverty data</u>	11 November 2022
<u>Cost of living and putting away the bayonet</u>	21 September 2022
<u>Heat is on to tackle Climate Change</u>	18 August 2022
<u>Direct Payments in Wales</u>	15 June 2022
<u>Unscheduled Care in Wales – a system under real pressure</u>	21 April 2022

Good Practice Exchange events and resources

Title	Link to resource
<p>A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language: Inspired by the Football Association of Wales journey over the past decade, this event will examine and discuss how going beyond expectations creates an inclusive and positive attitude that becomes self-fulfilling.</p> <p>Working in partnership with the Future Generations Commissioner and the Welsh Language Commissioner, this event will assist and inspire public bodies, and the third sector to embrace the cultural diversity of modern Wales and work beyond compliance and into excellence.</p>	<p>All resources are now available on our website. https://audit.wales/our-work/good-practice/wales-vibrant-culture-and-thriving-welsh-language</p> <p>Link to blog: https://audit.wales/blog/gpx/2023/6/6/wales-vibrant-culture-and-thriving-welsh-language-events-may-2023</p>
<p>Together we can – creating the conditions to empower our communities to thrive: This shared learning event will bring people together from across public services to share ideas, learning and knowledge. We will share the findings of our reports on social enterprises and community resilience, including our recommendations going forward.</p>	<p>20 June 2023 – 10:00 – 12:00 – Online. The recording will be available on our website in 1-2 weeks.</p>
<p>Podcast: Poverty and Community Resilience Our latest podcast follows our recent reports and events on poverty, social enterprises, and community resilience.</p>	<p>https://audit.wales/news/podcast-poverty-and-community-resilience</p>
<p>Digital Strategy: The Covid pandemic has demonstrated the importance of digital in delivering modern services at pace. We have seen digital acting as a major catalyst in adapting to the challenges we have faced. Public services need to continue with this agile and responsive mind set as the norm and not the exception. This event will help equip public services with the practical tools and knowledge they need to successfully implement a Digital Strategy within their organisations.</p>	<p>21 September 09:00 – 13:00 – Cardiff - Link to register for Cardiff: https://audit.wales/events/digital-strategy-cardiff</p> <p>27 September 09:00 – 13:00 – North Wales - Link to register for North Wales: https://audit.wales/events/digital-strategy-north-wales</p>

Recent Audit Wales blogs

Title	Publication date
<u>Helping people to help themselves</u>	15 February 2023
<u>A perfect storm – the cost of living crisis and domestic abuse</u>	21 November 2022
<u>Tackling poverty means tackling poverty data</u>	11 November 2022
<u>Cost of living and putting away the bayonet</u>	21 September 2022
<u>Heat is on to tackle Climate Change</u>	18 August 2022
<u>Direct Payments in Wales</u>	15 June 2022
<u>Unscheduled Care in Wales – a system under real pressure</u>	21 April 2022
<u>Skills Competition Wales</u>	18 February 2022
<u>Cyber resilience – one year on</u>	9 February 2022
<u>Helping to tell the story through numbers</u> (Local government financial sustainability data tool)	3 February 2022
<u>Call for clearer information on climate change spending</u>	2 February 2022
<u>Actions speak louder than words</u> (Building social resilience and self-reliance in citizens and communities)	14 January 2022



NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER – HUW JONES

26th January 2024

Matter for Monitoring

Wards Affected - All

TREASURY MANAGEMENT MONITORING 2023/24 AS AT 30th SEPTEMBER 2023

Purpose of Report

1. This report sets out treasury management action and information for 2023/24.
2. This report has already been considered by the Cabinet at their meeting on 13th December 2023.

Rates of Interest

3. Over the past 18 months, the cost of living has risen sharply. The speed of this increase is called the 'rate of inflation'. It is the job of the Bank of England to keep this rate around their target of 2%, however, it is currently above this – mainly due to the higher price of goods coming in from abroad along with the increase in the cost of energy.
4. To reduce the rate of inflation, the Bank of England increase their interest rates. Since March 2022 the interest rates have increased as per below:

Effective Date	Bank Rate
16 th March 2022	0.75%
5 th May 2022	1.00%
16 th June 2022	1.25%
4 th August 2022	1.75%
22 nd September 2022	2.25%
3 rd November 2022	3.00%
15 th December 2022	3.50%
2 nd February 2023	4.00%
23 rd March 2023	4.25%
11 th May 2023	4.50%
22 nd June 2023	5.00%
3 rd August 2023	5.25%

5. The following table provides examples of external borrowing costs as provided by the Public Works Loans Board (certainty rate) as at 17th October 2023:

	Equal Instalments of Principal		Annuity		Maturity	
	Previous 26Jul23	Current 17Oct23	Previous 26Jul23	Current 17Oct23	Previous 26Jul23	Current 17Oct23
	%	%	%	%	%	%
5-5.5 years	5.62	5.37	5.60	5.36	5.29	5.18
10-10.5 years	5.26	5.17	5.22	5.16	5.07	5.30
20-20.5 years	5.07	5.30	5.11	5.39	5.29	5.68
35-35.5 years	5.27	5.63	5.28	5.70	5.14	5.63
49.5-50 years	5.27	5.70	5.17	5.64	4.97	5.47

General Fund Treasury Management Budget

6. The following table sets out details of the treasury management budget for 2023/24 along with outturn figures for 2022/23. The budget consists of a gross budget for debt charges i.e. repayment

of debt principal and interest, and interest returns on investment income.

2022/23 Outturn £'000		2023/24 Original Budget £'000
21,646	Principal and Interest charges	20,732
	Investment Income	
(1,523)	- Total	(1,500)
577	- less allocated to other funds	375
(946)	Subtotal Income	(1,125)
0	Contribution from General Reserves	0
0	Contribution to General Reserves	0
(186)	Contribution to/(from) treasury management reserve	0
20,514	Net General Fund	19,607

NB: Other funds include Trust Funds, Social Services Funds, Schools Reserves, Bonds etc.

Borrowing

7. There has been no new loans taken out since the last report.

Investments

8. The following are a list of investments as at 30th September 2023:

<u>Counterparty</u>	<u>Value (£)</u>	<u>Investment type</u>	<u>Investment start</u>	<u>Investment maturity</u>	<u>Interest rate</u>
Goldman Sachs International Bank	£5,000,000	Fixed	25 th May 2023	24 th Nov 2023	5.24%
Goldman Sachs International Bank	£5,000,000	Fixed	5 th July 2023	5 th October 2023	5.50%
Cambridgeshire C.C.	£5,000,000	Fixed	6 th Dec 2021	6 th Dec 2023	0.40%
South Ayrshire Council	£5,000,000	Fixed	27 th Mar 2023	27 th Mar 2026	4.30%
Medway Council	£5,000,000	Fixed	10 th Feb 2023	10 th Feb 2027	4.35%
Middlesborough Borough Council	£5,000,000	Fixed	12 th Sep 2023	12 th Dec 2023	5.45%
Somerset Council	£5,000,000	Fixed	29 th Sep 2023	29 th Dec 2023	5.45%
DMO	£6,800,000	Fixed/ Overnight	N/A	N/A	5.17% - 5.245%
Santander	£7,700,000	Call Account	N/A	N/A	5.25%
Lloyds	£7,800,000	Call Account	N/A	N/A	5.14%

9. Please note – the Council’s investment criteria (appendix 1) allows for a maximum investment for an F1 rated counterparty to be £15m. Santander are currently an F1 rated counterparty – however, the policy also allows for this to be temporarily exceeded in exceptional circumstances.

Investment Income

10. In line with the Council’s Investment Strategy, the 2022/23 original budget target for investment income is £1.5m, income for the financial year to date totals £1.1m. This target will be reviewed throughout the year and adjusted if necessary with any variances going into/out of the Treasury Management reserve.

11. Members should note that the short-term investments are classified as 'specified' i.e. up to 12 months and are currently deposited with DMO, Local Authorities, Goldman Sachs International Bank, Lloyds Bank, and Santander Bank.
12. The Council policy allows long-term investments up to a maximum of £25m for periods of more than 1 year and up to 5 years. The Council has two investments in this category which are both made to other Local Authorities.

Financial Impact

13. All relevant financial information is provided in the body of the report.

Integrated Impact Assessment

14. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring purposes.

Valleys Communities Impacts

15. No implications

Workforce Impacts

16. There are no workforce impacts arising from this report.

Legal Impacts

17. There are no legal impacts arising from this report.

Risk Management

18. Borrowing and investment decisions are made in line with the Council's Treasury Management Policy. The Council has appointed Link Asset Services to provide support and advice in relation to this policy.

Consultation

19. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

20. It is recommended that Members note the contents of this monitoring report.

Appendices

21. Appendix 1 - Specified Investments

List of Background Papers

22. PWLB Notice Number 395/23

Officer Contact

Mr Huw Jones – Chief Finance Officer
E-mail - h.jones@npt.gov.uk

Mr Ross Livingstone – Group Accountant – Capital and Corporate
E-mail – r.livingstone@npt.gov.uk

Specified Investments

	Minimum 'High' Credit Criteria	Funds Managed	Max Amount	Max Duration
Term deposits				
Term deposits - Debt Management Office	N/A	In-house	Unlimited	1 year
Term deposits – local, police and fire authorities	N/A	In-house	£10m	1 year
Term deposits – Nationalised & Part Nationalised UK banks/Building Societies	Fitch short-term rating F1+, F1	In-house	£20m	1 year
Term deposits – UK banks/Building Societies	Fitch short-term rating F1+	In-house	£20m	1 year
Term deposits – UK banks/Building Societies	Fitch short-term rating F1	In-house	£15m	6 months or 185 days
Callable deposits				
Callable deposits – Debt Management Agency deposit facility	N/A	In-house	Unlimited	
Callable deposits – Nationalised & Part Nationalised UK banks/Building Societies	Fitch short-term rating F1+, F1	In-house	£20m	
Callable deposits – Nationalised & Part Nationalised UK banks/Building Societies	Fitch short-term rating F2	In-house	£10m	
Callable deposits - UK banks/Building Societies	Fitch short-term rating F1+ or F1	In-house	£15m *	
Term deposits – non UK banks	Fitch short-term rating F1+	In-house	£5m	6 months or 185 days

* Where necessary this limit may be temporarily exceeded with the Authority's bankers only.

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

26th JANUARY 2024

Report of Director of Strategy & Corporate Services

Mr N Daniel

Matter for Information

Wards Affected: All Wards

Half Year Progress Report

Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan for 2023-2024

1st April 2023 – 30th September 2023.

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the Governance & Audit Committee with an update on the progress made on the Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan for 2023-2024 (attached at Appendix 1). The action plan reflects the governance issues (improvement areas) identified in the council's Annual Governance Statement for 2022-2023.

Executive Summary

2. On the 28th June 2023, Cabinet approved the council's Annual Governance Statement 2022-2023. Appendix 1 contains areas identified for improvement and an update on progress.
3. The six monthly update was presented to Cabinet on 28th November 2023.

Background

4. The Annual Governance Statement forms part of the Statement of Accounts and reports on the extent of the council's compliance with its principles and practices of good governance, including how the council has monitored the effectiveness of its governance arrangements.

Progress to Date

5. The Corporate Governance Group continues to oversee the improvement work identified in the Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan to ensure the council's processes and procedures enable the council to carry out its functions effectively.
6. During the period 1st April 2023 – 30th September 2023, progress has been made on the improvement work areas contained within the action plan. More detail on the progress is contained in Appendix 1.

Financial Appraisal

7. The progress described has been delivered within service budgets.

Integrated Impact Assessment

8. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring purposes.

Valleys Communities Impact:

9. There is no impact on the valley communities as a result of this report.

Workforce Impact

10. There is no impact on the workforce as a result of this report.

Legal Impact

11. The council has a duty to reflect the requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to ensure that our governance structures enable different parts of the organisation to work together on setting well-being objectives and taking all reasonable steps to meet the well-being objectives.

Risk Management

12. The council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk. Failure to monitor progress on the action plan may lead to non-compliance by Audit Wales and statutory recommendations the council would be obliged to address.

Consultation

13. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

14. It is recommended that Governance and Audit Committee note the half year progress made on the Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan for 2023-2024 for the period 1st April to 30th September 2023 - attached at Appendix 1.

Reason for Proposed Decision

15. This is a matter for information therefore no decision is required.

Appendices

16. Appendix 1 – Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan 2023-2024.

List of Background Papers

17. Annual Governance Statement 2022–2023

Officer Contact

Noelwyn Daniel, Director of Strategy & Corporate Services

E-mail: n.daniel@npt.gov.uk

Caryn Furlow-Harris, Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support.

E-mail: c.furlow@npt.gov.uk

Louise McAndrew, Corporate Strategic, Planning and Governance Office

E-mail: l.mcandrew@npt.gov.uk

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Corporate Governance Improvement Action Plan for 2023-2024

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2023-2024	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2023-2024
Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of the law			
1.1.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. All members ensure they attend annual refreshers in respect of the Members Code of Conduct undertaken by the Monitoring Officer; II. All Group Leaders make Standards and Ethics a standing item on their political group meeting agendas; III. All members ensure they are completing their declarations of gifts and hospitality, including where such gifts and hospitality are declined; IV. Group Leaders consider bi-annual meetings with the Monitoring Officer to discuss standards and ethics and how they can work together to promote standards within their political groups; V. Steps be taken to promote the Member Officer Protocol to all 	<p>Head of Legal & Democratic Services</p>	<p>On signing their Declaration of Acceptance of Office, Members are required to give an undertaking to abide by the Members’ Code of Conduct. Training was subsequently provided on the Code of Conduct. By the end of June 2022, all 60 elected members had attended and received this training.</p> <p>Refresher training takes place on an annual basis to enhance member’s compliance with the Members Code of Conduct and to ensure members are aware of the responsibility to act ethically and with integrity, with advice provided on a variety of matters throughout the year on interests and predetermination matters.</p> <p>The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 provided an additional duty on group leaders to ensure members within their political group also comply with the Members Code of Conduct and ongoing support will be provided on this function via the Standards Committee.</p> <p>The Standards Committee were pleased to note the approach that Group Leaders take in promoting standards and the personal commitment they have to encourage members within their groups to embed ethical processes in their day to day activities. Of interest particularly to the Standards Committee was how Group Leaders deal with</p>

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2023-2024	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2023-2024
	<p>elected members and officers of the Council, with training provided as appropriate;</p> <p>VI. A series of guidance documents to be circulated to all members in respect of key conduct matters such as declarations of interest, predetermination, conduct case studies and key information for members.</p>		<p>the “thick skin” ideology that the Public Service Ombudsman and other regulatory bodies adopt and the views that all Group Leaders have that often this is an inappropriate test and it is not something that any elected member should have to have if they face abuse from members of the public, particularly in a social media setting. The Standards Committee are required to conduct an assessment of how political group leaders have complied with their new duty to promote high standards of conduct and the Standards Committee are able to confirm that throughout 2022-2023, Group Leaders have discharged their duty, in the views of the Standards Committee, and that there were no ethical concerns arising. The Standards Committee published their Annual Report in April 2023 for the work of the previous finance year.</p> <p>A detailed member induction programme took place following local government elections in May 2022. This included specified training relating to the member code of conduct, social media issues, gifts and hospitality and officer/member protocols.</p> <p>A protocol is in place as part of the council’s Constitution and Employee Code of Conduct.</p> <p>A review of the protocol was undertaken at the early stages of the member induction programme, as part of the wider review of the council’s Constitution. Copies of which have been distributed to officers.</p>

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2023-2024	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2023-2024
			<p>Training has also been provided to officer groups within the council on the nature of the relationship between officers and members and this training will continue in future years. The protocol is monitored by the Standards Committee who considered the protocol and its implementation at a meeting of the Standards Committee recommending a few minor changes for consideration which will now be included within the Constitution going forward and circulated to officers and members.</p> <p>A series of guidance documents have now been produced in respect of member's interests, predisposition and predetermination and work commenced on the development of a guide in respect of social media and the code of conduct which will be considered by the Standards Committee in 2023-2024.</p>
1.3.4	Continue with future training of officer groups in the significance of the member and officer relations protocol.	Head of Legal & Democratic Services	<p>A protocol is in place as part of the council's Constitution and Employee Code of Conduct. A review of the protocol was undertaken at the early stages of the member induction programme, as part of the wider review of the council's Constitution. Copies of which have been distributed to officers.</p> <p>Training has also been provided to officer groups within the council on the nature of the relationship between officers and members and this training will continue in future years. The protocol is monitored by the Standards Committee who considered the protocol and its implementation at a meeting of the Standards Committee recommending a few minor changes for consideration which have now included within</p>

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2023-2024	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2023-2024
			the Constitution going forward and circulated to officers and members.
2.1.1	Corporate Procurement to monitor and evaluate compliance looking at what approach sections adopt. Head of Legal & Democratic Services to report annually to the Corporate Governance Group.	Head of Legal & Democratic Services	The Corporate Procurement Team have spent the last year developing toolkits that will enable better reporting of financial spending and to monitor control mechanisms in respect of procurement activities. Work has been ongoing to address to procurement compliance in respect of the use of the council's Select List as well as addressing individual tendering arrangements in service areas. As part of the development of its procurement strategy and ongoing monitoring of council expenditure this work will continue.
Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement			
4.4.3	Review the Citizens' Panel and further develop in line with the action plan in the Public Participation Strategy	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	<p>In August, officers met with Opinion Research Services (ORS) to discuss how best to move forward with the Citizens' Panel. ORS have re-opened the recruitment form with an amendment to make it easier to identify the age group of respondents. A recruitment drive was launched in October during Local Democracy Week.</p> <p>In addition an opportunity for respondents to indicate whether they wished to be included in the circulation list when the council recruits for future activities such as focus groups, NPT Citizens' Panel etc. was built into the 'Let's Keep Talking' (LKT) questionnaire. These 'recontacts' from LKT responses will be contacted as part of the current recruitment drive.</p>

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2023-2024	Responsible Officer	Progress During 2023-2024
4.6.1	Commence the review of the Partnership Agreement (Compact) between the council and the voluntary sector (to be completed by September 2024)	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	Discussion held at Voluntary Sector Liaison Forum – 13 th November 2023 to inform timeline and approach.
4.6.3	Commence the review of the Charter between the council and Town and Community Councils (to be completed by September 2024)	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	Discussion scheduled at Town / Community Councils Liaison Forum – 4 th December to set out timeline and approach.
Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits			
5.1.1	Review business planning and performance management arrangements across the council	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	Review of the Corporate Performance Management Framework is underway in readiness for implementation from 1 st April 2024.
5.4.1	Ensure all strategic risk are embedded and further refine Directorate (operational) Risk Registers	Chief Finance Officer / Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	The Strategic Risk Register has been reviewed by Corporate Directors Group and presented to both Cabinet and Governance & Audit Committee. The Directorate Registers are being developed and have been presented to Corporate Directors Group (as set out in the council's Corporate Risk Management Policy).
5.5.1	Revisit the Let's Talk campaign during 2023-2024 to inform priorities for 2024-2025.	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	The Let's Keep Talking campaign was launched at the end of June 2023 and ran until 8 th October. The output will help inform the council's updated Corporate Plan for the period 2024-2027.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

6.1.1	Further refine the council's annual self-assessment process.	Strategic Manager - Policy & Executive Support	The self-assessment for 2022-2023 has been undertaken. Further work is required to ensure the self-assessment fits within the Corporate Performance Management Framework to add value and ensure its fit is aligned to Annual Report and Annual Governance Statement.
6.9.1	Further development of a medium term financial strategy.	Chief Finance Officer	Work has progress on development of a MTFP however further work is required to develop proposals to ensure the council has a sustainable financial footing.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management			
8.14.1	A review of Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing work to be undertaken by the Information Governance team.	Chief Digital Officer	<p>An audit of council information is underway to identify information assets, their characteristics, risks and any gaps in required documentation. This process prioritises areas likely to involve higher risk information or processes. As higher risk items are identified, they are addressed with lower risk items added to the Information Governance team's work plan. This will progressively improve the position of the council.</p> <p>It is expected that circa 500 Information Assets will be assessed and mitigated by the close of the Quarter 2 2024-2025. Upon completion of the Information Asset Audit, ongoing review of these information assets and council processing activities will be included in the business as usual activities of the team to provide adequate assurance of compliance in Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing.</p>
Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability			
9.5.1	Work to deliver governance awareness training across the council is ongoing and will continue during 2023-2024 to ensure appropriate training takes place with council officers.	Head of Legal & Democratic Services	Safe and Legal Decision Making Training' is available for relevant officers and is provided on an annual basis by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to council officers. Democratic Services Officers and Legal Services monitor reports to ensure legal compliance.

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NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE

26th JANUARY 2024

Report of the Director of Strategy & Corporate Services

Noelwyn Daniel

Matter for Information

Wards Affected – All wards

Register of Regulators Reports & Recommendations.

Purpose of the Report

To provide the Governance & Audit Committee with an updated Register of Regulators Reports and Recommendations.

Background

This report presents a summary of the reports issued by external review bodies since October 2023 and an updated Register of Regulators Reports (Appendix 1).

National Reports

1. Audit Wales Interim Report (October 2023)

The report documents Audit Wales' progress during the first six months of 2023-2024 and delivery of planned programmes of work. It also updates on key performance indicators set out in the Audit Wales Annual Plan for 2023-2024.

This report was for information.

2. Audit Wales Equality Report (October 2023)

This report reflects progress made on delivering Audit Wales' equality objectives during 2022-2023. The objectives set out in the Audit Wales Joint Strategic Equality Plan for 2022 to 2026 aim to

build on progress to ensure diversity, inclusion and equality considerations are built into everything they do.

Exhibit 1 of the report provides more detail of steps taken and progress made towards meeting individual objectives.

This report was for information.

Local Reports

- 3. Neath Port Talbot Council – Digital Strategy Review (October 2023)** – This report looks at the extent to which the council’s strategic approach to digital has been developed in accordance with the sustainable development principle, and that it will help to secure value for money in the use of the council’s resources.

Audit Wales highlighted the well-aligned strategic approach to digital within the council, with other key plans and strategies, and those of partners, with strong arrangements to communicate the strategic digital approach.

The report addresses the developing, comprehensive arrangements to assess and monitor the impact of the digital approach, however the absence of a clear timeframe to deliver the digital strategy will make it difficult for the council to assess progress and value.

Recommendations:

- **Monitoring benefits:** If the Council continues with the approach of not stating a timeframe to deliver its Digital, Data and Technology strategy, it should put in place arrangements to: – clearly articulate its short, medium and long term outcomes and intended benefits; – cost its short, medium and long term ambitions and match them with available resources; and – assess if it is delivering the strategy and its intended outcomes at the intended pace.

This report was presented to Cabinet on 28th November 2023.

- 4. Neath Port Talbot Council – Review of Scrutiny (November 2023)**

This report focusses on the current effectiveness of Neath Port Talbot Council’s scrutiny meetings, which includes the introduction of online/hybrid meetings. Audit Wales have reflected on a piece of work undertaken in 2018 with the council and have taken into account local government elections which took place in May 2022 and the Covid pandemic to inform this review.

In the main this review of scrutiny looked at 'how effective are scrutiny arrangements at the council?' Their overall opinion was that the council is missing opportunities for scrutiny to maximise its impact, influence and effectiveness in holding cabinet to account, shaping council policies and reviewing performance.

As a result of the review there are 5 recommendations included with the report.

Recommendations:

R1. Current model and role of scrutiny:

The Council should review its current model for scrutiny to ensure scrutiny can fulfil its broader range of roles and responsibilities. Any revised model should ensure there are opportunities for scrutiny to engage in its wider roles, including for example, in relation to:

- Policy development
- Performance monitoring
- Holding cabinet members to account throughout the decision-making process
- Following up outcomes of previous recommendations or decisions Public engagement

R2. Public Engagement - The council's scrutiny model should be more citizen focused by strengthening its arrangements for public involvement and engagement in scrutiny. This should include ensuring greater transparency and timeliness about which items will be on the scrutiny committee agendas; and using existing engagement and consultation work to inform its scrutiny work including consideration of scrutiny topics, as part of its scrutiny reviews, in holding cabinet members and decisions to account, and in its performance monitoring roles.

R3. Planning and work programme - To enable the scrutiny model to be more citizen focused, the Council should review its arrangements for the way in which scrutiny is planned to ensure scrutiny can independently plan and strategically prioritise its own work programme.

R4. Support - The Council should review the type of scrutiny support it requires across all areas of the organisation including service areas, to enable scrutiny to perform its wider role and ensure that any resourcing implications arising from any changes to the scrutiny model are understood and planned for.

R5. Evaluation - The Council should strengthen its arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny.

This report forms part of the council's review of Scrutiny which will be presented to Council on 20th March 2024 and Governance and Audit Committee later in the year.

5. Neath Port Talbot Council – Springing Forward – Strategic Management of Assets (December 2023) – The report is a review of the council's arrangements for managing its assets with a focus on office accommodation and buildings from which services to its residents are delivered from. Audit Wales looked at how the council strategically plans the use of its assets, monitors the use of its assets and reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of its arrangements.

The review sought to answer the question: 'Is the council's strategic approach to its assets strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of its services in the short and longer-term?' The conclusion reflected that there isn't a current vision and plan for managing assets, nor a timely and comprehensive monitoring arrangements.

There are 3 recommendations included with the report.

R1. Strategic asset management vision and strategy

- In developing its new Corporate Asset Management Strategy, the Council should put the Sustainable Development Principle at the heart of its considerations. In particular setting out its long-term vision and the outcomes it wants to achieve over the short, medium and longer term.

R2. Strategic asset management planning and delivery

- Once the Council has agreed its new Corporate Asset Management Strategy it should develop the supporting arrangements to ensure that it has sufficient corporate oversight and a consistent approach to the delivery of its asset objectives across the organisation.

R3. Strategic asset management governance and monitoring

- To ensure that the Council is able to understand the progress its asset management strategy and arrangements are making and how those are helping to deliver and achieve its Well-being Objectives, it will need to assure itself that its current

governance arrangements are sufficient to effectively monitor its progress.

This report, along with a completed Organisational Response Form will be presented to Cabinet during February and Governance and Audit Committee on 21st March 2024.

6. Neath Port Talbot Council – Springing Forward – Strategic Workforce Management 2021-2022 (December 2023) –

The report examines the overall arrangements and approach in relation to its strategic management of its workforce. Asking the question ‘Is the council’s strategic approach strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of its services in the short and longer term?’

Work took place on this review between February 2022 and October with three main aims, to gain assurance that councils are putting in place arrangements in relation to its workforce to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, to explain the actions that councils are taking both individually and collectively to strengthen their arrangements; and lastly to inspire councils and other organisations to further strengthen their arrangements through capturing and sharing notable practice examples and learning and making appropriate recommendations.

Overall, Audit Wales found that the council has a clear vision for its workforce, strengthened by its work with partners and have identified two recommendations as part of this work.

R1. Workforce planning and delivery:

- To ensure there are progression pathways for staff and there is resilience around its business-critical roles, the Council should ensure all services have succession plans and have identified their business-critical roles.

R2 Workforce governance and monitoring:

- To have a better understanding of the impact of its workforce strategy the Council should develop measures that focus on outcomes and impacts in addition to inputs.
- The Council should build on its benchmarking with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and consider where there may be opportunities to benchmark its measures and metrics with

its peers to ensure it can identify areas of good practice and potential areas for improvement.

- To enable the Council to have a clearer understanding of the progress it is making towards meeting its workforce ambitions the Council should assure itself that the Organisational Delivery Board is providing effective oversight and driving integration across related programmes of work

This report, along with a completed Organisational Response Form, will be presented to Cabinet on 14th February and to Governance and Audit Committee on 21st March 2024.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts in respect of this item.

Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement for an integrated impact assessment in respect of this item.

Valleys Communities Impacts

There are no impacts in respect of this item.

Workforce impacts

There are no workforce impacts in respect of this item.

Legal Impacts

There are no legal impacts in respect of this item.

Risk Management

There are no risk management issues in respect of this item.

Consultation

There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- The Governance & Audit Committee note the reports issued by the Council's external review bodies since October 2023 and the updated Register of Regulators Reports and Recommendations.

Appendix

- Appendix 1 – Register of Regulators Reports

Background Papers

None

Officer Contact

For further information on this report item, please contact:

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No.	Name - Inspection / Review	Publication Date	Date noted by Governance & Audit Committee	Status of Report	Scrutiny Committee responsible for monitoring action plan (or other monitoring arrangements)	Date Presented to Scrutiny	Target date for update to Governance & Audit Committee on the monitoring of progress (for assurance purposes)	Responsible Officer	Number of accepted recommendations	Date of update received by Governance & Audit Committee on monitoring of progress	Recommendations for Local Government
	Neath Port Talbot Council - Springing Forward - Strategic Management of Assets	Dec-23	26.01.2024	Local	TBC	TBC	21.03.2024	Nicola Pearce	3 Recommendations	TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In developing its new Corporate Asset Management Strategy, the Council should put the Sustainable Development Principle at the heart of its considerations. In particular setting out its long-term vision and the outcomes it wants to achieve over the short, medium and longer term. R2 Strategic asset management planning and delivery Once the Council has agreed its new Corporate Asset Management Strategy it should develop the supporting arrangements to ensure that it has sufficient corporate oversight and a consistent approach to the delivery of its asset objectives across the organisation R3 Strategic asset management governance and monitoring To ensure that the Council is able to understand the progress its asset management strategy and arrangements are making and how those are helping to deliver and achieve its Well-being Objectives, it will need to assure itself that its current governance arrangements are sufficient to effectively monitor its progress. To ensure that it can better understand the progress it is making around its assets, and to determine if it is delivering value for money, the Council needs to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop and communicate regular progress monitoring reports; develop a broader set of asset related measures; and look for opportunities to benchmark itself against other organisations
	Neath Port Talbot Council - Springing Forward - Strategic Workforce Management (2021-2022)	Dec-23	26.01.2024	Local	Cabinet	14.02.2024	21.03.2024	Noelwyn Daniel	2 recommendation	TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 Workforce planning and delivery: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure there are progression pathways for staff and there is resilience around its business-critical roles, the Council should ensure all services have succession plans and have identified their business-critical roles. R2 Workforce governance and monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To have a better understanding of the impact of its workforce strategy the Council should develop measures that focus on outcomes and impacts in addition to inputs. The Council should build on its benchmarking with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and consider where there may be opportunities to benchmark its measures and metrics with its peers to ensure it can identify areas of good practice and potential areas for improvement. To enable the Council to have a clearer understanding of the progress it is making towards meeting its workforce ambitions the Council should assure itself that the Organisational Delivery Board is providing effective oversight and driving integration across related programmes of work
	Neath Port Talbot Council - Review of Scrutiny	Nov-23	26.01.2024	Local	Council	20.03.2024	TBC	Noelwyn Daniel	5 recommendations	TBA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 Current model and role of scrutiny: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council should review its current model for scrutiny to ensure scrutiny can fulfil its broader range of roles and responsibilities. Any revised model should ensure there are opportunities for scrutiny to engage in its wider roles, including for example, in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy development Performance monitoring Holding cabinet members to account throughout the decision-making process Following up outcomes of previous recommendations or decisions Public engagement - The Council's scrutiny model should be more citizen focused by strengthening its arrangements for public involvement and engagement in scrutiny. This should include ensuring greater transparency and timeliness about which items will be on the scrutiny committee agendas; and using existing engagement and consultation work to inform its scrutiny work including consideration of scrutiny topics, as part of its scrutiny reviews, in holding cabinet members and decisions to account, and in its performance monitoring roles. R3 Planning and work programme - To enable the scrutiny model to be more citizen focused, the Council should review its arrangements for the way in which scrutiny is planned to ensure scrutiny can independently plan and strategically prioritise its own work programme. R4 Support - The Council should review the type of scrutiny support it requires across all areas of the organisation including service areas, to enable scrutiny to perform its wider role and ensure that any resourcing implications arising from any changes to the scrutiny model are understood and planned for. R5 Evaluation - The Council should strengthen its arrangements for assessing the effectiveness and impact of scrutiny.
	Audit Wales Equality Report 2022-23	Nov-23	26.01.2024	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations	N/A	No recommendations listed
	Neath Port Talbot Council - Digital Strategy Review	Oct-23	26.01.2024	Local	Cabinet	28.11.2023	21.03.2024	Noelwyn Daniel	1 recommendation	N/A	R1 Monitoring benefits: If the Council continues with the approach of not stating a timeframe to deliver its Digital, Data and Technology strategy, it should put in place arrangements to: - clearly articulate its short, medium and long term outcomes and intended benefits; - cost its short, medium and long term ambitions and match them with available resources; and - assess if it is delivering the strategy and its intended outcomes at the intended pace.
	Audit Wales Interim Report 2023-2024	Oct-23	26.01.2024	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations	TBA	No recommendations listed
	Neath Port Talbot Council - Setting of Well-being Objectives	Sep-23	12.10.2023	Local Letter	Cabinet	20.09.2023	21.03.2023	Noelwyn Daniel	1 recommendation	TBA	In order to support the effective delivery of and accountability for its WBOs, the Council should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop a clearer understanding of when and how partners will support the delivery of its WBOs; ensure its MTFs 2023-2027 clearly considers how the Council's resources support the delivery of its WBOs and identifies how any future financial risks or savings might impact on the delivery of its WBOs; and ensure that as it refreshes its CPMF, it looks for opportunities to develop more outcome-focused metrics that will enable it to measure its crosscutting WBOs.
	Approaches to achieving net zero across the UK	Sep-23	12.10.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	Nicola Pearce	No recommendations	N/A	No Recommendations listed - report shared with relevant officers
	Springing Forward: Lessons for our work on workforce and assets	Sep-23	12.10.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	Noelwyn Daniel	No recommendations	N/A	No Recommendations listed - report shared with relevant officers. Awaiting draft local report.
	Cracks in the Foundations' - Building Safety in Wales	Aug-23	12.10.2023	National		12.10.2023					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R1 The Welsh Government should provide greater clarity on the implementation and expectations of the Building Safety Act to ensure local authorities are able to deliver their new responsibilities and duties. This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clarifying the detailed requirements for competency and registration to enable local authorities to plan for these changes; a specific timetable for development and adoption of Welsh guidance to ensure local authorities and others can deliver their duties; and the Welsh Government should work with key stakeholders, such as LABC Cymru, to support understanding and implementation when guidance is issued. R2 The Welsh Government should ensure that it has sufficient resources to deliver the legislative and policy changes for Building Safety to reduce implementation risks. Recommendations page 12 'Cracks in the Foundations' – Building Safety in Wales Recommendations R3 The Welsh Government should review the mixed market approach to building control and conclude whether it continues to be appropriate and effective in keeping buildings in Wales safe. This should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> assess the status quo against potential changes, such as the model of delivery in Scotland; be framed around a SWOT analysis of costs, benefits, threats, and risks; draw on existing research to identify good practice; and be published and agree a way forward. R4 The Welsh Government should increase its oversight and management of the building control sector to ensure there is a robust assurance system in place for building control and safety by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> creating a national performance framework with clear service standards to promote consistency of service. This should also include outcome measures to monitor performance and an evaluation and reporting framework for scrutiny. developing a national building safety workforce plan to address the most significant risks facing the sector. This should include regular data collection and publication, as well as coverage of priorities, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a greater focus on trainees to mitigate succession risks; establishing aligned, national job roles matched to competency levels; increasing the diversity of the sector to ensure it reflects modern Wales; and specific funding to enable surveyors to obtain and maintain competence should also be considered. the Welsh Government should explore with the further education sector how best to provide building control training in Wales to support succession planning, skills development, and competency. page 13 'Cracks in the Foundations' – Building Safety in Wales Recommendations R5 Local authorities should develop local action plans that articulate a clear vision for building control to be able to plan effectively to implement the requirements of the Act. The Plans should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> be based on an assessment of local risks and include mitigation actions; set out how building control services will be resourced to deliver all their statutory responsibilities; illustrate the key role of building control in ensuring safe buildings and be linked to well-being objectives and other corporate objectives; and include outcome measures that are focused on all building control services, not just dangerous structures.

											<p>R6 Local authorities should urgently review their financial management of building control and ensure they are fully complying with Regulations. This should include: • establishing a timetable of regular fee reviews to ensure charges reflect the cost of services and comply with the Regulations; • annually reporting and publishing financial performance in line with the Regulations; • ensuring relevant staff are provided with training to ensure they apply the Regulations and interpret financial reporting correctly; and • revise fees to ensure services are charged for in accordance with the Regulations.</p> <p>R7 Local authorities should work with partners to make better use of limited resources by exploring the potential for collaboration and regionalisation to strengthen resilience through a cost benefit analysis of partnering with neighbouring authorities, establishing joint ventures and/or adopting a regional model where beneficial. page 14 'Cracks in the Foundations' – Building Safety in Wales Recommendations R8 Local authorities should review risk management processes to ensure that risks are systematically identified, recorded, assessed, mitigated and subject to regular evaluation and scrutiny</p> <p>R8 Local authorities should review risk management processes to ensure that risks are systematically identified, recorded, assessed, mitigated and subject to regular evaluation and scrutiny.</p>
Audit Wales Annual Plan 2023-2024	Apr-23	16.06.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Digital inclusion in Wales	Mar-23	16.06.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations	16.06.2023	No Recommendations listed	
Neath Port Talbot Council - Annual Audit Summary 2022	Mar-23	16.06.2023	Local Letter	Council	26.04.2023	N/A	Karen Jones	No recommendations	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Neath Port Talbot Council - Assurance and Risk Assessment 2021-22 Financial Position Update	Jan-23	17.03.2023	Local Letter	Cabinet	17.05.2023	16.06.2023	Huw Jones	No recommendations	16.06.2023	No Recommendations listed	
Together we can' - Community Resilience and Self-Reliance	Jan-23	17.03.2023	National	Cabinet	TBD	16.06.2023	TBD	2 recommendations for local government	16.06.2023	<p>R1 To strengthen community resilience and support people to be more self-reliant, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authorities use the evaluation tool in Appendix 2 to: • self-evaluate current engagement, management, performance and practice; • identify where improvement is needed; and • draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified in completing the evaluation tool.</p> <p>R2 To help local authorities address the gaps they identify following their self-evaluation, we recommend that they: • formally approve the completed Action Plan arising from the evaluation exercise; • regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and • revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance</p>	
A Missed Opportunity' – Social Enterprises	Dec-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	TBD	16.06.2023	TBD	3 recommendations for local government	17.03.2023	<p>R1 To get the best from their work with and funding of Social Enterprises, local authorities need to ensure they have the right arrangements and systems in place. We recommend that local authority officers use the checklist in Appendix 2 to: • self-evaluate current Social Enterprise engagement, management, performance and practice; • identify opportunities to improve joint working; and • jointly draft and implement an action plan with timeframes and responsibilities clearly set out to address the gaps and weaknesses identified through the self-evaluation</p> <p>R2 To drive improvement we recommend that the local authority: • formally approve the completed Action Plan; • regularly report, monitor and evaluate performance at relevant scrutiny committees; and • revise actions and targets in light of the authority's evaluation and assessment of its performance</p> <p>R3 To ensure the local authority delivers its S.16 responsibilities to promote Social Enterprises we recommend that it reports on current activity and future priorities following the evaluation of its Action Plan including the Annual Report of the Director of Social Services.</p>	
A Picture of Flood Risk Management	Dec-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Poverty in Wales data tool	Nov-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
"Time for Change" – Poverty in Wales	Oct-22	12.01.2023	National	Cabinet	TBD	16.06.2023	N/A	2 recommendations for Welsh Government / 6 recommendations for local government	17.03.2023	<p>R2 In Paragraphs 2.13 – 2.23 and Paragraphs 3.33 – 3.35 we highlight that councils and partners have prioritised work on poverty, but the mix of approaches and a complicated delivery landscape mean that ambitions, focus, actions and prioritisation vary widely. We highlight that evaluating activity and reporting performance are also variable with many gaps. We recommend that the councils use their Wellbeing Plans to provide a comprehensive focus on tackling poverty to co-ordinate their efforts, meet local needs and support the revised national plan targets and actions. This should: • include SMART local actions with a greater emphasis on prevention; • include a detailed resourcing plan for the length of the strategy; • be developed with involvement from other public sector partners, the third sector, and those with experience of poverty; • include a robust set of consistent outcome indicators and measures to increase understanding of poverty locally; and • be subject to annual public reporting to enable a whole system view of poverty locally to help improve delivery and support</p> <p>R3 In Paragraph 2.23 we note that just over a third of councils have lead members and lead officers for addressing poverty. Given the importance of effective leadership in driving the poverty agenda forward and breaking silos within councils and between public bodies, we recommend that each council designate a cabinet member as the council's poverty champion and designate a senior officer to lead and be accountable for the anti-poverty agenda.</p> <p>R5 In Paragraphs 3.2 – 3.6 we highlight that people in poverty are often in crisis, dealing with extremely personal and stressful issues, but they often find it difficult to access help from councils because of the way services are designed and delivered. We recommend that councils improve their understanding of their residents' 'lived experience' through meaningful involvement in decision-making using 'experience mapping' and/or 'Poverty Truth Commissions' to review and improve accessibility to and use of council services.</p> <p>R6 In Paragraph 3.14 we highlight the difficulties people in poverty face accessing online and digital services. To ensure people are able to get the information and advice they need, we recommend that councils optimise their digital services by creating a single landing page on their website that: • is directly accessible on the home page; • provides links to all services provided by the council that relate to poverty; and • provides information on the work of partners that can assist people in poverty</p> <p>R7 In Paragraphs 3.15 and 3.16 we note that no council has created a single gateway into services. As a result, people have to complete multiple application forms that often record the same information when applying for similar services. We highlight that whilst it is important that councils comply with relevant data protection legislation, they also need to share data to ensure citizens receive efficient and effective services. We recommend that councils: • establish corporate data standards and coding that all services use for their core data; • undertake an audit to determine what data is held by services and identify any duplicated records and information requests; • create a central integrated customer account as a gateway to services; • undertake a data audit to provide refresher training to service managers to ensure they know when and what data they can and cannot share; and • review and update data sharing protocols to ensure they support services to deliver their data sharing responsibilities</p> <p>R8 In Paragraphs 3.27 to 3.32 we set out that while all councils undertake some form of assessment to determine the likely socio-economic impact of policy choices and decisions, approaches vary and are not always effective. We recommend that councils review their integrated impact assessments or equivalent to: • ensure that they draw on relevant, comprehensive and current data (nothing over 12 months old) to support analysis; • ensure integrated impact assessments capture information on: - involvement activity setting out those the service has engaged with in determining its strategic policy such as partners, service users and those it is co-producing with; - the cumulative impact/mitigation to ensure the assessment considers issues in the round and how it links across services provided across the council; - how the council will monitor and evaluate impact and will take corrective action; and - an action plan setting out the activities the Council will take as a result of the Integrated Impact Assessment</p>	
Assurance and Risk Assessment Progress – Carbon Reduction	Oct-22	12.01.2023	Local Letter	Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Cabinet Board	20.01.2023	17.03.2023	Nicola Pearce	1 recommendation for local government	17.03.2023	In order to meet its net zero ambition the Council needs to fully cost its action plan and ensure that it is aligned with its Medium Term Financial Plan.	
National Fraud Initiative 2020-2021	Oct-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3 recommendations for local government	17.03.2023	<p>All participants in the NFI exercise should ensure that they maximise the benefits of their participation. They should consider whether it is possible to work more efficiently on the NFI matches by reviewing the guidance section within the NFI secure web application.</p> <p>Audit committees, or equivalent, and officers leading the NFI should review the NFI self-appraisal checklist. This will ensure they are fully informed of their organisation's planning and progress in the 2022-23 NFI exercise.</p>	

											Where local auditors recommend improving the timeliness and rigour with which NFI matches are reviewed, NFI participants should take appropriate action
Equality Impact Assessments: More than a Tick Box Exercise	Sep-22	12.01.2023	National	Cabinet	N/A	17.03.2023	N/A	1 recommendations for local government	17.03.2023	R4 While there are examples of good practice related to distinct stages of the EIA process, all public bodies have lessons to learn about their overall approach. Public bodies should review their overall approach to EIAs considering the findings of this report and the detailed guidance available from the EHRC and the Practice Hub. We recognise that developments in response to our other recommendations and the Welsh Government's review of the PSED Wales specific regulations may have implications for current guidance in due course	
Public Sector Readiness for Net Zero Carbon by 2030: Evidence Report	Aug-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
The Welsh Community Care Information System	Jul-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Public Sector Readiness for Net Zero Carbon by 2030	Jul-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
New Curriculum for Wales	May-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Direct Payments for Adult Social Care	Apr-22	12.01.2023	National	Social Services, Housing and Community Safety Cabinet Board	N/A	17.03.2023	Andrew Jarrett	1 recommendations for Welsh Government / 9 recommendations for Welsh Government & Local government	17.03.2023	R1 Review public information in discussion with service users and carers to ensure it is clear, concise and fully explains what they need to know about Direct Payments. R2 Undertake additional promotional work to encourage take up of Direct Payments. R3 Ensure advocacy services are considered at the first point of contact to provide independent advice on Direct Payments to service users and carers. R4 Ensure information about Direct Payments is available at the front door to social care and are included in the initial discussion on the available care options for service users and carers. R5 Provide training to social workers on Direct Payments to ensure they fully understand their potential and feel confident promoting it to service users and carers. R6 Work together to develop a joint Recruitment and Retention Plan for Personal Assistants. R7 Clarify policy expectations in plain accessible language and set out: • what Direct Payments can pay for; • how application and assessment processes, timescales and review processes work; • how monitoring individual payments and the paperwork required to verify payments will work; • how unused monies are to be treated and whether they can be banked; and • how to administer and manage pooled budgets. Public information should be reviewed regularly (at least every two years) to ensure they are working effectively and remain relevant. R9 Work together to establish a system to fully evaluate Direct Payments that captures all elements of the process – information, promotion, assessing, managing and evaluating impact on wellbeing and independence. R10 Annually publish performance information for all elements of Direct Payments to enable a whole system view of delivery and impact to support improvement	
NPT Annual Audit Summary 2021	Mar-22	12.01.2023	Local	Council	16.03.2022	N/A	N/A	No recommendations	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Local Government Financial Sustainability Tool	Feb-22	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Care Home Commissioning for Older People	Dec-21	12.01.2023	National	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2 recommendations for Welsh Government / No recommendations for local government	N/A	No Recommendations listed	
Audit of NPT's Assessment of Performance (Dec 21) (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 12/01/2022 14:01 (npt.gov.uk)	Dec-21	12.01.2023	Local	Cabinet	12.01.2022	N/A	N/A	No recommendations	N/A	No Recommendations listed	

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Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE

26th January 2024

Report of the Audit Manager – Anne-Marie O’Donnell

Matters for Decision

Wards Affected: All Wards

Internal Audit Update Report & 23/24 Internal Audit Plan Amendments

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide details of the internal audit work undertaken since the last Governance & Audit Committee meeting in October 2023.

It is also necessary at this time to amend the Internal Audit Plan, previously agreed by this committee, due to the number of audit days lost to sickness and a vacancy.

2. Executive Summary

Since the last committee meeting a total of 17 reports have been issued and 5 Post Audit Reviews have been undertaken.

Appendix 1 of this report details the formal audit reports issued, Appendix 2 gives details of progress against the plan for 23-24 and

Appendix 3 provides a response from the Chief Finance Officer in relation to Report Number 31 – Court Deputy Service.

Appendix 4 provides a response from the Director of Strategy & Corporate Services in relation to Report Number 41 – Mandatory Training Strategy & Corporate Services Directorate

3. Background

One of the terms of reference of this Committee is to ‘monitor internal (and) external audit performance’. In order to comply with this requirement to monitor the in-house service, an update is given below outlining internal audit work undertaken since the Governance & Audit Committee meeting held on 12th October 2023.

In addition, information is provided for members on the current position regarding staffing issues within the team.

Due to the number of days lost due to sickness and a vacancy it is necessary to gain members’ approval to remove a number of audits from the internal audit plan.

4. Staffing Issues

One member of staff is currently on long term sickness, another has returned to work following long term sickness absence and will be working reduced hours for a period.

There is also currently one vacancy within the team. Following a recent recruitment drive it was not possible to appoint to the vacant auditor post. In light of this it was agreed to change the post from an auditor to a trainee auditor. The new post will offer the successful candidate the opportunity to gain the Certified Internal Auditor Qualification.

As at the 31st December a total of 129 audit days have been lost to sickness and 53 lost due to the vacancy.

5. Audit Work Undertaken

Since the last committee meeting a total of 17 formal reports, as at 31st December 2023, have been issued in line with normal reporting processes.

Final Reports Issued

7 Primary Schools

Community Independence Service

National Fraud Initiative (NFI) – Blue Badge Parking Permits to Benefits

Agency Deceased Persons

National Fraud Initiative (NFI) – Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Court Deputy Service

Direct Payments Monitoring

South Wales Trunk Road Agency Payments Processes

iTrent Sickness Pilot

Disabled Facilities Grants

Mandatory Training – Strategy & Corporate Services Directorate

1 private item

In addition to the audits undertaken which resulted in the issue of a formal report the following work has also been undertaken:

- The Audit Manager has attended the fortnightly meetings of the Social Services Quality Practice Strategic Group.
- The Audit Manager has attended the Social Care Case Management Platform Project Board meetings.
- The Audit Manager and Senior Auditor are undertaking investigations in line with the Authority's Disciplinary Policy and Processes.
- The Senior Auditor has attended the iTrent System (Payroll & HR) Project Board meetings.
- The Audit Manager had attended the Leisure Insourcing Project Board meetings.

- 2 special investigations are in progress
- Staff have continued to provide advice to staff from across the Authority.
- 5 Post Audit Review has been undertaken, details of which are provided below.

6. Post Audit Reviews Undertaken & Recommendations Tracking

There have been no issues identified with recommendations not being implemented.

Audit Report Title	Number of recommendations made	Issues identified during Post audit Review
Cwmtawe Community School	4	3 recommendations have been implemented, the 4 th was trialled but was not deemed to be as efficient as previous processes. This was accepted and agreed by the Auditor.
Amazon Procurement Card Purchases	2	All recommendations are currently being progressed. The Audit Manager has attended working group meetings to address their implementation and wider issues which have since come to light.

Hillside Secure Children's Home	4	All recommendations have been implemented
Ysgol Gymraeg Ystalyfera Bro Dur	4	All recommendations have been implemented
Neath Register Officer	5	4 recommendations have been implemented. The 5 th in relation to a new till system cannot be progressed at this time discussions are ongoing.

7. Audit Plan Amendment

As previously stated in this report due to lost audit days it will not be possible to complete all the audits contained in the previously agreed internal audit plan. It is therefore proposed the following amendments are made to the plan.

Audit Name, number of days & risk rating	Proposed action & reasons for proposals
Decarbonisation 20 days High	That this audit is carried forward to the 24/25 plan. The Head of Property & Regeneration is currently recruiting for a Decarbonisation Strategy Manager and an Energy & Carbon Reduction Manager. It would therefore be more appropriate to delay the audit until both posts are recruited to.
City Deal Projects 15 days High	That this audit is carried forward to the 24/25 plan. It was intended that an audit would be undertaken of the Homes to Power Station Project. However there has been very little

	spend to date on this project and it has been subject to a review by Welsh Government and no issues were identified..
Sandfields Business Centre 25 days High	That this audit is carried forward to the 24/25 audit plan.
In House Domiciliary Care 25 days High	That this audit is removed from the plan due to a review currently being undertaken by the service. This has been agreed with the Head of Adult Services. Internal Audit will act in the role of “critical friend” following the service review.
3 rd Party Top Ups 15 days Medium	That this audit is removed from the plan. The Head of Adult Services requested that the audit be deleted due to their being limited scope within the legislation for any meaningful changes to be made.
Schools Admissions 35 days High	That this audit be carried forward to the 24/25 audit plan.
Harm Outside the Family 10 days Medium	That this audit be deleted, it has been carried forward previously and is now no longer required.
Empty Properties 20 days Medium	That this audit work be combined with the Homelessness Audit.
Music Service 10 days Medium	That this audit which has been rolled forward from previous years be deleted.

Should there be any days “saved” elsewhere within the plan then the high risk audits to be rolled forward will be started this year.

It is intended that the low rated audits which are in the plan remain as they provide assurance to the Section 151 Officer in relation to the statement of accounts process. They will also provide work for the trainee auditor when appointed.

8. Integrated Impact Assessment

There is no requirement to complete a new assessment for the changes proposed within this report.

9. Valley Communities Impact

No impact

10. Workforce Impacts

No impact

11. Legal Impacts

No impact

12. Risk Management Impacts

The work of Internal Audit is key in relation to ensuring compliance with internal controls. This work forms part of the Council's overall risk management arrangements.

13. Consultation

There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

14. Recommendations

That members note the content of the report and appendices and approve the proposed revisions to the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan.

15. Reason for Proposed Decisions

To comply with the Committee's Terms of Reference and the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

16. Implementation of Decision

It is proposed that the decision is implemented immediately.

Appendix 1 – Audit Reports Issued.

Appendix 2 – Audit Plan Monitoring.

Appendix 3 – Response from Chief Finance Officer relating to Report No. 24.

Appendix 4 – Response from the Director of Strategy & Corporate Services relating to Report No. 41.

Officer Contact:

Anne-Marie O'Donnell

Audit Manager

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Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Report Ref	Responsible Head of Service & Report Subject	Report Conclusion	Assurance Rating
R27	Head of Adult Services Community Independence Service	<p>It was identified during the audit that recent changes to the positioning of the service within Social Services has created uncertainty around the appropriate criteria for individuals to access the service. The recent changes have involved a change in line management and the service now forms part of Housing and Homelessness. However, it was confirmed that there will be no change to service delivery.</p> <p>Recommendations were made in relation to the need to update the Authority’s website with up to date service information; team workloads and cover when staff are absent; staff supervision records and driver documentation.</p> <p>5 recommendations were made 2 of which were high priority and 3 medium priority. All recommendations made were accepted.</p>	Reasonable
R28	Head of Education Development Sandfields Primary School	The school is complying with current DBS guidance. Robust controls were found to be operating in all areas tested and no recommendations were made.	Substantial
R29	Chief Finance Officer	As a result of this review, 357 matches were reviewed, one instance of suspected fraud was identified and has been passed to the Department for Work & Pensions for investigation. It was also	Reasonable

Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Report Ref	Responsible Head of Service & Report Subject	Report Conclusion	Assurance Rating
	NFI Blue Badge Parking Permits to Benefits Agency Deceased Persons	<p>established that there are weaknesses in the systems currently in place for the recovery of Blue Badges in the event of the holder’s death.</p> <p>Recommendations were made in relation to a revision of current practices in respect of the recovery of Blue Badges when the holder dies and on how to ensure that Blue Badge system is kept up to date.</p> <p>2 recommendations were made 1 of which was high priority and 1 was medium priority. All recommendations made were accepted.</p>	
R30	Head of Education Development Gnoll Primary School	<p>The school was found to be complying with current DBS guidance in relation to staff and advice was given in relation to Governors’ DBSs. Good controls were found to be in place in relation to most areas tested. Recommendations were made in relation to Purchasing/Procurement Cards and Cash Collection, which once implemented will enhance the good controls already in place.</p> <p>In total 2 recommendations were made both of which were low priority. Both recommendations made were accepted.</p>	Reasonable
R31	Chief Finance Officer Court Deputy Service	<p>The service has recently undergone significant staffing changes. The longstanding manager has retired and a new manager and deputy manager appointed.</p>	<p>Limited Please see appendix 3</p>

Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Report Ref	Responsible Head of Service & Report Subject	Report Conclusion	Assurance Rating
		<p>Good controls were found in relation to the Office of Public Guardian Fees and use of pre-payment cards. However weaknesses were found in a number of areas. Recommendations were made in relation to staff training with the need to prioritise safeguarding and health & safety training; delegation of vehicle administration; use of the Caspar IT system; review and update of client documentation; review and update of policy documents to ensure alignment to the Office for Public Guardian; the further roll out of pre-payment cards; management of the waiting list and cataloguing of the safe contents. In total 12 recommendations were made 8 of which were high priority, 3 medium priority and 1 low priority. All recommendations made were accepted.</p>	
R32	<p>Head of Adult Services Direct Payments Monitoring</p>	<p>It was identified during the audit that the Financial Assessments Team are experiencing considerably higher volumes of work following the pandemic. This has consequently impacted the time available for staff to complete Direct Payment financial reviews and audits. It is recognised by senior staff within the Direct Payments Support Service (DPSS) that there is a large backlog of reviews to be undertaken, however the team are working to address this issue currently. The main weaknesses identified related to delays in financial audits and reviews of need being undertaken. It is</p>	Reasonable

Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Report Ref	Responsible Head of Service & Report Subject	Report Conclusion	Assurance Rating
		<p>important that these issues are addressed to ensure the best use of public monies.</p> <p>Recommendations were made in relation to clearing backlogs; supervisory reviews; formulation of an escalation protocol when issues cannot be agreed and the updating of policies and procedures. The Assessments Manager and the Operational Manager for direct payments have set up regular meetings to address the recommendations made.</p> <p>In total 6 recommendations were made 3 of which were high priority and 3 medium priority. All recommendations made were accepted.</p>	
R33	Head of South Wales Trunk Road Agency (SWTRA) SWTRA Payment Processes	<p>Overall good controls were found to be in place for the payment of invoices. The recommendations made related to IT storage capacity; the addition of another procurement card within the service and compliance with the relevant accounting instructions.</p> <p>In total 3 recommendations were made 2 of which were medium priority and 1 low priority. All recommendations made were accepted.</p>	Reasonable
R34	Private Item		

Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Report Ref	Responsible Head of Service & Report Subject	Report Conclusion	Assurance Rating
R35	Director of Strategy & Corporate Services iTrent Sickness Recording Pilot	This review was undertaken following the work the Senior Auditor undertakes as part of the iTrent project board. The pilot covered only 10% of the workforce who were predominantly office based. A number of errors were identified which were attributed to the need for more comprehensive training prior to rolling the process out further. Only 1 high priority recommendation was made in relation to the need for more training.	Reasonable
R36	Head of Education Development St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School (Neath)	The school was found to be complying with current DBS guidance. Good controls were found to be in place for all areas tested other than the procurement of goods and services and the school’s unofficial fund administration. Two low priority recommendations were made and accepted.	Reasonable
R37	Head of Education Development YGG Castell Nedd	The school is complying in full with current DBS guidance. Good controls were found in all areas tested and no recommendations were made.	Substantial
R38	Head of Housing & Communities Disabled Facilities Grants	Overall, findings relating to the administration of the grant were positive. It was noted that the current waiting list will consume the next financial year’s budget. The team has seen the removal of client contributions by the Welsh Government for small/medium grants, with no equivalent funding to bridge the gap. If the increased trend	Reasonable

Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Report Ref	Responsible Head of Service & Report Subject	Report Conclusion	Assurance Rating
		<p>for the service continues it will see clients facing a longer wait time and impact on other services provided by the Authority.</p> <p>Recommendations were made relating to giving consideration to how these grants will be funded in future; recording of visits to properties and the need for Driver Declaration checks for staff to be undertaken.</p> <p>In total 3 medium priority recommendations were made and accepted.</p>	
R39	Head of Education Development Crymlyn Primary School	The school was found to be complying in full with current DBS guidance. Robust controls were found to be operating in all areas tested and 1 low priority recommendation was made, and accepted, in relation to the timing of the coding of procurement card purchases.	Substantial
R40	Head of Education Development Blaenhonddan Primary School	The school is complying with current DBS guidance and robust controls are operating in all areas tested. No recommendations were made.	Substantial
R41	Director of Strategy & Corporate Services	The sample of Strategy & Corporate Services teams examined during this audit had completed only 35.8% of all of the mandatory training courses. However in relation to safeguarding (68.9%) and GDPR (71.1%) there was significantly better compliance.	Limited Please see appendix 4

Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Report Ref	Responsible Head of Service & Report Subject	Report Conclusion	Assurance Rating
	Mandatory Training – Strategy & Corporate Services	Mandatory training provides staff with the skills and knowledge they need to identify, minimise and report risks during their day to day activities. Non-compliance with mandatory training exposes NPTCBC to unnecessary reputational, financial, health & safety and safeguarding risks. In total 8 recommendations were made of which 3 were high priority and the remaining 5 medium priority. All recommendations made were accepted.	
R42	Head of Education Development YGG Tyle’r Ynn	The school was found to be complying in full with DBS guidance. Robust controls were found to be operating in all areas tested and no recommendations were made.	Substantial
R43	Chief Finance Officer NFI Council Tax Reduction Scheme	No fraud was detected in any of the 85 matches reviewed. Robust controls were found to be operating in both the Housing Benefit and Council Tax teams in relation to the administration of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. No recommendations were made.	Substantial

Assurance Categories:

Substantial Assurance - Substantial assurance is provided in relation to the effectiveness of the internal controls operating at the time of the audit.

Appendix 1 – Published Reports

Reasonable Assurance - Reasonable assurance is provided in relation to the effectiveness of the internal controls operating within the service which will be further enhanced by the implementation of the agreed recommendations.

Limited Assurance - Limited assurance is provided in relation to the effectiveness of the internal controls operating within the service audited. The Head of Service is required to provide a written response to the Governance & Audit Committee on actions taken to address the issues raised during the audit.

No Assurance - Following the audit no assurance can provided in relation to the internal controls operating within the service audited and the Head of Service will be required to attend this committee to advise members of what actions they have taken to address the failings identified during the audit.

Appendix 2 – Audit Plan Monitoring at 31st December 2023

Audit Plan Item	Risk Rating	Quarter 1 position as at 31stMay 2023	Quarter 2 position as at 30th September 2023	Quarter 3 position as at 31st December 2023
Ethics – Members(carried forward from 22/23)	M		Audit paused due to resource issues	Audit will be picked back up in January 2024.
Decarbonisation	H			
Payroll	H			Audit in planning stage
Council Tax	L			
Housing Benefits	L			
National Non-Domestic Rates	M			
Debtors	L			
Creditors (monthly checks)	M	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
Creditors	M		Audit complete and report issued	
Risk Management	M			Audit in planning stage
Direct Payments (added from contingency budget)	H		Audit complete and draft report issued	Final report issued.
Capital Programme	H		The Audit Manager has attended meetings of the Capital Programme Steering Group	The Audit Manager has continued to attend meetings of the Capital Programme Steering Group

Appendix 2 – Audit Plan Monitoring at 31st December 2023

Court Deputy Service (added at request of Chief Finance Officer)	H			Audit complete and report issued.
Licencing	M	Audit in planning stage	In progress	Audit almost complete, paused due to staffing constraints
Accident Reporting	H		Audit in planning stage	Agreed at October committee to incorporate into individual service audits
Performance Management Framework	M			Audit in planning stage
Cyber Security	H			Audit in planning stage
Glamorgan Education Trust Grant & any other grants received	M		Independent Examination completed & opinion produced	
Primary Schools	M	4 schools audited	6 schools audited	13 schools audited
Comprehensive Schools	H	1 school audited		1 audit in progress
Safe Recruitment in Comprehensive Schools	M			Audit in progress
Music Service (carried forward from 22/23)	M			

Appendix 2 – Audit Plan Monitoring at 31st December 2023

Health & Safety/Accident Reporting in schools	H			Agreed in October meeting to add additional tests into the current school audit programmes
Schools admissions	H			
Leisure Services Insourcing	H	Steering group meeting attended.	Steering group meetings attended	Steering group meetings attended
Waste Costs	H			
Stores	H			Advice given when sought
South Wales Trunk Road Agency – Payment Processes	M		Audit in progress	Audit complete and report issued
City Deal Projects	H			
Sandfields Business Centre	H			
Waste Transfer Station (added from contingency budget)	H		Audit in planning stage	Audit in progress
Empty Properties	M			
In-house domiciliary care provision	H			
Supported Living Arrangements	H			Audit in planning stage

Appendix 2 – Audit Plan Monitoring at 31st December 2023

Follow up on use of respite care (carried forward from 22/23)	M		Audit paused due to resource issues	Audit paused due to resource issues. It is anticipated that it will be concluded before the end of February 2024.
3 rd Party Top-ups (clients in residential or nursing care)	M			
Harm Outside the Family (carried forward from 22/23)	M			
Disabled Facilities Grants	M	Audit in planning stage	Audit in progress	Audit complete and report issued.
Homelessness to include youth homelessness	H			
Community Independence Team	M	Audit in progress	Audit complete and draft report issued	Final report issued.
Procurement Cards	H		Audit complete and report issued	
Officers Declarations	M		Audit Complete and report issued	
Mandatory Training (added from contingency budget following concerns raised)	H			1 directorate audit complete. Others in progress.

Appendix 2 – Audit Plan Monitoring at 31st December 2023

National Fraud Initiative (NFI)	H	Reports being reviewed	2 reports issued	4 reports issued
Special Investigations & Whistleblowing	H	3 in progress	1 completed and 2 in progress	1 completed and 2 in progress
Staff Association/Lottery	Not applicable	Advice has been given and bonus draws attended.	Advice has been given and bonus draws attended.	Advice has been given and bonus draws attended
Vision Impaired West Glamorgan	Not applicable			Audit in progress
FOI requests	Not applicable	All received have been answered	All received have been answered	All received have been reviewed
Attendance at working parties & task & finish groups	Not Applicable	Various attended	Various attended	Various attended and 1 report issued.
Advice & Guidance requests	Not applicable	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

Appendix 3 – Response from the Chief Finance Officer relating to report no. 34

To: Governance & Audit Committee

From: Chief Finance Officer – Huw Jones

Subject: Internal Audit Report No 34 – Court Deputy Service.

By way of background the Court Deputy Service has recently undergone some staffing changes. The long serving manager has retired and a new manager and deputy manager appointed.

All recommendations made within the report are accepted and will be implemented.

The major recommendations related to staff training; revision/updating of policies and client documentation; client vehicle administration and the Casper IT System.

Whilst there has been some improvement in the mandatory training which needs to be undertaken it has not been achieved within the timescale recommended by the auditor. I have instructed the service manager to ensure that the outstanding training is completed as a priority.

The other recommendations require some significant changes to current working practices and I have asked the Audit Manager to keep me abreast of the implementation of these recommendations.

Huw Jones
Chief Finance Officer

Appendix 4 – Response from the Director of Strategy & Corporate Services relating to report no. 41

To: Governance & Audit Committee

From: Director of Strategy & Corporate Services – Noelwyn Daniel

Subject: Internal Audit Report No. 41 – Mandatory Training Strategy & Corporate Services Directorate.

All of my Heads of Service have accepted the recommendations made within the Internal Audit report. They have committed to ensuring that their teams undertake the mandatory training in line with the timescales recommended by the Auditor.

Since the original report was issued, 15th December 2023, the latest data shows that there has been good progress made by staff in completing the mandatory training courses.

As records held within iTrent (the payroll and HR system) are updated, with training data, automatic reminders will be sent to staff when mandatory training is due. This will help prevent future occurrences of noncompliance as managers will also be notified when their staff are due to undertake refresher training.

Noelwyn Daniel
Director of Strategy & Corporate Services

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GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

2023-2024

Governance and Audit Committee (10am unless otherwise stated)

Meeting Date 2024	Agenda Item	Type	Contact Officer
21 March	Draft Internal Audit Strategy & Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25	Decision	Diane Mulligan/Anne-Marie O'Donnell
	Internal Audit Quarterly Update Report	Information	Diane Mulligan/Anne-Marie O'Donnell
	Special Investigations Update Report	Information	Diane Mulligan/Anne-Marie O'Donnell
	Springing forward report – CMB 17 th January/Cabinet 24 th January	Information	Louise McAndrew/Sheenagh Rees
	Audit Wales – Strategic Workforce Management – NPTCBC – Organisation Response.	Information	Sheenagh Rees
	Strategic Risk Register	Information	Louise McAndrew
	Corporate Governance – Code of Corporate Governance	Information	Caryn Furlow-Harris
	Audit Wales – Use of Performance Information Service User Perspectives and Outcomes	Information	Caryn Furlow-Harris/Audit Wales

By virtue of paragraph(s) 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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