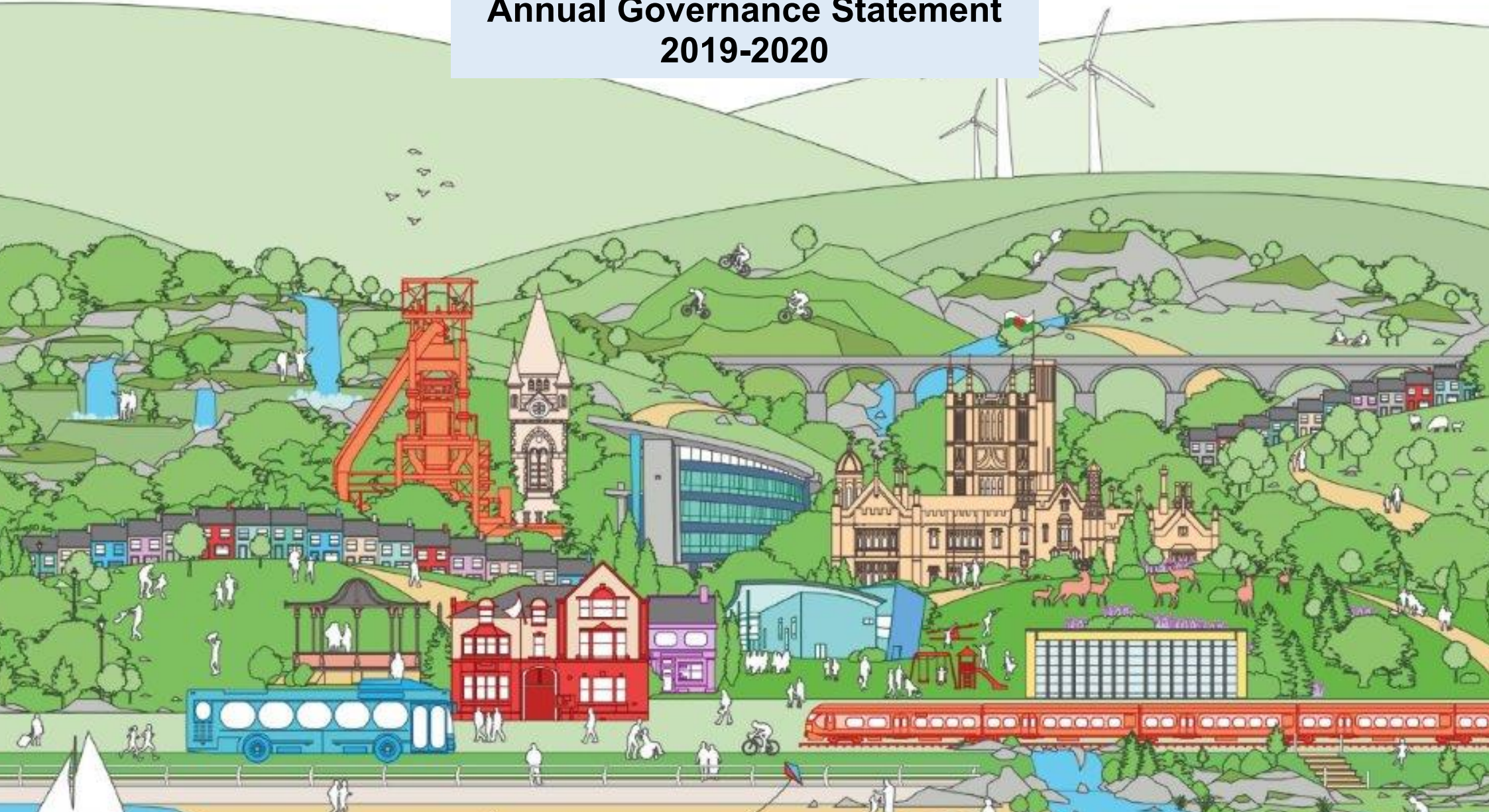


## **Addendum (COVID-19)**

### **Neath Port Talbot Council Annual Governance Statement 2019-2020**



## Introduction

By mid-March 2020, before mobilising an emergency response to the developing Covid-19 national emergency, the Council had prepared the draft Annual Governance Statement (2019/2020). The draft Statement, which set out the Council's system of internal controls before the pandemic, was approved by the Council's Cabinet on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2020 subject to early and urgent review of the improvement work outlined for action during 2020/2021 due to the impact of the pandemic. In addition, on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2020, a briefing paper from the CIPFA Better Governance Forum was received which set out a number of matters to be considered when finalising the Annual Governance Statement (2019/2020) as a result of the pandemic.

This Addendum has been prepared to meet the above requirements and sets out:

- Section 1** - The changes to the Council's system of internal controls (up until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020) which were required to ensure the Council was able to take action in step with policy decisions taken by the Welsh Government and the UK Government
- Section 2** - A lessons learned review on the adequacy and effectiveness of the above changes
- Section 3** - A reassessment of the Council's governance arrangements as part of recovery planning to ensure they remain effective
- Section 4** - The output from the work undertaken above has informed a revised improvement work table for 2020/2021. The original improvement work for 2020/2021, identified as part of the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020 has been re-prioritised.

## **Section 1 - Changes to the Council's system of internal control during the response phase (middle to end of March 2020)**

In the middle of March 2020, the Council mobilised an emergency response to the developing Covid-19 national emergency situation. To ensure the Council was able to take action in step with policy decisions taken by the Welsh Government and the UK Government a number of changes to the Council's system of internal controls were initiated.

The changes are outlined below, categorised by the 7 principles of good governance which make up the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016).

### **Principle A – Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of the law**

A clear governance structure for providing leadership, taking decisions and monitoring impact was established at the outset of the Covid-19 emergency situation. The structure is attached at Appendix 1 for information. All meetings of the Incident Management Team were supported by the Emergency Planning Unit who took notes of all meetings held. Decisions made by the Executive were documented in accordance with the Council's Urgency Action arrangements as set out in the Constitution, with manual administrative processes adapted to work in a digital environment. External meetings convened by the WLGA and Strategic Co-ordination group meetings were also minuted and fed back into the Incident Management processes.

### **Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**

- Formal meetings of the Council were suspended when the UK and Welsh Government introduced emergency lockdown measures as the Council would not have been able to comply with the emergency measures in force

related to essential travel and social distancing. The Council's Urgency Action process was initiated to enable decisions required by the Executive to be made to in accordance with the Council's Constitution, relevant laws and regulations. Scrutiny chairs were consulted routinely about decisions requested from the Executive to ensure inclusive decision making. All decisions made under the above arrangements were published on the Council's Modern.gov system – making them available to all members of Council and to members of the public (except for private items).

- A number of mechanisms were deployed to ensure communication with all Members of Council. In addition to the urgency actions being published on Modern.gov, regular bulletins and e mails were sent to Members focusing on the key changes that had been taken or were being planned. The Leader has set up meetings on a fortnightly basis with the opposition group leaders to brief them on the situation and similarly, the Cabinet is meeting informally on a fortnightly basis to overview the developing situation.
- The Head of HR met with the Trade Union and Teaching Association representatives on a weekly basis from 31<sup>st</sup> March – 9<sup>th</sup> June, and from 9<sup>th</sup> June these meetings continue on a fortnightly basis, to ensure sharing of information, providing a forum for the raising of concern, and seeking TU input on key workforce matters. The Chief Executive has regularly attended these meetings.
- The Communications Service was enhanced and delivered on a 7 days / week to ensure public health messages were consistently promoted across all channels owned / commissioned by the Council. During the emergency response the Council commissioned radio broadcasts and sent a letter to all households, in addition to the channels that existed prior to the crisis. Accurate and timely information was provided about changes to service delivery, including the establishment of new services to support vulnerable people. Regrettably, it was not possible to maintain bi-lingual communication during the crisis period due to lack of linguistic capacity in the organisation.

- The Council also brought into operation its citizens' panel to help secure feedback from the resident population on the way in which the population was experiencing the restrictions on community life. The Citizens Panel has been designed to be demographically and geographically representative of adults living in the county borough.
- Because civic offices were closed as part of lockdown arrangements, staff from the One Stop Shops were redeployed to the Council's corporate contact centre and all staff enabled to work from home. The Contact Centre work was refocused to support the emergency response and daily data reports were provided to enable the pattern of interactions between the Council and its residents to be tracked.
- Reliance on digital services increased significantly during the emergency response phase. ICT work plans were re-prioritised to focus infrastructure and software developments on supporting the emergency response. This has entailed a rapid roll out of remote working technologies and also the creation of new software systems to enable the Council to interact with the resident and business communities.
- The Council's Digital Services team developed at pace an online form for customers who felt that they would have difficulty making their agreed Council Tax payments as a result of the pandemic. The form captured all information needed by Council Tax staff at source, enabled them to deal quickly and efficiently with customer requests and provide re-profiled payment schedules.
- The Council, via well-established links with local businesses located in our premises, provided 4 months' rent free to help alleviate some of the ongoing financial issues faced by businesses across our communities.

### **Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits**

- The Council was required to implement changes to services and functions at pace as part of a UK-wide approach to protecting the public health. It is clear that the impact of the measures introduced have been felt differently across

geographies and between people who share protected characteristics. However, the anticipated peak of infection was suppressed and the local NHS was not overwhelmed.

- The key planning arrangements have been suspended during this period. Statutory duties related to the publication of key plans, such as the Council's Corporate Plan, Strategic Equality Plan, were relaxed by the UK and Welsh Government's to enable concentration on the management of the emergency response. The extended nature of the emergency means that key documents that were due to be presented for approval at the beginning of this financial year will now be largely redundant. We are now revisiting our forward plans and will be adjusting our priorities in light of the changed circumstances.

#### **Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes**

- The Chief Executive established and chaired an Incident Management Group to provide professional leadership which met daily, seven days a week. The Group was comprised of Corporate Directors, Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer and Heads of Service, as appropriate. Key issues discussed and decided at the daily Incident Management Group were recorded and briefed to daily meetings between the Leader and Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer. Information was also cascaded down to operational teams via the respective chief officers. Work tasked from the Group ensured the Council quickly assembled (and where required deployed) emergency responses and enabled changes to happen in service delivery / design during the following months. For example:
  - Decisions were taken to close down services to assist in reducing the spread of the disease as well as focussing regulatory services on ensuring compliance with new legislation and guidance by local businesses and other organisations.
  - The response enabled plans to be deployed quickly enabling service changes to ensure critical services could operate safely over the following months. For example, innovating across safeguarding services to fulfil



statutory safeguarding responsibilities using digital platforms; supporting care providers to minimise the risks involved in providing personal care across community and residential settings; re-prioritising and adapting street-scene services to keep refuse and recycling services operational; and re-shaping services at crematoria and burial grounds in line with governmental advice. Staff using remote technology increased from an average of 50 per day to over 1,500 per day over the first four weeks of the outbreak as many were required to work from home using Microsoft Teams. New software services created through collaboration between business rates, economic development and digital services staff created on-line services to enable the rapid payment of government grants to over 2,000 businesses – the value of payments made to date exceeding £25 million. Similarly, collaboration between finance, education and digital services teams have enabled payment of funds to over 5,000 parents of pupils entitled to free school meals and the data sciences skills within digital services enabled lists of people advised to shield to be matched with other data to support the development of systems needed by the NPT Safe and Well Service. For those who are digitally excluded, over 1,350 devices have been issued to pupils who have no suitable device or Wi-Fi connection at home which will ensure no learner is excluded from learning because of technology limitations in their household.

- New service responses included the NPT Safe and Well Service, which was set up to support people who were told to shield themselves from the virus and other vulnerable people with daily living tasks. Childcare provision was provided through a network of school-based hubs to ensure the most vulnerable learners and the children of key workers were well supported.
- The Leader participated in the network of meetings established by the Welsh Local Government Association. This enabled the Council to escalate issues where needed but also had early notice of additional changes required.
- Informal meetings of the Cabinet were held as well as regular meetings between the Leader, Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer with opposition group leaders to provide regular briefings on changes taking place and to receive feedback.
- The Council's emergency response was undertaken in alignment with the work of the South Wales Local Resilience Forum which convened a series of Strategic Co-ordinating Group meetings – with a focus on facilitating co-ordination across the different arms of the public service.

- Joint arrangements were also agreed between Swansea and Neath Port Talbot councils and the Swansea Bay Local Health Board to oversee the local health and social care response.



## **Principle E – Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**

- The Head of Service Workforce Planning Group, chaired by the Director of Environment, with representative Heads of Service from each Directorate and a trade union representative have also met on weekly and then fortnightly basis to discuss and develop workforce planning in response to the emergency situation, including the redeployment of staff to the frontline, critical recruitment and the training necessary to support both measures.
- The Council’s Human Resources Service was refocussed to support the workforce as many were required to work from home using new remote technologies;
- Clear guidance was made available on the Council’s internet to ensure employees had an information point for updates in relation to the changing situation; this included Frequently Asked Questions;
- On-line and telephone based support was created to provide employees with advice and reassurance if their ability to work was affected by their own health conditions, caring responsibilities or because their work had significantly changed or had temporarily been suspended.
- Staff unable to undertake normal duties were invited to redeploy into roles required to support the emergency situation and significant training support was provided to enable them to safely undertake these roles, with advice from Health and Safety and agreed safe systems of work risk assessments in place.
- Personal Protective Equipment was sourced and provided to staff in accordance with the guidance advised by governments and as identified in local risk assessments.
- Adaptations to working environments for critical workers were made to comply with prevailing guidance.
- Regular dialogue has taken place between HR, the trade unions and the Chief Executive. This has included the joint development of a ‘return to workplaces’ risk assessment and guidance, as well as agreements on joint workforce messaging;

- Use has been made of video technology to maintain visibility of senior leaders at a time when all were required to work from home.
- On-line learning has been extended and promoted to the workforce with good take up.
- One to one support was provided to those elected members and officers who required it to ensure everyone who needed to use the remote technology was able to do so.

## **Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**



- All costs incurred in responding to the outbreak have been assigned to a project code enabling a clear audit trail to be available to identify and substantiate the costs of response, backed up by decisions taken under urgency provisions, where required.
- Health & Safety – Risk assessments undertaken which identify the range of protective measures put in place to protect staff and service users, such as: Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and workplace redesign to ensure social distancing. This has also extended to home working with the development of a Risk Assessment App.
- Risks to public health were managed through the Incident Management Team described earlier in this Addendum.
- Scrutiny through the political process was initially suspended at the outset of the emergency as lockdown measures were introduced without notice. Amendments to existing legislation to permit all meetings to be held remotely were not introduced for some time after the emergency response had been mobilised. In place of scrutiny, Members were provided with regular information about developments and provided with named contact officers in Democratic Services to follow up any queries from elected Members.

- A number of datasets required to support local and national performance management arrangements were temporarily suspended. Consequently, the Annual Report for 2019-20 will not provide a complete set of performance data for that financial year. A similar position will emerge in 2020-21.
- Routine monitoring reports, such as the Risk Register, Performance Indicators etc have been temporarily suspended to concentrate resources on managing the emergency. As the Council moves forward from emergency response towards recovery those systems of governance that have been disrupted will need to be reviewed and appropriate checks and balances restored.

### **Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver accountability**

- Planned internal and external audit programmes have been disrupted during the emergency response situation.
- The Corporate Governance Group met once between March and July 2020 - the focus of the meeting was to review the Annual Governance Statement prepared for 2019-20 and to prepare this Addendum.
- The main impact for the 2019/20 Internal Audit Plan was in relation to work nearing completion not being completed and Internal Audit Reports not being compiled, finalised and issued in relation to work undertaken in 2019/20. The majority of the unfinished reports will have been completed and issued during the early part of 2020/21.

## Section 2 - A lessons learned review on the adequacy and effectiveness of the above changes

<b>What Went Well</b> 	<b>What Didn't Go So Well</b> 
<p>Clear structure put in place to support the management of the emergency which provided for speedy communication internally and externally</p>	<p>7 day/week working over an extended period has been challenging. Welfare systems were introduced at an early stage in dealing with the emergency but the reality is that a core of staff and elected members have been working excessive hours</p> <p>Poor and delayed communication from Welsh Government on important issues, coupled with lack of certainty on how requirements were going to be funded created additional pressure and risk—arrangements worked best when local government co-produced the guidance and there was consultation over priorities.</p>
<p>Speedy adaptation of administrative processes to enable the Executive to function under Urgency Procedures during the initial response period when formal meetings could not be legally convened</p>	<p>Additional promotion of the urgency action arrangements could have helped some elected members and members of the public/stakeholders access the decision records earlier</p>
<p>Expansion of communications function and use of additional channels of communication to enable the public to understand the decisions being taken and</p>	<p>Communications through the medium of Welsh have not been possible in the emergency response phase due to capacity limitations within the communications</p>

how to access services during the emergency period	<p>team and the need to turn around communications at a very fast pace</p> <p>Radio will have bridged the communications gap for some digitally excluded people but most communications have relied on digital platforms</p>
Rapid deployment of remote technologies to enable home working at scale and rapid development of new software systems to provide new services during the emergency response period	<p>There were initial performance problems as large numbers of people began to use the remote technologies. That was remedied in quick time by the Digital Services Team. Longer term, more sustainable solutions will be introduced but will necessarily take longer to implement safely.</p>
Ability to re-purpose and re-prioritise at pace to respond to the emergency	<p>Generally, there have been few problems associated with the re-purposing and re-prioritisation of the Council's work. Work to respond to those advised to shield was in tension with work to establish community champions in the early stages, but this was quickly resolved through dialogue between local elected members and officers.</p> <p>There has been a variable response from the Council's partners – some partners have been able to respond quickly and effectively, however, some partners in the third sector were not able to mobilise a response.</p>
Financial monitoring – systems were put in place immediately to code all expenditure linked to the emergency response. Additional work has been undertaken across services to identify lost income. All of this has been fed into the national meetings	<p>Because of reliance on traditional channels, it was a significant effort to administer some of the new payments. This has highlighted the importance of making greater progress on implementing digital</p>

where the financial impact of the crisis has been debated	methods of working across a number of our services and functions
Partnership working enabled the response to be deployed quickly and effectively. For example the partnership working between the Council, Swansea Council and the Health Board to build the field hospital at Llandarcy	The response from other partners has been more mixed. It will be important to understand the reasons for this and to refresh the Council's partnership arrangements taking on board the lessons learned, including the way the Council targets resources.

**Section 3** – Priorities for action following a reassessment of the Council’s governance arrangements as part of recovery planning to ensure they remain effective

**Democratic arrangements** – continuous review of arrangements in being undertaken to evolve democratic arrangements when meetings will be held remotely. Planning and preparation for a period when it may become possible to meet face to face but some of the methods of working developed during the crisis may permanently change the way in which the Council wants to administer its business. These arrangements will be developed with Members and supported through the Democratic Services Committee.

**Audit** – refocusing of the audit work programmes to focus on issues related directly to the crisis (eg verification of the recovery of expenditure incurred to manage the crisis etc); revisiting risk assessments to identify priorities for forward programme of work for Internal Audit (eg the extent to which services and functions have changed the way they operate and the types of controls in place to secure probity, stewardship etc).

**Health, safety and welfare** – ensuring risk assessments and associated control measures are robust across the Council to protect the workforce, those who need to use our services and functions and to uphold confidence in the Council’s response to the ongoing situation.

**Equalities and other impacts**- ensuring there is scrutiny of the extent to which the changes implemented and planned discharge the Council’s legal obligations. (Ensuring democratic oversight of the wider impact on the community arising from the crisis and how this may vary between geographies and between people who share protected characteristics).

**Finance** – understanding the one-off and recurring costs associated with the situation and the impact of this on the Council’s financial health.

**ICT** - ensuring there is an assessment of the impact of innovation on Information Risk and suitable measures in place to manage the risks.



**Business Continuity** – a review of business continuity planning to identify lessons learned for both the ongoing situation and for future incidents. (Assurance that emergency response can be mobilised quickly to any rise of infection across the county borough or to local clusters/outbreaks).

**Statutory duties** – careful consideration of Council responses to statutory duties suspended or relaxed during the emergency situation to ensure lessons learned from the emergency response inform choices made about the way such statutory duties are discharged into the future.

**Partnership working** – ensure the lessons learned from mobilising the emergency response, inform future choices made about partnership working.

**Capacity and capability** – review the Council’s workforce planning priorities to ensure they continue to be aligned with the organisation’s priorities given the challenges and opportunities associated with the ‘new normal’. This includes developing longer term methods of working based on what we have learnt during the pandemic and drawing on our experience of delivering services in different ways, embracing new technologies in order to do so. Our leaders will need to manage this change, helping employees adapt as we move forward, developing their skills sets and helping the Council to evolve in the post-pandemic era.

## Section 4 - An updated governance improvement work table (2020/2021)

The output from the work undertaken above has informed a revised improvement work table for 2020/2021. The original improvement work for 2020/2021, identified as part of the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement 2019/2020 has been re-prioritised.

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law		
Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021	Responsible Officer
A1	Areas of work identified following a reassessment of governance arrangements as part of recovery planning and the associated governance improvement priorities:	
	A1i – Democratic arrangements - continuous review of arrangements in being undertaken to evolve democratic arrangements when meetings will be held remotely.	Strategic Manager - Policy & Democratic Services
	A1ii – Audit - refocusing of the audit work programmes to focus on issues related directly to the crisis and revisiting risk assessments to identify priorities for forward programme of work for Internal Audit	Head of Financial Services
	A1iii – Health, safety and welfare - ensuring risk assessments and associated control measures are robust across the Council to protect the workforce, those who need to use our services and functions and to uphold confidence in the Council's response to the ongoing situation.	Corporate Governance Group
	A1iv – Equalities and other impacts - ensuring there is scrutiny of the extent to which the changes implemented and planned discharge the Council's legal obligations. (Ensuring democratic oversight of the wider impact on the community arising from the crisis and how this may vary between geographies and between people who share protected characteristics).	Strategic Manager – Policy & Democratic Services
	A1v - Finance – understanding the one-off and recurring costs associated with the situation and the impact of this on the Council's financial health	Head of Financial Services
	A1vi - ICT - ensuring there is an assessment of the impact of innovation on Information Risk and suitable measures in place to manage the risks.	Strategic Manager - ICT

**Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021	Responsible Officer
	A1vii – Business Continuity – a review of business continuity planning to identify lessons learned for both the ongoing situation and for future incidents. (Assurance that emergency response can be mobilised quickly to any rise of infection across the county borough or to local clusters/outbreaks).	Head of Human Resources
	A1viii - Statutory duties – careful consideration of Council responses to statutory duties suspended or relaxed during the emergency situation to ensure lessons learned from the emergency response inform choices made about the way such statutory duties are discharged into the future.	Corporate Governance Group
	A1xi - Partnership working – ensure the lessons learned from mobilising the emergency response, inform future choices made about partnership working	Corporate Governance Group
	A1x - Capacity and capability – review the Council’s workforce planning priorities to ensure they continue to be aligned with the organisation’s priorities given the challenges and opportunities associated with the ‘new normal’.	Head of Human Resources
A1.1.2	Report annually to the Corporate Governance Group and Standards Committee to give an assurance that the Member Code of Conduct is fit for purpose	Head of Legal Services
A1.4.4	Update the constitution and bring a report to members in Autumn 2020 following royal assent of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill.	Head of Legal Services
A1.4.6	Whistle Blowing Policy to be reviewed in 2020 and published on the council website.	Head of Human Resources
A1.4.7	Revise Corporate Complaints Policy in 2020 (to include: implementation of the Complaints Standards Authority for Wales (CSA) powers; recommendations from an internal audit review report which was received in November 2019; further staff guidance within the complaints process for disability related reasonable adjustments; further staff guidance in relation to covert recording and further staff guidance in relation to managing querulous/persistent complainants).	Strategic Manager Policy & Democratic Services
A2.2.2	Deliver six courses in relation to Recruitment and Selection and Safe Recruitment.	Head of Human Resources

**Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021	Responsible Officer
A2.3.3	To provide training on implementation of Contract Procedure Rules - training to be scheduled for Spring 2020 and bi annually thereafter.	Head of Legal Services
A2.4.1	Report annually to the Cabinet on the implementation and operation of the Ethical Employment in Supply Chain Policy - add to Cabinet forward work programme for 2020-2021.	Head of Legal Services
A2.4.2	To ensure that a copy of all partnership agreements are logged centrally with the Head of Legal Services – by the end of March 2021.	Head of Legal Services
A3.4.1	Reports annually to the Corporate Governance Group to give an assurance that the current system for dealing with data protection breaches is fit for purpose - add to agenda for 2020-2021.	Head of Legal Services

**Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021	Responsible Officer
A4.1.3	To undertake a review of FOI Publication Scheme in 2020-2021 with a report to Cabinet for approval.	Head of Legal Services
A4.13.1	Where relevant incorporate proposals for improvements from external regulators audit work into the Council's 2020-2021 corporate planning arrangements.	Strategic Manager Policy & Democratic Services

**Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits**

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021	Responsible Officer
A5.1.1	Incorporate the findings from the Audit Wales review of our performance, risk and business planning arrangements in 2020-2021 into CPMS.	Strategic Manager Policy & Democratic Services

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

Ref (action)	Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021	Responsible Officer
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See A5.1.1

**Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**

<b>Ref (action)</b>	<b>Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-21</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>
None identified		

**Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**

<b>Ref (action)</b>	<b>Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>
A8.14.1	A review of Data Processing, Data Protection and Data Sharing work will be undertaken by the Information Governance team in 2020 and central records kept of data sharing.	Head of Legal Services
A1	A1xi To identify further training opportunities in order to provide additional clarity as to the role of Audit Committee Members and strengthen the Audit Committee function.	Head of Finance

**Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability**

<b>Ref (action)</b>	<b>Improvement Action to be undertaken during 2020-2021</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>
A9.5.1	To deliver governance awareness training across the Council in 2020-2021	Head of Legal Services / Strategic Manager Policy & Democratic Services

**Signed:**



**Chief Executive: Steven Phillips**

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020**

**Signed:**



**Leader of the Council: Councillor Rob Jones**

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020**