

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 19<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2023

REFERENCE FROM HOMES AND SAFE COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE: 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2023

“315 DRAFT VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT  
2022/23 (REF) –

The reference from Cabinet of 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2023 was presented by the Director of Environment and Housing for consideration by the Committee. The Annual Self-Assessment formed part of the Council’s legislative requirements and performance management framework, which entailed the self-assessment of its work against the Annual Delivery Plan, which formed part of the overall Corporate Plan for 2020 to 2025. The Draft Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment report 2022/23 was appended at Appendix A, with an “easy read” version at Appendix B.

This was a considerable piece of work, which evaluated a wide range of performance, engagement and other data insights from the Council’s annual planning and performance framework including the annual Directorate Self-Assessment and Peer Challenge process which enabled the Council to draw conclusions on how well it was using its resources to support the achievement of the Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives. This also tied in with how Directorate services were applying the five ways of working [Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015].

The Council believed that on balance it had met its Annual Delivery Plan commitments for 2022/23, in what continued to be another challenging year for the Council. It had attributed a judgment of ‘Good’, reflecting the achievement of over 85% of in-year activities and performance target. Use of resources by the Council was also judged to be ‘Good’ because it had good evidence of how resources had been used economically, efficiently, effectively and equitably to enhance performance, achieve outcomes, meet need and was in a strong position to secure future service improvements. From the review, assessment and on-going monitoring work undertaken throughout the year via the internal and external audit work programme as well the findings of the performance evaluation, reasonable assurance could be given that the governance arrangements for the Vale of Glamorgan Council continued to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Workshops and other means of engagement with partners, trade unions, local businesses, residents and Council staff were also undertaken as part of this self-assessment process.

Following the presentation of the report, the following comments and questions were raised by the Committee:

- Councillor Haines approved of the “easy read” format of the Annual Self-Assessment report, but asked if the report could be made shorter to enhance its accessibility further. He also felt that by its nature, the report was perhaps overly “positive” compared to the comments he received from residents in his ward on Council services, etc. His views would be taken on board, including the need to produce a more “bite size” version of the report. In terms of residents’ views on Council services and support, there was a “gap” between what the Council said it would do and the public’s perception of what it wanted the Council to do. It was important therefore for residents’ views and concerns to be fully factored into the assessment.
- Councillor Campbell queried whether the self-assessment was a wholly retrospective document or if it was still “live” due to some projects referred to within it either being live or they had not started yet. It was confirmed that the report was retrospective, but any projects that had started during the period the report covered would be included. If there were any projects that were felt to have been included outside the scope of the period, then these would be taken back to the appropriate officers for consideration.
- On Councillor Hanks’ query on the progress being made with recruitment and retention, it was explained that challenges remained in certain specialist areas and disciplines, i.e. engineering and refuse drivers, where remuneration remained highly competitive in both the private and public sector jobs markets. The Council was addressing this in terms of remuneration and other means of attraction and retention, such as offering flexible working arrangements wherever possible and to make sure that the job valuation process was fit for purpose. Overall however, the Council’s recruitment and retention remained good with relatively low turnover in staff.
- The Vice-Chair wanted to build on the easy read nature of the report and on the accessibility of the self-assessment process itself to all residents in the Vale through using a wide range of formats and not relying on social media or digital which would not be accessible to or readable for all residents and communities. She also added that it was important for the Council and Elected Members to provide an honest and open assessment on the provision of services by the Council to residents in light of current economic pressures and to counter the more “toxic” and untrue statements that were provided on social media around this and the work of Council staff. It was agreed to take back the suggestions around formats and accessibility to Performance colleagues. It was important to engage in a way people wanted to be engaged with. On the issue of misleading information on social media, it was important that the Council provided as much information as possible on its services to the public in order to address this and to inform residents on how the Council spends its budget in terms of services, such as during the budget setting process. This would help manage residents’ expectations in an honest, open and realistic way.
- Councillor Lloyd-Selby highlighted the incredible amount of hard work that had been undertaken by the Council such as with free school meals despite significant challenges with the cost of living crisis. It was therefore important to

highlight to residents in the report, as part of its introduction, that it was reporting on things the Council said it would do, as well as the prioritisation of essential services, particularly those for the most vulnerable in society. However, it was important to also emphasise that this was not the extent of the Council's ambition but that it simply did not have the resources to do so at this time. It was also important to encourage Vale of Glamorgan residents to participate in the self-assessment process and to ensure the Council was a "listening Council" with the emphasis of wanting to hear from residents about the issues that mattered to them. The Director of Environment and Housing agreed with the points raised and would refer these back to Performance colleagues for their consideration.

Scrutiny Committee, having considered the reference and appended report, subsequently

**RECOMMENDED – T H A T** the following comments of the Homes and Safe Communities Scrutiny Committee be passed to Cabinet:

- To consider producing a "bite size" version of the report, in order to provide a shorter version for Elected Members and residents. This would build upon and enhance the "easy read" aspect of the document already in place.
- As part of the introduction to the report, it should clearly outline that it will be addressing those areas and services that the Council said it would do, as well as highlight the Council's need to prioritise essential services, particularly those for the most vulnerable in the Vale of Glamorgan. It was important to highlight the Council's achievements, particularly in terms of those areas and services which it had said it would do. Consideration should also be given to include a statement around the Council's ambitions and aspirations, but this needed to be coupled with the inclusion of a realistic, honest and sober assessment of the current challenges and pressures that the Council faced in providing services, such as the impact caused by the cost of living crisis.
- It was important to encourage Vale of Glamorgan residents to participate and engage in the self-assessment process, and to ensure the Council was a "listening Council" with the emphasis on wanting to hear from residents about the issues and services that mattered to them, as well as where they felt resources should be focussed. As part of this, it was vital for the Council to communicate to the public about the services it provided and what it could and could not do due to the current economic and other pressures that it faced. This would help to ensure that the Council could manage residents' expectations on the services and other areas of support that they expected the Council to provide.
- To look to ensuring that the report and the means of engagement with the self-assessment process itself were provided in as many different formats as possible, which would enable greater accessibility and engagement with the residents of the Vale of Glamorgan in this process.

### Reason for recommendation

In order for Cabinet to consider the comments raised by the Committee prior to the

final Vale of Glamorgan Annual Self-Assessment Report being considered by the Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet and thereafter presented for endorsement by Full Council.”