

Wrexham County Borough Council

Self-Assessment

2023/24

This document is also available in Welsh



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1. Introduction

Self-assessment is important to any organisation and is a way of critically, and honestly, reviewing the current position in order to make decisions on how to secure improvements for the future. New legislation in Wales (Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021) requires councils to keep under their performance under review through self-assessment. At its simplest level it ensures we are asking annually

- How well are we doing?
- How do we know?
- What and how can we do better?

This report reflects our findings from our self-assessment review and in line with the new legislation considers whether we are:

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

2. Our Approach to Self-Assessment 2023-24

Self-assessment is already an integral part of our performance management framework which helps us to identify areas where support for improvement is most required in order to be able to deliver against our priorities, whilst remaining flexible and innovative in order to respond to the changing environment in which we operate.

Self-assessment as an improvement tool is embedded across the council – from self-assessment at individual service level, to cross-cutting and thematic levels, such as when we assess our performance against our Council Plan or the effectiveness of our governance framework.

In developing our approach to the new Self-assessment requirement as defined in the legislation, we have drawn on the Act's Statutory Guidance. As such, it is structured around the following governance themes:

- **Performance outcomes:** The council's commitment to its vision and achieving performance outcomes across the council, whilst considering the progress made in achieving the Council Plan Well-being Objectives and Improvement Priorities.
- **Corporate planning:** The council's capacity to define and plan sustainable outcomes. Considering if decisions made include views from all stakeholders, further the authority's purpose, contribute to intended benefits and outcomes, and remain within the limits of authority and resources.
- **Leadership and organisational culture:** The effectiveness of the council's performance management system in facilitating a process to ensure the achievement of intended outcomes by providing a mixture of legal, regulatory, and practical interventions.
- **Performance management:** The effectiveness of the council's performance management system in facilitating a process to ensure the achievement of intended outcomes by providing a mixture of legal, regulatory, and practical interventions.
- **Financial planning:** The proficiency of the council's system of financial management in underpinning and setting the context of decision-making, implementation of policies and achievement of intended outcomes.
- **Risk management arrangements:** The council's risk management processes as an integral part of a performance management system and considering how well risk is addressed as part of all decision making.
- **Workforce planning:** The extent to which the council has systems in place to develop the workforce to ensure it has the capacity to respond to change over time and has the skills and experience of leadership and the workforce to fulfil its functions.
- **Assets:** The effectiveness of the council's assessment management to ensure effective service provision and value for money.

- **Procurement:** The efficiency of the council's procurement process in being sustainable, achieving value for money and generating benefits for local people and the local economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment.

Our assessment process is underpinned by an assessment against the good governance principles set out in CIPFA/SOLACE's 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' and our own governance framework, and we have used this framework to define what good performance in each of these areas looks like. Our process has included a review of available evidence, progress made against the areas of development identified in our Self-assessment 2022-2023 and challenge sessions with our Senior Leadership Team, key officers and our elected members.

This report includes an update on progress against those areas of which the 2022-23 report identified as requiring development in 2023-24 and also identifies areas for development moving forward, progress against which will be reported in the 2024-25 report.

The Statutory Guidance states that the Self-assessment report should be accessible and succinct, therefore it offers a high level and strategic summary of our performance against the nine themes. It identifies those areas in which the council is progressing well, as well as areas for development and these are set out in each of the themes ([section 4](#)).

3. Summary of our Self-Assessment 2023-24

In undertaking the assessment, we have judged our performance using the following rating:

GREEN: Consistently good performance with minimal areas for development.

YELLOW: Good performance with strengths outweighing areas for development.

AMBER: Satisfactory performance, but investment and increased capacity may be required in a number of key areas.

RED: Weak performance and actions to improve unclear.

A summary of our self-assessment against the nine themes is set out below.

Theme	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Performance outcomes	Amber	Yellow	Yellow
Corporate Planning	Green	Yellow	Green
Leadership and Organisational Culture	Yellow	Amber	Amber
Performance Management	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Financial Planning	Yellow	Amber	Amber
Risk Management Arrangements	Yellow	Yellow	Green
Workforce Planning	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
Assets	Amber	Amber	Yellow
Procurement	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow

Details of how we have reached these judgements, along with the areas we have identified for development are contained in the next section. A list of some of the key sources of evidence we have used in reaching these judgements is available at appendix 1.

4. Assessment against our Self-assessment themes

Theme: Performance Outcomes

The council's commitment to its vision and the Well-being Objectives and Improvement Priorities are reflected in the progress made in achieving the agreed outcomes. New actions and interventions should be agreed, to adapt and respond where progress in achieving outcomes is of track or impacted by external challenges. Outcomes that are not on track are highlighted through the performance management framework. In light of the challenge of the pandemic, evidence of progress and decision making in respect of the developing landscape should be evident in pursuing the council's vision.^[1]

Our new well-being objectives (council priorities) are set out in the [Council Plan \(2023-28\)](#) which was agreed by Council in December 2023. The Council Plan also demonstrates how our well-being objectives help deliver on Wales' Well-being Goals.

We report progress on our council priorities using our performance management framework. Performance against the council priorities is reported quarterly to elected members, twice a year to the Executive Board and Scrutiny, and annually to the public via our annual performance report. As a whole, at the end of the first year of the Council Plan (2023-28), achievement against the plan was judged to be yellow: which means good progress has been made towards delivering our council priority outcomes, with evidence of improvement observed across several measures in year 1 of the plan.

A summary of how we assessed our performance in terms of achieving our council priorities in the first year of the plan (2023-28), is set out below. Full detail can be found in the most recent annual performance report.

- All six priorities assessed as yellow (good progress has been made towards delivering our council priority outcomes, with evidence of improvement observed across several measures)

COUNCIL PRIORITY	OVERALL RAYG
Delivering Efficient Streetscene Services and Decarbonising our Environment	Yellow
Developing the Economy	Yellow
Ensuring Wrexham is a Fair and Safe Place	Yellow
Improving Education and Learning	Yellow
Promoting Good Health and Well-being (with a focus on social services and good mental health)	Yellow
Supporting a Highly Skilled and Engaged Workforce, Focussed on Delivering Services	Yellow

The budget challenges for the council affected the progress on some planned areas of work and a number of measures were reviewed for year 2 of the Council Plan (2023-28). The review identified areas where we may not be able to deliver as originally expected and/or areas where we may need to move from an 'improve' to a 'sustain' position in 2024-25 – more detail on our performance management arrangements is available in the Performance Management Theme.

Our Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) and outcomes are fully embedded in the Council Plan (2023-28). Full detail on progress at the end of the Plan can be found in the most recent annual performance report. At the end of the Council Plan (2023-28), six equality outcomes were assessed as green (very good progress has been made towards delivering outcomes, with strong evidence of improvement observed across the majority of measures) and five assessed as yellow (good progress has been made, with evidence of improvement observed across several key performance measures) and one assessed as amber (progress has been made but limited evidence of improvement across key performance measures). This demonstrated an improvement towards being a more inclusive council.

Enhancements in performance management and strategic and operational planning at service level have resulted in better identification of service priorities and increased responsiveness to challenges. This adaptability ensured dynamic responses in an ever-changing environment. Specifically this has included significant progress made in Education and Early Intervention Service resulting in removal from the Estyn follow up category of causing significant concern, positive feedback from Audit Wales of the Planning Department in the Audit Wales review of the governance arrangements, and improvements reported through Care Inspectorate Wales improvement checks within both Adult and Children's Social Care.

Our performance management arrangements also highlight where we have faced challenges and where we need to improve. In particular, recycling performance across the County Borough has declined and in 2023/24 we did not meet the Welsh Government statutory target. Progress is required in 2024/25 to review our waste strategy to achieve the 2024/25 70% recycling rate target set by Welsh Government.

Recognising the need to remain tightly focussed on performance and delivery of services in a climate of increased financial challenge and growing demand, changes will be implemented to our performance management arrangements to enable a greater degree of focus on improvement – see performance management theme.

Where complaints are made against the council, there is evidence of learning from investigations and actions implemented from findings. In 2023/24, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales intervened in 9% of the complaints made to Wrexham Council, amongst the lowest of all the local authorities in Wales. However, formal complaints increased from 164 in 2022/23 to 291 in 2023/24. This mainly concerned waste collections as a result of industrial action. However even accounting for the increase due to the industrial action, there has been a general increase in complaints across most services compared to the previous year.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as yellow which meant that we demonstrated good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Education and Early Intervention Service to be removed from the 'follow up' Estyn category of causing significant concern. *(AGS)	Significant progress has been made in the Education and Early Intervention Service to develop a systematic approach for evaluating education services and establishing clear strategic and operational plans. Resulting in removal from the Estyn follow up category of causing significant concern.	No
Continue improvement journey in those corporate or service areas with agreed improvement plans; Decarbonisation (corporate) and Social Care (service).	<p>Both of these areas, guided by agreed-upon improvement plans, have demonstrated progress in 2023/24. Enhanced direction and improved planning has facilitated effective prioritisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Care consistently made progress along their improvement journey, as evidenced by the improvement check conducted by Care Inspectorate Wales in October 2023, with CIW reporting a new culture of raised expectations and standards in social care. • Decarbonisation has been prioritised and resources were considered as part of budget setting 2024-25. To continue to achieve a downward trajectory in our carbon production / emissions, the main challenge moving forward will be to properly embed decarbonisation into the council's everyday service delivery and integrate effective decarbonisation. • Challenge moving forward is sustaining the delivery of the Council Plan performance. Delivery of the Change Programme will support service delivery and financial sustainability in the context of ongoing financial pressures. 	No

Our assessment 2023-24: Yellow (sustained)

We have reached this conclusion because of good performance with strengths outweighing areas for development.

Strengths

- Notable progress made on all council priorities during the first year of the new Council Plan, despite the necessity to address budget challenges affecting resources.
- Enhancements in performance management and strategic and operational planning at service level have resulted in increased responsiveness to challenges in a number of services and identification of service priorities:
 - ▶ Significant progress has been made in the Education and Early Intervention Service to develop a systematic approach for evaluating education services and establishing clear strategic and operational plans, resulting in removal from the Estyn follow-up category of causing significant concern.
 - ▶ Social Care have consistently made progress along their improvement journey, as evidenced by the improvement check conducted by Care Inspectorate Wales in October 2023.

Areas for development

New

- Sustain delivery of council plan performance, with a focus on statutory and high priority services. (Change Programme ToR)
- Review Waste Strategy and explore new initiatives to improve recycling rates across the County Borough in order to meet statutory targets.

Theme: Corporate Planning

The long-term nature and impact of many of local government's responsibilities mean that it should define and plan outcomes and that these should be sustainable. Decisions should further the authority's purpose, contribute to intended benefits and outcomes, and remain within the limits of authority and resources. Input from all groups of stakeholders, including citizens, service users, and institutional stakeholders, is vital to the success of this process and in balancing competing demands when determining priorities for the finite resources available.^[1]

We have a clear vision, for the County Borough, which informs our ambition, our well-being priorities and our corporate planning processes:

- We publish our Council Plan which clearly sets out our vision for the County Borough and our council priorities (our well-being objectives), and identifies how they contribute to Wales' Well-being Goals. The Plan is a key corporate document which drives our strategic direction and leadership, and underpins the delivery of all Council services. It sets the context and focus of our priorities, defines what success will look like, and sets out clear outcome measures. Our Strategic Equality Outcomes have been embedded in our priorities to ensure we remain focussed upon them in the way we design and deliver our services.
- The Plan includes a section on our finances which clearly reflects the challenges the council is facing and helps set the context within which we are operating.
- A robust process to review and agree our council priorities for the Council Plan 2023-28 began in autumn 2022. Audit Wales has provided positive assurance on our processes for setting our council priorities.
- We work regionally and in partnership to ensure that our corporate planning reflects regional issues and priorities – for example Public Services Boards, North Wales Economic Ambition Board, Mersey Dee Alliance and Regional Leadership Board.
- The council is fully engaged in the current economic opportunities that are available nationally, regionally and locally in order to continue to develop and raise the profile of Wrexham in terms of tourism and investment.
- Wrexham and Flintshire Public Services Boards (PSB), having worked together closely to jointly address cross-border issues during the pandemic, formally merged, with a view to strengthening leadership and governance, reducing duplication and focusing on delivering long term well-being outcomes for both communities. The PSB Well-being Plan (2023-28) is in place, and is aligned with partner organisations' own strategic plans.
- We have comprehensive service planning guidance to support services in their own planning processes. Targeted support has been provided in those areas identified for improvement and this has been evident in the development of strengthened performance management frameworks for both children's and adults' services.

- Our Performance Review and Development (PRD) processes ensure that service activities are focussed on achieving objectives and service requirements.
- During the year, the council focused on managing and preparing for the potential financial and operational challenges as a result of not having a Local Development Plan (LDP) in place. Following a High Court Judgement in November 2023, the Council adopted the LDP in December 2023. There is now an appeal in place against this decision, so although the Council has an LDP in place and can plan on this basis, the ability to implement LDP related decisions remains difficult and time consuming because of the ongoing differing views about the validity of the LDP. The outcome of the appeal is expected October 2024.
- Work on key strategic plans during 2023-24 has included: People Strategy; Asset Management Plan; ICT and Digital Strategy; Placemaking; Open Space Strategy; and Flood Risk Management Plan.

We take a long-term view and plan sustainable outcomes within resources and manage risks to the achievement of our outcomes.

- Our Council Plan was agreed in December 2023, following a review of the proposed priorities and outcomes necessitated by the need to review proposed outcomes in the light of emerging financial and resource pressures identified at the end of 2022-23.
- Audit Wales' examination of the setting of our well-being objectives (our priorities) confirmed that we had applied the sustainable development principle in our processes. The range of evidence and data considered, along with the review of our previous council plan, gave assurance that the process was well informed of the current needs and circumstances of residents, the key challenges and the demands they face, and how these might change over time. It confirmed that we had considered how our priorities could have a broad impact and deliver long term benefits, and that the extensive and varied engagement activity with elected members, stakeholders and the public, had emphasised consideration of the sustainable development principle.
- We have arrangements in place to monitor the delivery of our priorities – all priorities are supported by an outcome-focused performance management framework. Audit Wales has provided assurance that we are measuring and monitoring performance appropriately. Our annual review process provides us with the opportunity to consider whether the council's priorities are still well placed to help deliver Wales' well-being goals, as well as providing us with the flexibility to reflect on resources, national developments and/or changing local priorities due to service demand pressures, when setting targets.

- The sustainable development principle is embedded within our approach to corporate planning and we recognise that making the best use of our resources requires a broader definition than 'finance' – we need to balance the economic, social and environmental impacts of our policies and plans. An integrated impact assessment has been developed to require an assessment of the impact of proposed decisions on our ability to achieve our priorities; equality protected groups; socio economic duty; welsh language; and decarbonisation, along with an assessment of how proposals have been developed in alignment with the sustainable development principle in planning and decision-making. (New process implementation 1 May 2024.)
- There are difficulties in undertaking long term corporate planning at the present time, given the financial pressures being faced by the local government sector as a whole, along with uncertainties around levels of future funding. We continue to request a three year settlement to enable us to plan more effectively. We have establishment of a Change Programme to support service delivery and financial sustainability in the context of these pressures. Processes will support decision-making around identifying cost savings and understanding the impact of these decisions on the delivery of our priorities. The objectives of the Change Programme are:
 - ▶ Sustain delivery of council plan performance, with a focus on statutory and high priority services; implementing improvements in line with plans agreed following regulatory inspections (Social Care and Education)
 - ▶ Support the achievement of a sustainable budget through delivery of a two year programme that maintains and implements an agreed level of savings defined in the MTFP (currently £28m) and the unallocated savings of £1.8m in the 24/25 budget
 - ▶ Ensure that the workforce is engaged in the process of change, ensuring resilience and effective planning for future work functions, processes and working styles.
 - ▶ Maintain stability of the council, ensuring long term sustainability with appropriate reserves and an organisation design that is fit for purpose.
- The council has prioritised decarbonisation at a strategic level – decarbonisation is identified as a council priority, and is supported by Senior Leadership Team, working groups, consideration of resources in budget setting and action planning, and the inclusion of carbon impact assessments in the new integrated impact assessment. The need to embed decarbonisation across the organisation has been identified as a significant issue in the Annual Governance Statement (2023-24) and actions to support these have been identified and will be progressed and monitored by the Decarbonisation Board.

We invite and facilitate constructive challenge and debate on priorities, outcomes and targets, including consulting with the public and our stakeholders.

- We have a clear, high level Involvement Strategy in place which emphasises the importance of working collaboratively with residents through consultation, engagement and co-production, and external regulators have provided assurance that involvement is embedded within our culture.

- A robust process to review and agree our priorities for the Council Plan 2023-28 began in autumn 2022, including a review of data and intelligence with Priority Boards and Elected Members, and involvement with the public, stakeholders and less well-represented groups. We used available information from our own and our partners' involvement activities, as well as consulting specifically on our proposed objectives. The Wrexham Public Services' Board's Well-being Assessment (May 2022) was a key source of evidence we have used to develop our next Council Plan and for our service planning more broadly. Audit Wales recognised the quality of our approach to use of data, and engagement activity, and has recognised that our involvement activities, which included opportunities to engage with communities and equality protected groups in community venues, resulted in improved engagement.
- Our six Priority Boards provide challenge on the delivery of the priorities on a quarterly basis ensuring interventions are identified and opportunities maximised, as well as leading on the annual review of priorities and targets. We make performance information available to elected members quarterly, report twice a year to Executive Board and scrutiny, and publish an Annual Performance Report on our website. Priority Boards will be reviewed early in 2024-25 to ensure they are effective and that their work compliments the work of the Change Programme and service challenge more generally.
- Insight, the new Performance, Projects and Risk Management reporting system was implemented during this year, and improves our ability to analyse and report on achieving our priorities and risks and determining necessary interventions.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as yellow which meant that we demonstrated good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Council agrees well-being objectives and adopts Council Plan (2023-28).	Our Council Plan 2023-2028 was agreed by Council in December 2023 and is published on the council's website. Audit Wales has provided assurance on the processes followed to develop the well-being objectives, in accordance with the 'sustainable development' principle.	No
Improve information for decision makers to make it clear how decisions will contribute to intended benefits and outcomes, including the climate and carbon implications of all decisions.	New integrated impact assessment process and supporting tool developed during the year. Pilot and training completed ready for the launch in May 2024.	No
Consider and mitigate implications of Council decision not to adopt the Local Development Plan.*(AGS)	Following a High Court Judgement in November 2023, the Council adopted the LDP in December 2023. There is now an appeal in place against this decision, so although the Council has an LDP in place and can plan on this basis, the ability to implement LDP related decisions remains difficult and time consuming because of the ongoing differing views about the validity of the LDP. The outcome of the appeal is expected October 2024.	Yes
Prioritise and embed Decarbonisation across the organisation. *(AGS)	The Senior Leadership Team continue to lead the strategic response to decarbonisation and have fed into decarbonisation planning. Annual reporting to Executive Board provides a comprehensive position statement and establishes our priorities, in support of addressing regulators' recommendations. Theme Leads and Working Groups are in place and report regularly to Decarbonisation Board and scrutiny. Resources for decarbonisation remain challenging in the current financial context, and the challenge moving forward is to embed decarbonisation into the council's everyday service delivery and to integrate effective decarbonisation Themes into our work drawing on existing service budgets.	Yes
Establish an Involvement & Diversity Champions Group to identify and embed best practice across the organisation.	This group has been established with representatives from all departments and key services, nominated by Chief Officers. The focus is on upskilling key officers to support and embed best practice in their service areas and to highlight where additional corporate action / support is required.	No

Our assessment 2023-34: Green (improved)

We have reached this conclusion because of consistently good performance with minimal areas for development

Strengths

- Our vision for the County Borough provides a clear focus for our well-being objectives and services.
- Our well-being objectives have been developed using the Future Generations Act's 'sustainable development' principle and this is embedded across the organisation. We use intelligence from a range of sources to inform our corporate planning and involve our stakeholders.
- We are active at a regional level in key partnership bodies and our corporate planning reflects regional issues and priorities.
- We have robust corporate planning and performance management processes in place, which are long term, but which are flexible to enable us to be responsive.
- The council is fully engaged in the current economic opportunities that are available nationally, regionally and locally in order to continue to develop and raise the profile of Wrexham in terms of tourism and investment.
- Early establishment of a Change Programme to maintain stability of the council, ensuring long term sustainability with appropriate reserves and an organisation design that is fit for purpose.

Areas for development

Carried Forward

- Consider and mitigate implications of Council decision not to adopt Local Development Plan (LDP) and the subsequent legal decisions and actions. (AGS).
- Embed De-carbonisation across the organisation.(AGS)

New

- Delivery of the Change Programme to support service delivery and financial sustainability in the context of ongoing financial pressures. (Change Programme ToR)

Theme: Leadership and Organisational Culture

Local government needs appropriate structures and leadership. The council should ensure that it has both the capacity to fulfil its own mandate and to make certain that there are policies in place to guarantee that its management has the operational capacity for the organisation as a whole. As both individuals and the environment in which an authority operates will change over time, the council should continually develop its capacity as well as the skills and experience of the leadership of individual employees. Leadership in local government entities is strengthened by the participation of people with many different types of backgrounds, reflecting the structure and diversity.^[1]

We are a strong community leader – at both local, regional and national levels. The council welcomes engagement with partners, with partnership working embedded at all levels within the council to achieve shared objectives and improve services.

We maintained our focus on our corporate and service improvement journey – including the development of improvement plans, senior management restructures and the commissioning of independent reviews.

We ensure that we have appropriate structures and leadership in place to operate efficiently, achieve intended outcomes and support effective relationships between senior leaders and Lead Members:

- Structures are in place to support senior leaders and elected Members, SLT and Lead Members to work closely to agree direction – expectations of respectful working relationships set out in clear principles and terms of reference which align with the Nolan Principles.
- Actively worked to enable a supportive and respectful council, with elected Members and officers who developed a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Elected members have fed back that developments in social media, etc. in recent years has led to an increase in ward workloads, which can impact on their capacity to fulfil their roles in relation to corporate roles and responsibilities.
- By the end of 2023-24 there was a notable improvement in the values and behaviours exhibited by elected Members during public meetings. However, we acknowledge that some planning committee meetings remained challenging as a result of non-committee Members. This underscores the necessity for values and behaviours to be consistently transferable across members' roles.
- Chief Officers review the structures and the rules that guide decision making within their services each year. The 2023-24 review did not identify any systemic issues.

Our decision-making processes are clear and we are committed to developing the capabilities of elected members and senior management to achieve effective leadership:

- The council's Constitution sets out the council's decision-making processes. A forward work programme of upcoming decisions is published on the website.

- The Member Development Strategy promotes a clear and shared understanding of elected members' roles. Quarterly update reports are submitted to the Democratic Services Committee to report on progress against the strategy and underpinning plan.
- Workforce Development continued to work with elected Members to raise the profile of core training (which cover key governance areas). Whilst figures have seen an improvement in 2023-24, up take remains low.
- Workforce Development provided support and development to ensure leaders have the right skills to implement change and achieve outcomes – including commissioning the Welsh Local Government Association to focus on behaviors and values through leadership coaching.
- We are committed to the development of leaders and ensuring these leaders have the skillset and commitment to deliver improved outcomes. The council's People Strategy, agreed in 2024, recognises our workforce as our greatest asset and most important resource, and is supported by our Workforce Development Strategy, which sets out the frameworks and support in place to identify and offer development opportunities.
- In service areas that were requiring improvement following external regulation, external agencies have recognised good commitment within leadership to delivering improved outcomes and the council is no longer in a regulatory position requiring improvement (Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales).

Our leadership is committed to an open culture, has a strong commitment to ethical values and achieving improved outcomes:

- The council's 'values and behaviours' were reviewed in 2023-24 and the updated version has been incorporated into the new Council Plan 2023-28.
- We have good resources and processes in place to support high standards of behaviour, ethical standards and adherence to the rule of the law. The Statutory Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer attend SLT and key council meetings to provide advice on the rule of law.
- A leadership seminar took place in 2023-24 which included Members, Chief Officers and Heads of Service. The seminar focused on values, behaviors and equality, diversity and inclusion. A follow up programme is planned for 2024-25.
- Maintained good practices in transparency of reporting and audit throughout the year and arrangements for the open sharing of information through committees has been fully implemented.
- Policies, induction and training regarding expectations of and codes of conduct for employees and elected Members were regularly reviewed to ensure they remain robust and line with new Welsh Government guidance.

- Mandatory training was available for all employees on key areas of legislation (such as equalities and diversity, Welsh Language Standards, etc.) however, we have identified there remains a need to improve our monitoring and reporting mechanisms to provide assurance on completion rates.
- Senior Leadership are coached to lead on the culture of professional development and ensure that these are seen as an important aspect of employee wellbeing and retention. Although there is evidence to show that the majority of PRDs were completed as expected, more consistency in completion in timeframe would ensure a more robust process.
- We worked in partnership with the Trade Unions, meeting monthly, regularly sharing, discussing and consulting on our workforce policies and practices.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as amber which meant that we demonstrated satisfactory performance, but investment and increased capacity may have been required in a number of key areas.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Improve culture, values, behaviours and ways of working in public meetings. *(AGS)	Generally, by the end of 2023-24, we have seen improvement in values and behaviours between elected Members in public meetings in comparison with 2022-23 period. Some Planning Committee meetings continued to be difficult due to the behaviours of non-committee Members. This was also reflected in the findings of the Audit Wales 'Review of governance arrangements with a specific focus on the Planning Service at Wrexham Council (January 2024)'	Yes
Significantly improve Elected Member take up of core training and key governance e-learning modules *(AGS)	Workforce Development continued to work with elected members and group leaders to raise the profile of core training and how to access key governance e-learning modules. Whilst figures have seen an improvement, they remained low. Individual members' difficulties accessing the e-learning portal are being addressed.	Yes
Improving workforce uptake of mandatory learning topics and improve reporting of uptake to improve monitoring across the organisation (also Workforce Planning Theme)	An internal audit of Workforce Development reported 'Amber' assurance in May 2023 in relation to the need to improve monitoring arrangements to provide assurance that all mandatory training has been completed satisfactorily across the workforce. Progress has been made and this will continue to be monitored by internal audit.	No

Our assessment 2023 - 24: Amber (sustained)

We have reached this conclusion because of satisfactory performance, but investment and increased capacity may be required in a number of key areas.

Strengths

- We are a strong community leader – at both local, regional and national levels – and welcome engagement with partners, with partnership working embedded at all levels within the council to achieve shared objectives and improve services.
- We have maintained our focus on our corporate and service improvement journey with continued strong leadership and direction from Chief Officers and Heads of Service in service areas requiring improvement.
- Leadership within the council maintained good practices in transparency reporting, framework of meetings and audit throughout the year.
- Diverse plan of member training and workshops to support elected Members and officers in understanding roles and responsibilities and encourage positive values and behaviours.
- Regular communication on governance, policies and procedures.

Areas for development

Carried Forward

- Improve culture, values, behaviours and ways of working in public meetings with a focus on actions to embed the new values and behaviours and improve ways of working. (AGS)
- Ensuring elected members and committees have access to, and take up, appropriate training to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. (AGS)

New

- Embed a culture that supports the change programme, to develop a modern council, financially and commercially astute and fit for the modern environment.
- Roll out of Values and Behaviours Programme across the organization based on new Values within the Council Plan 2023-28 and the Nolan Principles of public life.

Theme: Performance Management

The performance management system facilitates a process to ensure that local government achieves its intended outcomes by providing a mixture of legal, regulatory, and practical interventions. Local government needs to ensure that the organisations and governance structures that it oversees have implemented, and can sustain, an effective performance management system that facilitates effective and efficient delivery of planned services. Decisions made need to be reviewed continually to ensure that achievement of outcomes is optimised.

Risk management and internal control are important and integral parts of a performance management system, along with a strong system of financial control. It is also essential that a culture and structure for scrutiny is in place as a key part of accountable decision-making.^[1]

We have effective governance structures in place to sustain effective performance:

- Priority Boards (including two Chief Officers, two Lead Members, and key officers) are in place to support the achievement of each of the Council Plan priorities and are accountable to Senior Leadership Team, Lead Members, Executive Board and Council.
- Our 2023-24 annual performance report concluded that achievement at the end of the first year of the new Council Plan (2023-28) was judged to be yellow, with good progress made towards delivering council priority outcomes, and evidence of improvement observed across several measures.
- Performance scorecards include an 'interventions' column which ensures that corrective action are identified to address any underperformance. Providing a clear link between the performance indicators and actions whilst supporting Priority Boards in focusing on sustainable performance improvement.
- Insight, the new corporate performance, risk and project management system, is now live reducing the risk of user input error and providing a comprehensive audit trail.
- Established project management reporting procedures have been reviewed alongside the implementation of the new performance, risk and project management system – Insight. The Project Management Framework has been improved and refined, user guides developed and the process aligned with the new system, with implementation planned for early 2024-25. Work to align non-capital and capital projects to follow implementation.

We report regularly on progress towards achieving our objectives.

- Reporting on the performance management framework for the Council Plan 2023-28 was delayed until quarter 3 2023-24, because of the need to review the council priorities within the plan in light of the financial challenges and potential cost savings.
- Our reporting processes are that Priority Boards meet quarterly to review progress against the council priorities. Performance against the council priorities is available quarterly to Elected Members, reported twice a year to the Executive Board, Scrutiny and Scrutiny Coordinating

Group (to inform Scrutiny work programmes), and annually to the public via our annual performance report. The [annual performance report](#) includes an appendix which sets out the scrutiny that has been undertaken in-year, in relation to the priorities. In 2023/24, the first reporting for Priority Boards was at quarter 3 and the first reporting to Executive and Scrutiny was at quarter 4.

- Insight, the new corporate performance, risk and project management system, went live and improved our ability to analyse and report on achieving our council priorities and determining necessary interventions. The internal Performance Management Framework was reviewed and aligned to the new system in 2023/24 by the Performance, Improvement & Partnerships Team.
- Some elected members have raised concerns that the pace of decision-making in relation to services (in particular, Change Programme proposals) mean that there is less opportunity for pre-decision scrutiny.

We use a 'golden thread' approach to performance management and review interventions at all levels when progress is not on track.

- Our performance management framework toolkit supported a consistent service planning approach. It provides comprehensive guidance to all services in the planning for service improvements, ongoing performance monitoring and the review and self-assessment process.
- Our Council Plan Performance Management Framework (PMF) was strengthened as part of the development of the new Council Plan 2023-28 and now significantly incorporates greater outcome measures ensuring a better understanding of the impact of the council's activities.
- Plans were put in place to review the Council Plan PMF twice a year to ensure it remains relevant in context of budget challenges and external factors, and will also provide an opportunity to consider any additional relevant outcome measures that become available.
- Audit Wales reported that 'The council's processes and activity provide assurance that it is measuring and monitoring performance appropriately and learning lessons from how it has set its objectives. The body has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the body's understanding of the 'as is'/ short-term need.'
- Senior management, Lead Members, Scrutiny Committees undertake a valuable challenge function. Services report regularly to Scrutiny Committees as required and processes are in place for elected members to refer performance concerns for scrutiny challenge.
- A range of methods were used across services to provide senior leaders with performance information. At service level the range and depth of these measures are substantial. However, they are filtered to create a more succinct set of high level corporate reporting measures that reflect the performance priorities of the Council Plan 2023-28. Examples of service performance governance include:

- ▶ The ICT & Digital Strategy is implemented and regularly monitored at the Digital & ICT Programme Board.
 - ▶ Focused service planning and performance management in social care to support improvements and transformation.
 - ▶ A systematic approach to evaluating education services and planning for improvement in education and early intervention service. Work was undertaken in 2023/24 to improve the quality of business plans and performance measures within these.
 - ▶ The Planning Service monitors its performance via the Planning Committee. However Audit Wales identified that the delay in adopting the Local Development Plan (LDP) resulted in Wrexham being the only council in Wales unable to benefit from data produced for statutory LDP monitoring reports to inform and underpin decision making arrangements during this period.
- Our Performance, Improvement & Partnerships Team supported our services in embedding these approaches.
 - A range of involvement activities were undertaken in 2023/24, to gather feedback from customers and inform performance reporting. 45 surveys via the council's involvement platform 'Your Voice' took place and included equality monitoring questions as standard, enabling the council to evaluate differences in views and satisfaction between those representing different protected characteristics.

We are working to improve the use and quality of data and bench marking performance indicators to inform decision-making to ensure achievement of outcomes is optimised:

- At the end of 2023-24 Data Cymru launched a Self-Assessment Performance Dataset Tool and a Local Authority Performance Profile Tool, which go some way to replacing the Welsh Government Performance Accountability Measures, which were discontinued in 2019, and to enabling benchmarking. Work is underway to utilise this resource to better understand our performance in relation to other local authorities.
- We recognised the need to strengthen service user perspective data and work is ongoing with Welsh Local Government Association on the development of an all-Wales annual resident survey to identify where relevant data can be included to inform progress in relation to service user perspective.
- Our annual review and target setting review helps ensure that Council Plan Performance Management Framework retains a focus on outcomes (including service user perspective where this is available).
- We are satisfied that our corporate data quality arrangements are consistent and sufficient, and are continuing to refine processes as the new Council Plan performance management framework becomes more established. Our new projects, performance and risk management system ('Insight') reduces the risk of user input error and provides an effective audit trail.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as yellow which meant that we demonstrated good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Implement the new Performance and Risk Management System to improve data collection and recording arrangements to enhance effectiveness, minimise risk of data errors and improve accessibility of information.	<p>New Performance, Risk and Projects system procured and implemented in year. Initial roll out for risk and performance completed and quarter 3/quarter 4 corporate performance and risk reporting completed via the new system.</p> <p>Projects to be implemented in early 2024-25.</p>	No
Develop and implement outcome focussed indicators for the new council plan priorities and the use of comparative and benchmarking performance indicators.	<p>New performance management framework developed to accompany the new Council Plan focussed on outcome measures and impact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new PMF included outcome measures/ supporting measures/supporting actions and contextual indicators. • Further work required to develop the use of benchmarking data availability. 	Yes
Focus on use of service user outcomes performance information to further inform future service planning and meet service users' needs (to be informed by Audit Wales review due autumn 2023).	<p>Whilst there is evidence of service user data being utilised at service level, there is potential to further develop this by incorporating high-level service user data into corporate reporting.</p> <p>The council priority outcomes were directly informed by what people told us was important to them, and the PMF is structured around outcome measures that demonstrate impact on these areas.</p> <p>Twice yearly reviews planned of measures and targets.</p> <p>Initial work commenced in partnership with Welsh Local Government Association of an annual resident's survey.</p>	Yes

Our assessment 2023-24 - Yellow (sustained)

We have reached this conclusion because of good performance with strengths outweighing areas for development.

Strengths

- The council's performance management framework has been strengthened. Carefully considered outcome measures and underpinning activity provide assurance of appropriate measuring and monitoring of performance.
- Ongoing review of measures and targets to ensure we remain focused on deliverability and outcomes.
- The council has incorporated lessons learned to enhance how it defines its priorities and outcomes by reviewing past plan performance and drawing from a variety of data, and this has been recognised by Audit Wales.
- A range of service performance information was provided to senior leaders.
- Quality and accuracy of reporting on achieving priorities and risks has been enhanced by the new corporate performance and risk management system
- Effective scrutiny and oversight arrangements were in place throughout the year, reinforced by scrutiny training delivered by WLGA.

Areas for development

Carried Forward

- Explore use of Data Cymru Self-Assessment Toolkit throughout the organisation to support benchmarking and service improvement.
- Continue collaboration with WLGA to develop an all-Wales annual resident survey and identify relevant service user perspective measures that align with the council priorities.

New

- Ensure performance management arrangements **are more focused to** include consideration of demand management and performance pressures, to include the introduction of Balanced Scorecards for each key service to ensure clarity of what the council is able to sustain within the context of future budget cuts.

Theme: Financial Planning

A strong system of financial management is essential for the implementation of policies and the achievement of intended outcomes, as it will enforce financial discipline, strategic allocation of resources, efficient service delivery, and accountability.^[1]

We take a long term view and ensure that our medium term financial strategies, as far as possible, set the context for ongoing decisions on significant delivery issues and changes in the external environment:

- We have proactively addressed financial resilience in response to the mounting pressure on service budgets, demonstrating transparency in our actions. Identified this as a significant issue in the Annual Governance review in 2023-24 and into 2024-25, due to high levels of expectation, increasing demands complexities and costs.
- Our budget outturn 2023-24 was in line with projections and strategy.
- We have made improvements to governance arrangements and processes including the clarity and timeliness of our strategic approach as evidenced by Audit Wales.
- Our Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was approved for 2024-25 and planning for 2025-26 and 2026-27 is underway. The MTFP and budget sets the framework for future spending and investments requirements against a range of potential funding scenarios.
- We regularly updated our Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to reflect latest assumptions and to ensure we are able to respond effectively to emerging potential budget pressures.
- We have established a 'Change Programme' to support service delivery and financial stability in the context of the ongoing budget pressures.
- We worked collaboratively at a regional level to ensure early identification of regional factors.
- Financial risk is incorporated into all risk assessments.
- The Capital Programme to 2026-27 will be updated in autumn 2024. However managing the unexpected in terms of the revenue position is difficult beyond one year given the uncertainty of settlement funding.

We recognise that we need to manage service pressures effectively to secure long term financial resilience and sustainability

- Services with challenging budget demands were supported through task and finish groups. In 2023-24 work was undertaken to manage financial pressures in Social Care and Environment and Technical departments.
- We recognised the need to improve the management of the commissioning of off-contract placements in Children's Social Care. An important area due to high levels of expectation and increasing demands and costs in these areas.

- In 2023-24 we reviewed staffing structure within the Finance service to improve resilience – manage vacant posts within the context of the overall budget position, address balance of service responsibilities, to ensure the necessary level of resource to priority service areas and prepare for core financial system implementation.

We have sound financial management and reporting arrangements

- Improvements made to governance arrangements and processes, and the clarity and timeliness of our strategic approach in terms of financial management have received positive feedback from our regulator. The council has established a Change Programme to ensure that the council plans, both operationally and politically, to deliver its priorities in a challenging economic environment.
- The 2023-24 in-year position recovered well, in line with forecasts. The final position did not require use of reserves having managed a potential in-year £23.8m pressure.
- We proactively ensured that our financial management arrangements are sound. As part of the Welsh Government Local Government (WGLA) improvement offer programme, we commissioned a review to assess the budget position and draw lessons from the outturn position 2022-23. The review provided assurance that the fundamentals of financial reporting are resilient, while highlighting areas for learning.
- The council embraced the areas for learning from the WGLA review and is making good progress with implementing actions including; focus on improving demand forecasting, focus on Social Care and Environment & Technical through Task & Finish Group working, management and monitoring of potential in-year pressures, enhanced reporting, and MTFP enhancements made and MTFP regularly updated.
- Following a review of our core financial system and related processes we implemented a new system that will better support financial reporting whilst providing scope to report financial and non-financial outcomes together.
- We reported to Council, Executive Board, scrutiny committees as required, Governance & Audit Committee and Senior Leadership Team. Budget forecasts were reported to Executive Board five times through the cycle with additional interim reports being made to all elected members between formal committee reporting.
- Regular Member workshops were held throughout the year on local government finance, budget assumption national budgets and economic forecasts, as well as service pressures, risks and council reserves.
- National processes, information, advice and guidance reviewed and used to support our planning. Including Society of Welsh Treasurers (SWT), North Wales Practitioners, Regional Social Care Fees Group, Association of Directors of Social Services, Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountability, Association of Directors of Education Wales, Wales Fiscal Analysis, Central Government and WLGA.

We have an inclusive budget process that ensures budgets are prepared in accordance with intended outcomes:

- We involved our stakeholders and the public in our budget setting decisions through consultation on our council priorities: we involve stakeholders and the public in the development of our Council Plan priorities, which inform our resource decisions.
- A stronger business partnering approach is embedded with finance officers' regular attendance at service Departmental Management Team (DMT) meetings and increased input into service planning. Plans to develop a training module on financial management for budget holders will strengthen collective understanding of forecasts and assumptions used in financial planning and reporting.
- Whilst the Council Plan is not costed, financial priorities, commitments and pressures are linked to priorities and fed into proposals in relation to budget pressures and to determine final budgets. Chief Officers identified financial priorities, commitments and pressures for their services which are linked into Council Plan priorities. A review of the Council Plan Performance Management began at the end of 2023-24 to set year 2 targets against budget challenges.
- The budget monitoring framework has been strengthened. A stronger Business Partnering approach is being embedded with regular attendance at Service Departmental Management Team meetings along with greater finance input into the service's process mapping.
- All financial proposals / decisions were subject to an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and as of April 2024 an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA). Socio Economic Duty is considered via the IIA process. Mitigation of impacts built into EIA / IIA process.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as amber which meant that we demonstrated satisfactory performance, but investment and increased capacity may have been required in a number of key areas.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Improve financial resilience through better financial forecasting and closer links between services and financial management (due to increased pressure on service budgets due to high levels of expectation and increasing demands and costs, particularly in social care) *(AGS)	<p>Progress has been made to improve financial resilience and respond to increased pressures on service budgets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assurance that the fundamentals of financial reporting are sound, whilst responding to areas of development. • Services with challenging budget demands were supported through task and finish groups. • Remains a significant issue in 2024-25 as the public sector funding environment remains particularly challenging for the future, considering the latest estimates of government funding, compared with the significant growth in costs and demand pressures. 	Yes
Appraisal of budget planning and monitoring processes in light of continued challenging economic environment.	<p>The council has responded to challenging economic environment through budget planning and monitoring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements made to governance arrangements and processes, and the clarity and timeliness of our strategic approach for 2024-25. • Establishment of a Change Programme to support service delivery and financial sustainability over the next two years. 	No
Ensure we have Budget Mitigation Measures to enable a 23/24 balanced budget.	Budget outturn 2023/24 was in line with projections and strategy.	No
Strengthen in-year forecasting of future demand and cost for services where there are particular pressures i.e. social care, technical services and homelessness.	Work with services is on-going to ensure that the necessary data is available to allow accurate forecasting, along with budget holders having a greater understanding of cash limited budgets. In addition, work continues to ensure that budget holders understand financial implications of any decisions made in service delivery.	Yes

Our assessment Our assessment 2023-24: Amber (sustained)

We have reached this conclusion because of satisfactory performance, but investment and increased capacity may be required in a number of key areas.

Strengths

- Robust financial governance framework always been in place. This has been strengthened in response to a more challenging economic and financial environment and in response to WLGA review.
- Strengthened in-year forecasting of future demand and cost for services where there are particular pressures i.e. social care, technical services and homelessness, and successfully managed the Task and Finish Groups for both Social Care and Environment and Technical Services.
- Continued strong working relationships with external bodies and departments.
- Good relationships with members have continued through a challenging financial context.
- Successful management of outturn position for 2023/24 and management of a potential in-year £23.8m pressure.
- Financial risk is incorporated into all risk assessments.

Areas for development

Carried Forward

- Continue to develop financial resilience due to increased pressure on service budgets due to high levels of expectation and increasing demands and costs within the context of forecast lower Welsh Government settlement. (*AGS)
- Maintain strong in-year forecasting of future demand and cost for services where there are particular pressures.

New

- Implementation of Change Programme to:
 - ▶ Support the achievement of a sustainable budget through delivery of a two year programme that maintains and implements an agreed level of savings defined in the MTFP (currently £28m) and the unallocated savings of £1.8m in the 24/25 budget
 - ▶ Maintain stability of the council, ensuring long term sustainability with appropriate reserves and an organisation design that is fit for purpose. (Change Programme ToR)

Theme: Risk Management Arrangements

Risk management and internal control are important and integral parts of a performance management system and crucial to the achievement of outcomes. Risk should be considered and addressed as part of all decision making activities.^[1]

We evaluate and monitor risk management and our risk management arrangements on a regular basis and report on these regularly:

- We reported comprehensively on our risks – risk registers were updated at least quarterly and reported to Senior Leadership Team, Lead Members and Governance and Audit Committee twice a year.
- Our risk management arrangements are formally reviewed every 5 years (the current Risk Management Policy 2020-25) and underpinning Guidance is kept under review and updated as required. An annual and ongoing review is undertaken via the governance framework review work which informs the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), and by the Head of Internal Audit via the Annual Opinion.
- We updated our risk policy to adopt a new 5 x 5 risk matrix to include a more detailed criteria and to bring us in line with other organisations.
- Additional reporting in relation to identified areas of risk was also undertaken in-year: the need to improve the Management of Contracts (Health & Safety Governance Framework) was identified as a significant issue in the AGS 2022-23. Additional reporting in-year to Senior Leadership Team and Lead Members, Health and Safety as a corporate risk reported to Senior Leadership Team, Lead Members and Governance & Audit Committee twice, and additional reporting to Executive Board as required. Resulting in a marked improvement evidenced by improvement in procedures, compliance and training.

We have a robust and integrated risk management system, which includes clear accountability for risks.

- In 2023 we procured an integrated Performance, Risk and Project management system ('Insight') and implemented the risk management module in quarter 3 2023-24. This has improved efficiency and the quality of risk management reporting.
- The council holds risk registers for departments, council priorities, projects and partnerships.
- Ownership and accountability for all risks is clearly assigned to identified risk owners.
- Corporate Risks are assigned to a responsible Chief Officer; Chief Officers are responsible for the management of their service area risks.
- Our processes require risks to be discussed with appropriate officers and within departmental management teams.

- 'Insight' supports assurance around active review of risks – risk owners are now required to set a risk status of 'Tolerate' or 'Mitigate' for each risk quarterly and additional mitigation ('risk actions') are clearly assigned to named officers within 'Insight.'
- We undertook an annual Chief Officer peer review challenge of our risk registers to ensure consistency of approach and appropriate risk scoring across services.
- We reported annually on anti-corruption and fraud to Governance and Audit Committee and updates included in interim internal audit reports show little evidence that fraud and corruption are currently major problems. Any whistleblowing or concerns with regards to influencing decisions and misuse of decisions are investigated using established corruption and fraud processes.
- A risk-based approach was used within internal audit service to develop the Internal Audit Plan - taking account of the council's governance framework, risk and control registers and Internal Audit's own assessment of the council's financial and governance risks. The Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion was that from most of the areas examined, 'the council's framework of governance, risk management and control is generally adequate and effective in achieving the Council's objectives.'
- There are current regulatory policies, procedures and guidance available to manage risks around Information Governance and managing data, including an Information Governance Handbook on the intranet.

We consider and address risk as part of all decision-making activities and we ensure risks to the achievement of our priorities are identified.

- Departmental risks which relate to the achievement of the council's priorities are compiled into a council priority risk register, and are reviewed by Priority Boards as part of their Terms of Reference.
- The identification and management of risk is embedded in the project management process and the Partnership approval process, and is included in the established reporting processes supporting these.
- Governance arrangements agrees for the council's Change Programme, (established at the end of 2023-24 to support service delivery and financial sustainability in the context of ongoing financial pressures), have been designed to ensure that risks associated with the impact of proposals on the delivery of our priorities are identified early and fully considered as part of the decision-making process.
- The Procurement Team support departments in managing the risks associated with the council's procurement processes. The Team supports departments with ongoing contract management arrangements, including the identification of risks, and Tender processes includes checks with regard to the financial stability of companies.
- Corporate Governance and Risk Management arrangements are included in Member Induction programme and core training.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as yellow which meant that we demonstrated good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Implement the new Performance and Risk Management System to improve efficiency and quality of risk management reporting.	Performance and Risk Management System implemented during 2023-24 and risk reporting completed via the system for quarter 3 onwards.	No
Ensure that risk is considered as part of the budget mitigation measures undertaken to enable a 23/24 balanced budget.	Risk was considered as part of the in-year budget management process. Balanced budget achieved.	No

Our assessment 2023-24: Green (improved)

We have reached this conclusion because of consistently good performance with minimal areas for development

Strengths

- We reported comprehensively on our risks – risk registers were updated at least quarterly and reported to Senior Leadership Team, Lead Members and Governance and Audit Committee twice a year.
- Implementation of 'Insight' has improved assurance around active review of risks and management of mitigations.
- Clear lines of accountability for risk ownership and additional risk actions to further mitigate risks.
- Anti-corruption and Fraud reporting to Governance and Audit Committee show little evidence that fraud and corruption are currently major problems.
- A comprehensive review has significantly enhanced the robustness of our risk management and mitigations. Including more detailed categorisation of risks and closure of risks that have been mitigated or are no longer relevant.

Areas for development

New

- Ensure that risks associated with the impact of Change Programme proposals on the delivery of our priorities, are identified early and fully considered as part of the decision-making process.

Theme: Workforce Planning

A local government organisation must ensure that it has both the capacity to fulfil its functions and to make certain that there are policies in place to guarantee that its management has the operational capacity for the organisation as a whole. Because both individuals and the environment in which an authority operates will change over time, there will be a continuous need to develop its capacity as well as the skills and experience of the leadership of individual staff members.^[1]

We have an effective workforce plan that is reviewed regularly and that is focussed on ensuring we have the necessary capacity and skills.

- The council continues to work to ensure that Wrexham is an 'Employer of Choice' in a highly competitive market.
- We understand the challenges around the recruitment of staff and the potential impact on service delivery. We have implemented a revised People Strategy that acknowledges our workforce as our greatest asset and most important resource in achieving our Council Plan priorities. The Strategy, and our annual workforce planning processes facilitated by HR, include succession planning.
- We continue to identify service areas where there are recruitment and retention challenges, and to develop long term and innovative ways to address these: including 'Grow Your Own' approach, a review of pay and reward benefits, and the identification of instances when we need to take decisive and immediate action to encourage applications and reduce turnover.
- We use employee monitoring information and our workforce planning process to review the effectiveness and fairness of our employment policies and practices, to help us identify key equality issues with services and to review whether our workforce reflects the local community. We are taking steps to improve our equality monitoring to better target actions to promote workforce diversity.

We recognise the need to 'do more with less' and we are changing our working arrangements to support this.

- We have recognised the need to ensure that the Change Programme, established to support service delivery and financial sustainability, is designed in a way that considers the pressures placed on recruitment and retention, and is able to focus on service areas that become a pressure point, as required.
- Our 'Supporting a Highly Skilled and Engaged Workforce, Focused on Delivering Services' council priority ensures we are committed to being an 'Employer of Choice' to attract the right people with the right skills and mindset to deliver our services.
- The council continues to develop modern ways of working, transforming working practices by providing improved working environments, adopting new technology and digital solutions and making our work more sustainable in the long term.

- We recognise the need to learn, embed new practices and support further innovation and change in order to build resilience and make ongoing sustainable improvements in the way we work.

We have a framework in place to ensure that we have the people with the right skills, appropriate qualifications and mind set and we ensure the workforce has a strong awareness of and commitment to good governance and the rule of law:

- A framework of policies exists to support our expectations of our workforce – this includes induction, Performance Review and Development (PRD) arrangements which include values and behavioural competencies.
- We recognise the need to ensure that there is a continuing focus on supporting managers in the consistent interpretation and compliance with set and agreed policies and procedures.
- We recognise that we need to continue with work to ensure that inductions, PRDs and training are used effectively, and to improve reporting on these. Completion data is shared with Chief Officers to target support.
- Our training offer includes development opportunities from entry level to degree level.
- We have identified a programme of core training and key governance e-learning modules but recognise the need to improve monitoring arrangements to ensure that all mandatory training has been completed satisfactorily across the workforce,
- Workforce policies for recruitment and selection promote equality and diversity and encourage candidates from all communities, and promoting equality and diversity is an integral part of our workforce development programme.
- To support early identification of any potential challenges in relation to the workforce, regular monthly meetings are held between Human Resources and Trade Unions to gather this soft intelligence. This provides a platform to discuss potential hotspots, implement early intervention and begin problem solving before potential concerns develop.

We are committed to the health and well-being of our workforce.

- Awarded Gold Corporate Health Assessment in 2023 (12 month extension to previous Gold status).
- The revised People Strategy, approved by Executive Board in March 2024, underscores the council's commitment to employee health and well-being, as well as the development and nurturing of our own talent as integral components of succession planning.
- Sickness absence is monitored by our Senior Leadership Team and our scrutiny committee through Workforce Monitoring Reports. Departmental sickness absence rates are reviewed and underlying issues identified and addressed.

- The percentage of days lost to sickness absence is higher in some departments than others. This can be for a variety of reasons and health and wellbeing initiatives are targeted differently in different services to reflect the diversity of our workforce.
- Our absence rate (number of days lost per employee) for this period is slightly lower (12.6 for 23-24) than the same period last year (12.7). The number of leavers has reduced by 100, compared to the same period last year. However this is likely to rise in 2024-25 due to the response to budget challenges.
- There has been a reduction in the cost of agency workers in Environment and Technical and Social Care.
- Absenteeism was high for stress, depression and anxiety as well as musculoskeletal compared to other reasons. This has been recognised by the council and supportive initiatives put in place including; Mental Health Champions, employee assistance programme and access to counselling.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as yellow which meant that we demonstrated good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Improve recruitment and retention – specifically in those services experiencing recruitment and retention issues. (*AGS)	<p>Good progress made however pressure in some service areas remain.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the People Strategy which sets out the future direction for recruitment. • Promotion of flexible/modern ways of working to ensure Wrexham Council is an ‘Employer of Choice’ in a highly competitive market place. <p>Reframe around ensuring that the Change Programme is designed to manage the pressures placed on recruitment and retention.</p>	Yes (re-framed)
Work with our Public Services Board partners to identify where organisations can use their recruitment practices to enable diverse and thriving workplaces. (PSB Well-being Plan).	No development work in this area currently as a result of prioritising internal restructure and revision of the People Strategy.	Yes
Improve the monitoring and reporting arrangements for the completion of mandatory training across the workforce. (See also Leadership and Organisational Culture theme)	An internal audit of Workforce Development reported ‘Amber’ assurance in May 2023 in relation to the need to improve monitoring arrangements to provide assurance that all mandatory training has been completed satisfactorily across the workforce. Progress has been made and this will continue to be monitored by internal audit.	No
Improve our workforce equality monitoring data and the timeliness of our reporting.	Limited progress in this area in-year: once initial work on the HR system has been completed, we will consider how to improve and report on equality monitoring data.	Yes

Our assessment 2023-24 - Yellow (sustained)

We have reached this conclusion because we can demonstrate good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Strengths

- Our new 'Supporting a Highly Skilled and Engaged Workforce, Focused on Delivering Services' council priority ensures we are committed to being an 'Employer of Choice' to attract the right people with the right skills and mindset to deliver our services.
- We have implemented a revised people strategy that acknowledges our workforce as our greatest assets and most important resource in achieving our Council Plan priorities, and recognises the development and nurturing of our own talent as integral components of succession planning.
- The need to identify and take action to support services experiencing challenges around recruitment and retention has been recognised and supported by the council's leadership. We have adopted an innovative and flexible approach to respond to these challenges.
- The council's clear commitment to workplace health and well-being support is integral in our People Strategy, and evidenced across external reviews and maintaining the Gold Corporate Health Standard Award in 2023.
- The council continues to develop modern ways of working, transforming working practices by providing improved working environments, adopting new technology and digital solutions and making our work more sustainable in the long term.
- The council has good resources, policies and processes in place to support high standards of behaviour.

Areas for development

Carried Forward

- Improve our workforce equality monitoring data and the timeliness of our reporting.
- Work with our Public Services Board partners to identify where organisations can use their recruitment practices to enable diverse and thriving workplaces. (PSB Well-being Plan).

New

- Ensure that the Change Programme, established to support service delivery and financial sustainability, considers the pressures placed on recruitment and retention within the organisation and is able to focus when needed on service areas that become a pressure point. (AGS*)

Theme: Assets

Local government ensures good asset management to ensure effective service provision and achieve value for money. Asset management is central to local government priorities with assets reviewed regularly and recommendations for improvement made. Current and future service needs of the local population are considered as part of an appropriate asset management strategy.^[1]

The value of the council's Assets as at 31 March 2023 is £536 million as per 2022/23 Statement of Accounts (Note 20 and 22). This figure relates to Council Fund assets and includes Land & Buildings, Community Assets, Surplus Assets, Assets under Construction, Assets Held for Sale and Infrastructure Assets. It excludes Council Dwellings, Heritage Assets, and Vehicles, Plant & Equipment.

The Value of the Council Dwellings as at 31 March 2023 is £402 million as per 2022/23 Statement of Accounts (Note 20). (Latest available figures)

For further explanation as to how these values are calculated, please see Appendix 2 – Glossary of Terms.

Corporate assets

We support service delivery by ensuring asset management strategies are driven by service need and future service requirements:

- The council's Asset Management Strategy 2023-28 has replaced the Corporate Land & Buildings Strategy and Strategic Asset Management Plan. The development of the new strategy was supported and reviewed by CIPFA; it addresses Audit Wales' 2022 'Springing Forward' recommendations for managing our corporate assets, and reflects de-carbonisation priorities.
- The strategy demonstrates the management, resource, processes and procedures that are in place to effectively manage the estate, including processes for the disposal of assets. It shows how the Council reviews, rationalises, maintains and modernises its estate to reflect its priorities and to ensure that the estate is fit for purpose.
- The strategy aligns with our Council Plan 2023-28, which was developed using the Public Services Board's Well-being Assessment as a key source of data and population need, ensuring the 'Golden Thread' approach.
- We recognise the importance and significance that the council's property portfolio plays in the activities it undertakes, and we work to ensure robust decisions are taken regarding our assets and to ensure decisions to invest and improve assets are made in a robust and transparent way.
- We work in collaboration with national consortiums and regularly explore options around working in collaboration with our partners and/or sharing assets. This is considered from a service improvement as well as a financial perspective – for example the multi-agency approach to the 'Well-being Hub' in Crown Buildings.

We have improved the quality of our asset information and our support for departments in reviewing their asset management plans:

- Each department produces a service asset management plan, which identifies the service need for its assets and is the result of internal challenge and review of alternative options for asset use and service delivery within our stringent budgetary framework.
- We have completed our management and team restructuring, which is now better placed to support departments in the management of their asset management plans. There is a recognised need to fill essential roles within the new structure with regional recruitment challenges impacting on our ability to recruit within some of these posts. A business case has been submitted for funding for additional legal resource for lease and disposal work.
- The council's bespoke Asset Management database contains comprehensive details of all land and property assets held and managed by the council and enables the council to manage the performance of the assets portfolio, detect trends and identify any underperforming property.
- New governance arrangements within the new Asset Management Strategy ensure we regularly review and report on operations, performance and use of assets to ensure their continued effectiveness, including supporting a consistent approach across departments.

We recognise the need to obtain Value for Money and to work towards improving long term sustainability and reducing energy use:

- Value for Money and use of resources is supported by new procurement rules and management systems, including rental management and rent arrears actions.
- We have improved corporate asset void performance, and repurposed buildings, for example the Old Library for the new Culture Hub.
- We have contract frameworks in place which include mechanisms to review prices using nationally recognised indices – however the recent sharp rise in building materials has meant that some contractors have left the frameworks. Price adjustments are now considered on a shorter frequency to help mitigate these risks to the supply chain.
- £300K reduction in the Repairs and Maintenance Budget 2024-25 reflects the deferment of phase five (Guildhall) in the Office Accommodation Review project following completion of phase four (Lambpit Street and Old Library).
- Our Facilities Management continues to meet statutory compliance.
- We ensure cost-recovery from all professional workstreams such as acquisitions, disposals licences and leases and other legal agreements such as easements, and wayleave agreements where applicable; and ensure that we achieve market rents associated with the commercial estate, within the context of supporting council priorities. This approach is captured in the Scheme of Delegation.

- We recognise the need to consider not only financial and physical resources in terms of value for money and best use of resources: the council's commitment to contributing to the national de-carbonisation agenda (Buildings is one of the four Key Themes in the council's Decarbonisation Plan) must be taken into account in all decisions and strategies and is incorporated into the Council's Asset Management Strategy.

Our governance controls are good, but we recognise there are opportunities to improve on clarity around our decision-making.

- Decisions about assets are often contentious and there is a reputational risk to the council if our processes are not clear and understandable to elected members, the public and our stakeholders. The new strategy includes a section on decision making and consultation processes, and new governance arrangements will ensure we regularly review and report on operations, performance and use of assets to ensure their continued effectiveness. Including supporting a consistent approach across departments.

Housing Revenue Account Assets (HRA)

We support service delivery by ensuring asset management strategies are driven by service need and future service requirements:

- Effective management of our housing stock supports the council's 'Wrexham is a Fair and Safe Place' council priority to ensure that people, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to the right housing.
- The Local Housing Strategy 2018-23 currently sets the priorities and actions for housing and housing related services and for meeting housing need and demand as identified by the Local Housing Market Assessment (LHMA). The current LHMA was produced in 2015 and updated in 2017. The LHMA is in the process of being rewritten, using the template for writing the report and the Excel tool for calculating future demand, which has been issued by Welsh Government. It has to be completed this year and will last for 5 years. It will inform the new Local Housing Strategy, which is due to be revised this year.
- We are one of the largest stock retaining local authorities in Wales, at November 2023 the Council's housing stock consisted of approximately 11,071 properties.
- Our Housing Allocations Policy ensures that accommodation is provided to meet the housing needs of all groups in local communities and we gather equality monitoring data in support of this. We aim to make best use of housing stock by allocating general needs properties to applicants whose household size is the best match for the size of the property.
- Our Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan was approved in 2023-24, the plan demonstrates how we will maintain our housing stock and Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS).
- We have achieved compliance with the WHQS 1 and maintenance of this standard is now embedded. WHQS 2, released in October 2023, directs future investment in terms of demanding

targets in relation to Decarbonisation and affordable warmth, and the requirement to change individual components (e.g. kitchens and bathrooms) within properties at relevant intervals. Investment is subject to funding within the council's Housing Revenue Account. Plans to achieve WHQS 2 are being developed to achieve this alongside Net Zero plans for the future. We recognise the challenge in the current financial climate and are managing this.

We are taking steps to improve the quality of our asset information and planning processes:

- A new asset management software system (Asprey) was procured in 2023-24 which will drive our future delivery programme and plans, including component life expectancy (kitchens and bathrooms). The new system offers an integrated, flexible and user friendly approach for our officers and our contract holders. Implementation of the new system will take place in 2024-25.
- We have ensured we have a consistent corporate approach to asset management across services by ensuring the two asset management ICT systems (corporate assets and domestic council housing stock) are underpinned by the same principles.
- Our asset management system now includes a decarbonisation element to support us working towards Net Zero.

We recognise the need to obtain Value for Money and to work towards improving long term sustainability and reducing energy use:

- The housing team work closely with corporate procurement on tendering and updating contracts to ensure Value for Money. The contractual documentation is reviewed and updated accordingly to strive for Value for Money as well as making service improvements.
- We have moved to focus on prevention measures to support contract holders to keep their homes in good condition (which also contributes to their health and well being), rather than enforcement.
- The department has invested significantly into the refurbishment of empty properties over the last 6-7 years, and this has improved the turnaround times of our empty property refurbishment programme. Empty properties have reduced by nearly 50% in the last 2 years. This is currently around 1% of our stock. This year, a further £11 million will be invested into empty properties.
- A small number of properties (10) have received a full retrofit refurbishment using Welsh Government's Optimised Retrofit Programme (ORP) funding. We anticipate increasing these figures year on year, subject to funding. These pilot properties now have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) A rating, indicating a SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) energy score between 92 and 100. Positive progress continues to be made to date. Our housing stock has an average SAP energy score of 72 (2023-24).
- The WHQS programme has been used to support social value / community benefits and our contracts are used to promote social, economic and environmental well-being in communities.

- Rented Homes Act – We need to become compliant with all aspects of the act. There remains ongoing work with aspects of the act, e.g. correspondence with contract holders.

We report regularly on how well we manage our housing stock and the associated finances:

- Our reporting includes how inflation and increased costs have impacted on our HRA, and our focus on the need to sustain quality service provision through the current period of budget challenge.
- We report to the council's Homes and Environment Scrutiny Committee as required, and submit quarterly and annual returns to Welsh Government.
- We prepare comprehensive quarterly performance reports for the Tenant Membership Partnership – rent (revenue and arrears); lettings and voids management, updates on housing stock; repairs and planned maintenance; tenancy management and sustainment; and statutory compliance with gas servicing.

We involve our stakeholders and tenants in designing our services and regularly seek feedback to improve our services:

- We employ a dedicated Contract Holder Participation Officer who promotes and encourages involvement across a range of initiatives – Tenant Member Partnership, Tenant Forums, Tenant and Resident Associations, Service Improvement Groups, surveys and questionnaires, annual tenant events. Initiatives have included the promotion of 'Tenants' News' (4,156 subscribers at end March 2024), membership of E-Cymru (digital learning platform aimed at providing access to a wide range of training opportunities for contract holders), supporting use of our digital services and a review of the Tenant Member Partnership.
- We actively consider ways of ensuring that there is representation across a fully diverse tenant demographic, consult on all proposed changes to policies which affect the management of contract holders' homes, and work alongside contract holders to develop a number of initiatives where improvements are required.
- Feedback from the survey of our contract holders (November 2023) was positive. Of those contract holders who responded (889 – 8%), 75% of contract holders agreed that they were satisfied with the service provided by the housing service, and 72% were satisfied with the overall quality of their home. However, only 41% agreed that they were satisfied with how the council gives contract holders a say in how services are managed.
- We use complaints to identify lessons learned and improve practice. The housing department are one of the service areas receiving the majority of complaints to the council, which is to be expected due to the nature and size of the service. While the number of formal complaints increased in the last 12 months (from 63 to 88) the majority of these are not upheld, which indicates the team is following due process in the majority of cases.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as amber which meant that we demonstrated satisfactory performance, but investment and increased capacity may have been required in a number of key areas.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Corporate: Approval of new Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Action Plan.	Asset Management Strategy 2023-28 agreed.	No
Corporate: Establish Asset Management Implementation Group to support consistency of approach to management of assets across departments.	The Asset Management implementation group, including representatives from other service areas will be reconvened now the Asset Management Strategy has been adopted at Executive Board	Yes
Corporate: Implementation of Asset Management Plan through efficient and effective asset decisions that are clearly linked to priorities for the council identified in the Asset Management Policy.	Asset Management Strategy now agreed and is clearly linked to the council's priorities, and includes a section on decision making and consultation processes. The new governance arrangements will ensure we regularly review and report on operations, performance and use of assets to ensure their continued effectiveness.	No
Corporate: Ensure asset information is up-to-date and complete by completing the update of the new asset management software (Tech forge).	Financial Management are using Tech Forge and all premises have been inputted. Lease information will be updated and completed for September 2024.	No
HRA: Ensure accurate asset management informs effective business planning and financial management through procurement of new Housing Management System and review of stock condition survey approach	<p>Asset management and business planning is supported by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asset Management Plan approved May 24 • HRA business Plan approved January 24 <p>Procurement of new housing asset management system is complete, implementation will be completed in 2024/25.</p> <p>Following funding awarded by Welsh Government, a programme of stock condition surveys are planned in 2024/25.</p>	No

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
HRA: Improve management of contracts. *(AGS)	Good progress made but still areas to develop: Removed as a significant issue in the AGS 2023-24 review. Further development and compliance work embedded.	No
HRA: Work with contract holders to support decarbonisation work.	Progress made - during 2023/24, contract holders' representatives visited a Decarbonisation hub to support a better understanding of technologies available and visited properties where alternative technology has been installed. Further work ongoing as part of WHQS2 and is also now being taken forward as part of the Decarbonisation Plan theme.	No
HRA: Improve contract holder experience (Housing Repairs) and reduce reactive repairs backlog	64% of repairs carried out within relevant timescale (improvement from 60% in previous year). Good progress made but still focus on further improvements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department introduced an online repairs form to provide easier process of repair reporting for contract holders. • Further work required to reduce repairs backlog. Survey- 63% of contract holders said they were satisfied with how the service deals with repairs and maintenance.	Yes
HRA: Expand Contract Holder participation.	A number of activities have improved potential for contract holder participation. However, further work required to improve contract holders' satisfaction rates with how the council gives them a say in how services are managed (41%); opportunities to participate in decision-making (45%)	Yes
HRA: Source housing stock to meet increasing need	Formulated the Housing Accommodation Project, remit to increase stock, alongside: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with social care to bring supported housing in county. • Various models being considered, e.g. leasing, buybacks. • Increased stock this year by 24 units (further 24 planned for 2024/25). 	Yes
HRA: Ensure quality service provision is sustained through period of budget challenge.	The HRA and service provision review is underway. Some challenging and difficult decisions are required to maintain standards, within a tight financial framework.	Yes

Our assessment 2023-24 - Yellow (improved)

We have reached this conclusion because we can demonstrate good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Corporate Assets

Strengths

CORPORATE

- New Asset Management Strategy agreed that demonstrates the management, resource, processes and procedures that are in place to effectively manage the estate.
- Established a robust management and team structure to enhance the management of our corporate assets and to support departments in their asset management efforts.
- The Office Accommodation Review (OAR) has delivered major improvements and ensured the sustainability of Crown Buildings and Lambpit Street. New areas will be subject to the Change Programme.
- Progress is being made on a range of asset projects, including capital works on schools and project plans in place for key assets, including the regeneration of the Old Library.
- We continue to meet statutory compliance in facilities management.

HRA

- Our services are driven by service need and supported by business plans, allocation policies and effective management of the HRA.
- Continued investment in stock and delivery of new build (including refurbishment of sheltered housing stock) to increase housing stock capacity.
- Reduced empty property numbers and sustaining a good standard of accommodation and external works focused on reducing energy use.

Areas for development

CORPORATE

Carried Forward

- Establish Asset Management Implementation Group to support implementation of the Asset Management Strategy and ensure consistency of approach to management of assets across departments.

New

- Explore further opportunities to maximise income and generate capital receipts.
- Implement Assets Team restructure, including additional legal resources, to deliver increased capacity to manage and dispose of assets.

HRA

Carried Forward

- Improve contract holder experience (Housing Repairs) and reduce reactive repairs backlog.
- Expand Contract Holder participation rates and improve satisfaction rates with questions relating to participation in decision-making and having a say in how services are managed.
- Source housing stock to meet increasing need.
- Ensure quality service provision is sustained through period of budget challenge.

New

- Agree new Housing Allocations Policy to ensure best use of housing stock.
- Maximise income to HRA – including reviewing approach to rent arrears management policy and processes, and addressing below target rents as appropriate.

- Financial inclusion work to maximise contract holders' income, and work to support sustainment of tenancies and to prevent homelessness reduces arrears.
- Effective working towards eradication of rough sleeping.
- Managing our assets according to service need – good customer service (including out of hours access) and proactive digital communications.
- Ensure compliance with remaining aspects of the Rented Homes (Wales) Act.
- Agree Local Housing Strategy (informed by the Local Housing Market Assessment).

Theme: Procurement

Effective procurement that is underpinned by commissioning, that improves productivity and efficiency to deliver better outcomes for local people. The procurement process is sustainable in meeting the needs of local people in a way that achieves value for money and generates benefits to the local people, the local economy and the organisation whilst minimising damage to the environment.^[1]

Options appraisals and decision-making is based on analysis and advice and there is evidence of clear reasoning and decisions.

- The procurement team follow a full commissioning cycle, in accordance with the current Commissioning, Procurement & Contract Management Strategy. Good practice standards and advice is available for services and we work closely with Chief Officers and managers to support successful procurement.
- The Head of Finance & ICT leads on all decisions ensuring clear reasoning is fully documented and, where possible, information is made public.
- Preparation has continued towards the introduction of Procurement Reforms (including implementation of a number of new processes/procedures) which will require increased transparency on procurement over £25k including approval of publication of council wide documentation. Evidence suggests that we remain one of the most prepared local authority procurement units in Wales for the reforms.
- All procurement projects have a corresponding risk register, and appropriate risks are included in department risk registers.
- Risk registers are in place for contracts that the procurement team manage e.g. Waste PFI and Leisure.
- A risk matrix is used for procurement activities, based on the perspective of the actual procurement.
- Transparency is one of the Procurement Principles adopted by the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (EAB) and is a key feature of all procurement activity. Policy and process for managing conflicts of interest has been implemented and rolled out across the EAB, Programme Boards, Project Boards and the Business Delivery Board.
- Transparency is a key theme under the reformed procurement legislation and has been adopted early by Wrexham County Borough Council.

We have a centralised, experienced team, but are facing capacity issues.

- Our Procurement Team won the prestigious Procurement Team of the Year Award at the Welsh Go Awards in 2023. This award focuses on how Team working is vital to the success of public procurement, and the power and potential of a focused and unified approach, recognising

leadership, communication, innovation, collaboration, personal development, and was evidenced through identified outcomes and evidence of success.

- The procurement team is a centralised unit, which is able to maintain an overview of commissioning and procurement across the authority, and identify opportunities for maximising budgets and expertise. This knowledge and expertise is then shared with departments, as we support them with their procurement activities.
- We work with departments to plan their procurement requirements to help ensure we have capacity to support them as required, including offering challenge and specialist knowledge, and the identification of opportunities for collaboration in procurement. Category managers work with departments on procurement projects. Plans are in place to introduce a risk matrix to manage procurement team workforce resource to ensure procurement requests can be supported. The 18 month pipeline approach to be introduced under the reforms will help to identify potential risk and resource requirements at an early stage in the procurement process.
- The procurement team work closely with chief officers and heads of service to advise them about on the procurement strategy and evolution of the approach to procurement reforms.
- We have an ongoing robust training programme. The procurement team have delivered over 20 training workshops across the council, with an additional 15 planned for autumn 2024. Working with the education and early intervention team, procurement training will be delivered to schools. There is a continued need to upskill staff and to ensure ongoing awareness of procurement procedures.
- Our team has effective regional and national networking relationships which support a good understanding of markets.
- We are building a partnership approach across North Wales, often leading the procurement body on projects for partners in public services.
- We involve the public and our stakeholders in decision-making and feedback, and this will be reinforced as part of the Procurement Reforms. The Procurement Team and departments carry out market engagement exercises as part of the procurement process. All potential suppliers are invited to these. Further work is on-going to ensure we have all relevant suppliers' details to share tender details with. The new procurement reforms require the authority to publish its pipeline – the Procurement Team is working on the ways that this can be communicated to the market further.
- Our current Commissioning, Procurement & Contract Management Strategy include a commitment to considering equality in our commissioning and procurement decisions and this is included in our tender documents and contracts.

We have taken steps to ensure that Value for Money is considered as the optimum combination of whole-of-life costs in terms of not only generating efficiency savings and good quality outcomes for the Council, but also benefiting society and the economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment:

- Commissioning, Procurement & Contract Management Strategy focuses on ensuring that all contractual arrangements take into account the requirement to consider how the Council can actively improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the local area in accordance with the sustainable development principle as required within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and supported by the Council Priorities, Council Plan and Equality duties.
- Our Commissioning, Procurement & Contract Management Strategy identifies social value as a key priority, and clearly defines that in Wrexham this means contributing to decarbonisation and providing defined community benefit. (Community benefit being the provision of something in kind for the community, a cash payment towards a community need, or products and services to help a given community within the County Borough.)
- A social value assessment tool is in development to use at point of tender.

In our self-assessment 2022-23, we rated this theme as yellow which meant that we demonstrated good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Below details the 2023-24 areas for development agreed in the 2022-23 report, progress made against these and the decision to carry forward or not:

2023-24 AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	PROGRESS MADE	CARRY FORWARD?
Improve management of contracts at corporate and operational levels.	<p>Internal Audit's work highlighted that the management within children's social care of commissioning of off-contract placements was a general area for consideration in the Annual Governance Statement 2023-24. This work is important due to high levels of expectation and increasing demands and costs in these areas, and consistency with assurances obtained through the financial management task and finish groups during the year.</p> <p>In general, performance has improved slightly within the department following support and facilitation provided by procurement; however there are specific areas identified in the council where improvements are still required.</p>	Yes
Management of contracts (Health & Safety Governance Framework) (*AGS)	<p>There has been a marked improvement in this area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in procedures, compliance and training. • Internal audit provided improved assurance level (Yellow) in 2023-24 and this has been removed as a significant issue in the AGS for 2024-25. • Further compliance work will be carried out as part of the 2024-25 internal Audit plan to ensure that the current practices are becoming embedded. 	No
Continue with preparation for implementation of Procurement Reforms.	<p>Evidence suggests that Wrexham County Borough Council remain one of the most prepared procurement units in Wales for the reforms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance Procedure Rules (Contract Procedure Rules) to be revised following introduction of National Procurement Reforms – now expected October 2024. 	Yes
Review the structures for contract management.	The procurement unit processes include constantly updating structures as requirements change and evolve.	No

Our assessment 2023-24 - Yellow (sustained)

We have reached this conclusion because we can demonstrate good performance and our strengths outweigh our areas for development.

Strengths

- Our Commissioning, Procurement and Management Strategy ensures Value for Money is considered as the optimum combination of whole-of-life costs in terms of not only generating efficiency savings and good quality outcomes for the Council, but also benefiting society and the economy, whilst minimising damage to the environment.
- Robust commissioning, procurement and management processes and procedures in place.
- We take a proactive approach to support the management of key council projects, in relation to Value for Money and the mitigation of risks.
- Supporting the Welsh Government on the implementation and development of the new procurement legislation at a regional and national level.
- We are well placed to meet the requirements of the new legislation within the required time frames and have been recognised nationally for our work.
- Delivery of effective procurement training programme.

Areas for development

Carried Forward

- Improve management of contracts at corporate and operational levels.
- Continue with preparation for implementation of Procurement Reforms, including review of Finance Procedure Rules.

New

- Continue to develop knowledge of procurement compliance requirements for processes and procedures across the council through targeted training events.

APPENDIX 1:

Key sources of evidence

The review to inform the report considered a broad evidence base, guided by Welsh Government's 'Performance and Governance of Local Authorities: Statutory Guidance.' This included, but was not limited to:

- Reports produced by the council in response to statutory requirements;
- Evidence, reports and advice from a range of inspection and regulatory bodies;
- Review of various council strategies, policies and procedures;
- Reports to the council's various committees, including Council, Executive Board, scrutiny committees and Governance & Audit Committee;
- Internal audit reports and self-evaluations undertaken by the council and individual services;
- Compliments, complaints and other feedback from engagement processes with local people and stakeholders; and
- Workforce surveys and outputs from other engagement processes with the workforce and the recognised Trade Unions.

Some of the key published documents we reviewed, with hyperlinks, are set out below:

[Wrexham Council Constitution](#)

[Council Plan \(2023-28\) and Council Plan Annual Performance Report \(2023/24\)](#)

[Annual Governance Statement \(2023-24\)](#)

[Budget Monitoring – February 2024](#)

[Wrexham County Borough Council Change Programme \(2024\)](#)

[Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Letter \(2022/23\)](#)

[Audit Wales – Approaches to Achieving Net Zero Across the UK \(2023\)](#)

[Audit Wales – Cracks in the Foundations, Building Safety in Wales \(2023\)](#)

[Audit Wales - Digital Strategy Review – Wrexham County Borough Council \(2022/23\)](#)

[Audit Wales – Review of Governance Arrangements with a Specific Focus on the Planning Service – \(2023/24\)](#)

[Audit Wales – Review of Brownfield Regeneration and Empty Buildings \(2024\)](#)

[Audit Wales – Setting of Well-being Objectives \(2023/24\)](#)

[Audit Wales - Springing Forward: Lessons from our work on workforce and assets \(2023\)](#)

[Audit Wales – Use of Performance Information – Setting User Perspective and Outcomes \(2023/24\)](#)

[Audit Wales - Wrexham County Borough Council – Decarbonisation Progress Update \(2023\)](#)

[Estyn Monitoring Visit \(July 2023\)](#)

[Care Inspectorate Wales - Improvement Check Visit to Wrexham County Borough Council Adult and Children's Services \(2023\)](#)

[Regional Partnership Annual Report \(2022/23\)](#)

[Asset Management Strategy \(2023/28\)](#)

[Commissioning, Procurement and Contract Management Strategy \(2023-25\)](#)

[Decarbonisation Plan Annual Report \(2023/24\)](#)

[Housing Revenue Account \(HRA\) and Budget, Rent Setting and Business Plan \(2024/25\)](#)

[ICT and Digital Strategy \(2024-27\)](#)

[People Strategy \(2024 -2028\)](#)

[Social Services Annual Directors Report \(2022/23\)](#)

[Welsh Language Annual Report \(2022/23\)](#)

[Workforce Monitoring Information Report \(2023/24\)](#)

APPENDIX 2:

Glossary of Terms

Annual Governance Statement

The purpose of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is to describe the extent to which the council has complied with its Code of Governance. It describes how the effectiveness of the governance arrangements has been monitored and evaluated during the year and sets out areas for improvement in the coming year.

The AGS is required to be published as part of our Annual Statement of Accounts.

Assets Valuation – additional detail

Council Fund Assets - Assets included in the Balance Sheet at current value are revalued sufficiently regularly to ensure that their carrying amount is not materially different from their current value at the year-end, but as a minimum every five years.

Assets are carried in the Balance Sheet using the following measurement bases:

- Infrastructure assets – depreciated historical cost.
- Assets under construction – historical cost.
- Council offices – current value, determined as the amount that would be paid for the asset in its existing use (existing use value – EUV), except for a few offices that are situated close to the council's housing properties, where there is no market for office accommodation, and that are measured at depreciated replacement cost (instant build) as an estimate of current value.
- School buildings – current value, due to their specialist nature, are measured at depreciated replacement cost which is used as an estimate of current value.
- Surplus assets – the current value measurement base is fair value, estimated at highest and best use from a market participant's perspective.
- All other assets – current value, determined as the amount that would be paid for the asset in its existing use (existing use value – EUV).
- The Value of the Council Dwellings: Council Dwellings are carried in the Balance Sheet based on current value, determined using the basis of existing use value for social housing (EUV-SH).

Audit Wales

Audit Wales is the trademark of two legal entities: the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office.

Each has its own particular powers and duties:

- The Auditor General audits and reports on Welsh public bodies.
- The Wales Audit Office provides staff and other resources for the Auditor General's work, and monitors and advises the Auditor General.

CIPFA/SOLACE

Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy: is a UK-based international accountancy membership and standard setting body.

Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers: is the leading members' network for local government and public sector professionals in the UK.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

Care Inspectorate Wales is the independent regulator of social care and childcare in Wales.

Change Programme

An internal programme of change which supports service delivery and financial stability over the next two years (2025/26 and 2026/27). Ensuring the council can meet the needs of local people by delivering modern and efficient services.

Commissioning & Procurement Strategy

The council's arrangements for how it undertakes commissioning, procurement and contract management activities.

Constitution

The Constitution sets out how the council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures it follows to make sure it is efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. It contains 22 sections, which contains sections about the rules, protocols and codes of practice that councillors and employees work under.

Corporate Land & Buildings Strategy

The council's strategy sets out the importance and significance of the council's property portfolio in the activities it undertakes, and seeks to challenge and justify why assets are being retained, while looking at alternative options for asset use and service delivery within our stringent budgetary framework.

Council

All 56 Elected Members. Approves the Council Plan and agrees the Constitution, policy and financial frameworks.

Council Plan

The [Council Plan](#) is a key document, agreed by Council, which publishes the well-being and equality objectives.

Council's Standards Committee

A council committee which promotes high standards of conduct by elected and co-opted members and monitors the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct.

Data Cymru

A Welsh local government company offering specialist support to local government in finding and using data effectively.

Elected Member Protocol

The Protocol promotes high standards of conduct and behaviour as a means of strengthening respect and trust among members. It is contained within the [Constitution](#).

Estyn

[Estyn](#) is the education and training inspectorate for Wales.

Executive Board

The Executive Board is appointed to carry out all of the Council's functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council, whether by Law or under the Constitution. The Executive Board consists of the Leader of the Council and nine other Councillors appointed to the Executive Board by the Council.

Governance/ Governance Framework

[Governance](#) refers to the processes by which organisations such as the council are directed, controlled, led and held to account. Our governance framework is set out in our Code of Governance which sets out our commitment to good governance and the framework of controls and arrangements we have in place to ensure good governance.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The HRA records expenditure and income in relation to the council's housing stock.

Internal Audit

Internal audit is an independent assurance function that undertakes work that will inform the Head of Internal Audit's (HoIA) annual opinion on the overall adequacy of the council's framework of governance, risk management and control, including all its operations, resources and services and responsibilities in relation to other bodies.

Involvement Strategy

The council's Involvement Strategy sets out the council's commitment to involving everyone in our communities in discussions about the services we design and deliver and the principles we will work to in ensuring this.

Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 established a new legislative framework for local government elections, democracy, governance, and performance.

Medium Term Financial Plan

The [MTFP](#) is a strategic guide to the council's spending plans over the coming 3 years to support the council's priorities within the context of a balanced annual budget. It forecasts the future financial outlook for the council based on a number of assumptions, setting out indicative revenue and capital budgets, including projections of the likely level of council tax and council balances.

Member Development Strategy

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 sets out a number of requirements in relation to Member training and development. The Member Development strategy sets out the development and training activities specifically designed to improve knowledge, skills and abilities of elected members in their varied roles.

Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA)

The [MDA](#) is a partnership supporting strategic economic growth across North East Wales, West Cheshire and Wirral, which is recognised as a single economic sub-region having a population close to 1 million.

Modern Ways of Working Programme

A programme to transform our working practices by providing improved working environments, adopting new technology and digital solutions, making our work more sustainable in the long term and challenging the culture around the way the council works.

North Wales Economic Ambition Board

The [NWEAB](#) is a partnership between the six local authorities in North Wales and other local partners in the region. It is the sponsoring group and decision-making body for the North Wales Growth Deal, funded by UK and Welsh Governments as well as other private and public partners aims to build a more vibrant, sustainable and resilient economy for North Wales.

Nolan Principles

The Nolan Principles are the seven principles of public life and apply to anyone who works in public office. Including all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the Civil Service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs), and in the health, education, social and care services. The seven principles include; Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.

Office Accommodation Review

A programme of work to review our office accommodation requirements, ensuring our assets are fit for purpose and provide modern and flexible office accommodation which meets the requirements of a modern organisation.

Performance Management Framework

A performance management framework ensures that individuals, teams and the overall organisation know what they should be doing, when they should be doing it, and how they should be doing it. It is part of an ongoing cycle of 'Plan, Do, Review', involving robust self-assessment, service planning and performance management. It is focussed on ensuring that we deliver our objectives and achieve our corporate and partnership priorities as set out in the Council Plan.

Personal Review and Development (PRD)

The council's arrangements for performance review of the workforce, to appraise the employees' performance over the previous year, to set objectives, to identify training and development needs and to provide constructive feedback to enable good performance.

Priority Boards

Each council priority is supported by a Priority Board responsible for delivering the outcomes set out in the plan and reporting on these to elected members and the public.

Public Services Boards

[Public Services Boards](#) were established by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, consisting a number of statutory members (including local authorities) to improve joint working across all public services in each local authority area in Wales.

Purchase to Pay

The council's e-Procurement process.

Strategic Equality Objectives

[The Equality Act 2010](#) requires public authorities to consider how they can positively contribute to a fairer society through advancing equality and good relation with and between 8 'protected characteristics'. It requires that local authorities prepare and publish its strategic equality objectives at least every 4 years. Our strategic equality objectives are published as part of our Council Plan.

Sustainable Development Principle

[The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) introduced the sustainable development principle: the importance of balancing short term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long term needs. It sets out 'five ways of working' to support this approach – long term, integration, involvement, collaboration and prevention.

Wales' Well-being Goals

Seven interdependent well-being goals for Wales, established by the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#).

Well-being Objectives/ Council Priorities

Local Authorities are required to agree and publish their own well-being objectives, which contribute to Wales' well-being goals. In Wrexham Council, these are published in our [Council Plan](#) and also serve as our Council Priorities.

Welsh Housing Quality Standards 1 (WHQS1)

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard is the Welsh Government standard of social housing quality, first introduced in 2002.

Welsh Housing Quality Standards 2 (WHQS2)

The Welsh Housing Quality Standard 2, is a new set of standards due to start in 2023. The Standard lays out the standards for what all homes should have, to name a few: a good state of repair, safety and security, proper insulation and be well managed.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)

WLGA represents the interests of local government and promotes local democracy in Wales. Its primary purposes are to promote better local government, to promote its reputation and to support authorities in the development of policies and priorities which will improve public services and democracy.

Endnotes

[1] Good governance statement – underpinned by CIPFA/SOLACE's 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' principle.