

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE: 17TH FEBRUARY, 2025

REFERENCE FROM CABINET: 6TH FEBRUARY, 2025

“C246 VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (EL/PR) (SCRUTINY – CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES) –

The Leader presented the Council’s Panel Performance Assessment and proposed response to the recommendations for areas of improvement.

Taking part in the Panel Performance Assessment had been timely as it coincided with the development of the new Corporate Plan and would work hand-in-hand to increase performance. The Vale of Glamorgan Council was only the third Local Authority to have undergone the process which was a new experience for all concerned.

Appendix A to the report contained the report of the independent Panel of peers, with the Overall Conclusion that “The Panel assessed the Vale of Glamorgan to be a good Council within the current context of high service demand, operational pressures, and resources. It is a values-based organisation with a good internal culture and solid external relationships. There is a clear commitment to delivering on the Corporate Plan, with a particular focus on prioritising the needs of vulnerable people. Staff are enormously proud to work for the Council, and there is a strong sense of ambition for the future.”

The Leader, when referring to paragraph 2.10 of the report concerning Local Context, said it was important to talk about the Vale of Glamorgan as a County rather than as a Council which was being addressed in the new Corporate Plan. Paragraph 2.11 referred to Strengths and Areas of Innovation and the Leader said she was pleased that it had been recognised that the Council had established itself as a values-based organisation built on a strong positive culture, with that culture demonstrating “a strong appetite for innovation and a willingness to do things differently”.

The Panel’s report made four Recommendations contained in paragraphs 2.17 to 2.20 of the report, with the Council’s response to those Recommendations detailed in paragraphs 2.25 to 2.38.

The Leader was pleased with the outcomes of the Panel Performance Assessment and grateful for the opportunity to reflect on how the Council might improve and thanked the Panel for the time they spent in the Vale of Glamorgan and for their insight into Council practices. Councillor Wilson also thanked the Members, Officers and various stakeholders who contributed to the Assessment.

The Deputy Leader endorsed the findings of the Assessment, particularly in regard to being considered as a values-based organisation and looked forward to further feedback and discussion at Governance and Audit Committee.

This was a matter for Executive decision and thereafter Full Council.

Cabinet, having considered the report and all the issues and implications contained therein

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the content of the report and appendices be noted.
- (2) T H A T the report and appendices be referred to Governance and Audit Committee for their consideration at the meeting of 17th February, 2025, with any comments reported back to Cabinet for further consideration.
- (3) T H A T the report and appendices, and the views of the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet, be referred to Full Council for consideration and approval.
- (4) T H A T Full Council considers the report and the views of the Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee and approves the Council's response to the Panel Performance Assessment.
- (5) T H A T following consideration and approval by Full Council, delegated authority be granted to the Director of Corporate Resources to send the response to the Panel Performance Assessment to the members of the Panel, the Auditor General for Wales, HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales and the Welsh Ministers.
- (6) T H A T Cabinet receive updates on the progress to implement the recommended areas of improvement in due course, including as part of the Council's next Annual Self-Assessment report later in 2025.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting.
- (2) To enable Governance and Audit Committee to consider the report, to discharge their duties under Part Six of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, 2021 and for Cabinet to subsequently consider the views of the Governance and Audit Committee.
- (3) To enable Full Council to consider the report and the views of Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee.
- (4) To enable Full Council to consider and approve the response to the Panel Performance Assessment.

(5) To comply with the requirement for the Council to publish its response to the Panel Performance Assessment and provide this to a range of specified recipients.

(6) To ensure the actions taken to progress the recommended areas of improvement are reported to Cabinet, consistent with the requirements of the Act.”

Attached as Appendix: Report to Cabinet – 6th February, 2025

Meeting of:	Cabinet
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 06 February 2025
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Corporate Performance and Resources
Report Title:	Vale of Glamorgan Council Panel Performance Assessment
Purpose of Report:	To present to Cabinet the Council’s Panel Performance Assessment and proposed response to the recommendations for areas of improvement.
Report Owner:	Executive Leader and Cabinet Member for Performance and Resources
Responsible Officer:	Rob Thomas, Chief Executive
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	The Panel Performance Assessment involved interviews with a wide range of Elected Members and Officers as described in the report.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet and thereafter Full Council.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <p>Part Six of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced a range of changes to the way principal Councils exercise their performance and governance functions. This includes a requirement for annual self-assessment which is a process the Council has undertaken for the past two years.</p> <p>In addition, the legislation introduces the requirement for an external assessment of the extent to which the Council is meeting the Act’s ‘performance requirements’ via a panel of peers. This assessment must be undertaken once in each electoral cycle. These are known as Panel Performance Assessments (PPA).</p> <p>In June 2024, Cabinet approved proposals for the PPA to be undertaken in 2024 as part of a report on the Council’s Annual Performance Calendar. The Council worked with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) to undertake the PPA in November 2024.</p> <p>The Panel have provided a report to the Council containing their findings and four areas of recommendation for improvement. The Panel’s report can be found in Appendix A.</p> <p>The Council has a statutory duty to respond to the Panel’s report and the proposed response is outlined in this report.</p> <p>The legislation requires the Governance and Audit Committee to consider the Council’s proposed response and share their views with the Cabinet. This report therefore also sets out the process for the Panel’s report and Council’s response to be considered by Cabinet, Governance and Audit Committee and ultimately Full Council.</p>	

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet welcomes and notes the contents of this report and appendices.
2. That Cabinet refers this report and appendices to Governance and Audit Committee for their consideration at the meeting of 17th February 2025, with any comments reported back to Cabinet for further consideration.
3. That Cabinet refers this report and appendices, and the views of the Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet, to Full Council for consideration and approval.
4. That Full Council considers this report and the views of the Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee and approves the Council's response to the Panel Performance Assessment.
5. That following consideration and approval by Full Council, delegated authority be granted to the Director of Corporate Resources to send the response to the Panel Performance Assessment to the members of the panel, the Auditor General for Wales, HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales and the Welsh Ministers.
6. That Cabinet receive updates on the progress to implement the recommended areas of improvement in due course, including as part of the Council's next Annual Self-Assessment report later in 2025.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. To enable Cabinet to consider the Panel Performance Assessment report and proposed response to the recommended areas of improvement.
2. To enable Governance and Audit Committee to consider the report, to discharge their duties under Part Six of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act, 2021 and for Cabinet to subsequently consider the views of the Governance and Audit Committee.
3. To enable Full Council to consider this report and the views of Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee.
4. To enable Full Council to consider and approve the response to the Panel Performance Assessment.
5. To comply with the requirement for the Council to publish its response to the Panel Performance Assessment and provide this to a range of specified recipients.
6. To ensure the actions taken to progress the recommended areas of improvement are reported to Cabinet, consistent with the requirements of the Act.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021 (LG&E) which came into effect from 1st April 2021 places new duties on all Welsh Local Authorities. The performance and governance provisions in the Act (Part Six) are framed within the wider sustainable development duties of the Well-being of Future

Generations Act and align to the Socioeconomic Duty (which came into effect on 31st March 2021) and our audit, regulatory and partnership arrangements.

- 1.2** The performance framework requires the Council to keep performance under review, consult and report on our performance through annual self-assessment and arrange and respond to a Panel Performance Assessment (PPA). These duties are embedded in the Council’s Annual Performance Calendar of activities which is reviewed annually.
- 1.3** The Council is required to arrange an independent PPA at least once during an electoral cycle, which means that for Councils in this electoral term, the PPA must take place between May 2022 and May 2027.
- 1.4** Chapter Three of the Statutory Guidance for Part Six of the Act describes the PPA and that “The panel performance assessment will assess, as the council does through self-assessment, the extent to which the council is meeting the performance requirements. It is not about checklists, it is not a form of inspection, and it is not an audit. It is about supporting the council to achieve its aspirations through developing and deepening its understanding about how it is operating, and how it can ensure it is able to offer effective services for the long term”.
- 1.5** Cabinet considered a report in June 2024 setting out a process for reviewing the Council’s Corporate Plan, undertaking a PPA and the Council’s corporate performance calendar. At that meeting (Minute C26 refers), it was resolved that: “Cabinet approves the timetable, approach and scope of the Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) as outlined in the report and delegates authority to the Director of Corporate Resources in consultation with the Leader and Chief Executive to agree the terms of reference for the PPA with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), the appointment of the Panel members and associated administrative arrangements.”
- 1.6** Cabinet referred the report of 6th June 2024 to all Scrutiny Committees and Governance and Audit Committee for their awareness and consideration. The following comments (as relevant to the PPA) were made by Committees.

Committee	Comments	Response
<u>Environment and Regeneration</u>	Queries regarding involvement of ‘backbench’ Members.	A focus group of Elected Members was incorporated as part of the PPA process.
<u>Corporate Performance and Resources</u>	Was the Panel process the first time the Council was undertaking said process and would be it timely? Who would be appointing the membership of the Panel and was consideration being given	Confirmed this as the first PPA and timing chosen due to development of the new Corporate Plan. Confirmed the appointment was delegated to the Director of Corporate Resources in consultation with Chief

	to the political balance of its members?	Executive and Leader and that consideration would be given to the choice of the single Elected Member peer in terms of political affiliation.
Learning and Culture	How would the PPA assist in the development of the new Corporate Plan? What discussion has taken place with other Local Authorities? Will the Youth Council be involved?	Confirmed the timing would enable independent views to be shared on the draft Corporate Plan. Confirmed this was a new process. However, Cabinet will note the Council participates in the Heads of Policy knowledge-sharing network. Youth representation was part of the PPA process.
Healthy Living and Social Care	None relevant to the PPA.	N/A
Homes and Safe Communities	None relevant to the PPA.	N/A
Governance and Audit	None relevant to the PPA.	N/A

- 1.7** The comments from these Committees were considered and incorporated into the final arrangements for the PPA which took place from 12th – 15th November 2024.
- 1.8** Whilst it is the Council’s responsibility to arrange the PPA, the WLGA have developed a programme of support for Local Authorities. As agreed by Cabinet in June 2024, the Council commissioned the WLGA to appoint the Panel and facilitate the PPA on its behalf. The requirements of the Act mean that as a minimum the panel needed to include an independent chair, a peer from the wider public, private, or voluntary sectors and from outside the Council a serving Local Government senior officer and a senior elected Member.
- 1.9** The WLGA has secured funding to support the delivery of the PPA process in 2024/25 and as such, costs have been limited by working with them.
- 1.10** The WLGA have produced national guidance for scoping a PPA and the Council submitted a scoping document to frame the process in the autumn of 2024. The scoping document provided an overview of the Vale of Glamorgan and the Council, and outlined our vision, well-being objectives and how they contribute to achieving the vision for the Vale of Glamorgan. The scoping document also provided details of resources, threats, opportunities and areas for improvement. The scoping document was informed by the Council’s latest annual self-

assessment findings and recent regulatory assessments in line with the guidance. The scoping document also shaped the focus of the PPA.

1.11 PPAs must assess the extent to which the Council is meeting the performance requirements from the Act. The performance requirements are the extent to which the Council:

- is exercising its functions effectively;
- is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and
- its governance is effective for securing the above.

1.12 The PPA was also an opportunity to sense check our emerging improvement plans as part of the development of the Corporate Plan 2025-30, the Reshaping Programme and also the associated arrangements to enable the effective delivery of these. The timing had been specifically selected to coincide with the development of these areas of the Council's work and enable the PPA findings to be reflected within their final arrangements. As such, the PPA scoping document contained three local questions for the Panel to consider:

- Leadership: How effective are our leadership arrangements in understanding and communicating the challenges and direction of the organisation?
- Corporate Plan: Is our approach to developing the Corporate Plan and the associated performance arrangements one that will set an ambitious but realistic vision for the Vale and enable us to demonstrate delivery of key outcomes?
- Transformation: Does our emerging Transformation Programme have the potential to change the way we work to support delivery of our objectives in the context of significant financial challenges?

1.13 The Director of Corporate Resources, in consultation with the Leader and the Chief Executive finalised the scoping document for the PPA, the administrative arrangements and the appointment of the Panel of four peers, supported by the WLGA.

1.14 This report sets out the findings from the PPA, including the Panel's report and the Council's proposed response.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

Panel Performance Assessment Report

2.1 Appendix A to this report contains the report of the independent Panel of peers. The Panel's report is structured into the following sections:

- i. Context
- ii. The Panel
- iii. Scope & Approach
- iv. Overall Conclusion
- v. Local Context

- vi. Strengths & Areas of Innovation
- vii. Local & National Challenges
- viii. Overview of Findings: Areas of Local Focus
- ix. Areas of Local Focus: Recommendations of Areas of Improvement
- x. The extent to which the Council is exercising its functions effectively
- xi. The extent to which the Council is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively
- xii. The extent to which the Council has effective governance in place
- xiii. Statutory Areas: Recommendations
- xiv. Improvement Support
- xv. Acknowledgements

2.2 The following paragraphs provide a summary of the Panel’s report for each of these sections.

Context, The Panel and Scope and Approach

2.3 These sections provide the context of the PPA including the preparatory arrangements and the legislative context.

2.4 Cabinet will note that the Panel of peers commissioned was consistent with the statutory guidance of membership and comprised:

- Independent Chair – Sally Loudon, former Chief Executive of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), former Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Council.
- Senior Member Peer – Neil Prior, Pembrokeshire County Council, Cabinet member for communities, corporate improvement, and the well-being of future generations (Independent Member).
- Senior Officer Peer – Ellis Cooper, Chief Executive Officer, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
- Peer from the wider public, private, voluntary sector: Anna Randle, Strategic Advisor, New Local – Independent think tank and network.

2.5 This section also provides details of the local as well as statutory performance requirements that the Panel considered during the assessment. Paragraph 3.5 of Appendix A provides Members with a list of the significant breadth of stakeholders the Panel met with individually or as part of focus groups, including Elected Members and staff of varying levels from the Council as well as representatives from many partner organisations, the Trade Unions, the Youth Council and others.

Overall Conclusion

2.6 The Panel’s report states that “The Panel assessed the Vale of Glamorgan to be a good Council within the current context of high service demand, operational pressures, and resources. It is a values-based organisation with a good internal

culture and solid external relationships. There is a clear commitment to delivering on the Corporate Plan, with a particular focus on prioritising the needs of vulnerable people. Staff are enormously proud to work for the Council, and there is a strong sense of ambition for the future”.

- 2.7** This section of the Panel’s report provides contextual information regarding the timing of the PPA as aligned with the development of the new Corporate Plan and Reshaping Programme.
- 2.8** The report indicates that “Our [the Panel’s] approach to the assessment was ambitious because the Council itself is ambitious for its communities. In terms of its PPA scope and by linking it with its transformation programme, the Council had demonstrably embraced the assessment process. We considered this to be an exciting and pivotal moment for the authority, and the Council possesses strong foundations to drive future growth and development”.
- 2.9** Paragraph 4.6 of the Panel’s report contains a summary of the recommendations for areas of improvement covering both local areas of focus and the statutory performance requirements and are described in further detail later in this report.

Local Context

- 2.10** The local context section of the report provides a range of information relating to the Vale of Glamorgan as a county and also the Council, including population and demographic data, information relating to industry and the housing market as well as the political makeup of the Authority.

Strengths and Areas of Innovation

- 2.11** The Panel have identified a range of strengths and areas of innovation relating to the Council. These include the view that the Council had established itself as a values-based organisation built on a strong positive culture, with that culture demonstrating “a strong appetite for innovation and a willingness to do things differently”. The Panel also noted that the “strong working relationships between the Leader, Chief Executive, senior staff and members demonstrated a cohesive and supportive working environment”. The Panel highlight the strength of the Council’s “positive relationships with a range of internal and external stakeholders” as well as making reference to the Let’s Talk About Life in the Vale survey results relating to people’s satisfaction with the Vale of Glamorgan as a place to live and work.

Local and National Challenges

- 2.12** In keeping with the approach being taken in other PPAs, the Panel have noted the pressures being faced by Local Authorities across Wales in section seven of the report. This section makes reference to demand, finance and people-based pressures as well as the climate and nature emergencies.

Overview of Findings (Local Areas) and Areas of Local Focus: Recommendations of Areas of Improvement

- 2.13** Section eight of the Panel’s report provides a detailed commentary in relation to their work in examining the three local questions set as part of the scope of the PPA by the Council which are referenced in the background section of this report.

- 2.14** With regards leadership, the Panel conclude that “it is our view, having heard the various responses during these interviews, that the Council has effective leadership in place with well-regarded and respected leaders”.
- 2.15** In terms of the Corporate Plan, the Panel describe the Plan as “ambitious” and that “the Council has been astute in timing the PPA to assist in the development of the draft corporate plan”. The Panel conclude the Council “is at an early stage of demonstrating outcomes” and “whilst staff are behind the ambition in the corporate plan, some expressed concern about the capacity to deliver it”.
- 2.16** Regarding the transformation programme, Reshaping, the Panel conclude that “overall, the Council is well-positioned to achieve these goals, and the right ingredients are in place. The Council has demonstrated a strong track record of innovation and a commitment to delivering high-quality services”. As for the Corporate Plan, the Panel note “whilst staff are optimistic and confident in the transformation programme, concerns about the capacity and the pace of change have been raised”. The Panel have also referenced that “the Council has a good reputation with the majority of partners ranging from statutory through to more informal local partnerships.
- 2.17** The Panel’s report makes three recommendations for improvement relating to the local areas of focus as follows:

Rec1.	<p>Planning for Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council would benefit from developing and effectively communicating a narrative that articulates a positive vision for the future, which is relatable to multiple audiences and has a call to action. In doing so it could be a catalyst for change for the Vale of Glamorgan as a County, drawing together partners, stakeholders, the business sector, and communities.
Rec2.	<p>Signalling Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council should consider how it signals and amplifies its changing approach both within the organisation and across the Vale.
Rec3.	<p>Building on existing, strong partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising the democratic convening role that the Council has in leading partnerships, whilst recognising when to lead and when to support wider partnerships to take the lead in the provision of services. • Taking the opportunity to create the time and space to strategically assess and review the partnership landscape, strengthening relationships and assessing where resource and energy is best spent for the wider benefit of the place in order to make the biggest difference • Working with stakeholders on getting the “brilliant basics” right that reflects the needs of the local community. • Leverage the collective capacity of the Vale of Glamorgan and continue to build innovative joint working arrangements with neighbouring Councils.

The Performance Requirements and Statutory Areas: Recommendations

2.18 A summary of the Panel’s findings regarding the three performance requirements is as follows:

i. The extent to which the Council is exercising its functions effectively	“The Panel concluded that overall, the Vale of Glamorgan Council exercises its functions effectively... and there were no identified areas of concern”.
ii. The extent to which the Council is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively	“From the evidence we have heard and within the current high levels of service demand and financial pressures faced by all local authorities across Wales the Council is using its resources effectively and efficiently”.
iii. The extent to which the Council has effective governance in place	“We consider the Council has effective governance arrangements in place but there are areas which could be further developed”.

2.19 Members will note that the report at Appendix A provides further detail regarding how these judgements were reached and the methodology for the Panel doing so. In particular, paragraph 12.3 of the Panel’s report provides suggestions from the Panel regarding Members, their roles and the effectiveness of Scrutiny and Council meetings.

2.20 The Panel made one recommendation for improvement regarding the performance requirements as follows:

Rec4.	Governance and using resource effectively <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing and revising the cycle of formal democratic meetings and formal reporting requirements, exploring ways to better engage members in more proactive and cross chamber collaboration – in both formal and informal ways including reviewing the effectiveness of online meetings.• Reviewing the balance between the internal corporate demands placed on members and their role as representatives of their constituents to deliver the Council’s vision of place.• Using the strong local politics as a force for good, whilst ensuring civility in public life is promoted and kept front and centre to encourage respectful and constructive debate including online and in-person meetings.• Enhancing the effectiveness of the Council’s scrutiny arrangements, specifically meetings, by assessing current practices to identify opportunities for improvement to make them more effective.
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Improvement Support and Acknowledgements

2.21 The Panel’s report concludes with details of the improvement support available (as at all times) from the WLGA and a series of acknowledgements from the Panel to colleagues who have assisted with the assessment process.

The Council's Proposed Response to the Panel Performance Assessment

- 2.22** Cabinet is recommended to welcome and note the Panel's report. As the Panel observed, the choice of timing of the PPA amongst the first to be held in Wales was designed to be useful to the Council as part of developing the new Corporate Plan for 2025-30, Reshaping Programme and the arrangements associated with these. The PPA is also an important aspect of the Council's overall improvement work as described in the Annual Self-Assessment.
- 2.23** It is proposed that the Council accepts the conclusions in the Panel's report in full and will seek to follow the recommendations contained within it, including progressing actions to increase the extent to which the Council is able to meet the Act's performance requirements.
- 2.24** To do so, it is proposed that the recommendations made by the PPA as summarised above and in full in Appendix A will be progressed as follows.

Recommendation 1: Planning for place

- 2.25** The Council will progress this recommendation in the final version of the Corporate Plan 2025-2030 with revisions to be considered by Cabinet and Full Council in the coming weeks. The changes being made include:
- A summary section has been introduced at the beginning of the plan to focus more on the outcomes and difference the plan will make through its delivery.
 - Details have been included within the plan for each objective about the information that will be used to help understand progress and challenges. Each objective also details the outcomes we are looking to achieve over the next five years.
 - There is a stronger emphasis on the importance of partnership working throughout the document.
 - The content of the plan has been simplified, shortened and sections brought together to make the plan clearer to navigate and understand by different audiences.
- 2.26** The above is intended to respond to the Panel's feedback, notably observations regarding the Corporate Plan setting a vision for the Vale as a place and the way in which it has the opportunity to bring together a range of stakeholders in its delivery. Key to this is demonstrating the outcomes the Plan is seeking to deliver which for the first time are illustrated via a range of data 'measures' that the Council is not solely responsible for (for example, children living in relative poverty).
- 2.27** This work to address this recommendation will be progressed in tandem with recommendation two.

Recommendation 2: Signalling change

- 2.28** The Council welcomes the Panel's observations of the potential to do more to communicate the challenges it is facing and the recognition from Peers that there is a delicate balance between keeping ambition high and being open about the challenges.

- 2.29** Work is being taken forward to consider the communications to support publication of the Corporate Plan both internally and externally. This will include a series of events associated with the Corporate Plan's launch and making connections with the ten-year anniversary of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 2.30** For Council staff, the changes planned for the performance management of the Corporate Plan and how, via Directorate Plans, this links with individual objectives will enable colleagues to understand and demonstrate their contribution to the Plan's objectives. This builds on the significant staff engagement work that has been a feature of the Council's way of working (and recognised by the Panel) for many years. The opportunity to signal and amplify the changing approach to the way in which we are working will continue to be progressed via the Council's corporate induction, the six-monthly management development programme, Learning Café and internal communications activities such as the Chief Executive's weekly message and the new Corporate Plan and Reshaping Programme are an excellent and exciting opportunity to reinvigorate aspects of these engagement mechanisms.
- 2.31** Externally, work is advancing to develop a strategy for the way in which the Council will communicate key messages about our work in the future. This 'corporate narrative' will seek to demonstrate how the Council works, how the decisions we take are consistent with the well-being objectives, and do so with an increased emphasis on explaining this through the work of Council staff and the impact it has on residents. This will be a complementary area of activity with the Public Participation Strategy and will be an on-going process throughout the five-years of the Corporate Plan. Work will also be undertaken (in conjunction with recommendation four) to simplify and streamline the way in which Council reports are written and presented to make them as accessible as possible to a range of audiences.

Recommendation 3: Building on existing, strong partnerships

- 2.32** The introduction of the new Corporate Plan and Reshaping Programme both demonstrate the Council's willingness to work further in partnership to deliver improved outcomes for our residents. As described above, the Corporate Plan has been updated to reflect the Panel's observations and consultation feedback. The Reshaping Programme includes specific references to working in partnership, for example through the Strengthening Communities theme to work with communities and via the Service Transformation theme to look at new models of service delivery. The Corporate Plan contains a dedicated section, 'Working with Others', which sets out what those organisations the Council is working with can expect from us. This work has been progressing following the review of poverty-related work undertaken by Cwmpas and reported to Cabinet recently.
- 2.33** In response to this area of recommendation, the Council has commenced work to review the partnership landscape as the Panel recommended. This is being undertaken by the cross-directorate Strategic Partnerships Group which meets bi-monthly to make connections across the Council's strategic partnerships

including the Public Services Board, Regional Partnership Board, City Region and others.

- 2.34** It is proposed that the Strategic Partnerships Group will undertake a mapping exercise to identify the partnerships the Council is involved in, how these align with the Council's Corporate Plan priorities, the resources that are committed and the impact derived from our involvement. This will enable themes and categories of partnerships to be identified as by its nature, this landscape is very wide ranging. It is intended that this exercise will complement and bring to life the 'Working with Us' statement contained in the Corporate Plan and inform how we can communicate these commitments to partners and also with Council staff. Further reviews of the Council's approach to individual partnerships may then be undertaken.
- 2.35** In parallel with this strategic mapping work, the Brilliant Basics workstream of Reshaping will also consider how to progress aspects of partnership working the Panel have commented on, for example including working with Town and Community Councils.
- 2.36** It is proposed that this work will be reported to Cabinet as part of the established reporting on the Compendium of Collaboration and will also make connections with the Target Operating Model theme of Reshaping as it will contribute to the way the Council delivers services in the future.

Recommendation 4: Governance and using resource effectively

- 2.37** With the introduction of a new Corporate Plan comes the opportunity to review and reassess the way in which the Plan is monitored and scrutinised. Cabinet recognised this in the report which presented the draft Corporate Plan in October 2024 (Minute C128 refers). That report set out that "as part of the development of the new Corporate Plan and in response to feedback on the ADP, Annual Self-Assessment, Service Plans and scrutiny processes, work is being undertaken to consider how these elements can improve and evolve further, ensuring arrangements remain robust and support the need to be open, transparent and accountable". As such, the Council welcomes the views of the Panel and commits to undertake the recommended review of the cycle of formal democratic meetings and formal reporting requirements.
- 2.38** Meetings have already been undertaken with the Chairs/Vice Chairs of Scrutiny Committees and Group Leaders to discuss the scrutiny of key corporate performance work including directorate plans, the Annual Self-Assessment and performance reporting against the new Corporate Plan. A working group of senior officers has been established to consider the Panel's recommendations and the work already underway in this area. Proposals are being developed for a more wide-ranging review of Scrutiny and Committee arrangements, including opportunities to align the work of Committees with the future well-being objectives, looking at new approaches to reporting and scrutinising activity and consideration of ways to better engage Members in more proactive and cross chamber collaboration including reviewing the effectiveness of online meetings. Proposals will be presented to Democratic Services Committee, Cabinet and Full

Council for their consideration in the coming months with a target to have new arrangements in place following the Annual Meeting in May 2025.

Next Steps

- 2.39** The proposed approach to reviewing and approving the PPA report and Council's response is outlined in the Legal Implications section of this report below, highlighting the role of Cabinet, Governance and Audit Committee and Full Council.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1** The development of new Well-being Objectives as part of the new Corporate Plan will ensure that the Council is continuing to maximise its contribution to the Well-being of Future Generations Act and improve social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being.
- 3.2** The proposal to focus the PPA on how we are developing the new Corporate Plan was due to a desire to place the organisation in a strong position to ensure that we are embedding the five ways of working across the programme of work detailed in the report to Cabinet in June 2024.
- 3.3** Performance Management is an intrinsic part of corporate governance and integrated business planning which underpins the delivery of the Council's Well-being Objectives and associated commitments in its Corporate and Annual Delivery Plan. The Council's Annual Performance Calendar is our key means of demonstrating how we are meeting the performance requirements whilst contributing to the national well-being goals, of which this year, the PPA is an important aspect.
- 3.4** The Council's key plans and performance reports associated with the delivery of our Well-being Objectives have been structured around the Well-being of Future Generations Act's sustainable development principle to enable us to better evidence our contribution to the Goals.
- 3.5** The five ways of working are a key consideration in our Corporate Performance Management Framework ensuring that we continue to focus on working differently and in an inclusive way to challenge why, what and how we respond to our key performance challenges including in the design and delivery of the Council's response to the PPA.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no specific climate change and nature implications associated with this report. Members will note reference to these issues in the Panel's report and also inclusion in the draft Corporate Plan and Reshaping Programme.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** There are no specific financial implications associated with this report. The cost of the PPA was met by the WLGA with incidental expenses being met by the Council from within existing Corporate Resources budgets. Members will note the references to the Council's budget, medium-term financial strategy and transformation programme within the Panel's report.

Employment

- 5.2** There are no specific employment implications associated with this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.3** The Act and accompanying statutory guidance require the Council to take specific actions following the receipt of the Panel's report, namely:
- 5.4** "It is the responsibility of the Council, not the panel, to publish the panel report. As soon as reasonably practicable after receiving the report from the panel, the council must make the report available to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee and publish the report".
- 5.5** "The Council must prepare a response to the panel performance assessment report. In its response, the council is required to state: the extent to which it accepts the conclusions in the report; the extent to which the Council intends to follow any recommendations contained in the report; and any actions it proposes to take to increase the extent to which it meets the performance requirements".
- 5.6** "In responding, a Council should apply the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and formulate its response according to the five ways of working. This should apply to both what the council intends to do and how it intends to do it".
- 5.7** "A Council should also reflect on a panel performance assessment when undertaking its next self-assessment, to see whether the learning from the panel assessment has been put into action".
- 5.8** The statutory guidance also contains requirements relating to the involvement of the Governance and Audit Committee in this process:
- "The Council must make a draft of its response to the panel performance assessment available to its Governance and Audit Committee, which must then review the draft response and may make recommendations for changes to the response to the panel assessment. If the Council does not make a change recommended by the Governance and Audit Committee, it must set out in the final response the recommendation and the reasons why it did not make the change".
- 5.9** Finally, the guidance requires "upon completion of the above, as soon as reasonably practicable after finalising the response, the council must publish the

response and send the response to: the members of the panel, the Auditor General for Wales, HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales and the Welsh Ministers”.

- 5.10** As outlined in the recommendations of this report, it is recommended that Cabinet consider this report and refer on to the Governance and Audit Committee for their consideration prior to Cabinet’s final consideration and reference to Full Council for all elected Members to consider and approve the response to the PPA report.

6. Background Papers

[Statutory Guidance on Part 6, Chapter 1 of the Local Government and Elections \(Wales\) Act 2021](#)

[Cabinet: Annual Performance Calendar 6 June 2024](#)

[Cabinet: Draft Corporate Plan 10 October 2024](#)

[Cabinet: Reshaping Programme Update 10 October 2024](#)

Vale of Glamorgan Council Panel Performance Assessment

November 2024



1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 In accordance with the performance duties under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Vale of Glamorgan Council commissioned a Panel Performance Assessment (PPA) via the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).
- 1.2 The onsite assessment was completed over a four-day period concluding on 15 November 2024 with a feedback presentation provided to the Council outlining the key findings detailed within this report.
- 1.3 The assessment was undertaken based on the Council's agreed scoping document and the WLGA's PPA methodology, which was developed with the sector. The WLGA PPA methodology provides an overarching framework: the lines of enquiry are not prescriptive but provide guidance to the Panel on the areas that could be explored to meet the statutory duty. However, the extent to which the Panel explores those areas should be proportionate to the Council's scope but sufficient to enable the Panel to form a conclusion.
- 1.4 In accordance with the statutory guidance the PPA is not an audit or an inspection and does not seek to duplicate work undertaken by regulators and other bodies. Whilst the Panel has undertaken a corporate assessment, this assessment was not in-depth and should be considered alongside other sources of assurance such as the Council's own self-assessment, internal audit reviews, external audit, and regulatory reviews.
- 1.5 In preparing for the PPA, the Council scoped their requirements to maximise the value and impact of the assessment to the Council. The specific areas of focus identified by the Council are reflected in paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3.
- 1.6 This report provides a summary overview of the conclusions of the Panel reported by exception.

2.0 The Panel

- 2.1 The following peers were commissioned by the WLGA to undertake the assessment. Selection of the peers was agreed and at the discretion of the Council, based on suitability of skills and experience:
- 2.2 Through discussion and agreement with the Council, the following Panel members were selected to undertake the PPA:
 - Independent Chair – Sally Loudon, former Chief Executive of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), former Chief Executive of Argyll and Bute Council.
 - Senior Member Peer – Neil Prior, Pembrokeshire County Council, Cabinet member for communities, corporate improvement, and the well-being of future generations.
 - Senior Officer Peer – Ellis Cooper, Chief Executive Officer, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council.
 - Peer from the wider public, private, voluntary sector: Anna Randle, Strategic Advisor, New Local – Independent think tank and network.

2.3 The Panel was supported by Cerith Thomas, WLGA Improvement Officer and Emily Griffiths, WLGA Senior Support Officer.

3.0 Scope and Approach

3.1 The Panel is required to assess the extent to which the Council:

- Is exercising its functions effectively.
- Is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively; and
- Has effective governance in place for securing the above.

3.2 The Council identified the following areas where peer insight would be valued as part of the Panel assessment:

- Will the changes the Council are making as part of its transformation programme and the approach they are taking deliver what is needed to make them more outcome and future focused and increase resilience.
- This includes consideration of how the Council are integrating their transformational activity with the work to develop a new five-year Corporate Plan. It will also need to take account of what the performance management and scrutiny arrangements will be and the collective ownership of the development and delivery of these activities.

3.3 To assist in answering the overarching question there are three particular areas of focus the Council would like to explore around leadership, the new Corporate Plan, and the transformation programme. These are:

- How effective are the Council's leadership arrangements in understanding and communicating the challenges and direction of the organisation.
- Is the Council's approach to developing the Corporate Plan and the associated performance arrangements one that will set an ambitious but realistic vision for the Vale of Glamorgan and enable the Council to demonstrate delivery of key outcomes.
- Does the Council's emerging Transformation Programme have the potential to change the way the Council works to support delivery of their objectives in the context of significant financial challenges.

3.4 In undertaking the assessment, the Panel conducted a desktop review of the Council's documents, data, external reports, and other relevant intelligence.

3.5 The onsite stage of the review involved a series of individual meetings and focus groups with the following stakeholders:

- Leader of the Council
- Chief Executive Officer
- Cabinet Members

- Elected members – non-executive and opposition Members
- Strategic Leadership Team (SLT)
- Head of Finance and s.151 Officer
- Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)
- Head of Internal Audit
- Head of Human Resources (HR) & Organisation Development (OD)
- Head of Digital
- Operational Manager, Democratic Services
- Operational Manager, Property
- Operational Manager, Customer Relations
- Operational Manager, Communications, Participation, Equalities & Directorate Development
- Learning Links Manager
- Chair and Vice Chair: Governance & Audit Committee
- Chair and Vice Chair: Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee
- Independent Chair: Standards Committee
- Chair Democratic Services Committee
- Statutory and non-statutory members of the Public Services Board (PSB)
- Leader of Cardiff Council
- Chief Executive of Cardiff Council
- Leader of Bridgend Council
- Chief Executive of Bridgend County Borough Council
- Staff focus groups – Heads of Service, Middle Management, colleagues involved in the transformation team and Head Teachers
- Trades Unions
- Chief Executive Glamorgan Voluntary Services
- Chair of the 50+ Forum
- Youth Council representatives
- Co-Chair of Diverse the staff equalities group
- Representative from Ardal – Collaborative procurement partnership
- Representatives from Town and Community Councils
- Representatives from the business community

4.0 Overall Conclusion

- 4.1 The Panel assessed the Vale of Glamorgan to be a good Council within the current context of high service demand, operational pressures, and resources. It is a values-based organisation with a good internal culture and solid external relationships. There is a clear commitment to delivering on the Corporate Plan, with a particular focus on prioritising the needs of vulnerable people. Staff are enormously proud to work for the Council, and there is a strong sense of ambition for the future.
- 4.2 We were aware that the Council wanted to undertake the PPA at this time to allow it to make changes to strengthen its programme of work and its five-year plan 2025-30. This is an integrated approach that involves the public, staff, and elected members. The Council recognises the value of collaboration as part of its

“Reshaping Programme,” which is its transformation programme, and is keen to explore further opportunities.

- 4.3 The Authority wants to build in the need to look to the future, and beyond 2030, to consider what it needs to do and more importantly what are the outcomes it needs to achieve from the new corporate plan. In doing so the Council is looking at key data, its risks, and pressures, whether it is addressing the findings of their Annual Self - Assessment, national and local regulatory reports as well as researching good practice.
- 4.4 The Council will be publishing a new five-year plan in April 2025, and it has identified that it must be ambitious and clearly articulate what residents, colleagues, partners, and other stakeholders can expect from it. The plan will be underpinned by a programme of transformation that delivers values of open, together, ambitious, and proud. These will be the core of this activity and through this work the intention is that it will build trust and confidence in the Council and strengthen its ability to deliver its vision of **“Strong communities with a bright future.”**
- 4.5 Our approach to the assessment was ambitious because the Council itself is ambitious for its communities. In terms of its PPA scope and by linking it with its transformation programme, the Council had demonstrably embraced the assessment process. We considered this to be an exciting and pivotal moment for the authority, and the Council possesses strong foundations to drive future growth and development.
- 4.6 It is within this positive context that we consider the Council can further enhance its performance, by focusing on the following recommendations for areas of improvement:
- 1) Planning for Place: The Council would benefit from developing and effectively communicating a narrative that articulates a positive vision for the future, which is relatable to multiple audiences and has a call to action. In doing so it could be a catalyst for change for the Vale of Glamorgan as a County, drawing together partners, stakeholders, the business sector, and communities.
 - 2) Signalling Change: Clearly communicating the Council’s commitment to change and improvement.
 - 3) Strengthening Partnerships: Building on existing strong partnerships to maximise impact and outcomes.
 - 4) Governance and using resource effectively: Exploring opportunities to improve governance processes and allocate resources effectively.

5.0 Local context

- 5.1 The Vale of Glamorgan as a county is an area with significant assets and is Wales’ most southerly county neighbouring Cardiff, Bridgend, and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Residents and visitors enjoy both the countryside and coastal areas as well as the four principal towns of Barry, Cowbridge, Llantwit Major and Penarth which each having good shopping areas and benefit from a range of local business and retail.

- 5.2 There are hospitals in Llandough and Barry, an airport, enterprise zone, campus sites for Cardiff and Vale College as well as a range of agriculture and industry.
- 5.3 The Vale of Glamorgan itself has relatively low levels of unemployment, high performing schools, low levels of crime and good life expectancy. In the “Let’s Talk about life in the Vale” residents survey (Autumn 2023) 60% of respondents said that they are either very or fairly satisfied with the Vale of Glamorgan as a place to live, and 80% would recommend the Vale of Glamorgan as a place to live.
- 5.4 There are, however, inequalities across the Vale of Glamorgan and important issues that need to be tackled. These are detailed in a number of plans and strategies including the PSB Well-being Plan 2023-28 and the Council’s Corporate Plan 2020-25 and supporting Annual Delivery Plan 2024-25.
- 5.5 The population of the Vale of Glamorgan continues to grow and change: - In Mid-2022, the population of the Vale of Glamorgan was estimated to be 133,492, a growth of 1,001 (0.75%) in the last year. Between mid-2011 and mid-2022, the population of the Vale of Glamorgan is estimated to have grown by 6,813 (5.4%). Between 2011 and 2021 there has been an increase of 24.9% in people aged 65 and over in the Vale of Glamorgan, an increase of 4.3% in children aged under 15 years, and a 1.5% decrease in people aged 15 to 64 years. Through Census 2021, it was estimated that there was a total of 57,500 households in the Vale of Glamorgan.
- 5.6 Opportunities and experiences vary across the county with people living in some areas experiencing disadvantage and deprivation. Inequalities persist between different areas of the Vale of Glamorgan and 4 areas are at a much greater risk of deprivation. In 2018-2020 the gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived in the Vale of Glamorgan, was 8.3 years for females and 7.8 years for males. The Vale of Glamorgan records one of the highest average life expectancies, at 83.3 years for females and 79.6 years for males in 2018-2020.
- 5.7 The area has a diverse economic history, from the Port of Barry’s key position in the coal industry of the early 20th Century to the rich agricultural heritage of more rural areas of the Vale of Glamorgan. Whilst this history continues to shape the current economic landscape, the Vale of Glamorgan is also home to innovation, with cutting-edge technology industries such as aerospace and automotive industries alongside a well-established service sector that includes retail, tourism, hospitality and public sector.
- 5.8 The 2023 Business Count for the Vale of Glamorgan highlights that of the 4,495 enterprises, 90.5% (4,070) are micro-enterprises, this compares to 89.2% across Wales. In the Vale of Glamorgan, 8.2% of enterprises were small, 1.1% medium and 0.1% large. The largest number of enterprises in the Vale of Glamorgan were in the Wholesale and Retail sector (640), followed by Professional, scientific, and technical activities (625) and the Construction Sector (590). Between January 2023 and December 2023, there were 62,700 economically active people in the Vale of Glamorgan, or 77.5% of the population, this compares to 74.1% for Wales. It was estimated that 2,200, 3.6% of the Vale of Glamorgan population was unemployed, this compares to 3.7% for Wales.

- 5.9 In September 2023, the Median House Price paid in the Vale of Glamorgan was £284,000, this is a £9,000 increase on the year and the second highest median price in Wales.
- 5.10 It is a coastal, rural county with a landscape dominated by intensive agriculture with 53km of coastline, including the Glamorgan Heritage Coast. Significant infrastructure links such as M4 corridor to the north and South Wales Valleys line are combined with areas of rurality in the west of the county. The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and published its climate challenge plan and the Project Zero programme in 2021. In 2021 the Council also declared a nature emergency. Through rising sea levels and river flow rates arising from the impact of climate change, it is estimated that 5,000 residential properties in the Vale of Glamorgan are currently at some level of flood risk.
- 5.11 The authority has 54 Councillors each representing an electoral division or ward. At the last elections in May 2022 no political group was in overall control, and the Welsh Labour Party became the largest group with 25 seats and formed a coalition with the Llantwit First Independents, and one of the Independent Councillors. The composition of the Council is Welsh Labour 25, Conservative 13, Plaid Cymru 8, Llantwit First Independent 4 and Independent 4. The Leader of the Council is Councillor Lis Burnett, Welsh Labour.

6.0 Strengths and Areas of Innovation

- 6.1 The Panel heard consistent feedback from the onsite interviews and focus groups about the culture of the Council and concluded that it had established itself as a values-based organisation built on a strong positive culture.
- 6.2 The Council demonstrates a strong appetite for innovation and a willingness to do things differently. A positive example of this is the Learning Café initiative which empowers staff by providing a platform to share innovative ideas and propose improvements. These business proposals are actively encouraged, evaluated, and, if viable, given the necessary support to be implemented.

We noted a comment from one of the interviews with a member of staff:

“I get agency to make change as I’m supported by management.”

- 6.3 The strong working relationships between the Leader, Chief Executive, senior staff, and members demonstrated a cohesive and supportive working environment.
- 6.4 Whilst on site, we were able to verify that the Council has developed positive relationships with a range of internal and external stakeholders, all of which are based on trust.
- 6.5 It was evident that the Vale of Glamorgan benefits from a diverse range of businesses including innovative technology industries such as aerospace and automotive industries as well as manufacturing, retail, tourism, hospitality, and public sector employment. We heard that people think it is a great place to live and work, which was also reflected in the residents’ survey results. There is pride in the Vale of

Glamorgan due to its amazing natural assets and a real mixture of rural and urban characteristics.

7 Local and National Challenges

- 7.1 The local challenges are outlined in section 5 of the report.
- 7.2 Nationally, the Vale of Glamorgan Council faces the same pressures of organisational resilience as other local authorities across Wales. The Council is facing ongoing pressures as a consequence of inflation, demographic growth and increased complex cases of need within social care and increased financial pressures within schools. The Council's financial strategy coupled with the reshaping programme are the key drivers that support the Council's ongoing financial planning and transformation programme. There is further detail in Section 11 of the report.
- 7.3 The Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 as have other authorities. The Council recognises the uniqueness of the Vale of Glamorgan's natural outstanding assets and published its climate challenge action plan and Project Zero programme in 2021. In 2021 the Council also declared a nature emergency. The Council also works regionally with the PSB who have an agreed climate emergency charter as one of its three workstreams.
- 7.4 The Council has identified challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff, again, a similar issue across Wales that's exacerbated by budget pressures, competition from the private sector and skill shortages. The Council is working through its People Strategy to develop a brand for the Council and promote the employment offer in the Vale against a backdrop of ongoing national pressures to recruitment in a highly competitive market.

8 Overview of Findings.

Local areas, as identified by the Council, where peer insight would be valued as part of the Panel assessment:

8.1 How effective are the Council's leadership arrangements in understanding and communicating the challenges and direction of the organisation.

8.1.1 The onsite timetable included a wide representative number of one-to-one interviews and focus groups including a broad range of Members, officers, external partners, and stakeholders which enabled us to evaluate the Council's leadership arrangements. It is our view, having heard the various responses during these interviews, that the Council has effective leadership in place with well-regarded and respected leaders.

8.1.2 There were several aspects to support our assessment namely:

- The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) demonstrates strong cohesion.
- The Cabinet functions as a well-coordinated strong team.
- There are strong working relationships between the Leader, Chief Executive, senior staff, and Members.
- There is a great culture created by the leadership of the Council.

- This collaborative environment has nurtured a positive organisational culture and effective communication with staff, resulting in a shared commitment to the Corporate Plan and the Transformation Programme.
- This leadership approach has also created opportunities for Members to work together and more effectively.

8.1.3 Whilst there are many positive aspects associated with the effectiveness of the Council's leadership arrangements we consider there is scope to further develop how it communicates the extent of its transformation programme both within the Authority and with external partners and stakeholders and the Panel consider the Council could do more to communicate the challenges, recognising there is a delicate balance between keeping ambition high and being open about the challenges.

8.2 Is the Council's approach to developing the Corporate Plan and the associated performance arrangements one that will set an ambitious but realistic vision for the Vale of Glamorgan and enable the Council to demonstrate delivery of key outcomes.

8.2.1 We concluded that the Corporate Plan is ambitious, but we consider its ambitions should go beyond a plan for the Council and there is scope to position it as a vision for the Vale of Glamorgan.

8.2.2 There is an opportunity to create a whole system approach, aligning organisations and stakeholders under the banner of place. There is an appetite on the part of all partners to help deliver on outcomes, including statutory partners, community, business, and young people.

8.2.3 We gained the impression that the Council is at an early stage of demonstrating delivery of outcomes.

8.2.4 The Panel heard lots of evidence of engagement of staff and partners in developing the Corporate Plan. That said, whilst staff are behind the ambition in the Corporate Plan some expressed concern about the capacity to deliver it.

8.2.5 The Council has been astute in timing the PPA to assist in the development of the draft corporate plan. To signal its changing approach both within the organisation and across the Vale of Glamorgan, the Council should consider crafting a shared 'story of the Vale of Glamorgan.' One that focuses on the place, and can be developed with partners, stakeholders, and communities.

8.3 Does the Council's emerging Transformation Programme have the potential to change the way the Council works to support delivery of their objectives in the context of significant financial challenges.

8.3.1 Overall, the Council is well-positioned to achieve these goals, and the right ingredients are in place. The Council has demonstrated a strong track record of innovation and a commitment to delivering high-quality services.

8.3.2 The Panel considered the Council's mixed economy approach to delivering services is a real positive in terms of delivering services directly and also with other key partners and stakeholders, examples include:

- Shared Regulatory Services (SRS) partnership with Bridgend County Borough Council and Cardiff Council. This partnership is intended to deliver more efficient, cost-effective services, increasing the resilience of Trading Standards, Environmental Health, Licensing, and management of private sector housing regulatory requirements.
- Ardal – a collaborative procurement partnership that delivers wider capacity benefits comprising of Cardiff, Monmouthshire County Council, Torfaen County Borough Council, and the Vale of Glamorgan Council.
- The Regional Partnership Board (RPB) working together with Cardiff Council, the Cardiff and Vale UHB, Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust, third and independent sectors and carer representatives to deliver care and support services. The construction of a new health clinic on Council owned land with the Cardiff and Vale UHB is an example of joint working. The capital build costs will be funded by the Council and fitting out costs by the UHB. The former health clinic UHB site will be used for community housing.
- The South East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), Cardiff Capital Region. The Vale of Glamorgan is one of 10 Unitary Councils and a National Park Authority who comprise its membership. The CJC is responsible for preparing Regional Plans, Transport Plans and doing whatever is deemed necessary to enhance or promote the economic well-being of the area. The work of the CJC is still at an early stage.

8.3.3 The “Brilliant Basics” approach is a fundamental strand of the Council's Reshaping Programme, and it highlights the importance of getting the basics right, every time, by placing service delivery at the heart of everything the Council does. That includes services to its residents, those who work for the authority and its stakeholders. The Council will develop a guide and initial action plan on areas including customer service principles, process simplification and streamlining, reducing duplication, and working at pace when capacity is challenging. We consider there is an opportunity to work with stakeholders to better understand their requirements. As an example, the Council could explore opportunities to strengthen its relationship with Town and Community Councils as that sector wants to work more closely with the Vale of Glamorgan.

8.3.4 Whilst staff are optimistic and confident in the transformation programme, concerns about the capacity and the pace of change have been raised. To mitigate these concerns there is an opportunity for greater collaboration with partners to help address this. The readiness of partners to support these efforts is a positive indicator and there is lots of evidence of innovative joint working, as set out in paragraph 8.3.2.

8.3.5 We consider including young people in partnership working is essential for creating inclusive and effective solutions. Young people bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas and an understanding of their own needs and challenges. By actively involving

them in the transformation process, it will empower them to shape their own futures, build valuable skills and develop a sense of ownership and responsibility. This collaborative approach increases the prospect of more relevant and sustainable outcomes, ensuring that the voices and experiences of young people are heard and valued.

8.3.6 The Council has a good reputation with the majority of partners, ranging from statutory through to more informal local partnerships. Building on these foundations, there is an opportunity to go further, and partners are willing, and keen to collaborate more for the benefit of the place.

9 Areas of Local Focus: Recommendations areas of improvement

9.1 Based on the local areas of focus, the Panel suggest the Council should consider the following recommendations for improvement:

1.	<p>Planning for Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council would benefit from developing and effectively communicating a narrative that articulates a positive vision for the future, which is relatable to multiple audiences and has a call to action. In doing so it could be a catalyst for change for the Vale of Glamorgan as a County, drawing together partners, stakeholders, the business sector, and communities.
2.	<p>Signalling Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council should consider how it signals and amplifies its changing approach both within the organisation and across the Vale.
3.	<p>Building on existing, strong partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising the democratic convening role that the Council has in leading partnerships, whilst recognising when to lead and when to support wider partnerships to take the lead in the provision of services. Taking the opportunity to create the time and space to strategically assess and review the partnership landscape, strengthening relationships and assessing where resource and energy is best spent for the wider benefit of the place in order to make the biggest difference Working with stakeholders on getting the “brilliant basics” right that reflects the needs of the local community. Leverage the collective capacity of the Vale of Glamorgan and continue to build innovative joint working arrangements with neighbouring Councils.

Statutory areas considered by the Panel.

10.0 The extent to which the Council is exercising its functions effectively.

- 10.1 The Panel concluded that overall, the Vale of Glamorgan Council exercises its functions effectively, given the significant pressures local authorities are facing and there were no identified areas of concern.
- 10.2 Prior to attending on site, we conducted a desktop review of the Council's documents, data, external reports, and other relevant intelligence.
- 10.3 There is clear rigour as evidenced by Audit inspection reports, regulators reports including Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales.
- 10.4 As part of the PPA process we ensured that our initial desk top assessment was validated and triangulated by conversations at the one-to-one interviews and focus groups contained in the onsite timetable.

11.0 The extent to which the Council is using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively.

- 11.1 From the evidence we have heard and within the current high levels of service demand and financial pressures faced by all local authorities across Wales, the Council is using its resources effectively and efficiently as demonstrated by the budget setting process and ongoing financial reporting and scrutiny.
- 11.2 As part of our desk top review of documents before attending on site, we noted from the Audit Wales financial sustainability review of the Council, as issued in September 2024 for the audit year 2023/24, that the Council has arrangements in place to manage its financial resilience in the short to medium term, but its longer-term approach is less certain due to being at an early stage in its transformation agenda.
- 11.3 The Council recognises its financial and service pressures and is responding by developing the transformation of services for the medium term against the framework of five interrelated themes, namely, target operating model, strengthening communities, service transformation, digital innovation, and economic resilience.
- 11.4 Whilst the Council understands its financial position, it has a mixed track record in delivering savings and additional pressures will be placed on its reserves to balance the budget in the medium term. Balancing the budget through tactical savings alone will not be sustainable in the medium term and, as a result, the Council's transformation programme is critical to closing the budget gap and ensuring financial sustainability over this period.
- 11.5 The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the Authority's 2022/23 financial statements. In his report, issued November 2024, he is proposing an unqualified opinion on the Council's accounts for 2023/24.
- 11.6 Details of the Council's revenue budget 2024/25, capital programme 2024/25 – 2028/29 are as follows:

- The Council set a net revenue budget of £308.861m for 2024/25 (£294.4m in 2023/24) that required £7.68m of savings (£7.38m in 2023/24). A Council tax increase of 6.7% was agreed.
- The multi-year (2024/25 – 2028/29) capital programme totals £387.582m. It is funded from various sources including grants, capital receipts and borrowing.

11.7 We noted the Council has a strategy for development of its 2025/26 Budget and the 2025/26 to 2029/30 Medium Term Financial Plan.

11.8 The authority recognises the effective use of data in the delivery of services and now has much more data at its disposal and is on the journey to use it more effectively. By developing its data science capacity, the Council should be able to better understand and predict service demand and delivery.

11.9 Whilst there are capacity concerns regarding the ability to deliver transformation and priorities in the corporate plan, there is an opportunity to address these through more joint working with partners as identified earlier in this report and the areas for improvement.

12.0 The extent to which the Council has effective governance in place.

12.1 We consider the Council has effective governance arrangements in place but there are areas which could be further developed.

12.2 We are aware the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2023/24 was to be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee on the 18 November 2024 (post the onsite assessment stage of the PPA) and it demonstrates that appropriate governance arrangements are in place to meet the governance principles. The report confirmed the external audit of the AGS by Audit Wales is complete and no significant amendments were required.

12.3 We have some suggestions that could lead to better relationships and release capacity based on the following feedback whilst on site.

- We heard concerns around some inappropriate member behaviour impacting on public perception and adversarial nature causing individual member stress. This can negatively impact the organisation's reputation.
- Meeting and report overload i.e., excessive meetings and lengthy reports can hinder productivity and decision-making.
- Scrutiny arrangements could be more effective. There were concerns about the effectiveness of scrutiny arrangements and online meetings which suggest there are issues about the effectiveness of debate.

12.4 The Council places high demands on itself, which is commendable, however this workload places considerable resource requirements and time demands on both members and staff.

13.0 Statutory areas: Recommendations

13.1 Based on the statutory areas of focus, the Panel suggest the Council should consider the following recommendation for improvement to make better use of resources and engage members in more meaningful ways.

4.	Governance and using resource effectively <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing and revising the cycle of formal democratic meetings and formal reporting requirements, exploring ways to better engage members in more proactive and cross chamber collaboration – in both formal and informal ways including reviewing the effectiveness of online meetings.• Reviewing the balance between the internal corporate demands placed on members and their role as representatives of their constituents to deliver the Council's vision of place.• Using the strong local politics as a force for good, whilst ensuring civility in public life is promoted and kept front and centre to encourage respectful and constructive debate including online and in-person meetings.• Enhancing the effectiveness of the Council's scrutiny arrangements, specifically meetings, by assessing current practices to identify opportunities for improvement to make them more effective.
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14.0 Improvement Support

If you would like to discuss any further improvement support, please contact Jo Hendy, WLGA Head of Improvement.

15.0 Acknowledgements

The Panel and the WLGA would like to extend their thanks to the Corporate Strategy & Insight Team for the support in co-ordinating documentation requests, responses to queries, arranging meetings and workshops and providing onsite support.

Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources.

Helen Moses, Operational Manager Corporate Strategy, and Insight.

Lloyd Fisher, Corporate Policy, and Insight Manager.

Julia Archampong, Corporate Performance Manager.

Angela Bobbett, Business Manager, to the Chief Executive.